

"Ready! Pull! Dead!"

BY JOHN PHILIP SOUSA



THE vernacular of sports is most mystifying to the uninitiated. As a game grows in popularity there is created a jargon, a cant, and a slang peculiarly its own. Baseball furnishes the most familiar example in this respect, and when an old lady watching a game of tennis deplored the fact that

those who accumulated "Love" the most, were the grouchiest. Had she known that "Love" means nothing, and nothing is so exasperating as nothing, she would have understood.

Trap-shooting is the youngest of all the great sports; but it is increasing in popular esteem by jumps and bounds. It is estimated that there are over two hundred thousand men and women who face the Trap during the season. Gun Clubs exist in all cities and towns in the country. Like Baseball, Golf, Tennis and other pastimes, Trapshooting has risen to the dignity of a language of its own. When you hear a group of men and women discussing "Bulk" and "Dense," "Full choke," "Drop," "Comb," "Pull," "Regulation birds," know ye, they are Trap-shooters. For "Bulk" and "Dense" mean the smokeless powders used by the shooters. "Full choke" explains the special boring of the gun-barrel; "Drop," the inches the heel of the stock is below the sight when the gun is in position at the shoulder. "Comb" is the crest of the stock. "Pull," the power required to release the trigger. "Regulation birds," the speed, height and angle of the saucer-like targets known as "Blue-rocks," "White-fliers," etc., when thrown from the trap.

The flying target pastime makes many appeals to the lover of sports. It is a wonderful developer of self-reliance. It is your own game, and no one can do it for you. It is not a sport for the vacillating; for it requires great concentration and a happy blending of mental and physical attributes. The exercise in lifting to the shoulder, an eight-pound gun hundreds of times daily is a muscle-building factor and a sure death to insomnia. The recoil of the gun acts as a stimulating massage for tired nerves and muscles.

It has one great advantage over field shooting. There are many to whom it is abhorrent to destroy God's feathery creatures for sport. At the traps you shoot at inanimate clay; and to the most tender hearted, there can be no compunction in smashing the little black discs. All one's mental faculties are quickened, for the bird thrown from unknown angles with varying speed, made

illusive by the force of wind currents keeps one keenly alive to new conditions. Shooting where they ain't" successfully, adds to the exhilaration of the game. As a promoter of correct living it is over on the job. Local option and Fletcherism are not in it as deterrents of one's appetites. A contestant desiring success must be temperate in all things. A foggy brain or a gorged, overworked stomach, means a sluggish shooter, and a sluggish shooter means a defeated contestant. Spartan abnegation is absolutely necessary to success. I recall some six years since, while attending an important tournament in the Middle West, a young shooter led the field at the close of the first day. He shot with such splendid rhythm and accuracy that he was picked by the experts as the probable winner of the trophy. That night he proceeded to "paint the town." When he appeared at the traps next morning he was bleary-eyed, nervous and sluggish, and at the end of the day he was at the tail-end of the field of over two hundred shooters. I have shot with him many times since, and nothing can persuade him to put another coat of paint on the town. The humiliation of defeat was the greatest temperance lecture possible.

Trap-shooting is a splendid pastime for women. It is a tonic for the nervous system and makes a woman agile and alert. I have shot in many matches with women and have never seen an ungraceful one at the traps. The sport is most suitable to the gentle sex, for woman's quick perception both of eye and brain are splendid factors in the make-up of the shooter. In the beginning, women did not take to the shot gun because it was synonymous with death to the feathery denizens of the air. She who we call Grandmother, Mother, Aunt, Sister, Wife and Daughter love innocent nature too much to destroy it for sport. With the coming of the clay bird women shooters have become nearly as numerous as women golfers and tennis players. In the shooting game she is not segregated; she is not classified as a woman, but as a shooter. She meets all men shooters on an equality and there is nothing in which she so delights as beating mere man at his own game. Among the growing number of women trap-shooters, it is significant that two prominent eastern clubs are composed of women members exclusively.



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