THE GAME FIELD

AT the time of this writing abundant proof is at hand of the phenomenal "chicken crop" referred to in last issue. It is now quite certain that western grounds have furnished sport with grouse which has not been surpassed for many a year. Prom Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and the Canadian provinces, comes the same cheering news of plenty of birds, and sport of the highest order. Granted now a reasonable amount of care in enforcing the laws after the season has closed, a reasonable winter, followed by an average breeding season, and next season's crop should be something worth working for. The pot-shooting and the trapping after the close of the season, frequently play the deuce with what otherwise would have been a fine breeding stock, but it seems as though the trapper was now in for a hard time. Sportsmen of the west have at last asserted themselves, and the outlook for a continuance of sport as it should be is most encouraging.

THE State of Illinois has a new and very large game preserve which includes the well-known Thompson's Lake and several thousand acres of adjacent marsh lands. A sportsmen's club will have control, prominent members being Messrs. Hy. Bates, W. P. Ijams, Hon. H. S. New, Dr. T. Hill and others, all keen sportsmen.

A LAST word to intending campers, of whom there will be many this month in the deer country. Don't expect your guide to perform miracles—he is only mortal as you are, but he probably knows a heap more about the woods. Don't expect, him to put you right on top of a deer every few hours; don't fail to follow his instructions, especially about quietly waiting at a selected spot; neglect of this may cost you the deer he has worked hard to secure. Don't fill him full of whiskey and then expect him to be active, keen and reliable. Don't stuff him full of yarns about what you can do, or have done. He is a practical man and can read a duffer easier than he can read a book. Don't make a fire except where you can instantly quench it if need be, and never leave a temporary camp before drowning out the last spark of fire. One live coal is one too many, for it may cause a conflagration, which in turn may work tremendous damage, and possibly destroy human life. Put out your fire-drown it—water costs nothing beyond a little trouble—a fire may cost an hideous price.

ONE of the most persistent of pot-hunters and a difficult sinner to reform, is the prowling Italian. The swart son of the sunny land stems to think that as this is a free country, he is free to act in a do-as-you-damn-please sort of a way. When he gets hold of a gun he is apt to shoot anything with feathers and several things without. To him song birds, all birds, are desirable quarry; he can either eat them himself, or sell them to some countryman who runs a cheap restaurant, so he hunts persistently. The season for his woodland gleaning is now well advanced, and the papers have reported the usual crop of mysterious shot wounds. He is a menace to all who drive, ride, wheel, or walk along lonely road or woodland path, and he should be suppressed.

FEW of the foes of upland game are more persistent destroyers than that rascal in feathers, Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*), or his fellow rascal the sharp-shinned hawk (*A. velox*). Nor are their depredations confined to the game covers, as many a breeder of fancy poultry and pigeons knows to his sorrow. These hawks are crafty and practically fearless in attack, neither hesitating to attack a grouse or a pullet. It is their habit to conceal themselves amid dense foliage, from which they can bounce upon grouse, quail, pigeons and young poultry. In color and markings, in everything except size, they closely resemble each other. Cooper's hawk is the larger, but the most notable difference is in the tail, that of *Cooperi* being rounded, while the other is square at the end. Both have comparatively short wings, yet both are swift—indeed, *A. velox.*, as his name indicates, can go at an amazing pace. When a hawk is seen pursuing quail, the chances are it is one of these. Upon the wing both present a slim-bodied long-tailed effect. The best remedy for them is about an ounce of chilled shot, delivered well ahead if the hawk be crossing you.

IN reply to several young correspondents who have asked about how to purchase a gun—as Hamlet didn't say—"Get thee to a gunnery"—or rather go to a dealer of good standing. For the average young fellow, the best gun is a twelve-gauge of from seven and one-quarter to eight and one-half pounds weight. The question of price will be governed by the size of the pocket. I should advise a first-class, hence an expensive arm. If you can afford it, buy as though you contemplated buying but

once in your life. The best and most expensive is none too good, for with proper care it should last a lifetime. Buying a gun is like buying a watch—a strictly high-grade article costs money, but when once bought, it is a possession of which one may feel proudly for many years, and maybe bequeath to a deserving heir. A useful and reliable double gun can be bought for from $40 to $85; a fine gun may cost five or six times the latter price. For the extreme figure one gets an arm of the very finest materials, fashioned by the most skilled hands in the business, and the possession of it should prove most satisfying. However, lots of cheap guns will kill game, if that, is al that is desired, and a cheap arm by any one of the firms advertised in this magazine will be found exactly as represented. As to how to use the gun—well, that is another story. Granted that the arm has made a satisfactory pattern by test at a 30-inch circle at forty yards, the rest of the business mainly depends upon the young shooter himself. First let him practise bringing the empty gun to the firing position and covering some chosen mark until he can do it smoothly and rapidly, then let him attempt easy marks—sixty four-inch square blocks of wood tossed up by a friend. Light loads will suffice for these, as the range should be short. When the novice can hit half of these the distance should be increased until he performs fairly well at about thirty-five yards. Then, and not till then, he may go afield with a reasonable chance of stopping a bird or so in half a dozen attempts.

Quail are good birds for a beginner, especially early, in the season, because they lie close, fly only moderately fast and usually in a straight line. In a prairie country, young grouse afford excellent marks, they being large and comparatively slow. Where waterfowl have regular fly-ways, the novice can also get much useful practice, as this sort of shooting gives him more time to calculate how much to lead and how to keep the necessary even swing of the gun. While it is difficult to lay down hard and fast rules, I should say, hold high on flushed birds going away; low, just under low incomers; ahead, according to distance, of high incomers; ahead of all crossing shots, and dead on a bird going or coming face high.

HOLD ahead of everything that you can see ahead of, would be no bad rule, for seldom indeed is a bird lost through leading it too much. A very common fault is the stopping of the swing of the gun as the trigger is pulled. Nine out of ten beginners to this even after they have learned to hold ahead. then they wonder why they miss fair crossing shots. the only way to correct the fault is to master the smooth continued swing beyond the point of discharge. Many lead their birds too much, stop the swing and kill, and they do this without knowing it. This fault, after it becomes fixed, renders a man a most uncertain performer, for he is at the mercy of the bird, which by a sudden twist may instantly be out of the line of fire. Yet the man with a tendency to lead too far will kill more than the man who does not lead enough, for the former, when he hits a bird, touches a vital spot, while the other may dust bird after bird too far back, without securing one. Persistent hitting of birds too far back is an abomination, for it means broken legs, injured intestines and a lingering death for the wretched victims. A judicious lead and an even uninterrupted swing mean not only swift and painless death to the bird, but also that very valuable accomplishment, control of the second barrel. My young readers should remember this and practise accordingly.

The beginner also will do well if he learns to shoot with both eyes wide open. There is no sense in a chap squinting with one eye along the rib of a gun, when he can see much better with two. He doesn't depend upon one eye when playing billiards, fencing, sparring, catching a ball, or in any game where quick, true eyes are an advantage. Because some old Leather stocking used one eye for the fine sights of his rifle, is no reason why a modern sportsman should shut one eye while using a shotgun. I am aware that many good shots close one eye, they have formed the habit and can shoot best so. But that does not prove that they wouldn't be better shots had they always kept both eyes open. There are many mighty poor shots who close one eye, and all unknown to them, the cause of their poor performances may be some defect of the eye they depend upon. An old-timer once said of me, "That big-eyed brute shoots with both eyes open—one ye on his bird and the other eye on the next bird—gol durn him ennyhow!" There was a grain of truth in what he said, too, for the man who shoots with both eyes open gradually acquires a knack of keeping track of two birds at once.

Another important point for the beginner is to learn to pick his bird out of a rising bevy or covey, or whatever it may happen to be. Fix your eyes on your bird and keep them on

him. Bring the gun to the eyes instead of shifting the eyes to the gun. Trust to the hands to bring the gun to the proper place. If given free play they will act in strict accordance with the eyes. Let the right hand know what the left hand is doing and give it a chance to help. If you suddenly point your finger at an object, no matter how small, the finger points truly at it, providing your eyes are normal. When you run to catch a high fly you don't try to watch the ball into your hands—you keep your eyes on the ball and hold your hands where the eyes tell you the ball will drop. In billiards, archery, pitching, and so on, you don't try to draw a fine sight; your eyes tell you the ball, or arrow, must go to a certain point and the hands do the rest. And this holds true of shooting and the beginner who understands this and who trusts to the unity of action between eyes and hands should develop, after a reasonable amount of practise, into a clinking good shot.

Edwyn Sandys.

GUNNERY

THE A B C OF MARKSMANSHIP—III. (CONCLUSION)

MOST field shooting must be done offhand. Consequently offhand practise (after the preliminary rest shooting described in my previous paper) is more important to the hunter and the soldier than any other style. It is also the most difficult class of rifle practise. One may be successful as a wing-shot with the scatter gun, and yet be a sad bungler with the rifle. If a good shotgun be aimed anywhere within fifteen inches of a bird forty yards distant, it will hit. Now, if the distance from the gunner's eye to the muzzle of his gun be thirty-six inches, then a variation of fifteen inches from dead center at forty yards means a muzzle error of 3-8 inch. So the muzzle of your shotgun may wabble 3-8 inch in any direction from true line of aim, and you will still get your bird at forty yards. Now what would such an error mean if you were shooting a rifle? It would miss a thirty-inch mark at forty yards, or a twelve-foot circle at two hundred yards. Yet the bullseyes used in offhand rifle shooting at two hundred yards are not over twelve inches in diameter. To hit that twelve-inch mark, the muzzle of your rifle must not swerve more than 1-25 inch from dead center at the instant of explosion.

FIRST STEPS IN OFFHAND SHOOTING.

You should first learn to hit a small stationary object at known distance. Begin at fifty feet; because at that range you can see all shot holes that miss the black, and you can dispense with a telescope, or an assistant at the target. Use a one-inch bullseye. Stand quartering towards the target, left foot advanced, right foot almost at right angles to it, weight of body evenly distributed on both feet. Grasp the forearm of the rifle firmly two or three inches in front of the trigger-guard, and small of stock with the right. Raise the rifle in such a position that your left arm will be bent under it almost at a right angle, and your right arm will be thrown out almost on a level with the top of your shoulder (or you may extend the left hand farther forward, if more comfortable). Do not crane your neck forward, but stand erect, in an easy and comfortable position. Bring the tang sight within an inch of your eye, or even loss. With the left hand press your rifle firmly against the hollow between the biceps and shoulder; but do not grip tightly with the right hand, for that would cause tremor. Aim, as you did in rest shooting, with head just touching the black at 6 o'clock—or try to do so.

Now the sight will bob about in the most confusing manner. You cannot hold it on the black for half a second; and the longer you aim, the more you shake. Discouraging—isn't it?

Well, don't fire just yet. Practise aiming with unloaded gun, noting, each time that your bead touches the black, at what speed the sight bobs away from it. Try to get a regular swing, so that you may know in which direction the sight will go after touching the bullseye. Try to settle down, so that the swing becomes shorter and shorter. (Experts, when training for important matches, often practise at night in their rooms, by aiming the empty gun at a very small spot on the wall or window, and snapping an empty shell at it. This does them almost as much good as actual firing on the range.)

Feel pretty confident, now? Very well; open the breech and insert a cartridge. Stop! Do you notice where the muzzle of that gun is pointing? You don't want to kill somebody