

**GAME
BIRDS AT HOME**

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Game birds at home by Theodore S. Van Dyke

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THEODORE S. VAN DYKE

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GAME-BIRDS
AT HOME.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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GAME BIRDS AT HOME

BY THEODORE S. VAN DYKE
AUTHOR OF "THE STILL HUNTER";
"SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA"; ETC.

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ALICE'S
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PREFACE.

To the majority of sportsmen love of nature is the principal element in the love of hunting. The pleasure of exercising skill in the finding and capture of game is really secondary to this, and still more subordinate is the flavor or size of the game. Thousands enjoy a stroll with the dog, out of season, almost as well as the real hunt.

To please such, a book should be made up of selected charms of the field.

These are, first and foremost, the nature of the game, its action and behavior. The mere form or size is of no more consequence than the flavor. Why the action of certain birds will give man more delight than that of others is one of nature's secrets. We can only say it is charming; and describe it as we know it.

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Besides its own fascination, this action must be such as to require a high degree of skill in man or dog, and generally in both, to effect capture. Yet, though game must occasionally drop to gratify man's inborn love of exercising skill, there must be *no murder*.

Then, too, the stage of action must be the home of the bird,—that natural scenery the sportsman loves so well to roam without a gun. And this must be depicted true in color to its place and season.

Small room for mistake is left me on these points, after forty years of play with the gun and eighteen years of writing for the sportsmen of America. Chiefly for them this book is written, and that rather to touch certain tender chords of memory than to convey information; although the lover of nature who is not yet an expert huntsman may, I trust, find some hints of experience not altogether without value to him.

As to pictorial illustration, it is a sound rule of art that a picture must explain itself: one that requires exposition, or wandering of the eye to connect leading features, is generally a

bore. But when you apply this rule to a picture of field-sports—especially with small game, limit the action to a narrow background, and against this group the actors so clearly that every one must understand it at a glance, you have portrayed rank murder. Though easy killing occasionally happens, it is a matter always of regret, not of pride; a parade of it is simply disgusting. Fine drawing of shiny guns, fancy leggings, and other fashionable “toggerly” on the killer behind the gun, help this kind of “art” like a red rosette on the tail of the prize ox falling beneath the sledge at the shambles. Even a butcher would be disgusted with a painting of a lamb bleeding on the block; and the more perfect the dripping blood, the more damnable the outrage upon art in the selection of such a subject.

A picture that should even touch the field that charms—with its wide range, its varied features and colors, and its almost invisible game—would be more of a map than a picture. The rules of art cannot be safely violated. Neither can the rules of the sportsman’s taste: and *Positively no murder* is the first of these. I have