

SHOOTING WITH THE KING AT SANDRINGHAM

By A ONE-TIME GUEST

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES TEMPLE

THE most coveted invitation to members of the British aristocracy is that which bids the recipient to Sandringham as the guest of King Edward and Queen Alexandra. The visitors are usually divided into two distinct sets—a Friday to Monday party, and a Monday to Friday party. In the former there is gen-

erally a bishop, dean, or canon for the Sunday service, two or three eminent statesmen, and a sprinkling of musical, literary, and artistic celebrities. In the other party there are, principally, some distinguished visiting foreigner, his suite, and the King's personal friends, and more particularly those whom he has invited for the shooting,



One of the King's Guests, Colonel Macalmon, Waiting for the Flight.



King Edward Shooting on the Sandringham Preserves.

for it is in the shooting season that Sandringham is most largely used by its owners, their stay there, as a rule, commencing in November and terminating in February.

Arriving at Wolferton, where guests for Sandringham alight, carriages and baggage wagons are found waiting for the "royal train," and you are driven rapidly up to the gates of the King's private estate. Received by footmen, outer wraps and vestments are removed, and you are ushered into a spacious hall, or saloon, where you are received with

all in one extensive panorama, with an uninterrupted outlook over the North Sea.

Norfolk has always been noted for its game preserves, and the King has done much for the promotion of sport in the county. His Majesty is the keenest of sportsmen; his preserves are his great hobby, and are among the finest and best stocked in the kingdom. Facts and figures prove this; for the ten years ending in 1888, the bag ran from 6,831 head to 8,640 per annum, and since 1888 the bags have run from



The King's Gunroom at Sandringham.

the distinguished grace and courtesy for which the royal host and hostess are so justly celebrated. The drive from Wolferton has been an inspiring one. Rabbits, in hundreds, are popping hither and thither; pheasants are flying over your head; squirrels are scampering up and down the trees, and there are sounds of many feathery songsters in the branches. You catch the distant murmur of the sea, and you seem to get the beauty of the Highlands, the grandeur of the sea, and the very pick of English scenery,

10,000 during that year to 20,000, of which not less than two-thirds are pheasants. The King never allows more than ten people to shoot at one time at Sandringham, and the game book, an accurate record of all that is done, shows some remarkable bags. On the coming of age of the late Duke of Clarence the bag for three days was within 150 head of 6,000. The party consisted of His Majesty, then Prince of Wales; the late Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Christian, the Duke of Cambridge, the late Duke of Clar-



Emperor William of Germany at Sandringham on One of the Big Shooting Days During His Recent Visit.

ence, the Duke of York, the late Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, the late Prince of Leiningen, the late Count Gleichen, and the Marquis of Lorne, now the Duke of Argyll, and it is a singular fact that of the party of ten, five of its members, four of them younger than His Majesty, have died.

The King is an early riser, and usually has a half day's work done before his guests are served with their first cup of tea. The regular breakfast hour at Sandringham is 9:30. The meal is served on round tables, set for parties of six or seven. Neither the King nor any of the royal family take breakfast downstairs, but are served in their own rooms.

in the covers by some good-natured jokes. Seated on his shooting-stool, which is fixed in the ground by one long leg, and gives him the appearance of being seated in the air, he looks the picture of a jovial country gentleman. About eleven o'clock the shooting party groups itself in the grounds, and behind the sportsmen stand some forty beaters, looking picturesque in their blue blouses and low felt hats trimmed with royal scarlet, and armed with formidable looking quarter-staffs. In Wolferton woods, about two miles from Sandringham House, the main shooting is done, and the King is never happier than when he has donned his tweeds, and, with rifle in hand, is managing the shooting



The King Usually Walks From Cover to Cover, But Sometimes Rides His Shooting Pony.

Shooting at Sandringham usually commences at ten in the morning and ends at four o'clock, and the King, although he possesses a shooting pony, rarely uses him, and almost invariably walks with his guests for the greater part of the day, though this season, because of his recent illness, perhaps, he has ridden more than usual. The assembling hour is fixed the night before, and the party is at the spot, ready and awaiting the King's arrival at the appointed time. There is no formality in reaching the rendezvous; some walk, others ride in jaunting cars or country carts. The King is a genial host among his sporting guests, and occasionally relieves the tedium of a long "wait"

affairs. For, being a keen sportsman, he takes the shooting management mainly into his own hands, and it would be difficult to find a better day's sport than is arranged for upon the Sandringham pheasant estate, where partridge, woodcock, snipe, and sea-fowl abound. Though the King shoots regularly over his estates, big shooting days are quite important affairs, and there are only a few during the season. There are, generally, big shoots on the King's and Queen's birthdays, both of which are at the height of the shooting season, and during the Christmas holidays, when the party always includes four or five expert shots. The day before a big shoot, notice is sent over the

estate, and all work is stopped. On the morning of the day itself all farm machinery is at a standstill, as the King will not allow the birds to be disturbed by any noise, excepting what is made by the beaters who drive them in toward the guns. Soon after daylight, farmhands with blue and red flags, wearing smocks and red bands round their hats, are taken to their places by the keepers, and the head gamekeeper rides over the ground to see that they are properly posted. Game carts are sent to the places

ers' luncheon tent with their presence. Luncheon, which is always hot, and always of plain and simple dishes, takes place at one o'clock. There is Irish stew, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, or boiled beef and batter pudding, the Queen and the other ladies generally walk the remaining hours of daylight with the guns.

The spot for luncheon varies, according to the arrangements made for the shooting. If the rabbit warrens are gone over it is served in the rooms which the King added



The Prince of Wales Ready for the Birds.

where the firing is likely to be the hottest, and, when all is ready, the vehicles carrying the King and his guests arrive. Every one in the party works with two loaders and from two to four guns. The sight, when the birds rise just above the guns, is a remarkable one, and can only be seen on estates that are as carefully preserved as is that of the King. On these big shooting days, in November and December, the Queen, the Princess of Wales, the Princesses, and any other lady visitors invariably grace the shoot-

to Wolferton station when he was Prince of Wales. Occasionally the King and his party lunch at one of the farmhouses on the estate, notice having previously been sent of their coming; but the favorite mid-day halting place is at The Folly, a quaint little cottage nestling in a small plantation overlooking the highway. When the weather is fine, and no building is within easy reach, a tent is erected, and the lunch sent from the "house" is laid on the improvised tables. The "big days" at Sandringham, especially

when they are for the entertainment of royalty, are picturesque affairs. Here and there, through the vari-colored late foliage, are a hundred beaters, quaintly costumed in blue blouses with white lace fronts, and soft felt hats encircled by red or blue bands, each one showing his number on his chest; behind the guns come stray villagers, keen to see the sport, yet, courteously characteristic of the old country life, just as eager not to be in the way. There, last November, was the Kaiser, austere and autocratic, yet jolly

The King objects strenuously to having it said that he delights in the number of birds he shoots. In fact, he takes but a small part in the big shoots at Sandringham. He and the Prince of Wales, as keen a sportsman as his father, always take the worst places in the shooting line, and if a guest remarks upon the fact the answer is, generally, that if the guest is getting good sport, he, the King, is perfectly satisfied. His Majesty is very strict about the wounded birds being immediately put out of their



The Game Is Spread Out in Rows Near the Luncheon Tent.

as a lad out of school, in plain Norfolk dress himself, but followed by two loaders and a beater in gold-laced uniform, using only one hand, but with a deadly certainty—as he is one of the surest shots in Europe. There also, a few days later, came the King of Portugal, always smoking pipe or cigar, with gun in either hand, or both, for he is an ambidexterous marksman who never misses. The Prince of Wales shoots superbly, and is credited with killing nine brace of woodcock before luncheon, as rare as it must be a rapid performance.

miserly by the keepers, and never likes to see one of his cherished breed of golden pheasants among the killed. For the King himself, a stroll through the coverts, attended by his loader and his old and trusted keeper, with his favorite retriever at his heels, is always a greater pleasure than the biggest day recorded in the Sandringham game book.

The King's passion for sport dates from his childhood, when he accompanied his father, the Prince Consort, deer-stalking. Among his other expeditions have been the

shooting of crocodiles on the Nile and tigers in India. He has pursued the wild boar with the Emperor of Germany and the late Duke of Coburg in the immense forests of Central Europe, and deer, chamois, and game of all kinds on Baron Hirsch's enormous estates in Hungary. He has had his share of exciting adventures, too. He was once completely knocked over by a stag—he and his horse—while attending a deer hunt as the guest of the late Emperor Louis Napoleon. He was in repeated jeopardy while on his memorable tour in India. There is a magnificent mounted tiger at Sandringham, perhaps the most valued of all his trophies, which, from an elephant's back, he shot at Jeypore. During this time the royal party slew twenty-eight tigers—not to mention elephants, leopards, and bears—most of the "man-eaters" falling to the rifle of the Prince of Wales, as he was then known.

His skill with the rifle he acquired stalking deer with his father in Scotland, when, at the age of fifteen, he was accounted the best shot in his family. There are two rooms at Sandringham to which all the King's guests are welcome, but which he takes a particular delight in showing to his sporting friends. They are the gameroom and his own gunroom. The former holds six thousand head, and is the largest in Europe, save that of the late Baron Hirsch in Hungary, and there the result of the day's shooting is always laid out for inspection before it is consigned to the game larder.

The room presents a wonderful sight at the end of a shooting party, when it is well filled with pheasants, partridges, hares, rabbits, and wild fowl, which are finally despatched to charitable institutions, to employees on the royal estate, to the different royal households, to the rich, and to the poor, neighbors of the King. No one is forgotten, but not a single head is allowed to be sold.

The King's gunroom is a large, bright, airy apartment, wainscoted, and containing a number of crises with glass doors, ranged along the walls, in which are guns forming one of the finest private collections in the world. There is an entrance from the game larder into what is known as the lower gunroom, and here the weapons, brought in after the day's shooting, are cleaned and polished. The gunroom itself is reached by a flight of

stairs, and here the King keeps his shooting treasures. After constant use during a season's shooting he sends them back to his gunmaker for a thorough examination and overhauling. Of course, the case is rare where any one invited "to shoot" at Sandringham fails to bring his own guns with him, but in such an event in the King's gun-cases something will be found to suit the most fastidious. The cases contain all the best known makes of shotguns, and there is also a specimen of the American repeating shotgun, which, however, he does not use much, as practise is needed to handle it to advantage, and his keepers are always behind him with the ready-loaded second guns. This collection of rifles and pistols is a marvelously complete one, comprising American and various makes of English express rifles, mostly of 500 and 450 calibers. One of the most valued pieces is a double-barreled hammer rifle, a gift from Queen Victoria, bearing the date December 24, 1867. Close to it is what will one day become an historical national possession, a 24-bore muzzle-loader, which was King Edward's first own gun, and which has since been used as a practise weapon for other members of the King's family as they became old enough to be permitted to shoot. A present from King Leopold of Belgium is a double-barrel, smooth-bore shotgun made at Ghent, which is a marvel of fancy carving and metal work. The comb of the stock is an eagle's head, and on the face of the stock are several characteristic sporting groups in bas-relief. The silversmith has made the trigger-guard to represent a greyhound coursing with its long, lean body extended, the lock-plates are constructed to look like silver geese; the hammers are chased and wrought into the shape of dogs' bonds, and the ramrod is held in place by silver rings into which have been worked the figures of a fox and two swans.

The guns which have evidently had the most use are those that are the least ornamented. The shotguns go in sets of three; they handle and balance easily, and were evidently specially made for driving. King Edward usually selects, for his own use, a gun with an exceedingly light pull on the right trigger. He is fond of the pistol stock, and the left barrel is choked rather more than is usual.