

# The English Springer by Arthur Croxton-Smith

From the book *The Power of the Dog* (1910)

## THE ENGLISH SPRINGER

*"O, how full of briers is this working-day world!"*

Shakespeare—*As You Like It*.

*"The chief requisite in all kinds of spaniels is, that they be good finders, and have noses so true that they will never overrun a scent. . . . They should be high-mettled, as regardless of the severest weather as of the most punishing cover, and ever ready to spring into the closest thicket the moment a pointed finger gives the command."*

General Hutchinson

The transition from the toy varieties to a spaniel is somewhat violent. The one is intended to please the eye, to gratify the æsthetic sense, and charm by his manners in the house; the other is designed primarily, by serving the sportsman in the held, to accomplish useful duties, **but at the same time his docility of disposition, sagacity of expression and beauty of coat make him also a welcome companion when the day's labours are ended.** In estimating the worth of a gundog I should lay much stress upon his fitness for associating with mankind, for there is no doubt that if we win the confidence and friendship of our four-footed servitors the pleasure in their possession is much increased, and we have them under far better command **when at work.** Of all the foolish things written the hackneyed couplet so much quoted has precedence:

"A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut tree,

The more you beat them, the better they be."

The ladies are quite capable of looking after themselves, and need no champion. I daresay a walnut tree may be all the better for a good "splashing," as we used to say in the Midlands, **but I am certain the less a whip is used on a dog of any sort the more likely are we to be successful in our efforts to exact prompt and ready obedience to our commands.** The man who uses physical correction too freely is in want of a practical application of the monition contained in the Book of Proverbs: "A rod for the back of fools."

Of the many handsome sub-varieties of spaniels with which we are familiar to-day the English Springer, perhaps, enjoys the least popularity, although his merits as a worker entitle him to a high place in our regard. As a show dog he has never assumed much prominence, but at held trials and on private shootings he is constantly demonstrating his utility. **No other spaniel has been bred less for "points" or more consistently for work.** Less excitable than the volatile Cocker, his longer legs and sturdier frame adapt him to purposes which the smaller is unable to perform. **On the other hand, unless well broken, he, by ranging too far afield, may put up the game out of gunshot. It therefore follows that in his early days he must be made absolutely steady. Whether he becomes so or not is not so much attributable to the inherent wickedness of the dog as to the lack of patience in his breaker.** One is almost inclined to say that the good breaker is born not made. **At any rate, supposing you have the leisure, this is a task better undertaken by yourself than entrusted to a gamekeeper, who may have neither the time nor disposition to act as a wise schoolmaster.**

A Springer is large enough to retrieve both far and feather, but whether or no he should be encouraged to do this depends upon circumstances. General Hutchinson says: *"When a regular retriever can be constantly employed with spaniels, of course it will be unnecessary to make any of them fetch game*

*(certainly never to lift anything which falls out of bounds), though all the team should be taught to 'seek dead.'* This is the plan pursued by the Duke of Newcastle's keepers, and obviously it is the soundest and easiest practice, for it must be always more or less difficult to make a spaniel keep within his usual hunting limits, who is occasionally encouraged to pursue wounded game, at his best pace, to a considerable distance."



"Tissington Flush"  
Owned by Sir Hugo  
Fitzherbert, Bart  
and Painted by Maud  
Earl

The word Springer is applied to all medium-legged spaniels, as apart from the short-legged ones, that are neither Clumbers nor Sussex. It is of good old English derivation, denoting the object for which the dog was employed--to spring birds to the net or gun. The form of the dog has not undergone any marked change since a Dictionary of Sport, published shortly before Queen Victoria came to the throne, spoke of him as differing but little from the Setter, except in size, being nearly two-fifths less in height and strength. He is of symmetrical formation, varying a good deal in size from thirty pounds to sixty pounds, with unbounded energy. He may be a self-coloured

liver, black, or yellow, or pied or mottled with white, tan, or both. Miss Earl's picture brings out beautifully the correct shape of his body, and the handsome intelligent-looking head. Older pictures suggest that a hundred years ago or less the skull was broader between the ears, and the head shorter, but the refining process has not been carried far enough to jeopardise the brain power. In many breeds I have noticed that a broad skull indicates self-will and stubbornness, and therefore it seems to me that the slight change is all for the better.

The other variety of Springer indigenous to Wales is quite distinct from our own. He is smaller in size, and in colour he is red or orange and white, preference being given to the former.

From the same book: [click here to read about the English Pointer.](#)

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project!](#)

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From the book *The Power of the Dog* (1910)

## The Pointer

*"His nostril wide into the murky air,  
Sagacious of his quarry from so far."  
Milton—Paradise Lost*

*tiff by the tainted gale with open nose,  
Outstretch'd and finely sensible, draws full,*

*Fearful, and cautious, on the latent prey;  
As in the sun the circling covey bask  
Their varied plumes, and, watchful every way,  
Through the rough stubble turn the secret eye.*

Thomson

The respective virtues of the Pointer and Setter have been discussed without stint for many years, the advocates of each retaining their opinions uninfluenced by the arguments on the other side. It may not be known that no less a person than Sir Walter Scott once had a mild hand in the game. In "St. Ronan's Well," if you turn to the account of the dinner party which led to much ill-humour, you will find these remarks: "*The company were talking of shooting, the most animating topic of conversation among Scottish country gentlemen of the younger class, and Tyrrel had mentioned something of a favourite setter, an uncommonly handsome dog, from which he had been for some time separated, but which he expected would rejoin him in the course of next week. 'A setter,' retorted Sir Bingo with a sneer; 'a pointer, I suppose you mean?' 'No, sir,' said Tyrrel; 'I am perfectly aware of the difference betwixt a setter and a pointer, and I know the old-fashioned setter is become unfashionable among modern sportsmen. But I love my dog as a companion, as well as for his merits in the field; and a setter is more sagacious, more attached, and fitter for his place on the hearth-rug, than a pointer—not,' he added, 'from any deficiency of intellects on the pointer's part, but he is generally so abused while in the management of brutal breakers and grooms that he loses all excepting his professional accomplishments, of finding and standing steady to game.'*"

Sir Bingo could not understand why one should wish for anything more. He never before heard that a setter was fit to follow any man's heels but a poacher's. Tyrrel's point was that "many people have been of opinion, that both dogs and men may follow sport indifferently well, though they do happen, at the same time, to be fit for mixing in friendly intercourse in

society." A sentiment which we cordially approve. Whether the shooting man should select a Pointer or Setter to aid him in the field or on the moor resolves itself very largely into a question of individual taste. Either, when well broken, is capable of carrying out his highly specialized duties with great skill, and no prettier sight can be imagined than a brace of these clever animals quartering the ground and coming to a statuesque point when the game is winded. Of course, in externals the two breeds present many striking differences. Some admire the beautiful coat and gentle expression of the Setter, while others there are who declare that:

#### Loveliness

Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,  
But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.



"Flax" Owned by  
William Arkwright,  
Esq. Painted by Maud  
Earl (1910)

In other words, form appeals more to them than coat. They dwell upon the handsome outline of the Pointer, his symmetrical, powerfully knit body, his straight legs and muscular quarters. The modern dog is not without his critics, however, who contend that a foxhound cross has been used in modern times as well as many years ago, and that the hound

qualities introduced are detrimental rather than otherwise. It is urged that the duties demanded of the Pointer are even more exacting than those of the foxhound, as regards stamina, and that if the old dogs could perform them creditably there was no occasion to resort to outside blood, which developed a headstrong disposition that renders breaking more difficult, and tends to unsteadiness. In justice to the other disputants, it should be explained that they deny the alien cross, and contend that, as the foxhound is a perfect piece of mechanism, Pointer breeders are justified in attempting to work up to such a worthy model. Although one does not ask for a potterer it is questionable if great pace in a gundog is either necessary or desirable, for the fast animal is liable to pass birds that a slower one would find. After all, the truest test of excellence is finding birds for the guns, a feat in which the flashy worker is not always proficient.

In the innumerable letters which have appeared upon the subject I have never seen reference to the remarks of General Hutchinson. Possibly they have been quoted and escaped my observation. This gentleman, who is very rightly regarded as a sound authority, laid stress upon a sporting dog having small, round, hard feet, which he held [to be a more certain test of endurance than any other point.](#) *"Rest assured, that the worst loined dogs with good feet are capable of more fatigue in stubble or heather than the most muscular and best loined, with fleshy 'understandings.' The most enduring pointers I have ever seen hunted had more or less of the strain of the foxhound; but doubtless they were proportionately hard to break."*

A variety of Pointer not much seen now-a-days is the black, or Scottish, which, of course, is free from any imputations as to the purity of his lineage. He is said to be all that one could wish.

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