

# The Battery Commander

## CHAPTER 1

Reuben, squirrel  
shooter.  
Ike, his brother.  
Anna Oakley.  
Johnny Baker.  
Buffalo Bill.

Closson, billiardist.  
Paderewski, pianist.  
Eugene Ysaye, violinist.  
Fisherman's tall stories.  
Battery Commander.

(1) When Reuben takes his trusty shooting-iron in hand he gets the squirrel. His sole idea of shooting is squirrel shooting—"shoot 'em through the head." Ask him how he does it and he answers, "Oh, I dunno." And, so far as my experience goes, you may ask Reuben about anything under the sun and you will get the same answer.

(2) Is it heredity or knack? Reuben's brother Ike has been using Reuben's rifle for twenty years but has never yet succeeded in getting one squirrel. You begin to suspect it is not heredity.

(3) You are in the grandstand of the Wild West, and a little way in front you see a rack on which are a num-

ber of rifles. There is a blast of a bugle and two figures come flying to you across the field, lickity-split, as though there was a dollar for the one who arrived first. The announcer, he of the leathern lungs, cries "Miss Anna Oakley"—"Mr. Johnny Baker," and before the sound of the announcement dies away, and before Miss Oakley and Mr. Baker can straighten up from their bows of acknowledgment, there is a click of the trap and a glass ball rises in the air, and Mr. Baker, having finished his unbending, deliberately turns around and picks up one of the rifles and blows that glass ball into smithereens. Then another click and another glass ball and Miss Anna does the trick this time, after which we hear two clicks of the trap and see two glass balls in the air, and we see both these young shootists turn and deliberately get a rifle each and deliberately each smash a ball. Then there are two clicks of the trap again and we watch Johnny turn and pick up a rifle and shatter one of the balls and then lay the rifle down and pick up another one and shatter the other ball, and so on for the allotted five minutes. How did they do it? Ask them and they will refer you to Reuben.

(4) And now it's Bill's turn. He is on horseback, on the back of the horse that can squat on his haunches in obeisance when he of the leathern lungs announces "Mr.

Buffalo Bill." Bill has a rifle over his shoulder and he does some tall shooting when the trap begins to click, and it is not always that he turns with front to the objective as he shatters the glass balls or the clay pigeons. If you should ask this gentleman how he did it he would answer, explicitly, "Damfino."

(5) Closson dances the billiard balls about the table in a manner which seems to you, with your own experience, to be little short of marvelous. You ask him how he does it, and he shrugs his shoulders and points affectionately to his cue. Closson is not going to tell you how he does it, any more than the chef is going to tell you how he fixed that duck.

(6) You probably know all about cues and balls and angles of incidence and angles of reflection, and English, and high balls for follow-shots and low balls for draw-shots, and you know that if you indent the cushion you spoil your angles. You may know very much more about these things than Closson did, but you will have to acknowledge that in fifteen years' experience you have never succeeded in making a run of ten, and that it is with a sort of pride you remember that once you made a run of nine. You at once translate Closson's shrug and affectionate patting of his cue into "knack" and acknowledge that, with all your knowl-

edge of geometry and physics of the billiard table, you never have been able to make the stroke.

(7) The workman in his apron made the piano string the right length, and the tuner put it under proper strain, and the ivory key will cause the hammer to strike that string and give out a certain note, and so on through all of the keys and strings of the piano. You know this and you know these keys, and you can strike them.

But Paderewski seems, somehow, to be able to strike them differently. Ask Paderewski about it and he will tell you, in Polish, "knack" and "long practice."

(8) Eugene Ysaye, with his wonder-speaking violin, finds no string of definite length for the definite note but, unlike Paderewski, must make the notes as he goes along. Closson would probably have told you the same thing about his precious cue, if he would have told you anything. Ask Ysaye how he does it and he will answer with a benignant smile.

(9) After listening to the fisherman's marvelous story of those he caught and those that broke away, ask him how he does it, and listen to what he tells you. Or, what is better yet, move that the gentleman be given leave to print.

(10) But our **Battery Commander** does not take his trusty shooting-iron in hand and shoot squirrels through the head, for he may be where he cannot see his guns and where he cannot see the squirrel. He doesn't have to shatter glass balls or clay pigeons sprung from a trap, and he doesn't have to make draw-shots on a billiard table, and he doesn't have to get the concourse of sweet sounds out of the piano wire or the fiddle string, but there must be no "I dunno" or "damfino" in his lexicon; he **must** know. He must have the university training and his brains must be where he can put his fingers on them. Reuben might do if you would catch him young enough, which would probably be three or four generations before he was born.