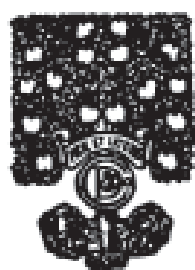


THE MASTER OF GAME
BY EDWARD, SECOND DUKE OF
YORK : THE OLDEST ENGLISH
BOOK ON HUNTING : EDITED BY
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WITH A FOREWORD BY THEODORE
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NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
MCMIX

FOREWORD

TO THE FIRST EDITION

DURING the century that has just closed Englishmen have stood foremost in all branches of sport, at least so far as the chase has been carried on by those who have not followed it as a profession. Here and there in the world whole populations have remained hunters, to whom the chase was part of their regular work—delightful and adventurous, but still work. Such were the American backwoodsmen and their successors of the great plains and the Rocky Mountains; such were the South African Boers; and the mountaineers of Tyrol, if not coming exactly within this class, yet treated the chase both as a sport and a profession. But disregarding these wild and virile populations, and considering only the hunter who hunts for the sake of the hunting, it must be said of the Englishman that he stood pre-eminent throughout the nineteenth century as a sportsman for sport's sake. Not only was fox-hunting a national pastime, but in every quarter of the globe Englishmen predominated among the adventurous spirits who combined the chase of big game with bold

exploration of the unknown. The icy polar seas, the steaming equatorial forests, the waterless tropical deserts, the vast plains of wind-rippled grass, the wooded northern wilderness, the stupendous mountain masses of the Andes and the Himalayas—in short, all regions, however frowning and desolate, were penetrated by the restless English in their eager quest for big game. Not content with the sport afforded by the rifle, whether a horse or a foot, the English in India developed the use of the spear and in Ceylon the use of the knife as the legitimate weapons with which to assail the dangerous quarry of the jungle and the plain. There were hunters of other nationalities, of course—Americans, Germans, Frenchmen; but the English were the most numerous of those whose exploits were best worth recounting, and there was among them a larger proportion of men gifted with the power of narration. Naturally under such circumstances a library of nineteenth century hunting must be mainly one of English authors.

All this was widely different in the preceding centuries. From the Middle Ages to the period of the French Revolution hunting was carried on with keener zest in continental Europe than in England; and the literature of the chase was far richer in the French, and even in the German, tongues than in the English.

The Romans, unlike the Greeks, and still more unlike those mighty hunters of old, the Assyrians, cared little for the chase; but the white-skinned, fair-haired, blue-eyed barbarians, who, out of the wreck of the Roman Empire, carved the States from which sprang modern Europe, were passionately devoted to hunting. Game of many kinds then swarmed in the cold, wet forests which covered so large a portion of Europe. The kings and nobles, and the freemen generally, of the regions which now make France and Germany, followed not only the wolf, boar, and stag—the last named the favourite quarry of the hunter of the Middle Ages—but the bear, the bison—which still lingers in the Caucasus and in one Lithuanian preserve of the Czar—and the aurochs, the huge wild ox—the *Urus* of Cæsar—which has now vanished from the world. In the Nibelungen Lied, when Siegfried's feats of hunting are described, it is specified that he slew both the bear and the elk, the bison and the aurochs. One of the early Burgundian kings was killed while hunting the bison; and Charlemagne was not only passionately devoted to the chase of these huge wild cattle, but it is said prized the prowess shown therein by one of his stalwart daughters.

By the fourteenth century, when the Count of Foix wrote, the aurochs was practically or entirely extinct, and the bison had retreated eastwards,

where for more than three centuries it held its own in the gloomy morasses of the plain south-east of the Baltic. In western Europe the game was then the same in kind that it is now, although all the larger species were very much more plentiful, the roebuck being perhaps the only one of the wild animals that has since increased in numbers. With a few exceptions, such as the Emperor Maximilian, the kings and great lords of the Middle Ages were not particularly fond of chamois and ibex hunting; it was reserved for Victor Emmanuel to be the first sovereign with whom shooting the now almost vanished ibex was a favourite pastime.

Eager though the early Norman and Plantagenet kings and nobles of England were in the chase, especially of the red deer, in France and Germany the passion for the sport was still greater. In the end, on the Continent the chase became for the upper classes less a pleasure than an obsession, and it was carried to a fantastic degree. Many of them followed it with brutal indifference to the rights of the peasantry and to the utter neglect of all the serious affairs of life. During the disastrous period of the Thirty Years War, the Elector of Saxony spent most of his time in slaughtering unheard-of numbers of red deer; if he had devoted his days and his treasure to the urgent contemporary problems of statecraft

and warcraft he would have ranked more nearly with Gustavus Adolphus and Wallenstein, and would have stood better at the bar of history. Louis XVI. was also devoted to the chase in its tamer forms, and was shooting at driven game when the Paris mob swarmed out to take possession of his person. The great lords, with whom love of hunting had become a disease, not merely made of game-preserving a grievous burden for the people, but also followed the chase in ways which made scant demands upon the hardier qualities either of mind or of body. Such debased sport was contemptible then; and it is contemptible now. [Luxurious and effeminate artificiality, and the absence of all demands for the hardy virtues, rob any pastime of all title to regard. Shooting at driven game on occasions when the day's sport includes elaborate feasts in tents on a store of good things brought in waggons or on the backs of sumpter mules, while the sport itself makes no demand upon the prowess of the so-called sportsman, is but a dismal parody upon the stern hunting life in which the man trusts to his own keen eye, stout thews, and heart of steel for success and safety in the wild warfare waged against wild nature.

Neither of the two authors now under consideration comes in this undesirable class. Both were mighty men with their hands, terrible in

battle, of imposing presence and turbulent spirit. Both were the patrons of art and letters, and both were cultivated in the learning of the day. For each of them the chase stood as a hardy and vigorous pastime of the kind which makes a people great. The one was Count Gaston de Foix, author of the most famous of mediæval hunting-books, a mighty lord and mighty hunter, as well as statesman and warrior. The other was Edward, second Duke of York, who at Agincourt "died victorious." He translated into English a large portion of Gaston de Foix's *La Chasse*, adding to it five original chapters. He called his book "The Master of Game."

Gaston's book is better known as *Gaston Phæbus*, the nickname of the author which Froissart has handed down. He treats not only of the animals of France, but of the ibex, the chamois, and the reindeer, which he hunted in foreign lands. "The Master of Game" is the oldest book on hunting in the English language. The original chapters are particularly interesting because of the light they throw upon English hunting customs in the time of the Plantagenets. The book has never hitherto been published. Nineteen ancient manuscript copies are known; of the three best extant two are on the shelves of the Bloomsbury treasure house, the other in the Bodleian Library. Like others of the famous old

authors on venery, both the Count of Foix and the Duke of York show an astonishing familiarity with the habits, nature, and chase of their quarry. Both men, like others of their kind among their contemporaries, made of the chase not only an absorbing sport but almost the sole occupation of their leisure hours. They passed their days in the forest and were masters of woodcraft. Game abounded, and not only the chase but the killing of the quarry was a matter of intense excitement and an exacting test of personal prowess, for the boar, or the bear, or hart at bay was slain at close quarters with the spear or long knife.

“The Master of Game” is not only of interest to the sportsman, but also to the naturalist, because of its quaint accounts of the “nature” of the various animals; to the philologist because of the old English hunting terms and the excellent translations of the chapters taken from the French; and to the lover of art because of the beautiful illustrations, with all their detail of costume, of hunting accoutrements, and of ceremonies of “*la grande venerie*”—which are here reproduced in facsimile from one of the best extant French manuscripts of the early fifteenth century. The translator has left out the chapters on trapping and snaring of wild beasts which were contained in the original, the hunting with running hounds being the typical and most esteemed form of the sport.

Gaston Phœbus's *La Chasse* was written just over a century before the discovery of America; "The Master of Game" some fifteen or twenty years later. The former has been reprinted many times. Mr. Baillie-Grohman in reproducing (for the first time) the latter in such beautiful form has rendered a real service to all lovers of sport, of nature, and of books—and no one can get the highest enjoyment out of sport unless he can live over again in the library the keen pleasure he experienced in the wilderness.

In modern life big-game hunting has assumed many widely varied forms. There are still remote regions of the earth in which the traveller must depend upon his prowess as a hunter for his subsistence, and here and there the foremost settlers of new country still war against the game as it has been warred against by their like since time primeval. But over most of the earth such conditions have passed away for ever. Even in Africa game preserving on a gigantic scale has begun. Such game preserving may be of two kinds. In one the individual landed proprietor, or a group of such individuals, erect and maintain a private game preserve, the game being their property just as much as domestic animals. Such preserves often fill a useful purpose, and if managed intelligently and with a sense of public spirit

and due regard for the interests and feelings of others, may do much good, even in the most democratic community. But wherever the population is sufficiently advanced in intelligence and character, a far preferable and more democratic way of preserving the game is by a system of public preserves, of protected nurseries and breeding-grounds, while the laws define the conditions under which all alike may shoot the game and the restrictions under which all alike must enjoy the privilege. It is in this way that the wild creatures of the forest and the mountain can best and most permanently be preserved. Even in the United States the enactment and observance of such laws has brought about a marked increase in the game of certain localities, as, for instance, New England, during the past thirty years; while in the Yellowstone Park the elk, deer, antelope, and mountain sheep, and, strangest of all, the bear, are not merely preserved in all their wild freedom, but, by living unmolested, have grown to show a confidence in man and a tameness in his presence such as elsewhere can be found only in regions where he has been hitherto unknown.

The chase is the best of all national pastimes, and this none the less because, like every other pastime, it is a mere source of weakness if carried on in an unhealthy manner, or to an excessive degree, or under over-artificial conditions. Every

vigorous game, from football to polo, if allowed to become more than a game, and if serious work is sacrificed to its enjoyment, is of course noxious. From the days when Trajan in his letters to Pliny spoke with such hearty contempt of the Greek over-devotion to athletics, every keen thinker has realised that vigorous sports are only good in their proper place. But in their proper place they are very good indeed. The conditions of modern life are highly artificial, and too often tend to a softening of fibre, physical and moral. It is a good thing for a man to be forced to show self-reliance, resourcefulness in emergency, willingness to endure fatigue and hunger, and at need to face risk. Hunting is praiseworthy very much in proportion as it tends to develop these qualities. Mr. Baillie-Grohman, to whom most English-speaking lovers of sport owe their chief knowledge of the feats in bygone time of the great hunters of continental Europe, has himself followed in its most manly forms this, the manliest of sports. He has hunted the bear, the wapiti, and the mountain ram in the wildest regions of the Rockies, and, also by fair stalking, the chamois and the red deer in the Alps. Whoever habitually follows mountain game in such fashion must necessarily develop qualities which it is a good thing for any nation to see brought out in its sons. Such sport is as far removed as possible from that in which the main

object is to make huge bags at small cost of effort, and with the maximum of ease, no good quality save marksmanship being required. Laying stress upon the mere quantity of game killed, and the publication of the record of slaughter, are sure signs of unhealthy decadence in sportsmanship. As far as possible the true hunter, the true lover of big game and of life in the wilderness, must be ever ready to show his own power to shift for himself. The greater his dependence upon others for his sport the less he deserves to take high rank in the brotherhood of rifle, horse, and hound. There was a very attractive side to the hunting of the great mediæval lords, carried on with an elaborate equipment and stately ceremonial, especially as there was an element of danger in coming to close quarters with the quarry at bay ; but after all, no form of hunting has ever surpassed in attractiveness the life of the wilderness wanderer of our own time—the man who with simple equipment, and trusting to his own qualities of head, heart, and hand, has penetrated to the uttermost regions of the earth, and single-handed slain alike the wariest and the grimmest of the creatures of the waste.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

THE WHITE HOUSE,
February 15, 1904.