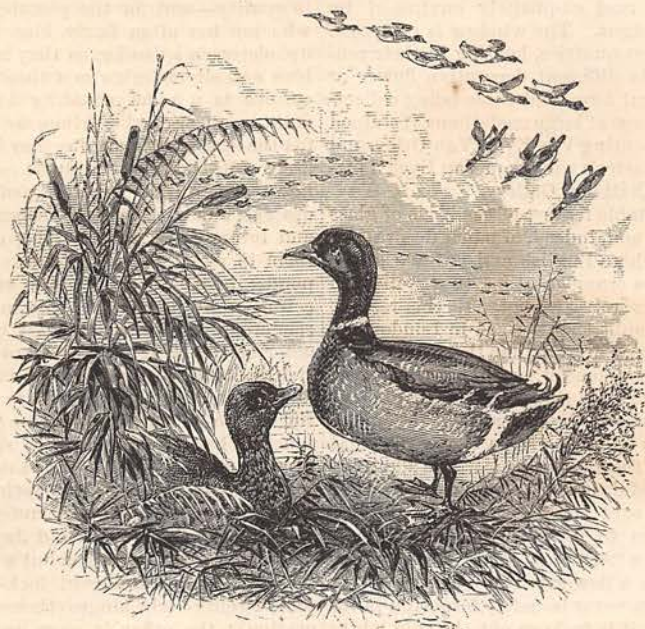


AMONG THE WATER-FOWL OF THE WEST.



THE MALLARD.

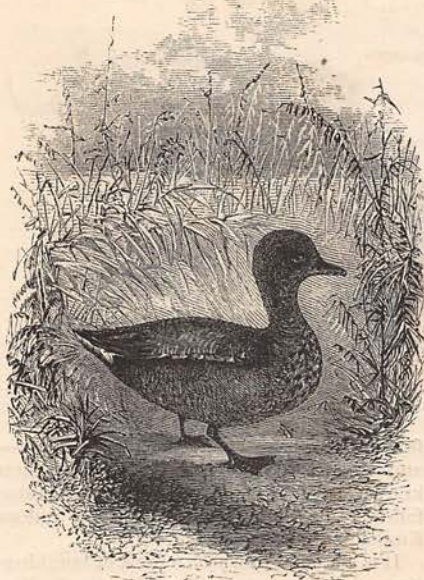
LONG ISLAND, Barnegat, Chesapeake Bay, and Currituck have each enjoyed an enviable reputation among the shore shooters, long unchallenged by any presumptuous rival within the scope of our domain.

Little did the denizens of Fulton Market in years gone by dream of the paradise in store for the lover of sport in the vast Western country, of the numberless resorts for their favorite birds on the boundless prairies, of the endless chains of miniature lakes abounding with their favorite food. But the encroachments of civilization, the multiplication of steam-vessels, and, above all, the continual hammering of the myriads of shooters who swarm around the larger cities of the Atlantic sea-board, have had a tendency to exterminate and to drive the main flight of our water-fowl to more quiet retreats in the West, while the more tempting grain fields and rice lakes offer to these fowl greater inducements to abide in their new home. Vast tracts of marsh and meadow which once offered a fine feeding ground around the bays and creeks of the coast are now an almost barren waste, where few birds can be seen, except fish ducks, such as coots, alewives, loons, sheldrakes, divers, etc., none of which offer any temptation to the true sportsman.

We will consider none but the edible species, the true game birds. Among these the

glorious mallard has a prominent place, from its greater abundance, from the wide range of country where it is found, and the quality of its flesh. It is a universal favorite at the table, and is more marketable than all other varieties combined. It affords, too, a wider field for genuine sport than all others. The canvas-backs of the Chesapeake, it is true, draw many lovers of the sport, who for years have practically known no other field, and who can recapitulate volumes of exploits among the red-necks and canvas-backs of Chesapeake Bay. As a favorite for the table this magnificent bird ranks first, when size and flavor are both considered. The wild celery upon which it delights to feed imparts to it a delicious flavor, and gives it the pre-eminence. Nowhere can we find its fit comparison save in the blue-winged teal of the West, which in September, after fattening on the wild rice while "in the milk," emerges a "perfect roll of butter," and in point of flavor and delicacy is not surpassed.

The black duck, which seems to be identified with the sea-coast, is also a great favorite. More wary than any of the other varieties, extremely sensitive to the approach of man, quick of perception, and exceedingly shy, it is the very ideal of a game bird. No sportsman returns with a round score of black ducks strapped over his shoulders, the result of a day on the marsh, but has earned the credit due to pa-



THE TEAL.

tience, perseverance, strategy, and accurate aim. The bag tells the story. "That fellow lay low for black ducks." So closely is the black duck allied to the mallard—there being but a slight variation in the plumage—that it is hardly worth the while to class them separately. Yet it is singular that throughout the vast migratory track of the West this bird is almost unknown. The mallard is every where; the teal, the widgeon, the pintail, the blue-bill, the red-neck, canvas-back, and all the favorites generally, are found in greater or less numbers as the locality favors; but rarely the black duck, which seems to be confined to the coast, and therefore doomed to extermination.

The Canada goose, too, while it frequents the sea-board of the Atlantic and Pacific and the whole of the country lying between—while it swarms on the vast grain fields of the West, destroying countless bushels of corn, pasturing on the sprouting winter grain, yet it does not exist on the Atlantic coast south of Currituck. During the winter months spent on the inlets and among the sea islands of South Carolina, when the bays teem with water-fowl, not a goose can be seen. There is no food for them.

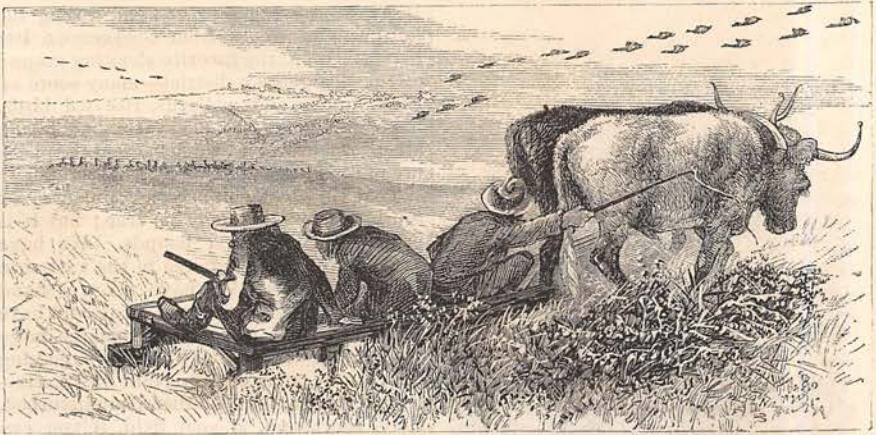
The ducks visit the old rice fields during the night, and return in the morning, lying off in the bays during the day, and occasionally taking a trip among the innumerable creeks, where they become an easy prey to the sportsman concealed behind his blind of palmetto leaves, which encircle his skiff. Many days have we spent on the Waccamaw,

Winyaw, and Muddy bays, and among the labyrinth of creeks from Georgetown Bar to North Inlet, the favorite shooting ground of the Georgetown district—many score of black ducks and mallards, rice-fed birds, have we brought to the water, but during all our sojourn there we never had the pleasure of drawing a bead on an "old hunker."

That they make an occasional visit so far south on the coast may be true; but it is beyond their natural bounds. We have made havoc in their ranks in the vast corn fields of Illinois. We have taken a stand in the centre of a large corn shock, and have seen them come in myriads from the large swamps in the vicinity—always making their entry at a certain point instinctively, and their exit at another, if undisturbed. Here, sportsman, is your field, if you can kill a goose! if you never did, ten to one if you draw a feather. Nothing is more deceptive than a long line of old hunkers bearing down on the hiding-place of a novice at goose-hunting. The size of the bird, the clack of their goose-talk as they approach a feeding ground, the apparent proximity of the noisy fellows as they seem to fly almost in one's face, create the impression in the mind of the uninitiated that they are only a few feet off; but when he suddenly rises and fires, to his chagrin he discovers that the flock has turned about at some eighty yards distance without a scratch. Many a splendid shot have we lost in this way through the nervousness of some amateur sportsman, who was sure of almost any other bird, and who could make his right and left shots very creditably, but who had never shot a goose.

The Canada goose is a heavily fledged bird, and bearing down in a direct line upon the hunter is no easy prey, until it is passing or has passed. It is better to wait until you can see its white tips; then a quartering shot under the wing will bring down your game. Four drams of good powder, an ounce of shot, No. 2 (which is coarse enough), and a little attention to the business will usually settle your goose question.

But shooting geese on the vast wheat fields in early spring or late in the fall, after the winter wheat has sprouted nicely, is another thing. Here are miles of expanse like the ocean, without cover of any kind; there are the geese, numbering thousands; the knolls are black with them. Now is the time for strategy. You must select a windy day—for they can not rise down the wind—provide yourself with a team of oxen and an old sled; lie down; allow the oxen to graze gradually toward them, making a circular tour toward the last, so that it will bring you to the windward; and work toward them until you notice symptoms of alarm, shown by the double note of the old gander. Now is your chance. To your feet before they



GOOSE-HUNTING ON THE OPEN PRAIRIE.

can gather! you are near enough. They must pass to the right or left, for they can not rise in any other direction. Each man select his birds, and if you do not bag two each, you should never shoot at a wild goose again, unless absolutely in self-defense.

Much cunning is exhibited by these birds in localities where they are frequently disturbed. We have often seen them in the great swamps of the Bureau Valley along the Illinois come in about dark, when it was just too late to draw a sight, noiselessly stealing along, so as to evade the random shot of the hunter returning to camp after a long day's work. So attached are they to their old grounds, and so liable to be pursued at night by reckless adventurers, that after a few warnings they baffle the most intelligent. Should their line of entry be discovered to-night as they come across the marsh from the south, to-morrow night, if you watch, you may hear the vibration of their wings as they pass over the timber to the north, in their approach to the old rice pond, or open water of the big slough. Upon all other occasions, and also when disturbed, they exhibit their usual propensity to indulge in gabble and goose-talk.

The most prominent among the varieties in the West is the Canada goose. The next, and existing in great numbers, is the white-fronted or laughing goose, called by many, "brant." Of the regular brent-goose we have but few. We killed one out of a flock in the Illinois River, in 1860, on a sand-bar, and believe it is the only flock we ever saw in that valley. The brent-goose is about half the size of the Canada variety, and is about two-thirds as large as the white-fronted, mottled, or laughing goose. But in the absence of the regular brent-goose, the mottled bird known as the laughing-goose carries the name of *brant*. And *brant* it is, so far as the average shooter is informed; for

few of them have ever seen a brent-goose—and this is the only bird which, to their knowledge, ever bore the name. These same fellows call a partridge a pheasant, and an English snipe a woodcock.

It is amusing to watch a flock of laughing-geese as they approach a favorite feeding ground or a resting-place. They come first in the regular acute-angle line of flight. Suddenly they break ranks, and with one accord the whole flock begins a series of evolutions, tumbling and turning high in air, and then descending in a most comical and irregular manner, to the amusement of the observer, all the while indulging in a jabber more resembling the merry laughing of a bevy of school-girls than any thing else, from which peculiarity they receive their name. As a table bird it is highly esteemed, and is generally preferred to the Canada goose. In point of numbers it exceeds the latter in this locality, while in other parts the ratio is reversed.

They visit the West in March and April, on their regular migrations to the lakes and bays of Northern Minnesota, the British possessions, and Labrador, remaining with us sometimes as late as May in small detachments. Many are killed before they reach their northern breeding grounds. After raising the usual brood, and replenishing their thinned ranks, they gather for the autumnal return flight, and in October we see them wending their way to their old and favorite haunts, until the cold weather drives them southward to the great marshes of Arkansas and the Lower Mississippi. As they pass north in March, generally before a southerly gale, which carries them along with little apparent effort, their coming is welcomed as a harbinger of returning spring. They come, too, in large numbers, accompanied by all the usual varieties of water-fowl in even greater profusion.

It is a pleasure to witness one of these

pilgrimages; and a trip to the West at the proper season, if for no other purpose, will repay the ornithologist. No sooner has the ice left the rivers, and the southerly gales secured the ascendancy, than the flight of water-fowl begins, line after line, flock after flock, all bent in one direction, and with one common purpose. If much rain has fallen, and the numerous ponds and sloughs of the prairie are



WILD GESE IN A COEN FIELD.

full, large numbers alight in their passage, and visit the large corn fields of the stock-raisers, where they pick up the corn which is trodden under foot by the feeding herds. Sometimes these vast tracts are covered with water after the spring rains, and before the frost has entirely left the ground; the cattle have cleaned the ranch, and the waste corn which lies trampled in the mud and water becomes a rich harvest for the weary birds; and here they congregate, acres upon acres of wild fowl of every variety. When fully alarmed by the sound of the gun, they rise with a noise like that of distant thunder, in tens of thousands, until the air is thronged with them. Should the spring be dry, and there be little water on the prairies, they pass over the locality, alighting occasionally in the rivers or in the adjacent ponds, but seldom break ranks until they reach the more extensive marshes of the Calumet, Winnebago, and other streams, or the lakes of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The Calumet Marshes, near Chicago, are, and have been for years, a favorite spot, where these birds in their pilgrimages mostly gather. This, however, is becoming to such an extent a resort for sportsmen, pot-hunters, and every variety of the genus *homo*, in search of ducks and a "good time generally," that we fear its days are numbered.

Here you will find the sterling representatives of Chicago's favorite clubs, her renowned "shots," who come in their marsh rig—a bottle of cartridges and a belt full of whisky—untrammelled with by-laws or resolutions of club origin, and far beyond the reach or influence of the Woman's Anti-whisky League. They secure some primitive "dug-out" of ample dimensions and sufficient breadth of beam, and with a unanimity of purpose worthy of the undertaking, they sally out to make that marsh the hottest place for ducks that the imagination can conceive, until the last bottle of ammu-

nition is exhausted, when they join in the favorite chorus,

"Oh! we'll never get drunk again,"

buy up of some more successful shots enough ducks to make a show at home, and beat a hasty retreat cityward.

The Calumet promises little for the sportsman of the coming generation, through the incessant hammering of the mob of sportsmen that congregate there, and, like the Atlantic coast resorts, in a few years it promises to be the abiding-place of the solitary heron, with an occasional sprinkling of crow-ducks, divers, and here and there a pensioner. This continual hammering drives the birds to other localities, and the main flight passes entirely over the locality, to stop only where they can escape this incessant warfare.

A man may be a good quail or snipe shot, and may be able to kill chickens admirably well, for this requires little skill or judgment—any boy who can handle a gun can bring down his prairie-chicken—but mallard duck shooting is another thing. If the birds are young and green—the first of the fall flight—they can be secured easily within twenty yards. But suppose them to be full-fledged, and that it is later in the season, with the wind light, while the birds fly wide, what are the chances of the ordinary marksman? Ah! then it is a different business, requiring tact and experience. I have seen good "shots," who could kill quail, woodcock, and snipe, shoot all day at ducks, and only succeed in crippling a few. Most of their shooting has been done at point-blank range, which, when applied to duck-shooting under ordinary circumstances, fails. The barrel is always a tangent to the line of flight of the shot, which describe an arc of a circle, and always fall after leaving the muzzle. In aiming point-blank at a duck on a cross shot forty yards away, if you do not aim ahead proportionately to the veloc-



A CHICAGO CLUB MAKING IT HOT FOR DUCKS ON THE CALUMET.

ity of the bird, and above in proportion to the distance and the natural fall of the shot, your bird will seldom grace your game-bag, unless you make a "scratch," which is often the case.

Take for example a blue-bill or a teal, coming down the wind, and *they* mean business when they fly: these are admirable subjects upon which to experiment if you are in doubt. Suppose a line of blue-bills come whizzing by twenty yards high and forty yards distant. You aim at the leader. What is the result? If you drop any, it will be one of the last in the line.

The most sportsman-like way to kill ducks is over decoys, and this requires much practice and experience in handling decoys. For to a novice it is more than likely his decoys will be in his way, and instead of drawing birds to him, he will drive them off. In the first place, secure a gun of proper weight and length. There is not so much depending, however, upon the gun as upon the man behind it. Most modern guns are good, and a good "shot" will kill birds with a musket. Select a gun about No. 11 calibre, with solid metal at the breech, and tapering very light at the muzzle; for one great object in water-fowl shooting is to have a good weight of metal at the breech of the barrel, since in constant hammering with light guns your shoulder will suffer after a day's work. Nine pounds is a good weight for a thirty-inch gun of No. 11. Properly handling this gun, you can do all the execution which opportunity may afford. Cumbersome duck guns are useless. I have

done some of my best shooting in the creeks of South Carolina with a No. 12, eight pounds; and one day, while there, I made a handsome bag of black duck and mallard on Marsh Island, in Winyaw Bay, near Georgetown Bar, with a fifteen-dollar gun—a No. 12, thirty inches—but I observed the ordinary well-settled rules in duck-shooting. For a short neck a straight-breech gun is absolutely necessary, and for a long neck the reverse. The eye always follows the object, and the gun should be suited to come right to the line of vision without changing the motion of the eye at all. Therefore, in selecting a gun, place the gun at the hip, or present arms, fix the eye on an object, close your eyes, then raise your gun quickly to the shoulder, open your eyes and see what the gun covers, and what would have been your chance of hitting it if a bird. You are then precisely in the position of a person shooting woodcock in a dense thicket: your eye is so busily engaged in following the bird that you can not stop to look for the sight; but the ear, the eye, and the hand follow each other instinctively, and you have the bird without ever seeing the gun at all. This is quick work, and is called "snap-shooting." Now a gun with which you can do this is a good one for ducks, provided you load it properly, and observe the other rules.

Early in the season, when the first of the flight comes down, and most of the birds are young and quite green, falling an easy prey to the sportsman, No. 8 shot will do the work effectually. But later in the season they are well fledged, will bear heavy pound-

ing, and get away under ordinary circumstances. Then four drams of coarse powder is a charge for a mallard, and an ounce of shot—*never* more than that. The size of shot should be governed by circumstances.

For mallard, No. 8 will answer until the birds become large and strong; then use No. 6 shot.

Provide yourself with a set of large decoys; anchor them in the right place, being careful to set them in such a position that the birds will always draw in front of you, being careful at the same time not to place yourself in such a position that they will draw every time right in the line of sunset or sunrise, as the case may be. Observe that ducks always draw, in alighting, head to the wind, and your position should be such that you have the wind on your right shoulder, when the birds will draw from the left. Push your skiff in the sedge, and cover it well with grass, wild rice, or whatever is most prominent, and always endeavor to conceal it. Have a suit of clothes as nearly the color of the sedge as you can. A black hat or cap is fatal. A dirty white cotton cap, such as is worn in summer, is good, if you rub it up with oil and iron rust, so that it will appear about the color of surrounding objects. Every thing prominent and striking is to be avoided. In such a rig you can take your stand. As soon as you see a flock, drop; watch the line in which they draw; move not a muscle while they circle around. When they come up the second time, and set their wings for a drop, select the first, and if you are patient you are sure of your bird. Then the whole flock spring, and you select the nearest, which is, in fact, a better shot, for he is going from you, climbing as no other bird can climb. The result—a pair of mallards. Let them lie, for there will be more along soon. Mark! there comes an old drake. He has his wings set, and is making a bee-line for the decoys. Let him swing first, and then take him as he draws. He likes not the looks of these decoys, on a closer scrutiny, and is inclined to make a tour of inspection. Here he comes, right on your quarter. He springs—you are discovered. Drop him. There comes a flock of pintails. They see nothing but the decoys. Don't let them light; but when they draw and bunch, get a quartering shot and rake

the line with No. 8 shot. Lie down: there come three mallards. Watch when they draw; they often cross each other. The two outside birds are drawing together. Now is your chance: the three birds are yours.

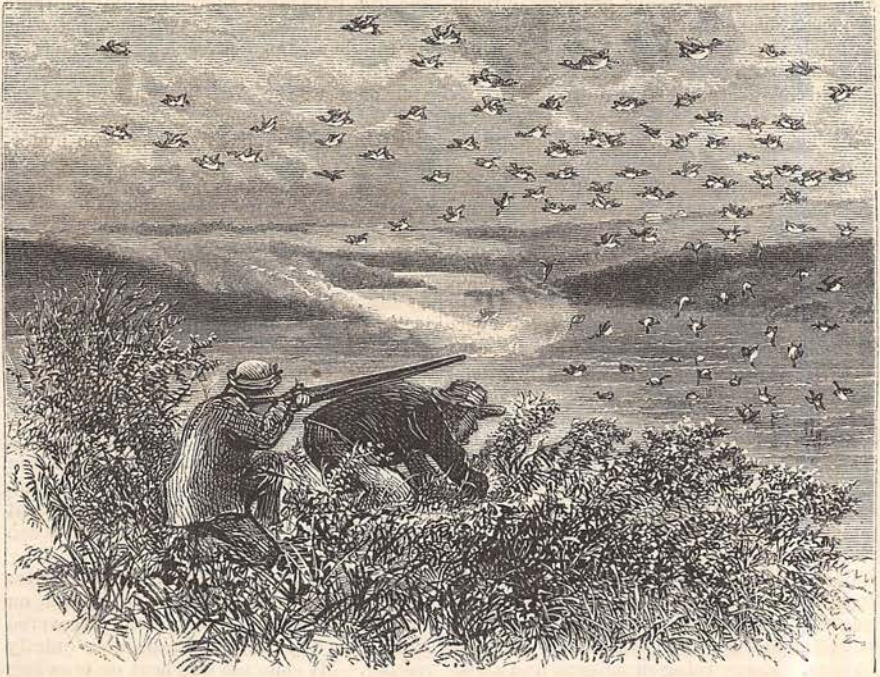
This is decoy shooting, such as is practiced in the marshes by those who understand it.

The most favorable days for duck-shooting are cold, windy days; the heavier the gale the better; it keeps them on the wing, and they can not lie out in the bays and ponds, nor seek a cove to the windward and fly low. Great judgment is required in selecting a good spot in which to work decoys. The country and the habits of the birds must be studied, their lines of flight, the changes which the shifting of the winds produce, where they feed, when they feed, their favorite haunts. The mallard duck loves company. Thousands of them can often be seen in a small pond no larger than a city lot, and by the exercise of judgment and skill you can bag a couple of dozen easily.

One of the most successful days the writer ever had was in Southern Minnesota, on Pine Creek, where a slough was discovered in which a thousand mallards were quietly resting. My comrade was bent on crawling up for a shot, and with difficulty did I persuade him to refrain. "Put down your gun," I said to him. We walked up, drove the ducks out, took our position at the windward end in the black flags, and prepared for their return. Shortly a couple of mallards rounded a point of timber not far distant and made a straight line for the slough. One apiece we dropped them. Then the work was begun, and in less than two hours we had secured eighty-eight mallards. Of the vast myriads in the great rice marshes of Minnesota few have any idea who have never beheld them in the season. This is the great migratory track, and here are their



THE DRAW—BIRDS SWINGING ROUND.



TWENTY-EIGHT AT ONE SHOT.

principal feeding grounds. In September, 1860, on an island in the Illinois River, the writer made a shot across a line of blue-winged teal preparing to migrate, and with a charge of No. 8 shot, with a No. 5 single heavy gun, he killed twenty-eight birds at one shot, and with a small No. 12 gun he killed fifty-four in fifteen minutes. This was done in the presence of Moses Osman, Esq., one of the editors of the *Ottawa Free Trader*, and now of Fairbury, Illinois. This shot was published at the time, and counted good, although it was a "poor day for ducks."

The valley of the Illinois was once a vast feeding ground for water-fowl on their passage, and even now is frequented by thousands. Bureau Valley is a favorite resort, lined with sloughs, rice lakes, and marshes, with easy access to the corn fields. The water-fowl cling to this home with a tenacity worthy of protection. Thousands are sent from Chillicothe, Henry, Peoria, Spring Lake, and Pekin to the market of Chicago, to be shipped to the Eastern cities, while Calumet, Winnebago, Green River, and the lakes of Wisconsin furnish their quota for the tables of the Eastern epicures. Great is the slaughter; but they return from the Northern breeding grounds next fall with their broken ranks replenished. Occasionally a drought destroys their harbors on the prairies, and we see few ducks. Then reports come to us that Western Iowa is teeming with ducks and geese, for the flight has

followed a track three hundred miles west for water, where they are comparatively undisturbed. But after a mild winter a wet spring, to fill up the marshes and sloughs, brings them back to their old track again.

While I write (March 5, 1874) the flight is passing north, and the papers announce, through advices from one of our clubs, that Calumet is teeming with myriads of ducks. The market bears faithful evidence of the truth. The Klimman boys, the great duck-hunters of the Calumet, are reveling once more in their favorite and lucrative sport.

A few years since I was one of a party of four who came out from the East year after year, each of us a crack shot. None save myself had ever been West. All had shot from Long Island to South Carolina, but had no conception of the vast multitudes of water-fowl in the West. We procured tents and other appliances, and struck out for Chicago, and thence to the town of Chillicothe, at the head of Peoria Lake. A storm had just passed, a driving storm from the northeast, which filled the marshes. A stiff norther was blowing a gale. The main flight of fall birds was coming before the wind down the valley in countless numbers. From twenty to fifty flocks could be seen bearing down across the head of the island, and making for the old Goose Pond, Spring Branch, Black Partridge, the Big Slough, and other resorts, until the swamps seemed alive with water-fowl. We got our boats, camp,

rig, and provisions, and made for the opposite shore. Such a sight, said one of our party, he had never witnessed any where along the coast, and he never expected to witness a grander one. Here was game without limit. Barnes pulled away at his pipe with his eyes fixed on the long black lines of geese as they turned over the head of the island a mile north, making a beeline for the sloughs, and adding to the already dense masses. We pulled down stream, passed the island, and went to the main shore to survey the country. We worked across the marsh in a line for the Goose Pond—an almost inaccessible marsh, about a mile long, filled with wild rice, and protected by timber, secluded and safe. Here, upon a projection of timber growing out of a sort of floating bog, we pitched our tent and built our camp fire. Abbott took his decoys and went for the mallards, while we got the camp in order and secured enough of sedge-grass with which to make our beds. The condition of the ground was such that we found it necessary to build a foundation of twigs upon which to lay our sedge-grass to keep it dry while we were preparing. Abbott was at work, and a more beautiful sight we never saw. Every flock apparently came straight for those decoys, and before dark he had bagged sixty mallards. He came in and we repaired to supper, after which we were enjoying our quiet smoke when a fine setter dog of Abbott's came at full speed for the tent. We stepped out, and in the darkness were two large eyeballs glaring from an old fallen tree, and a yell such as I never heard before greeted our ears as the eyeballs disappeared. A couple of trappers in search of musk-rat and mink were camped close by, and from them we learned in the morning that a large lynx had been prowling around the night before.

We remained on this spot about two weeks, and then changed our camping ground for

the Big Slough, whence our facilities for reaching the market were excellent, and we had regular access to the mails. Continual pounding for two weeks in the Goose Pond had driven the birds away to the other ponds. The wild rice grew here the alternate years, and this year there was abundant cover and feed, and with a will we went to work.

That the reader may not indulge in too generous an idea of the luxury and ease of camp life in a duck country, where the great object is to secure a full supply and the cream of the sport, we will point out some of the duties incidental to our daily routine.

The birds begin to fly at daybreak, and then it is very necessary that each man shall be in his place, probably a mile or two from camp. At four o'clock we indulge in a hearty breakfast, which with us usually consists of fried ducks' livers, buckwheat cakes, fried potatoes, and coffee. Each man has his boat, in which are his decoys, safely stowed away the night before, a good paddle, a pole, and a pair of oars. Often two go together in one skiff; but, although more companionable, it is more difficult to work about in the dense rice, over the ooze and black flags, when oftentimes speed and dispatch are necessary, and nothing but extreme buoyancy of the boat will permit quick motion. One man is also less likely to be detected by the ever-watchful eye of the duck than two. One man seldom indulges in unnecessary talk when birds are flying; two are generally exchanging ideas, when a flock near at hand is startled by the sound, and turns away, unobserved until too late.

We decide where each man will go, and usually arrange that the ducks can be kept flying from one set of decoys to another by proper posting of the shooters; for if a flock fails to draw to one, it is quite sure to take to another. Before daybreak each man has shoved his boat in the sedge in a favorable



THE GOOSE POND.



AN OLD CURMUDGEON.

spot, and built his screen or blind in such a manner that he can push his skiff in and out as it becomes necessary in picking up ducks and chasing cripples.

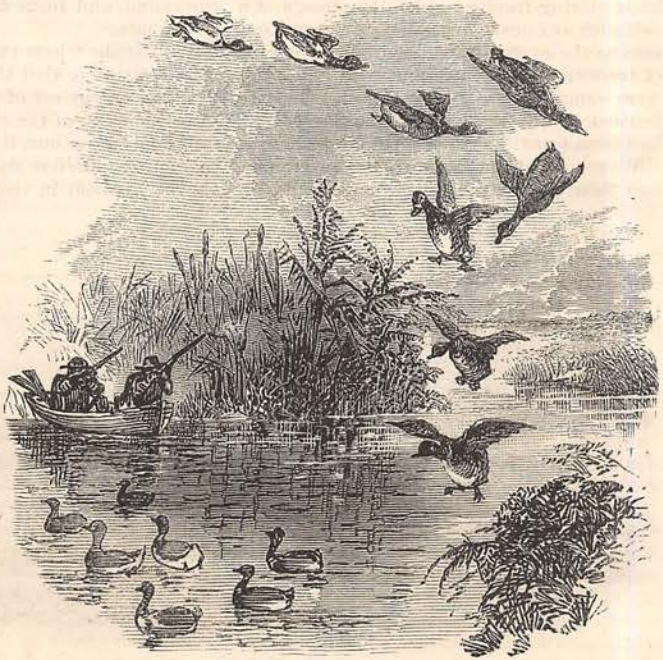
With the first gleam of light on the eastern horizon comes the dash, and oftentimes while engaged in setting the decoys in darkness the quiver of many wings can be heard overhead; and sometimes a splash, followed by a dozen or more in close quarters, denotes that the birds have discovered our decoys before we are prepared to receive them. The decoys being set in such a way that they will swing to leeward, and ride free from each other, leaving space enough between us and them to secure the pitch of the ducks in front rather than behind, we get behind our blind, and are ready. The flight has commenced, and the booming of guns is heard all over the marsh. The sight of a dozen decoys riding apparently undisturbed is an inducement to join company. The passing flock detects them, and the birds set their wings for the stools. Down they come, rocking and swinging, until close to the tops of the rice, when they swing around to scrutinize their irresponsible companions. One moment

more and the cheat may be discovered by the older heads, and away will go the flock. But we are quick to take our chances, and our harvest is an abundant one.

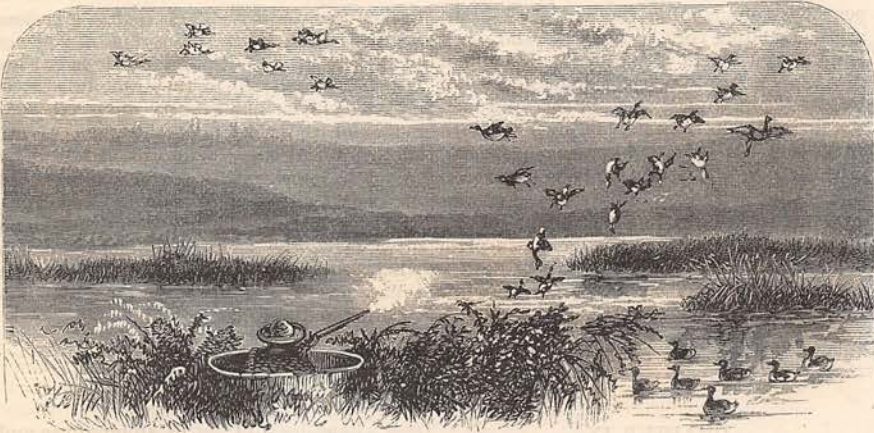
We always make it a rule to secure blue-winged teal for our table. We can roast them, broil them, toast them, or fry them in butter. Stuffed with mushrooms, and toasted, they leave a canvas-back in the shade, in my opinion. Early

in the season we find loads of mushrooms on the old pastures here, and there is nothing finer than a fat blue-winged teal stuffed with fresh mushrooms.

We proceed to draw the birds preparatory to shipping. This is done very neatly. The large mallard duck livers are always preserved, washed and slightly salted, for our breakfast, and a more delicate morsel can seldom be found. This done, the birds are sponged, tied in pairs, and hung up to dry. Afterward we put them in bunches of six, label, and ship them the next morning by the cook when he goes over for the



THE DRAW—DUCKS SETTLING TO DECOYS.



DUCK-SHOOTING IN A PRAIRIE SLOUGH.

mail. The express company deliver them, and we draw against them, the proceeds covering our expenses. On our last trip we sent to the Chicago market some fourteen hundred head of mallard ducks, widgeon, blue-bills, and geese, which were our surplus after giving away, consuming in camp, and sending to our friends East a fair share.

After dinner we take a smoke, and about three o'clock we sally out for the evening flight, which though shorter, is often stronger and more exciting, especially if on the eve of an approaching storm. This is a privilege not enjoyed in South Carolina. There you have no evening shooting, as the ducks leave the bays, where they congregate during the day, rising about dusk almost in a body for the rice fields ten to twelve miles up the river. But in the gray of the morning they return to the creeks and bays, affording fine sport for a time.

Other methods of securing these birds in the prairie sloughs of the West are somewhat different from that we have attempted to delineate. Our method is that practiced by the scientific sportsmen who pursue the sport for the love of the pastime—a method in which strategy, calculation, and study are concerned, and in which patience and perseverance secure success. Go down on the Calumet and you will see shooting practiced in all its modes. There you will find the true sportsman who has left his place of business for a day's recreation and relief. He does his work thoroughly. He has not come to cripple and to maim, but to kill. But paddle down the creek, and on every projecting point you will find posted some pot-hunter, who blazes away at every passing flock, frightening far more birds than his shot reaches, and crippling more than he kills. He never shoots at a single bird, but bangs into a flock pell-mell as it passes, to be treated in like manner by the next pot-hunter.

In the spring, when the prairie sloughs are full of water, the birds as they pass north remain for some time. Here is no cover at all—no means by which an approach can be made without discovery. The tempting sight of a thousand ducks in a mere pond or slough, almost at your door, gives occasion to a vast deal of strategy. Generally speaking, the birds in this situation are safe. Many times we have been perplexed to find some means by which we could secure our game. There they sat—elegant birds, all ready for an invitation to be bagged, but far beyond the effectual reach of flying shot. What is to be done? We get a team and drive to town, procure a cask and a spade, also a lot of stones—for you might as well look for a needle in a hay-stack as a stone on the prairie. We select a spot on the edge of the slough commanding the whole area. We dig a large hole and dam up around it to keep out the water. After the hole is large enough to admit the cask to within six inches of the rim, we bale it out and put it in, then throw in the stone until we have settled it fairly, and tramp the clay well around it. When the cask is firmly set, we throw out the stone and cover it with some old bleached prairie hay. Then we get inside, and, with a few decoys, our cover is complete. We have shot mallards in this way, to the utter astonishment of the farmers, who never were able to get near enough to touch a feather. The next season we go up to the old spot, and the cask is full of water. We bail it out, put some hay in the bottom, and are then again ready for work.

In the fall these birds resort to the vast corn fields to feed, and when they once come to understand the business, they soon fatten, and are in elegant condition. The best method of working a corn field which the ducks have been in the habit of visiting is to go in a party of three or four, take your

positions commanding the whole field, pull up the standing corn by the roots, and stack it up as you would stack muskets—enough to make a secure blind; get under cover and wait. About three o'clock in the afternoon the ducks begin to come, just over the tops of the corn, hundreds and thousands of them, according to the locality. We have seen them sally forth from the sloughs and marshes near Peoria Lake in a direct line for the corn fields in numbers that would surprise the novice.

Here is a fine chance to secure every bird. Cripples stand no chance of escape. A

broken wing is just as effectual as a broken head; for when they strike the soil you can pick them up. Quite different is it if they fall in a marsh; there they hide in a trice, and when the opportunity offers, at once make for the margin of the pond or the shores—eventually to die, to be eaten up by minks, musk-rats, foxes, or hawks, or to become the prizes of some fortunate poacher or bush-whacker. The cleanly picked bones often mark the spot in the lonely marsh where the wild-cat or fox has made "a square meal" from what was once a plump corn-fed mallard.

RAPE OF THE GAMP.

CHAPTER IX.

PROUD AS LUCIFER AND DARK AS EREBUS.

WHEN gentle Mrs. Browne plaintively remarked that she was doubtful as to what papa might think of "these new doings," she used the plural number advisedly, alluding not only to the monstrous innovation of walking before breakfast, but more obscurely to another change of doubtful tendency, which had crept almost imperceptibly into the practice of this well-regulated family. Mr. Browne, attended by the ladies of his family, worshiped in a district church which had been built in his part of the town. This edifice was of the Georgio-Palladian era, built of bricks, disguised inside and out with stucco, and lighted by means of tall sash-windows of the usual domestic pattern. Its interior was rendered at once elegant and commodious by a gallery which ran round three sides of the structure, like the dress circle at a theatre; and a handsome three-storied pulpit formed the grand centre of attraction. Walter Browne, Esq., was a very regular attendant at this place of worship, and expected his women-folk to be the same; but for many months past his expectations had been imperfectly fulfilled.

The old parish church, dedicated to the Holy Apostles, has been described as standing prominently on the brow of the cliff. It is a massive Gothic structure, and, having been designed for grand functions and pompous ecclesiastical processions, has a vast chancel and choir, extensive nave of seven spans, and broad aisles. The fourth seat in the northern aisle was facultied to Mr. Browne's house, which, before the other church was built, of course depended on the old one for spiritual ministrations. In this seat Albert, Frank, and Hubert Browne were wont to worship still, accompanied by Robert when on a visit to his family, and of late by Janet, who now affected to despise the rectangular "temple" (as Frank called it), and had been observed making efforts to pe-

ruse a hand-book of Gothic architecture and other works of a retrogressive character. It happened that the three front seats in this aisle were facultied to the Grammar School, and that Mr. Lane sat in the left-hand corner of the front seat.

A habit prevailed at Pedlington of entering the parish church by a door in the north wall of the choir, where, during the infrequent week-day services, the scanty congregation was easily accommodated in the stalls. But on Sunday the body of the church was filled; so those who went early sat in rows confronting those who came late. Every Sunday, just as the service was commencing, Albert, Frank, and Hubert would march down the choir steps, sweep to the right in front of the school seats, wheel to the left round Mr. Lane's corner, and so reach their own place in what seemed to them a quiet, unostentatious manner. After service they returned by the same way, again filing past Mr. Lane.

It must be said for this out-of-the-way angle of the church that those who worshiped there sat or knelt in the glow of a magnificent painted window which filled the wall at the eastern end of the aisle. Of late—at first occasionally, latterly more regularly—Mr. Lane had become aware of a graceful figure and a wave of delicately perfumed air attending his friends' arrival; and when he looked round from time to time at the boys behind him, the fair face of Janet, lit with tinted rays, closed the vista. At least he saw no further. Beauty such as hers, even with him, had power to arrest the eye, and say, "Thus far shalt thou come." But he averted his look, and went on with his prayer and praise. A poet-artist might have imagined this wayward girl unbanned and seated under the gilded organ-pipes in full blaze of all the chancel windows, and so, crowning her golden hair with white roses, might have made a St. Cecilia of her, as many a Madonna has been made. But Mr. Lane put such foolish ideas away from him, and pursued his devout exercises. Yet was