

CHAPTER XI.

ON SCENT.

THIS is a question that up to the present time has never been satisfactorily settled, and I suppose never will be. It is well known to hunting men that some counties will only carry a good scent when it is wet and cold; others when it is dry or hard. In some shires it is better on fallows; in others on grass. There is no accounting for it, and no absolute rule that we know of to go by.

Scent is nothing more than the effluvia or evaporation emitted from any animal or bird, and is elevated or depressed by the weight of the atmosphere and current of air. That scent attaches itself to the herbage, heather, grass, rushes, or bushes the quarry passes through, we all know; and that it is stronger or weaker according to the nature of the ground and the pace the game passes through it. Of course, any bird or beast 'dwelling' leave a stronger trail than they would if they were to pass through quickly.

Every shooting man of experience must have often noticed that whenever a 'runner' gets out of the heather, &c., on to bare ground, that the dog soon loses the scent, and it is much more difficult for him to retain. The reason is obvious—there is no herbage to hold it.

A dog will work much quicker on bare ground to recover 'scent.' His instinct and sagacity tell him that there is nothing for it to adhere to—that it soon evaporates; and unless he can take it up quickly, he will lose it for ever. Directly the bird gets over the bare ground and enters cover, then it is that the scent becomes good again.

The reason that lost dead birds, and those that are wounded, who never stir, are so difficult to find, is because they leave no scent.

All good and experienced dogs, when 'footing,' do so quickly, knowing well that unless they 'road' fast the game must be lost to them, having evaporated.

When in a boat, flapper-shooting, I have found that the scent of the ducks *lies on the water*; the birds, swimming about, leave it on the surface. The weight of the atmosphere being heavy at the time, as it generally is in July and August, prevents its being blown off the surface.

On the Moors, it is extraordinary the distance the air tainted with scent is carried. I have time after time seen dogs rear themselves on their hind legs to 'wind it' in the atmosphere floating over their heads; and after finding the direction it came from, go slower and slower in the right line till they got their 'point.'

Huntsmen often fancy hounds will carry a brilliant scent, and race away with their heads up from 'find to finish;' instead of which they cannot run a hundred yards on the line without throwing up. At other times, when you imagine there could not be a worse hunting day, they will run into their fox without a check. Scent is very fluctuating, much depending on the soil and state of the atmosphere.

All shooting men know well that the deadly killing time for game is after 4 P.M. About this hour the air becomes cooler and moister; the dew commences to fall, and the birds to move; and the dogs hunt keener, because the scent lies.

As a rule, the best scenting days are when *scent rises*. It is then that many dogs who generally carry their heads low will hunt high, to catch the taint which is borne and wafted away in the current of air.

There is not the slightest doubt that scent rises or is depressed according to the atmospheric pressure; damp, rain, and other causes will affect it as well.