

# Tales of the Long Bow

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHEN I was young a rabbit shot at 50 yards was 150 yards away when I got home; a stag brought down at 200 yards moved off to 500, and a running pig stopped at any distance at all over 75 yards was 300 yards away when I hit it, or more. It was not lying and nothing else, but it was lying more than anything else—conscious in accuracy lit up and stimulated by vanity, swagger, and the excitement of the chase. Today all my distances have shrunk to the dim realities of age and a rabbit at 100 yards is safe from everything but a fluke.

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But I need not have worried about my early lies. They were timid, dull and small. I have this week read a book by an American correspondent who was in the field with the Boers in 1900, and it was nothing for Boer marksmen to kill running hares at 500 yards. A stationary hare 500 yards is position and very little magnitude; a running hare is a moving blur. But the Boers did better than that. While they were filling in time waiting for Lord Roberts to advance from Bloemfontein, "Commandant Blignaut, of the Transvaal, killed three running springbok at a range of more than 1700 yards, a feat witnessed by a score of persons." I think I have met these "witnesses" before and these reporters. A springbok at 1700 yards is a hare at 1000 yards—with this difference, that it runs like a rooster robbed suddenly of its head, up and down without ceasing, but so fast that at 1700 yards you might as well shoot at the Morse code. A feat witnessed by a score of persons can be a bladder blown up by 20 unreasoning fools. Bravely as the Boers fought, and skillfully, they lost

their war. They lost because they were outnumbered at least six, and perhaps ten, to one. But ten men who can't hit a horse at 200 yards are all dead before they reach the concealed marksman who can bowl over running springbok at 1700 yards. Only one in six of the men who fought against the Boers did not return, after three years of battles, accidents, and intermittent waves of disease.

When a man tells me that two and two are five, I think his arithmetic is weak. When he says they are 25 I write a note about him.

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THE day after I wrote a note about the arrival of wasps in the South Island, Jim brought me one impaled on a cork. He had caught it in his kitchen, and since then has caught and seen others. Though I have so far seen none myself, I can't suppose that they have passed me by.

But when I suggested to Jim that wasps may help to keep the flies down and at the same time

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fertilise his lucerne, he said that if they did one of these things they would not do the other—that they could not be honey-eaters and also carnivorous. That sounded right to me, good logic and good biology; yet I was sure that I had read that wasps do have these contradictory habits. Though it was the blind trying to lead the blind I made another search through my books and found more than one plain statement by authorities that while mature wasps like



"Wasps may be doing as much good as harm"

honey, and in late summer live largely on the sweet juices of ripe fruit, wasp grubs are fed chiefly on chewed insects. There are, of course, wasps and wasps—about 1500 varieties, I think, altogether—and I still can't be sure that the variety we are said to have here, German wasps, are carnivorous, though I gather that they are to some extent. The story, if I have read it accurately, and with understanding, is that all wasps were carnivorous once, and that fresh meat is still a "primary appetite" with wasp grubs. Wasps do not, however, paralyse insects with their stings, as ichneumon flies do, and store them whole, but tear them to pieces with their jaws, chew them into a pulp, and then feed them to their larvae as birds feed their young, the hungry grubs protruding their heads from the cells and opening their mouths.

Nor does there seem to be any doubt that wasps fertilise or help to fertilise some flowers. They can't, I gather, reach deep-seated honey, and therefore visit

chiefly those flowers which are shallow and widely opened. That, I am afraid, makes them more useful to some of our noxious weeds (fennel, hemlock, hogweed, for example) than to lucerne and clover, but they at least have sucking mouths, and in a million years will probably be able to do everything that bees do now. In the meantime they may be doing as much good as harm, if they have an unpleasant way of doing it. But I don't think that is the reason why the authorities have thrown up the sponge.

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ONE of my problems these hot days is to keep Scamp out of the water-trough. It is no joke to carry 70 or 80 gallons with a bucket to the withering trees, but water has to be saved by the cup at present, and not to empty the trough once a dog has bathed in it is to doom the cows to about 36 hours of thirst before they will drink. Elsie is tougher in this matter than Betty is, and will usually drink in

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about 24 hours—unless I happen to have powdered Scamp with gammexane. Then there is nothing for it but an hour's hot work with a kerosene tin and an hour's wait later for the trough to fill again. Unfortunately, gammexane lingers a long time, and dogs, even when they have suffered for their sins, forget. It is monstrous to punish a dog at 6 o'clock for a sin committed at 4 o'clock, and I have not been lucky enough with Scamp, as I was with Tip, to catch him in the bath while I had a stick in my hand and was near enough to roar, strike and pursue in one continuous act of violence. With Tip the cure was permanent. In the same circumstances it might work with Scamp, too, but the setting so far has eluded me.

(Solution to No. 790)

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### Clues Across

- These little tracks usually develop after a while, but they could be first (5)
- An unexpected vehicle to find in such a riotous place as a Butlin's holiday camp (7).
- A busy little creature follows a very close-mouthed one, and together they become very noisy (7).
- Anyone could have these little differences, but Ma's are apparently caused by large dogs (5).
- I go before the engineering graduate, who has ten following him, to find a mountain goat (8).
- Low circles for yachts, perhaps? (8).
- Academic exercise from the half-sister (6).
- Little Antony confused, and in French, but a little later, perhaps (3, 3).

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- When this figure is regular, it's a square, and when misplaced it's not great (8).
- Con this for musical vivacity (4).
- It may be down, but it's nearly always on top (5).
- Going ashore at the top of the stairs? (7).
- To a Cockney, this might sound rather an intellectual feature (7).
- Hew at the grain (5).
- The principal ingredient of all potent wines (7).
- Idea from a hot thug (7).
- There is obviously nothing in this depression (6).
- Quote for a hat (5).
- The river of Wagner's maidens (5).
- "Like — upon the desert's dusty face" (Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam) (4)

No. 791 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

### Clues Down

- A written acknowledgment comes back from the one who gets the first piece, remember? (7).
- The R.A.F. is upset over me in the structure (5).
- A small piece of the Queen of Heart's tarts found in the sky (4).
- Actually it's a fruit, but you could make it corn (6).
- Near riot comes to the fore (8).
- Early childhood, apparently a matter of imagination (7).
- The heart of these jobs calls for an answer (5).
- Sad rites for a great misfortune (8).

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24.						25.

It interests me all the same to note the different ways different animals have of countering heat. Cats, which are as warmly clad as dogs, and as far as I know as impervious in the skin, never enter water voluntarily. Sheep don't and goats don't. Cows do to a limited extent, though their aim, I think, when they stand in water (and are not there simply to eat) is to escape from leg-biting flies. Horses will sometimes splash themselves with water, but as I have seen them doing it in winter as well as in summer I suspect that the splashing is a nervous reaction rather than an effort to give themselves a cold shower. Elephants, a thousand pictures prove, do take baths, both shower and plunge, while buffaloes will lie for hours nearly submerged. So will pigs, and so will deer; but since it is the males in these two places that do most of the wallowing, since they sometimes do it at night, and often in hard frosts, I am not sure that temperature is the basic factor. I have never seen a rabbit enter water except to cross it; or a hare or a ferret or a weasel or a stoat. I am not sure about rats, which plop in and out of the water when they live in the banks of a river or creek, but in those cases I imagine that food is the attraction—that they are hunting or scavenging. Birds like baths, but vary greatly in their method of taking them, sometimes throwing the water over themselves with their wings, and sometimes squatting in it (as pigeons often do even in the coldest weather). But has anyone ever seen a hen bathing herself, or a hawk, or an owl?

(To be continued)