

Old Fashioned Religion

By H. L. BETTEN

WHAT devilish blight has fallen upon the Irish? Where are the competent followers of that horde of Hibernians who over-ran and ruled the prize ring of old? You find no outstanding champions among the gallant race today. Apparently it has gone soft.

The Irish setters, too, once a grand breed of gun dogs, have long been decadent. You must go back sixty or seventy years to review an era when the breed was in its prime and its best exemplars could compete successfully afield in any company.

And yet, according to authentic traditions, the old Irish breed provided the foundation stock for all other setter breeds and strains with the possible exception of the Russian setter, now long extinct.

Unlike the Laveracks and a score of other English setter strains perhaps equally good which have passed into oblivion, the berry-red Irish are still with us. But compared with the breed's once high estate in the field, its current status apparently is the lowest in Irish setter history.

Since 1900 frequent spasmodic attempts have been made to reestablish the Irish breed on a parity with English setters and pointers. During this period a limited number of excellent individuals were bred and developed which lent some encouragement to such hopes. Unfortunately, however, the average owner of a red dog relied more on words than on persistency and deeds to see his favorite breed through. Interest in their regeneration quickly faded in most instances and again and again the breed was surrendered to the show ring to the often complete neglect of working qualities.

The charge that self or solid color is the basis of much prejudice against the Irishman is true only in small part. I honestly believe that the vast majority of field trial judges would be proud to place such a dog with utmost fairness in any company in full accordance with his merits. However, it is too true that Irish setters in general are often deficient in nose, bird sense, animation and biddability and do not ordinarily measure up to the high standard of their early predecessors or to the standards of current pointers and English setters. Put down a superlative red dog in competition with the best of these breeds and you may rest assured he will not be discriminated against because of his origin or color.

For a fair appraisal of the Irish setter at his old time best in America I wish to quote from the estimate of John M. Tracy, great animal artist, outstanding anatomist and widely experienced judge of field trials who flourished about the turn of the century. Wrote Tracy: "The very best field dog I ever saw was an Irish setter. A good Irish setter is so exceedingly good, that no pains should be spared to make the breeding of them more sure. For those who shoot a great deal, and work the same dog on a great variety of game, there is no dog like a good Irish setter."

As this criterion was expressed in the era of such sterling performers as Rowdy Rod, Rip Rap, Chance, King's Mark, Maid of Kent, Antonio, Gath's Mark, Prince Lucifer, Daisy Hope, Daisy Hunter, Spotted Boy, et al., it evidences the very high regard Tracy held for the Irish breed.

In the same connection, this is what Edward Laverack had to say some thirty years previous: "So highly do I value the true blood belonging to the Irish that I have visited Ireland four times for the express purpose of ascertaining where the true blood was to be found, with a view of crossing them with my Beltons."

And that the great breeder did exactly that, in spite of later denials, is patently evident by the appearance of the red setter Mystery in a litter bred by him and which individual he conveniently charged to telegony. The blood of this pseudo Laverack has been handed down to many American setters, notably to Ch. Joe Cumming.

That Laverack, in spite of protestations to the contrary, often sought blood outside the alleged charmed circle of his exclusive(?) strain was sensationally exposed by Mr. Llewellyn in charges preferred before the English Kennel Club. Moreover, practically every authority of his day questioned the genuineness of the Laverack pedigrees and of the breeding system he assertedly employed. It was also insinuated there had been collusion between Laverack and his ghost writer, Prince de Vesnes, in the preparation of the pedigrees and attempted plausible explanation of the highly intensive and exclusive breeding system set forth in his book on setters.

In a series of articles by Edward Armstrong and published in the AMERICAN FIELD, that noted figure of the English kennel world and admirer of Edward

Laverack dwelt on his idiosyncrasies and egotism. And he made it clear that for monetary reasons and because of consuming vanity the old breeder claimed absolute purity and exclusiveness for "my breed"—a strain within a then loosely constructed and regulated breed—while urgently seeking the service of Field's Duke, of Duke-Rhoebe fame, and a distinct outcross, for his Laverack bitches.

While the foregoing may seem irrelevant in relation to the Irish setter, it should be realized that undue employment of Laverack's alleged breeding system in show connections, while sometimes advantageous in the physical sphere, can be highly destructive of intelligence. In some measure something like this seems to have happened to show setters. And it's a serious question if by unraveling shoddy wool and re-knitting wornout material you can rejuvenate exhausted lines short of a miracle. The history of all sporting and working breeds which must possess high intelligence or mentality to succeed, plainly reveals they were initially developed from a conglomeration of blood and once seriously vitiated must be revived with a spark from without or wither on the vine.

Nor can we assume that by any carefully planned breeding system more than a small fraction of dogs bred will possess high field qualities. This regardless of attempted exploitation of the Mendel Law or theory. In the realm of sporting dogs ultra scientific deductions of the genes and chromosomes school are still on a plane with relativity, profound and impressive to the impressionable but still considerable of a joke in a practical sense. Meanwhile the rough and ready but intelligent breeders who can't call any of these scientific bugs by their given names, continue to hit the jackpot most regularly, aided by common sense, intuition and a very large element of luck. The peas and beans stuff of the Mendel cult may work in a non-mental experimental field but it obviously has no proved formula for the inclusion of brains in its robots.

Reverting to the Irish setter, while my experience does not extend to personal knowledge of such greats as Elcho, Elcho Jr., Tim, Chief, Finglas, Bruce and some others prominent as the sires of sterling gun dogs, I did have opportunities to shoot over their produce. I have pleasant recollections of the high ability of Mike T., Chief Jr., George Gray's three-time winner Elcho's Maid, Finglas Jr., Lady Josie; also of a few others bred outside the pale, but splendid gun dogs nevertheless. All this, however, fifty and more years ago. Since then, with the exception of a good red one owned by my departed friend T. J. A. Tiedemann, I have missed seeing another top-notch Hibernian, although Al Hochwalt assured me an occasional one was to be seen in his travels.

An analysis of this long continued deterioration of the Irish setter plainly indicates that if the breed is ever to be rescued from a slave status imposed by the show ring, and because of the indifference of a lackadaisical fancy, assistance must come from without its ranks. This necessity was fully recognized by Horace Lytle, outstanding gun dog authority whose experience has been empirical in all branches of the fancy. In the January issue of *Sports Afield*, the Dayton sage openly advised the infusion of English setter blood in the sluggish blood stream of the grand old breed as the quickest and most practical means for regeneration.

Naturally, this revolutionary suggestion has aroused wide comment and much interest, together with bitter condemnation from straight laced witch burners and commendation from broader and discerning minds. If the Irish setter is to be rescued and restored to its once proud station as an outstanding gun dog, then why should its kinsmen and descendants of the English breed not be allowed to come to its rescue! After all, in the face of the undeniable genealogical history of our sporting breeds, why should not a shot of the old fashioned religion be applied in this instance? Or is bigotry and snobbery to continue to rule and inevitably push this parent breed completely off the map in a sporting sense? And, in the final analysis, what is Caucasian royalty other than a conglomeration of patrician breeds which intermarry for purely political reasons. Yet the same snob who wrings his hands in holy horror at the thought of mingling the blood of closely related canine breeds has the greatest admiration for such royal unions!

Inasmuch as some authorities and other partisans prefer to remain blind to the facts of gun dog genealogy and to coat such with a veneer of fictitious origin and long continued purity, they doubtless will continue to deny that any good has ever come from a union of Irish and English setter blood.

Yet aside from Laverack's very obvious employment of this combination, under cover, there is Llewellyn's and Teasdale-Buckell's admission it entered into the pedigree of the Llewellyn setter May Fly, a successful sire in America and progenitor of National Champion Commissioner.

This combination entered also into the Illsley line of English setters of which Horace Lytle is now the most active exponent and which within its limited scope has produced a number of field trial winners of high merit.

The orange and white Gildersleeves and Theodore Morford's orange and white strain, exceptional gun dogs as a whole, were said to have originated from this same combination, but these meritorious lines passed out of existence long ago because of the stigma placed on "native" setters.

Of the so called "natives," the Campbell setters were most conspicuous and successful in competition with imported English setters and pointers and their American bred descendants. This famous strain of Tennessee setters were originated by M. C. and George W. Campbell of Springhill, Tenn. It was founded on the mating of Mason's Jeff, of Irish-English ancestry, and a white and lemon bitch, Fan, with English antecedents. Because of the exceptional field qualities of this pair, and of their progeny without exception, the Campbell line developed a great reputation in the South and West. Setters of this breeding were freely entered by the Campbells in early trials and with great success. This culminated in the famous match race between Gladstone, pride of the Llewellyn camp, and the Campbell setter Joe Jr., which was by the great imported Irish setter Elcho out of Buck Jr., a cross-bred English-Irish bitch.

As a result of this and other wins added popularity accrued to the Campbell strain. And had the fancy not mounted the band wagons of imported strains of setters and pointers slightly in advance and fallen for the glamor of alleged patrician breeding, doubtless these so called "natives" would have enjoyed a great vogue on the strength of sheer merit.

Notwithstanding, although held in the background by their homespun origin, the comparatively few that were bred and started in trials more than held their own in the best of company. Others which never entered competition were superlative performers in the gunning field. And doubtless if their pedigree was traced there are many setters today whose merit rests in part on a remote dash of the old Campbell stuff.

Among the winning setters that come to mind as representatives of the Campbell line are the following: Campbell's Tom, Campbell's May, Buck Jr., Joe Jr., Tom III, Fannie, Daisy F., Daisy Hope, Daisy Hunter, Sam R., Daisy Hunter II, Count Hunter, Pin Money, Belle of Hardbargain, Shadow, Oudh, Agra, Hops Hunter, Daisy Hunter IV, Nellie Bly, Hal's Hope, Hal's Surprise, Hal's Belle, Antoinette, Brown's Queen Vic, Vic's Vic, Lottie Lorraine, Seven Up, Hoosier Girl, Bruce, Plain Rex, Antoinette Nancy, Lottie Rodfield, Ortiz King, Victor Okaw, Chit Chat, Sport Count Whitestone, Master John, Count Ceyx, Silver Lining, Verona Cap, Verona Diablo, Verona Cash, Dick Mills, Fair Play, Tom Edwards, Glean's Count Whitestone, Clark's Sport's Marian, Captain Heikes, George Clay. Although incomplete, this list provides an inkling of the prepotency of the Campbell blood, particularly in relation to Count Whitestone. Outstanding among these winners were Joe Jr., Daisy F., Daisy Hope, Pin Money, Daisy Hunter and Count Hunter, which rated high among the best American setters of all times.

Infinitesimal as the amount of red leaven coming through Ch. Eugene M may be in his descendants today, it is there and cannot be denied. Literally thousands of setters have inherited this boon or blemish—whichever way you wish to regard it. And hundreds have won in trials because of it or in spite of it. Many more of this impressive race of setters will be placed before its prepotency expires. The predominant Sport's Peerless, Sam L's Skyrocket, General and Flight Commander families carry it and so do the great majority of the descendants of Florendale Lou's Beau. Mississippi Zev transmitted it and it is present in Horace Lytle's current Illsleys. All this in spite of vilification second only to that with which Count Whitestone was smeared in an earlier era. He, too, confounded his critics not only by siring an incomparable family of class setters, but four National Champions to boot.

Opportunities considered, I have long thought my old friend Billy Titus, the sage of West Point, as the greatest of American setter breeders. As a handler his winning career with such stars as Bohemian Girl, which left an impression of highest quality on the mind of Al Hochwalt, and the Campbellite, Daisy Hope, which likewise created a furore, was auspicious. In numerous discussions he dwelt on the extreme boldness and uncanny bird sense of the cross-bred Campbells and on their great stamina.

Those were the days when four-hour stakes were conducted as the proper test of staying qualities. Consequently I regretted to note that in the last National Championship not one setter was started to go the shorter route of three hours and demonstrate that the longhairs had lost none of their old-time viscera and toughness.

I regret to add that in spite of his sagacity, Uncle Billy became inoculated in his late years with the Laverack virus and mirage and bred in accordance with those false doctrines, and with limited success. But in a letter dated August 23, 1926, at the sunset of his career, he wrote in contemplation: "Sometimes I think I would like to have a few dogs, setters of course, and do a little breeding. I think I would pick up Eugene's Ghost's bloodlines and use it constructively as a starter. But this pure Llewellyn business has done more to kill off the setter than anything else. It should be pointers and it should be setters for the good of the breeds; there have been some wonderful Llewellyns and some wonderful English setters. It is a case of 'United we stand, divided we fall.' I have never doubted for a moment but what it was due to the acceptance of breeding, without any questions being asked, that put the pointer in the lead. Bloodlines, no matter how great, how blue, never can equal great lines that will blend—prepotent blood. Of course, the proper selection cannot be put into formula; one must 'sense' the right ones."

As an early admirer and owner of Irish setters thoughts revert to those good ones I knew—tawny, bi-colored, solid red; and to cross-bred ones as well that had the stuff and delivered. I could name a host of experienced sportsmen too who swore by the breed, and a large percentage were not sentimental Irishmen at that.

It seems almost a crime that the ancient breed, essentially a sporting race with fine old antecedents, should be abandoned to a careless show fraternity and a boudoir life, instead of exercising talents in the field for which it was originally bred. Admittedly the four generation ban on registration of outside blood, i.e., English, within authentic Irish setter ranks, is a handicap to restoration by means other than straight-laced conventional breeding, this last a seemingly hopeless procedure in the light of past experience.

Notwithstanding, there may be resolute champions of the old breed who would consider formation of a specialty club and the facing of a temporary ban while carefully maintaining a system of cross-bred registration in the *Field Dog Stud Book*; this ~~is the only~~ ^{is the only} and most practical means for re-fashion of solid color can be abrogated and participation sanctioned as another step toward greater popularity for the breed. In any event, rapid and complete restoration of the once great field ability of the ancient line, by any means whatsoever, is a worthy objective. This constitutes a challenge to the breeding ability of American fanciers and breeders of genuine bird dogs. Something of the sort has been accomplished in relation to the pointer and the Brittany spaniel and appears applicable to the Irish setter.