



MARCH.

WILD DUCK SHOOTING.

THE different methods of taking the wild duck afford capital sport and never-ending adventure. "Common wild fowl shooting with a shoulder duck gun," observes Captain Lacy in the "Modern Shooter," "has long been in vogue, and has often been the theme of ancient sporting authors; but, until Colonel Hawker's work appeared, wild fowl shooting on salt-water had scarcely been touched upon; still less had any one of 'gentle blood' ventured to commit his valuable case to 'the vasty deep,' in case so fragile as that yecept a shooting punt. The merit, therefore, of having invented this new pleasure, or, at least, of having added it to the stock of sporting recreations, attaches exclusively to the gallant colonel. As a practical performer, he is most successful, and is, perhaps, the very best wild fowl shot round the British coast. Hail, Hawker! Mao Adam of duck shooters, hail!" The colonel's well-known book contains the modes of hut shooting, &c., and some particulars relating to decoys.

The usual weight of the mallard or drake is about 2½ lbs., and that of the duck somewhat less; but the foreigners are generally larger than the home-breds. Captain Lacy has shot wild ducks in the Tees Bay above six pounds and a half the pair; but, if much beyond this weight, their purity of breed may be suspected. Wild ducks, excepting a few homebreds, whose full-grown ones are fine eating in August, do not appear in the Tees Bay until November, or, at all events, in any number worth mentioning. The mallards are very poor in condition after the middle of February, not so the ducks. The captain adds: "a common trick played upon the London cockneys is to serve them out with a couple of shell ducks in lieu of wild ducks. The heads and white legs of the former having been cut off, and the birds plucked, as they are just about the size of the latter, and always look plump, they sell better, and it is thus that wild ducks are libelled for eating so 'fishy!'"

The captain enthusiastically sings:—

"If tame-ducks were wanting,
And wild-ducks were flown,
Oh! who would inhabit
This bleak world alone!"

Colonel Hawker says: "It often happens that wild-ducks, dunbirds, and other fowl, come down at night to large rivers, ponds, or lakes, which are so deeply surrounded by floating reeds, that no one can approach the water; and the birds, aware of this, do not lower their flight till they come near them. So far from this defying the shooter, it is one of the finest opportunities that can be afforded for death and destruction. Let him sit, in a small punt, or canoe, fore and aft, among the rushes, where, towards dusk, he will be so completely hid, that he may either shoot at birds flying within pistol-shot, or wait for a good chance on the water; from whence, his boat being hid on each side, and foreshortened to the only point of view he will be pretty sure to escape the observation of the birds. This plan may be resorted to where there are no rushes, such as under the bank of an island, or in a small brook, near which there may be no biding-place."

The fens of Lincolnshire, Cambridge, and Martin Mere in Lincolnshire, are excellent localities for duck as well as every other wild fowl shooting. This species of shooting, both of duck and flapper, can likewise be pursued in perfection on the borders of many of the rivers of North and South Wales.

The nest of the wild duck is generally made in some dry spot of the marshes, and not far from water, to which she can lead her progeny as soon as hatched. It is composed of withered grass and other dry vegetable matter, and usually concealed from view by a thick bush, or some very rank herbage, though other and very dissimilar situations are occasionally chosen, as several instances have been recorded where they have deposited their eggs on the fork of a large tree, or in some deserted nest.

The Yankees have what they call their "ducking," i. e. when they form a party to go shoot ducks on Duck Island, in Chesapeake Bay. These are the

celebrated canvass-back duck of the American gourmand, and the estimation in which they are held may be gathered from the fact that, in Baltimore market, the price of a single duck is one shilling, whilst the common wild ducks are but threepence a couple. The former has been acclimated in Britain, and why the breed has not been more extensively encouraged is somewhat surprising, as they are sizeable and handsome birds, and, as a table luxury, most delicious.

ANGLING.

IN March, minnows, roach, chub, gudgeons, tench, carp, and trout, form the bill of fare. Bleak, pike, perch, and dace, spawn. In this and the preceding month, the middle of the day is the best for angling. The blue dun cow-dung flies make their appearance, and may be used throughout the year. The March brown fly appears about the same time, but is out of season at the end of April; it is a capital bait, and it kills most from eleven till three.

YACHTING.

THOUGH early in the season, yachting commences on the Thames during this month. The Thames Yacht Club rendezvous at Greenwich. The first law of the Club states its object to be "the encouragement of yacht-building sailing on the river Thames." The funds of the Club, after paying necessary current expenses, are appropriated to the purchase of cups and other prizes, to be sailed for by yachts belonging to members only. Another law of the Club throws open one of the matches, to be called "the Grand Match," to all yachts eligible to sail, winners of the same season not excluded.

STEEPLE-CHASING.

STEEPLE-CHASING or RACING, is one of the sports of this month, when the St. Albans steeple-chase takes place. The ancient borough of St. Albans, at present, appears to be to steeple-chasing what Newmarket is to legitimate turf practices; how long it may retain its metropolitan importance, over this connecting link between turf and field riding, it is not easy to predict, so much do caprice and fashion influence these matters. The benefit which this town receives from these sporting meetings, has stimulated its inhabitants to exert themselves to the utmost to provide the very best accommodation for both actors and spectators; while the liberality of the landowners cannot be too highly praised for throwing no impediment in the way. Thus, St. Albans offers its fields to bespatter the ardent riders, and its brooks to wash off the accumulated stains. Its hedges have waved under the jumpers, and its ancient town has opened its hotels to greet the conqueror and console the vanquished. Steeple-chases are also held this month at Banbury, Northampton, Burton Constable, York, Burton-upon-Trent, Bedford, Leamington, Boston, &c., &c.

English steeple-chasing appears to be rapidly gaining ground, and, in the absence of hunting, it offers one of the very best means of keeping up the wind and condition of our field-horses, and the emulative spirit of field-men. Our method of conducting a steeple-chase is not fettered with so many rules and enactments as those of Ireland; nor is it marked with much other ceremony than that of previously agreeing on the stakes, marking out the ground by means of flags on eminences, within certain distances, to the right or left of which the riders are confined in their course; neither must one horse follow the track of another, nor leap the same fence within so many yards of any other rider; nor is he allowed to take his course on any lane or road, beyond a certain distance. The horses are started by a preconcerted signal, such as a bugle sound, the firing of a pistol, &c. &c.

ARCHERY MEETINGS usually commence in this month.—FOOT-BALL play is still kept up on Shrove Tuesday, in some towns, as at Derby, and Kingston-upon-Thames.