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LAW and CUSTOM

by Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

Do hunters close their minds
when they hear hunting called sport?

Two months before the beginning of small game hunting season, a man was running his beagles, getting them in shape and finding out where the game was. He drove into the refuge looking for a lost dog. When I asked him not to let his dogs enter the refuge he shrugged: "They got off on a deer. I couldn't help it."

I've heard the same excuse a hundred times, while as many as a dozen dogs were running through the refuge. Against my repeated claim that I have a right to enjoy my land without being overrun with hunting dogs, hunters offer their right as owners of licensed dogs to let the dogs run where they will.

There is a New Jersey state law against running hounds on another's land without the landowner's consent. There is a local ordinance which compels one to keep one's dogs off other people's land. Why should hunting dogs be exempted? Why do people deliberately bring their dogs by truck and let them out where they may run all through posted property? The law does not excuse them. But local judges do.

I will cite another example of conflict between law and custom. We have laws against cruelty to animals, but they are interpreted as applying only to domestic animals. Live quail are dangled in "harnesses" before hunting dogs in training. Raccoons are tortured in ways which if applied to domestic animals would cause public outrage. Foxes are run to exhaustion. Deer are fatally injured or crippled for life. Rabbits are cornered by gangs of people and dogs. All this and more in the name of outdoor fun. Do people really believe that wild animals have no feelings? Or do they close



their minds when they hear hunting called sport?

It's time for a change, and change is coming. The public is turning against hunting. Raising pheasants and quail in pens is getting too expensive. Hunting fees have been hiked, and hunting territory is shrinking.

Can it be that humans will soon be elevated to hunting with their cameras? Is the day near when all of us will move through the woods and fields unarmed and enjoy nature without destroying it?

The biggest among us are not those with the biggest guns. Mrs. Louise Weibert Sutton of Indiana, whose husband gave up hunting years ago, has this to say:

The Big Man

*I saw a big man yesterday,
His coat was old, his hair was gray,
And stooped he was by years of care,
And yet I saw a tall man there.
When, asked by hunters on the trail
In search of small things such as
quail,
If he would like to join their aim,
Replied, "I find no lure in game.
I much prefer whole works of God
To knife or gun or fishing rod!
The gift of life, God's matchless gem,
Is not my right to take from them."
He left them standing in surprise,
And took a pathway up the rise,
Unfeared by any bird or beast,
A big soul, careful of the least?*

