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Snipe
1850

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Henry William Herbert,
1850

Spring snipe shooting of 1850.

FROM

Graham's Magazine, Phila. Vol. XXXVI.

May 1850.

deprived of many novel and amusing scenes, highly interesting to young persons, by her cousin's indolence and want of thought, but was, by the same culpable negligence, prevented from seeing many of the curiosities of the place, from a view of which she had promised herself much amusement, as her residence in the country had hitherto precluded her from any thing of the kind; while Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland erroneously imagined that whatever was stale to them must necessarily be so to our heroine. Besides these sources of vexation, Clara had one, which Mrs. Cleveland, habitually careless in money matters, could not sympathize with more than she did with her other annoyances, and this was the state of her purse, as Mrs. Cleveland, with characteristic thoughtlessness insisted upon Clara's purchasing whatever was handsome or fashionable, without regard to expense.

In accordance with this habit, Mrs. Cleveland one morning addressed Clara in the following manner:

"At last, my dear cousin, we are to have an excellent performance by the Thalian Association; and I have been anxious for you to see one, ever since you have been with us; you know there has been only one this winter, and then I could not go because the children were so cross, but the little rogues shall not prevent our going this time. By the way, my dear Clara, Mrs. Dawson has some elegant head-dresses, and we must go down this evening and get one for you."

"But, Cousin Florence, you don't recollect that I have several already, and one that I have never worn."

"La, Clara, you wore that to Mrs. Armand's party."

"But the wreath of white roses, cousin."

"Oh, Clara, that is too simple altogether."

"To tell you the truth, Cousin Florence, the sum of money mamma gave me when I left home was, I thought, much more than I should need, but I now find that it is nearly expended, and if I purchase these superfluities I must exceed that sum, and you know that our circumstances are limited."

"Pshaw, child, what of that? you can get all you want from your mother's business man."

Now, our heroine ought to have had moral courage enough to have firmly declined making the unnecessary purchase, but it must be recollected that she was very young, and being always accustomed to depend on her mother in such matters, it will not be wondered at if she quietly gave up the point.

As soon as the head-dress, which was a very handsome one for six dollars, was purchased Mrs. Cleveland turned to a ribbon-box, and selecting a very pretty piece insisted upon Clara's purchasing it: "Yes, Clara," said she, "it is only four dollars."

"Really, I do not think I need it, Cousin Florence," replied our heroine.

But Mrs. Cleveland would hear no objections, so the sash was purchased, and Clara with her cousin left the shop. When they returned home the sash was much admired by every one; but Mrs. Cleveland discovered that it was too long, and cutting off the superfluous, saying that, "it would make beautiful pin-cushions for the fair which Clara expected would take place shortly after her return home."

But Mrs. Cleveland might have spared herself the trouble of assigning any use to the ribbon, for Johnny having risen in haste from the dinner-table, his hands were in such a state as, after having possessed himself of the ribbon, soon to render it unfit for pin-cushions or any other purpose. "Johnny! you mischief," exclaimed his mother, "Cousin Clara 'll whip you." She would have been mortified had she known that Clara felt very much inclined to do so.

The evening at length arrived, which Clara hoped so much to enjoy; but here again our heroine was destined to disappointment, for immediately after tea, Mrs. Cleveland observed,

"Really, my dear Clara, I am very sorry, but Mr. Cleveland has gone to the Odd Fellows Lodge, he expressed his intention before I said any thing about the performance; and though he would willingly have staid and gone with us, yet I did so much dislike to disconcert, even the least of his arrangements, that I said nothing about it. Never mind, my love, there will be many more performances before you leave Savannah."

Clara knew that she must shortly return home, and that it was probable there would not be another performance before she left town, and when she thought that she could not gratify her little brother and sister, as she had promised, with an account of the many beautiful things which she expected to see there, and thought—shall we confess it—of her new sash and head-dress, she retired to her own room, and indulged in a girlish burst of tears.

In a few moments a knock was heard at the door, and hastily drying her tears, she opened the door, when a servant entered and gave her a letter from her mother, which informed her that Mr. B—, an old friend of the family, would visit Savannah in the course of a few days, and that if Clara felt disposed, it would be an opportunity for her to return home; at the same time, she desired her to consult her own inclinations on the subject. Clara's eyes sparkled at the thoughts of again being with the dear ones at Primrose Cottage, and she retired to rest, determined to accept Mr. B—'s protection home.

On the following morning, when Clara entered the breakfast-room, Mrs. Cleveland exclaimed, "My dear Clara, what do you think, Mrs. Wellwood's ball, that has been so much talked of, comes off next Wednesday evening, and cards have just been left for us; now I will tell you what we will do this very morning, we will go to Dawson's, and you shall get one of those beautiful robes, they are just twelve dollars, and how sweet you will look, for I will tell you, Clara, what I never did before, that there are few girls in Savannah with half your attractions. Now, will it not be delightful." Clara hesitated a moment, but considered that the enjoyment of the ball would not be adequate to the expense, besides preventing her return home with Mr. B—, she therefore replied:

"In consequence of a letter I last night received from mamma, I shall find it necessary, my dear cousin, to return home before that time."

"Oh, Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Cleveland, "how can you leave the city for that dull place?" And

found indiscriminately on the sea-shore, and in upland marshes; I have shot it from Lake Huron to the Penobscot, and the Capes of the Delaware; it lies well before dogs, which will point it, and is a good bird on the table. It is known in Long Island as the "Meadow Snipe" and the "Short Neck," in New Jersey, and thence westward, as the "Fat Bird," or "Jack Snipe" indiscriminately. It is not a snipe at all, but a Sandpiper, *Tringa Pectoralis*.

The only other true snipe ascertained to exist in America, is the RED BREASTED SNIPE, *Scolopax Noveboracensis*, better known as the "DOWITCHER," an unmeaning name, adopted and persevered in by the Baymen, or as the "Quail Snipe." At Egg Harbor the gunners call it the "Brown-back." It is found only on the salt marshes, and is never hunted with dogs but shot from ambush over decoys.

It appears, then, that the coming and stay of the common snipe in our districts, in spring, is very uncertain, and dependent on the state and steadiness of the weather. Some seasons, they will stay for weeks on the moist, muddy flats among the young and succulent herbage, growing fat and lazy, lying well to the dog, and affording great sport. Sometimes they will merely alight, feed, rest, and resume their flight, never giving the sportsman a chance even of knowing that they have been, and are gone, except by their chalkings and borings where they have fed. Again, at other seasons, they will lie singly, or in scattered whisks on the uplands, in fallow fields, even among stunted brushwood, lurking *perdu* all day, and resorting to the marshes by night, leaving the traces of their presence in multitudes, to perplex the sportsman, who, perhaps, beats the ground for them, day after day, only to find that they were, but are not.

This variance in the habit of the snipe it is, which makes him so hard a bird to kill; for, although he is perplexing from his rapid and twisting flight to a novice, I consider him, to a cool old hand, as easy a bird to kill as any that flies. The snipe invariably rises against or across wind, and in doing so hangs for an instant on the air before he can gather his way; that instant is the time in which to shoot him, and that trick of rising against wind is his bane with the accomplished shot and sportsman, for by beating *down the wind*, keeping his brace of dogs quartering the ground before him, *across the wind*, so that they will still have the air in their noses, he compels the bird to rise before him, and cross to the right on the left hand, affording him a clear and close shot, instead of whistling straight away up wind, dead ahead of him, exposing the smallest surface to his aim, and frequently getting off without a shot, as it will constantly do, if the shooter beats *up wind*, even with the best and steadiest dogs in the world. The *knack* of shooting snipe, as some people who can't do it choose to call it, is no other than the knack of shooting quick, shooting straight, and shooting well ahead of cross shots—this done with a gun that will throw its charge close at 40 to 50 yards, with 1½ oz. of No. 8 shot, equal measures of shot and of Brough's diamond-grain powder will fetch three snipe out of every five, which is great work, in spite of what the cockneys say, who pick their shots, never firing at a hard bird, or one over twenty paces away, and then boast of killing twenty shots in succession. *Verbum sap.*

The great difference of the grounds to be beaten in different weathers; the difficulty in determining which ground to assign to which day; the immense extent of country to be traversed, if birds are scarce or wild, or if there are many varieties of soil, covert, and feeding in one range, and the sportsman fail in his two or three first beats in finding game, and therefore have to persevere till he do find them, these, and the hardness of the walking in rotten

quagmires and deep morasses, affording no sure foot-hold, and often knee-deep in water, these it is which make successful snipe-shooting one of the greatest feats in the art, and the crack snipe-finder and snipe-killer—for the two are one, or rather the second depends mainly on the first—one of the first, if not the first artist in the line.

It is from this necessity of beating, oftentimes, very extensive tracts of land before finding birds, and therefore of beating very rapidly if you would find birds betimes, that I so greatly prefer and recommend the use of very fast, very highly-bred, and very far-ranging setters, to that of any pointer in the world, for snipe-shooting in the open—apart from their great superiority over the pointer in hardihood, endurance of cold, powers of retrieving, beauty and good-nature.

Of course, speaking of dogs, whether setter, pointer, dropper, or cocking-spaniel, it is understood that we speak of dogs of equal qualities of nose, staunchness to the point, and steadiness at coming to the charge the instant a shot is fired. No dog which does not do all these things habitually, and of course, is worth the rope that should hang him; and no man is worthy the name of a shot or a sportsman, who cannot, and does not, keep his dogs, whether setters, pointers, or cockers, under such command that he can turn them to the right or left, bring them to heel, stop them, or down charge them, at two hundred yards distance if it be needful.

If these things, then, be equal, as they can be made equal, though I admit a setter to be more difficultly kept in discipline than a pointer—the fastest setter you can get, is the best dog for snipe-shooting; his superiority, in other points, infinitely counterbalancing the greater trouble it requires to break and control him. I am well aware that it has been said, and that by authorities, that the best dog over which to shoot snipe, is an old, slow, broken-down, staunch pointer, who crawls along at a foot's pace, and never misses, overruns, or flushes a bird.

And so, in two cases, he is; but in one case, no dog is just as good as he is, and in the other, the argument is one of incapacity to use what is best, and therefore is no argument.

If birds are so thick on the grounds, and so tame that you can fill your bag in walking over one or two acres at a foot's pace, a very slow pointer is better than fast setters—but no dog at all, your walking up your birds yourself, which you can do just as quickly as the dog can, is better than the slow pointer. Indeed, on very small grounds, very thickly stocked, it is by far the most killing way to use no dog, but to walk up the birds.

If a man is so weak and infirm of purpose, or so ignorant of the first principles of his art, as to be unable to control his setters, he must, I suppose, use a slow pointer; but it cannot matter what dog such a man uses, he never can be a sportsman.

If there be a hundred birds lying, and lying well on one acre of feeding-ground, the birds can be killed without a dog, or with a slow dog, as you will; any man who can pull a trigger must fill his bag.

If there be a hundred birds scattered, wild, over five hundred acres of ground, where are you with your slow dog, or your no dog? Just no where. While you are painfully picking up your three or four birds with your slow pointer, your true sportsman, and slashing walker, with his racing up-head and down-stern setters, will have found fifty, and bagged twenty-five or thirty.

There are ten days in a season when birds are wild and sparse, for one when they are congregated and lie hard; and the argument comes to this, that when birds can be killed with ease, even without a dog at all, a slow pointer is the best; when they are difficult to find, and hard to kill,

even by a crack shot, the slow pointer is no where, and of no use, while the racing setters will fill the bag to a certainty.

For my own part, I can say to a certainty, that I have had more sport, and killed more birds, by many, many times, when birds have been widely scattered, and difficult to find, and when I have walked half or a quarter of a mile between every shot fired, than I ever have when birds have lain close, and jumped up at every pace under my feet; and for a simple reason, that the places in which birds so rise and lie, are rare and of small extent, and the days on which they do so few and far apart.

Therefore I say, *friend*—for all true sportsmen I hold friends—choose well thy day, when the air is soft and genial, the wind south-westerly, the meadows green with succulent and tender grasses, and moist with the deposit of subsiding waters—select thy grounds carefully; in such a time as I have named, the wide and open marsh meadows; but if the wind be from the eastward, cold, squally and snow laden, then try the bushy, briary brakes, where cattle poach the soil, and the marsh waters creep, or the verge of the meadows, under the lea of the maple swamp, or at the worst the very grounds where you would beat for woodcock in July—begin from the farthest windward point of thy beat, casting thy brace of *setters* off from thy heel, to the right and left, and so often as they have diverged one hundred yards, turning them with a whistle and a wave of the hand, so that they shall cross continually before thy face, down wind of thee, at some thirty paces distant; and so persevere—if birds be plenty and lie well, walking not to exceed two miles the hour; if they be rare and wild, four miles, or by'r lady! five, if thou mayest compass it. If one dog stand, while the other's back is turned, whistle, that he shall turn his head, then hold thy hand aloft, with one quiet "*toho!*" but no shouting; if he be broke, he shall stand like a carved stone. Then walk up to the point leisurely, be sure that thou go *down wind*, making a circuit if needs be, with thy gun at half-cock, the ball of thy thumb on the hammer, and the nail of thy fore-finger inside the guard, but not upon the trigger. When the bird rises, cock your gun, and down him! If thy dogs do their devoir, they shall drop to the charge unbidden; if they do not, raise thy hand with an imperious gesture, and cry coolly and calmly "down charge;" but however ill they behave, nay! even if they run in and eat thy bird, move not till

thy gun is loaded; then calmly walk up to them, drag them, pitilessly scourging them all the way, to the place where they should have charged, and rate them in the best of thy dog-language. I say "scourging them *piti-lessly*," because that is, in truth, the merciful course; for so one or two whippings will suffice, instead of constant small chastisement and irritation, which spoil a dog's temper and break his spirit, without conquering his obstinacy, or gaining the ascendancy over him.

If, on the contrary, they charge as decent dogs should and do charge, so soon as thy gun be loaded, lift them, with a "Hold up, good lads!" and cast them gently onward, checking them with a "Steady, dogs!" if they show disposition to be rash, until they point the dead bird, if killed, or draw on him, if running. Then, with a "Toho! Steady!" walk to their point; pick up the bird under their noses, praising them the while, or bid them "Fetch!" according to the circumstances of the case; but if they retrieve the bird without pointing him, or even after pointing him, until told to "fetch," let chastisement not hide her head.

This, rest assured, friend is the way to do it.

For the rest, whether thou wear fen-boots, or shoes and trowsers, or, as I use, by deliberate preference, arch-boots, corduroy shorts, and leggins, suit thine own fancy; but let thy shooting-jacket be roomy on the chest and shoulders, and well supplied with ample pockets. Let thy gun be—for my choice—of 31 inches, 12 or 11 gauge, $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 pounds. Let thy powder be Brough's diamond grain, or John Hall's glass—on no account any other—thou mayest get it of Henry T. Cooper, in Broadway, New York—thy shot No. 8—thy caps Starkey's central fire, or Moore & Gray's, or Westley Richards'—by no means *French*, or Walker's, the first of which *fly*, while the latter are, I think, corrosive. Forget not to have in thy pocket a dog-whip, a stout knife, a yard or two of strong cord, a pocket-flask, replenished, as thou wilt, with old Otard, or as I recommend thee, Ferintosh or Glenlivet whisky—stick in the seam of thy waistcoat a strong darning-needle, headed with sealing-wax, it is the only true and responsible gun-picker; and so, good sport to thee, and health and temper to enjoy it!—as good sport, gentle reader, as I trust myself to enjoy this coming week of April, the rain-gods and the river-gods permitting, and the nymphs remembering us, as their long-time adorer, in their kind orisons.

The Cedars, March 25, 1850.

SONNET.—FROM THE ITALIAN.

BY GIDDINGS H. BALLOU.

WHAT is it to the fields of heaven
Light hath given,
Radiance glowing, unexpected,
And from soft imbosomed bowers,
And od'rous flowers,
Hath sweet Spring to us directed?
See! by gentle May upholden,
Beech-tree olden
Joyful welcomes springing leaflet;
Spring the flowers of glorious tinting,
Fair imprinting
Meadows kissed by smiling wavelet.

Ah, 't is Lilla, ever charming,
Soul-disarming,
Gathers flowers, her hair adorning!

Dearest Lilla, dost discover
With thy lover
Spring and Summer now returning?

Flows for thee the tiny river,
Cheerful giver,
Early green and freshness bringing;
Springs for thee the joyous morning,
Heaven adorning,
All the air with praises ringing.

Shepherds, shepherds, to the chorus!
See, before us,
Binds with flowers her hair dark flowing—
While our hearts all homage will her—
Dearest Lilla,
Sing her name with praises glowing!

THE FINE ARTS.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN—The twenty-fifth anniversary of this institution was held on the first of last month, at the new galleries, No 663 Broadway, in the rear of the Stuyvesant Institute. It is extremely gratifying to the friends of Art to know that this excellent nursery of artistic talent has now suitable buildings for its accommodation, and the display of the productions of the painters of New York. It was only last fall that definite arrangements were made for the construction of this building, and already, as if at the bidding of the genii who ministered to the wants of our youthful friend Aladdin, it has sprung into existence. This result has been effected by the constant exertions and devoted attentions of the building trustees, Messrs. Durand, Cummings, Ingraham, Edmonds, Stergesand Leupp. The new edifice is situated in the heart of the fashion of the metropolis; the galleries are five in number, all intercommunicating, well lighted, airy, spacious and elegantly neat. The *coup d'œil* of the whole, when filled with works of art for exhibition, will present one of the most animating and beautiful scenes which the city can afford. The artists of New York have a right to be proud of this edifice, and we do not doubt that the public will be equally proud of those splendid productions with which they will adorn its walls. At the advanced period, when we write this article, it is impossible to give any definite account of the present exhibition; but the notes of preparation, the foreshadowings and the glorious promise of an array of talented names, are the tokens that it will be of unusual brilliancy. Every exertion will be made to give *eclat* to the opening, and more pains will be bestowed on this display, than its *début* before the public may be dazzling and defiant of criticism.

We learn from the New York papers, and from other sources, that all the artists of that city will offer "tastes of their quality" to the public. Huntington, who has been exhibiting nearly all his prominent works for his own benefit, states in the catalogue that his latest efforts have been retained privately for the opening of the new gallery. Durand has a new work, of which report speaks in the most rapturous terms; this, with others of his elaborate and highly finished compositions, will be displayed. Cummings, Ingraham, Gray, Edmonds, Elliott, Cropsey, Stearns, Kensett, Gignoux, Cafferty, Edouart, Audubon, and others, will contribute portraits, compositions, landscapes, etc. In fact, the artists have determined by every means in their power to make the first exhibition in the new building both brilliant and attractive. We hope by our next number to be able to speak more fully of this exhibition.

THE PHILADELPHIA ART UNION.—It is but a few years only since the first plan of an Art Union was suggested in Germany, and already they are in existence wherever the beautiful is venerated and art admired. In this country we have Art Unions in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Newark and Cincinnati. The Philadelphia institution differs from all the rest in its mode of distribution, and follows, we believe, in every respect the London one, which has been by far the most successful ever started. In New York the managers purchase pictures and distribute them. Under this arrangement it frequently happens that the person who draws a prize is disappointed, because he has not obtained some particular picture in the collection which pleased his fancy. The Philadelphia plan is to divide the proceeds of the subscription money

into various sums, which are allotted to the subscribers, who with the certificates, when successful, can choose any picture which may suit their taste, provided it is by an American artist, and on exhibition in some accredited gallery of art in the country. The annual distribution of the Philadelphia Art Union takes place on the 6th of this month, and we are pleased to learn that its prospects are most flattering. The engraving for this year is from HUNTINGTON'S celebrated picture of "Mercy's Dream," which will be executed in a mixed style of line, stipple and mezzotint by A. H. RITCHIE, of New York. This composition is derived from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, where Mercy relates to Christiana the sweet dream she had in a solitary place, where she saw a winged messenger approaching, who placed a crown upon her head, and invited her to a golden gate, etc. The landscape of this picture is clothed in the first shades of evening, and the figures of Mercy and the Angel form the attraction of the work. In calm, spiritual expression, anatomical precision, delicacy of coloring, and perfect keeping, there is no modern work which can surpass this.

The Free Gallery of this Institution, located at No. 210 Chestnut Street, has doubtless had a most beneficial influence in disseminating a taste for Art, and preparing the public for its just appreciation. The walls of this gallery have been constantly supplied with much-admired pictures, and a crowd of visitors are always in attendance. We hope hereafter to find much pleasure in referring to the new pictures exhibited in this gallery. The effects which are dependent upon the success of the Art Union, are shown by the great impetus which has been given of late years to many extremely varied branches of manufactures and commerce by a judicious encouragement of the Arts of Design. It has been found, more particularly in Europe, that numerous classes, hitherto considered as unproductive and useless, have been supplied with employment, and entire districts revived, as it were, by the establishment of certain manufactures, whose excellence depended mainly upon the skill of the artist. The surest means of effecting this result, is to create a public taste, and not merely comply with it as it exists at large; and it may be brought about by offering rewards for the best designs, by the publication of the best specimens of Art at cheap prices, by the erection of free galleries of painting, and chiefly by the encouragement of Art Unions. With such objects in view, and such results to achieve, the multiplication of these institutions in our country must be regarded as a cheering indication of the true progress of the age, and the precursor of a widely diffused love of the Beautiful in Art, which cannot but tend to the general improvement of the useful arts. All such results must be effected by our citizens at large, for we cannot expect legislative aid, and hence it is that we feel the necessity of impressing upon the public attention the operation of the Art Unions, as the great popular plan for fostering talent, infusing a love for the beautiful in Nature and Art, and cultivating those studies which invariably mark national progress in civilization, refinement and general happiness.

NEW JERSEY ART UNION.—We announce with great pleasure that an association of the friends of art in Newark have drawn up the programme of an Art Union, and made a stirring appeal to the citizens of the State for encouragement and co-operation. A free gallery will be opened im-