

Red Setter Recollections

By Nash Buckingham

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Mr. W. A. Wheatley, famed though his pen name of "Guido" as a champion of "Native" Setters in the post Civil War days, lived just three blocks from us. During my childhood and schoolboy days he was, next to my father, my chief mentor afield. I recall Sunday afternoons when we'd run bird dogs well within the city limits of Memphis. The P. H. Brysons lived just back of us, our kennels adjoined. I recall much talk of George and M. C. Campbell, later, but my closest link was with Mr. Jack Hays who had hunted over the Campbell dogs and owned some of the same stock. Mr. Wheatley, of course, had also hunted over them, particularly Joe, Jr., in some of his informal heats with the Llewellyn great, Gladstone. Mr. Hays always said that Joe beat Gladstone "about as often as Gladstone beat him."

I have a Wheatley owned color sketch from the old Beaver Dam Club of a pair of red end white setters. The inscription reads: "Joe, Jr. III and Morgan, sons of Native Joe Jr., Field Trial Champion. Property of W.A. Wheatley." I recall two or three setters of my youth that were good ones. My dad shot over two Gordons that were corkers and could have come down from old Knight. Knight was the Irish-Gordon that won America's first field trial in 1874.) But, suddenly, the red dogs just seemed to fade from the picture and the saying, then current among hunters was that they "had been bred down to pets and show dogs." I recall one black native named Nigger that we hunted just after the turn of the century. He belonged to Brodie Finley and would, today, be priceless. We hunted him for years; he had it all, and then some.

As to the red dogs, I agree heartily with Mr. Betten that perhaps a carefully selected and controlled outcross might have a substantial effect in "regressing" (Bridley Murphy effect) the old-time Redman's substantial gifts, and he had 'em!

Even so, NOTHING will save the gun dogs of this land, of any breed, until game is again as plentiful as it was in the coverts of long ago, and decent men (get that) go there to gun. Strange to say, or is it? today there are darn near more quail today than we had bird dogs in the yesteryears. Actually the bird dog shortage is acute and distressing. Various reasons are assigned: 1. Loss of what was public shooting territory to pasturage, etc. 2. Young fellows gone from country homes to wars, drafts and factories, consequently fewer country bird dogs raised. 3. Actual loss through droughts of interest in quail because of fewer birds. 4. Posted lands, and so on, including the cost and care of keeping dogs ten months to hunt a half-dozen times a season, maybe.

Anyway, you go through the country nowadays and the bird dogs 'just ain't there'. Men of means manage to keep leased lands, but even these are checking out. And, when they acquire properties, they have a devil of a time getting dogs worth gunning over. Recently a wealthy friend, a tycoon, acquired such a property and came flying

to me (and others) for dogs. Now, this season there was a slight uppage in bird conditions and even the ordinary hunters, enticed back, can't find dogs worth a dime. Nonetheless, the seller's look you right in the eye and ask \$350 to \$500 for some \$50 egg buster of five years ago. It's all gotta end somewhere.

The last time I saw the late Rufus McTybe O'Cloisters, I judged him in one of the stakes at the lovely old Plantation Owners Trials, near Estill, S. C. As I remember it, we gave him third, and he did a bang-up job of it too He was a fine sturdy fellow; stood up well. And I recall a very delightful lady in Pittsburgh, back in the war years, who had a string of darn good Irishmen. I regret that her name escapes me at the moment. I judged one of her dogs, I recall, at the stake held on the big Mellon Club at Rolling Rock. She was most delighted with her dog's win.

I'd like to see an All-Irishman Field Trial Shooting Dog Stake on much the same basis as the trials held at Estill. The grounds would have to hold plenty of birds. Each amateur owner to handle his own dog with shooting allowed and retrieving to count. We used to have a lot of fun. Some chap would have a corking dog, but he couldn't hit anything, and oh, how the gallery would razz!