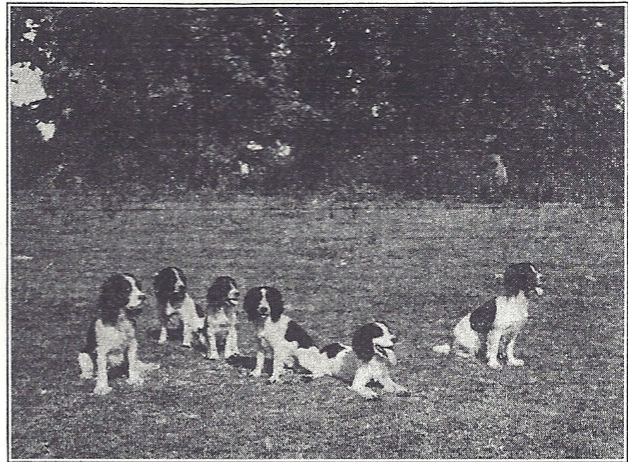


THE FERRY
Home of Major and Mrs. Hugh Peacock



THE PEACOCK SPANIELS
Awaiting training session on The Ferry Lawns

Account of a Delightful and Rewarding Visit to the Famed Kennels in England

By HENRY BEROL

MRS. BEROL and I had the good fortune this year to visit The Ferry, the home of Major and Mrs. Hugh Peacock. I am sure that Major Peacock's name will be familiar to Springer, Cocker and Retriever fanciers, for he is probably the foremost breeder, handler and trainer in England of these breeds. Their hospitality was superb, their knowledge of dogs was far and wide, and even their young daughter trains and runs her own Retrievers in trials.

We spent a most delightful evening talking about English Cockers, English Springers, and Labrador Retrievers, and when we finally retired that night, I realized that if there were more sportsmen in the world like our host, the country would be far better off, for here was a man who really practiced what he preached, as we were well able to find out early the next morning.

Until two of his trainers arrived the next morning, Major Peacock showed Mrs. Berol and myself a little work with Cockers, two of which have since been sent to the United States. For example, he took a dummy and threw it amongst some tame mallard ducks that were running around his lawns. Then he would tell his dog, that was sitting at heel, to fetch. This eleven-month-old Cocker ran through the ducks, picked up the dummy and returned to the handler in perfect fashion, not even noticing the ducks. "Ah," I said to myself, "this is real obedience work and these dogs are not very birdy." But the Major, as if he read my thoughts, said, "Now you believe that these are not real bird dogs—let me show you." In the meantime, the ducks of course had flown away to another part of the lawn, and again we walked to where the birds were, and again he had this eleven-month-old dog at hup position and again he threw the dummy amongst the birds, but this time he did not give the order to fetch, but gave the order to flush, and the dog immediately went among the birds and pushed them all into the air, returning without the dummy.

It is very interesting to note that during these demonstrations, the dogs continually watched the hand of the Major. When he points to the left, the dog goes to the left. When he points to the right, the dog goes to the right. In other words, the dog is guided solely by the hand. It is also interesting to note that there is practically no talking between the dog and the handler. The Major uses a silent whistle, and we were amazed when, on one of his demonstrations, the dog was ready to flush the bird and sat down apparently without command. Only later did we realize it was due to the fact that he blew this silent whistle.

Not only did we see these pups of eleven months work to perfection, but we also saw his more experienced dogs, and it was a pleasure to watch dogs that were so perfectly trained in every aspect of a Spaniel working without shouting, without loud whistles, without any noise, and working to perfection.

A little later on, a truckload of dogs arrived with two of the Major's handlers. We were then taken into a fenced in field of approximately five acres. This field contained brush, briars, cover, trees, everything that you would find during a day's hunting, including wild game, which include rabbits—as

a matter of fact, the rabbits had a special small pen in the middle of the five-acre tract where they breed, with special gates that are closed during these training periods so that the rabbits cannot get into their home. Some of the pheasants we saw running around were pinioned, others could fly. There were partridge, ducks, in fact practically all the game that is usually hunted in England. We happened to be on this estate during the month of June, when it is against the law to do any hunting, and therefore no shooting was involved during our demonstration.

The three handlers—that is, the Major and his two handlers—were in a straight line about twenty yards from each other. They each must have had at least six or eight dogs walking at heel. Then we started off, Mrs. Berol and I in the rear as judges. First one handler would allow his dog to run until he flushed either a rabbit or some bird, then the dog would have to hup. The game, whatever the dog flushed, would usually run forward, fly forward, or across the other dogs, that would all be in a sitting position at this time, and the dogs would have to continue to sit even though the birds would run right through them. The reason for this, namely that the birds run right through the dogs at hupping position, is the fact that there are a lot of one-foot wire fences throughout this field in order to make the birds run along the fence where the dogs are kept in a hupping position. The handler who had the dog working and who flushed the game would then take a dummy or a dead crow and throw it among the brush, where, in all likelihood, there were more game. The dog would immediately go for the dummy, would not flush the game, and would return with the dummy. This operation would then be repeated, with one of the dogs of another handler retrieving the dummy. Each of the eighteen to twenty-four dogs would have a turn at flushing or retrieving or both. The Retrievers, of course, were only allowed to retrieve. Sometimes two dogs would be allowed to flush game, but none of the dogs were allowed to interfere with each other.

During the first demonstration through these five acres, we saw the younger dogs work. The ages varied from eleven months to approximately eighteen months of age. Then we had a demonstration of the older dogs. The remarkable part was that even though there were these young dogs, all of the dogs we saw were under perfect control at all times. Sometimes, of course, the younger dogs would break, as is very natural for young dogs to do. None of the dogs were severely punished—in fact, the Major told me that he had never whipped a dog in his life. All he does is scold the dog, and a mere slap is about the worst punishment they receive. The dogs love the sport, and above all love their handlers.

The next demonstration we saw was taking these same dogs before they finished their work into a pen, about six dogs at a time. This pen was about 100 feet long, and possibly six feet wide. Every ten feet there was a jump, starting from about one foot to three and a half feet for the last four or five, with different kinds of jumps—one being wire, another of steel rod, another of wooden fences, and one a mixture of both, so that they would have a variety of jumps to cross. They would then throw the dummy the length of the pen, or put the dummy into the last few sections of the pen, and then they would ask one dog after another to make the retrieve. The purpose of this, of course, is to teach the dogs to jump and also to carry the bird or the dummy, as the case may be, during the jump. This means that the dog has to hold the bird in the air

while he is jumping, and hence his head is high when he makes a regular retrieve.

The Major starts all his training at a very early age, approximately six months. The puppies are allowed to chase for the first few days, and after that they are completely held in restraint. In other words, he doesn't allow the puppies to do as they please, but starts their obedience training after he is convinced that the dogs really have the hunting instinct in them. In order to do this, however, he has to be sure of his strain. Hence the Major will not accept any kind of strain for this type of training. The dogs that don't come up to his expectations during the training period are disposed of as rapidly as possible. He keeps only the best. It is easy to understand, therefore, why Greatford Kennels produces such wonderful dogs, and why the Major has been so successful in field trials. Sometimes a competitor may have a better dog, but the competition is not as well trained and, as a consequence, the Major is quite at ease when he takes a dog into a field trial. He doesn't have to worry whether the dog will break, for these dogs certainly had lots of opportunities to break during the exhibitions we saw and very few of them did, that is of the younger ones, and of course none of the older ones did, even though the game ran through their legs. It is therefore easy for him, for example, to call off a dog that is trailing in a field trial, without being worried whether or not the dog will come off. It is also easy for him to get the bird that was shot without the dog going on the trail of a running bird and flushing a lot of other birds near the shot game, because when a dog is told to fetch, he knows that he must bring back the killed bird without flushing some other game.

It is also interesting to note that English field trials are conducted on quite a different basis than American trials. All of the game in a field trial is wild, no birds are planted. A brace of dogs is down for approximately an hour, therefore as a rule no more than about sixteen dogs can run in a day's trial. A dog, therefore, must have a great deal more stamina than our dogs that are only down for about fifteen minutes. It is also interesting to note that shouting or a lot of whistle blowing is highly frowned on in English trials. It is also true that a dog which crushes its game or kills wounded game is deeply frowned on. Furthermore, an English trial cannot be run, as they are in America, in a small section of land such as one hundred acres. He has, for example, approximately 8600 acres in which to train his dogs. Here at Castor, many of the permanent field trials are held, and they utilize most of the land in the course of the trial.

It is interesting to note that once a dog starts his training career, he is never allowed to do as he wants. The dogs are kept in smaller pens than those of our dogs here, and smaller than the pens of most of the trainers here. However, a dog is usually taken out twice a day, morning and evening, by an experienced handler. He may be taken out for only ten minutes or half an hour, depending on the circumstances, but he is never left in the pen any length of time. Of course, the weather is much more favorable for training all year round than it is in most parts of the United States. Be that as it may, a dog undergoes continuous training until he has completed his field trial career. Most of his training is done in such a way that he enjoys it. He and his handler work in perfect coordination as a team. The dog relies much more on his handler than the American dogs that are used to relying on their own ingenuity. Another interesting thing about English training and field trials is that in