

## FIELD SPORTS IN MINNESOTA.

THE fall of 1877 will long be remembered by the people of Minnesota, as the time when the destructive locust took his farewell meal from their wheat-fields. Visited by this scourge for three years in succession, our farmers, of the grasshopper districts, were generally in a deplorable condition. Many had staked their all upon the yield of '77, and between hope and fear, all stood awaiting their fate. With the warm sunshine of May and June, the insects appeared in countless millions, but, strange to say, in most instances without the usual voracity of appetite. Disappearing entirely in some districts, they asserted themselves in others by devouring everything before them. Fortunately the damage was limited to a narrow belt of country, and the rest of the state produced an unheard-of crop, which, coming in a time of need, was doubly welcome.

Kandiyohi County, with others, had again suffered severely from the visitation, and its wheat-fields were in a bad condition for harvesting. Fields that might have yielded from three to five bushels of wheat per acre were not gleaned at all, but left to be plowed over in the fall. To such fields as these the wild fowl, for which the state is noted, resorted undisturbed, and geese, brant, cranes and ducks fairly reveled in their bounty.

It may well be imagined that news of this state of affairs sent numerous hunting parties out along the two lines of railroad that penetrate the afflicted region, viz., the Sioux City and St. Paul, and the St. Paul and Pacific roads. During the last week in September of that year, the writer found himself with a party of three friends *en route* by the second-named road for a few days' stay among the wild fowl in Kandiyohi County. With every possible convenience for camping out, the outfit comprised also a portable Bond boat, and a full complement of decoy-ducks, together with a dozen or more goose-decoys, all of our own manufacture. W—, our "Senior," brought along his retrieving setter and constant companion, "Prince." B—, our "Junior," from Lake City, Minnesota, exhibited with pardonable pride his "Royal Fan," a dark liver-and-white pointer, the first prize winner in her class at the New York Bench Show of 1877. "Turk," a dark-brown Irish water-spaniel, accompanied his master J—,

the most tireless hunter of the party. "Fuller" and "Occie," a matched pair of black-and-white setters, were the property of the writer, and, with those before mentioned, comprised the dogs of the party.

A run of six hours brought us to Swede Grove, where we left the cars and were met by Mr. William Wilcox, *alias* "Bill," a well-to-do farmer and an ardent sportsman. His two-horse team and wagon furnished us transportation to his house, where we were to pass the first night out.

"I'm glad you've come," said Bill, as we drove up briskly to the open door of his roomy dwelling; "for the sand-hill cranes have been goin' for what little corn the plaguey 'hoppers left standing, and 'pears to me, gentlemen, with such guns as you have got along, you might make it right lively for 'em."

"Yes," chimed in his wife; "you can hear them even now, gentlemen. 'The noise is gettin' unbearable; and, if you'll step up here on the porch, you can see them plain."

We assured her, while taking a look at the large birds, as they covered the field like a flock of sheep, that nothing would please us better than an immediate attack; but even as we debated on a plan of assault, the cranes, to the number of several hundred, as if they scented danger, took wing and with discordant cries circled about until they attained a certain altitude, when they left in the direction of Big Marsh.

"Oh, never mind," said Bill's oldest girl, a little "nut-browne mayd" of ten, "they'll come back again in the morning; long before sister and I are up we can hear 'em screaming."

This prospect filled me with delight. I had long desired to make the closer acquaintance of these birds, incited a little, too, by many a failure to stalk them. On the sly, for fear of being laughed at by my companions, I had brought along three crane-decoys, neatly cut out of card-board and painted light gray, in fair imitation of the sand-hill crane. Here, at once, was the opportunity to make a test of their merit. So, leaving the rest of the party at a favorable moment, I took my way to the corn-field, where all was now quiet. The ground had been beaten hard in places by the busy feet of the marauding cranes, and corn-stalks lay here and there, as the hungry birds had



wantonly tossed them. It did not take long to select a convenient "shock" for a "blind," or ambush, and I returned to the house filled with anticipations of the coming sport. Upon the floor of Bill's cozy sitting-room, surrounded by his children, who regarded my movements with open-mouthed attention, I proceeded with some diffidence to unwrap the package of decoys. Presently the crane counterfeits stood disclosed, and a ripple of merriment went round the circle, ending in a perfect roar upon the entrance of my friends, who relentlessly joined in.

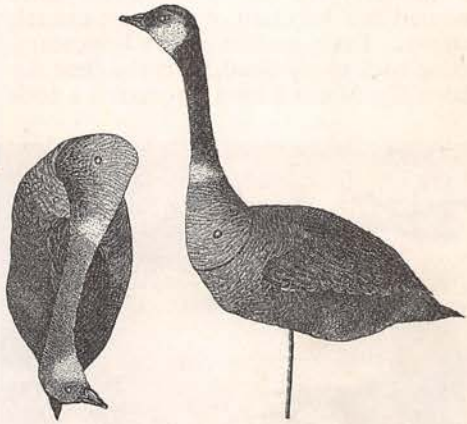
"If you think, mister," said one of the plow-boys, after the merriment had somewhat subsided, "that you can fool a crane with such nonsense, I guess you'll find yourself much mistaken. Why, I'd be willin' to pay you a dollar apiece for all you can shoot over them things."

"You shall have a chance," I said, somewhat nettled. "When you ride out to your plowing in the morning, come to my stand, and you may have an opportunity to invest your small change."

The little folks exhibited great glee over my menagerie, and raced about the room, each one astride of a crane-decoy.

When at last it was light enough to distinguish objects about me, I had been at my post in the corn-field a full hour, almost breathless with expectation. What if the cranes should fail to come, and I be compelled to return to the house empty-handed and face my more fortunate companions, the distant report of whose guns had been repeatedly borne to me from the direction of Crow River and Wilcox Pass? Worse than this would be the triumph of the knight of

the plow-share. For the sixth time, certainly, I walked off a little distance and took a survey of my ambush, about which the



GOOSE-DECOYS, READY FOR TRANSIT AND FOR USE.

three "base libels" were so naturally grouped as to give me quite a start when my eyes fell suddenly upon them. The smoke curled lazily upward from the farm-house chimney, and lost itself in a veil of mist which slowly ascended from the lake on the right of the house. Now the upper edge of the cloud mist took on a rosy hue, due to the first warm rays of the sun, which seemed to be rising from an early morning bath in Wilcox Lake. The varying beauties of the veil of mist were duplicated by reflection in the still water beneath. The beauty of the scene made me quite forget my disappointment.

There is considerable activity now among



THE MENAGERIE.



Bill's barn-yard fowls, and I can even see his little folks scampering about the yard. A gentle breeze has ruffled the surface of the lake, and carried away every trace of the fog which made the sunrise so beautiful. My slender decoys feel the influence of the wind, and nod in a ludicrous, if not most natural, manner. But in another minute I am scampering back to my blind, for in the clear sky above Big Marsh I have discovered a flock

of making a "right and left," I "cut away" again at the now thoroughly alarmed flock, and one more of the immense birds comes to the ground. Too elated with my success to exercise patience or even to think of caution, I do not pause to reload, but, dropping my gun, run rapidly to bag. The first is found dead within forty yards; giving him only a glance, I pass on to the other, which is not less than sixty yards from the blind. The



A CLOSE SHOT.

of cranes, winging their way in a direct line for this field. Stepping quickly into my blind, I grasp my trusty gun, and somewhat nervously await their approach. Though scarcely considered fast flyers, they are not long in traversing the intervening space, and presently are circling about over me, evidently scanning the ground closely. Of course, when directly overhead the decoys are invisible to them, but are again clearly seen when they have swung off at an angle. A little more maneuvering, and they seem to conclude there is no enemy about, for they set their wings, and, with long legs awkwardly dangling in the air, come on slowly, preparing to alight. Almost before I am aware of it, they are upon me,—one, indeed, so near that, were I to fire now, he would be fearfully mangled. The leader of the flock offers a tempting shot at thirty-five yards; him I give the contents of my right barrel, and he doubles up instantly over my sight. Not wasting an instant, in the hope

old fellow seems dead enough, and without much ado I stoop to pick him up, when he astonishes me by instantly rising to his feet, with every feather ruffled and his long wings beating the air. His ugly, sharp bill is extended and emits a hissing noise, and altogether he is a very unpleasant-looking bird. For a full minute we gaze at each other, at least one of the two at a loss what to do next. It is becoming more and more evident to me that I do not care so much for him now as I did a short time ago. We are yet eying each other as I catch the sound of voices mingled with the confused tramp of horses, and feel certain that the plow-boys are approaching. Not caring to appear in a ridiculous light, above all others to these men, I determine to put an end to the scene, and accordingly make a quick attempt to seize the crane by the neck. This he successfully dodges, and in a twinkling wounds me in the wrist. Altogether out of patience, I make a bold dart



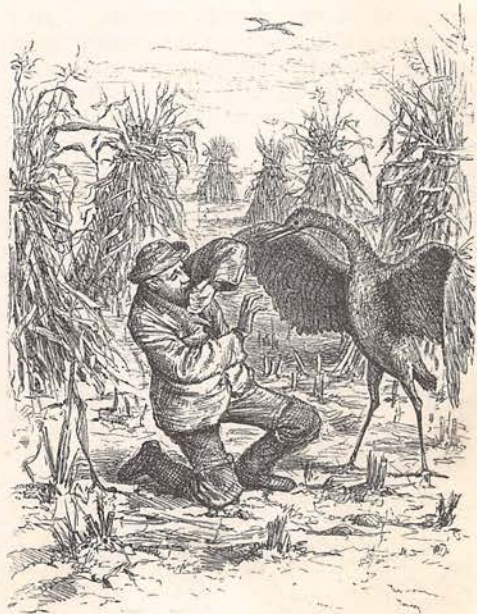
for my gun, when to my astonishment the irate crane gives pursuit. At this moment the farm hands come into full view, and I offer them the spectacle of the "city hunter," as they are pleased to style me, running away from a crane! The rest of the scene must be imagined. I do not attempt a settlement with the tormentors, but after finishing my enemy with a vengeful charge at close range, return to my blind, where I have the satisfaction of knocking over three more cranes before the summons to breakfast comes booming over the stubble.

My companions hang up in Bill's cool cellar thirty-one mallards, mostly green-heads. My adventure with the crane is freely discussed over juicy crane-steak sliced from the breast, which, together with good coffee and some of Mrs. Wilcox's best griddle-cakes smothered in cream and white sugar, constituted a breakfast heartily enjoyed by all. After allowing me to be well teased, our host puts a somewhat more serious color upon the matter by assuring us that it was rather a dangerous proceeding to face a wounded crane, which, like the heron, always strikes for the eye. Once, to his knowledge, the bill penetrated through the eye of an Indian, producing instant death.

Twenty-eight miles or more lie between us and Kandiyohi, where we intend camping, and there is no alternative but instant departure after breakfast. By nine o'clock we are waving our adieus to the Wilcox family, whose worthy head accompanies us as driver, friend and companion. Our outfit, none of the smallest, is snugly stowed away. The day is exceedingly pleasant, and the entire party is in the very best of spirits. The rolling prairie road offers no hindrance, and we jog on at a fair pace. The neat appearance of the farm-houses and their immediate surroundings shows plainly the thrift of the owners, who are mostly Swedes or Norwegians. A likely looking prairie bordering a stubble causes us to tie up the duck retrievers, Turk and Prince, and cast off Royal Fan and the two setters; this is done with the hope of finding a brood of pinnated grouse or (as they are invariably called in this state) prairie-chickens.

Fan led off at a round pace and quartered her ground thoroughly, showing beautiful style and action with thorough training. B——, her proud owner, from his seat in the wagon, controlled her movements by the "call" and by the motion of the hand.

I could not help wishing that Macdona might see her now, and behold in her superb action and style a confirmation of



CORNERED BY A CRANE.

his judgment of her on the bench. Not much behind her in either pace or style were the two black-and-white setters, as with heads well up they dashed over the prairie; ranging in perfect accord with each other, yet entirely independent, they cast furtive and anxious glances in Fan's direction, evidently fearful lest she should secure a "point" before them or they lose an opportunity to "back."

Now Fan is slackening her pace, and is investigating a narrow strip of corn, which from neglect has become lodged. E——'s quick eye has detected the presence of game by the change in Fan's pace and manner. The two setters are down wind from her about forty yards distant, and are evidently scenting the same birds, for they come trotting up with their black noses high in the air, and with the peculiar elastic step seen only under these circumstances. Fan, in the meantime, proceeds with more caution, the scent becoming stronger; a moment or two of suspense on our part, and the little beauty comes to a stand. We prepare to jump out, guns in hand, but desist as she makes a few steps in advance, every motion indicating her intense and increasing excitement. Presently she is rigid! The setters



have approached within a few yards, and the instant she makes her final stand become rigid also, backing her point stanchly. The trio form a picture no sportsman could fail to regard with pleasure: Fan is erect, yet exhibiting the characteristic point looked for in her species (not much does it resemble in its intensity of action the vacillation of a "puppy point"); her two companions, who seem to have attained an unnatural length, appear to be crouching for a spring, their usually kind faces showing lines and wrinkles indicative of strong excitement. "Are you all ready?" is B's question when we have ranged ourselves in position back of the dogs. Even as he speaks he makes one step forward, and

portunity for a right-and-left, which he fully improves. Still the dogs maintain their recumbent attitudes, though it is easy to see their growing impatience. Another pair has bit the dust in response to a quick double from my gun, and poor J—, who seems to be fated, for so far not a bird has flushed to him, is becoming tired of the monotony of the thing. Then B— and W— each bring down another bird.

At the word "Fetch!" the eager dogs "seek dead," and in a twinkling come trotting proudly back each with a bird, on being relieved of which they are again sent in with a like result. Not much do these birds resemble the puny little ones bagged on the fifteenth of August, for they are full grown, hardy and strong, and very swift of wing. Number seven shot backed by a good charge of powder has done the work. September grouse seldom lie so close as did this brood, every one of which lay safely bagged before us.

The three dogs, having had barely a taste of sport, show much unwillingness to take up again their position back of the wagon; but it is now the duck retrievers' turn, for we are about to enter a section of country thickly interspersed with small lakes or ponds, here called sloughs (pronounced *slews*). Turk and Prince, having work before them, are set free and soon testify their appreciation by eccentric gambols. The two setters and Fan would delight in retrieving ducks, but are not very often indulged; the example of the average "duck dog," as he dashes in at the crack of the gun, is apt to have a demoralizing effect upon the steadiest of pointers and setters, and they are tempted to "break shot" at all times, which would be disastrous on almost any game other than ducks.

Mallards, widgeons and sprig-tails delight in those small grassy ponds, which are generally thickly grown with wild rice, reeds and rushes. A musk-rat house here and there furnishes sunning opportunities,



A SIDE SHOT.

a cock grouse flushes before him. He throws his gun quickly to his face; with the sharp report the bird drops into the corn, and a long stream of feathers drifts down the wind, their number showing his perfect aim. Fan drops to "wing," instantly followed by Fuller and his mate. A step forward by our party and a pair flushing before W— gives him an op-





A "BOND" IN WET WEATHER.

and also enables them to mount guard. While Bill is securing his team to a convenient fence, we are planning an assault on one of these sloughs which the little prairie-knoll ahead of us hides from our view. We employ the usual tactics, by surrounding it, each one approaching it from a different direction in deep silence, though we are not able from the shore to discover a feather. When every one is posted in as good cover as possible, Bill, according to previous arrangement, fires a random shot from his "pin-fire" over the water. In an instant, with a quacking and a terrible fluttering, the well-concealed ducks spring into the air, and make a break in the direction of one of the large lakes. This will bring them over J—, and I watch them nearing the fatal stand. Now the barrel of his gun points upward from the clump of reeds in which he is concealed, and two birds

ducks killed. Fuller and Occie are sent over the hill after those knocked down by Wilcox, and we are once more on our way.

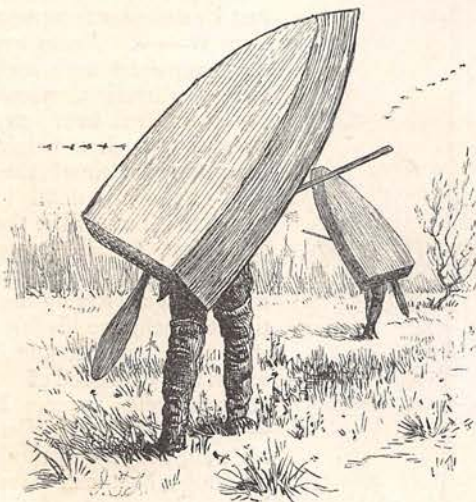
To me there is not much real sport in this style of shooting, though the game is



A MISHAP.



large and fine; it lacks the excitement of the "pass" shooting, and many birds are lost by falling into the matted reeds and grass where the dogs have great trouble finding them; the incessant popping of the guns also has a tendency to divert their attention from



BOND(ED) GOODS IN TRANSIT.

the careful search necessary to find skulking wounded ducks. These sloughs or ponds occur very frequently upon the St. Paul and Pacific and Sioux City and St. Paul railroads, and under proper guidance a party of four or five will take heavy tribute from each as they go along. For this kind of shooting a Bond boat offers superior advantages: composed of sheet-iron sides and a wooden bottom, it is made in two water-tight compartments, besides an air-chamber, to prevent sinking in case of an upset; it is of trifling weight and easily transported. Two sportsmen, by each shouldering one half of the boat, can make portage after portage, shooting out one pond and then carrying to another, no great distance ever intervening. These boats in transit upon a hunter's back have a most ludicrous aspect, and dull indeed must he be who cannot extract much humor out of the novel spectacle. Should a rain-storm arise, one of the compartments of the boat set up on end makes a very good shelter. The inadvertent kicking away of the supporting paddle to your novel roof will certainly justify the laugh sure to be indulged in by your more careful companion; but unlike the turtle which you so closely resemble as you look out from under your temporary shell, you *can* crawl out of it.

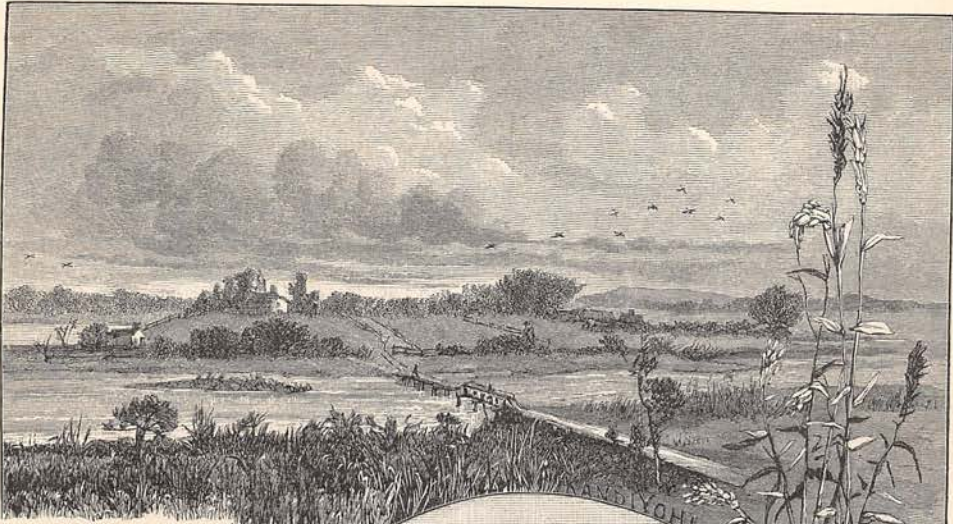
It was quite late, with frequent stopping on our route from one cause or another, when our destination was reached. We were well used to camping-out, and our tent was very soon in position and in readiness for the straw bedding hauled from a neighboring stack. This was at once stuffed into a wide empty tick brought along for that purpose, and we had a bed fit for a king, and one on which no tired hunter can long remain awake.

It devolved upon our good-natured senior, W—, to prepare the supper, which in this case, on account of the lateness of the hour, was to consist only of tea, bread and butter, and a mutton chop. The latter delicacy our thoughtful hostess at Swede Grove had kindly sent along for the first day out. After placing a well-filled tea-kettle upon the roaring camp-stove, W—, followed by his constant and faithful attendant, Prince, sought a convenient spot to carve the mutton. This he soon discovered in a short log, which he immediately bestrode. Finding it impossible to place both the frying-pan and the meat in front of him, the former was carefully balanced behind him and he proceeded with his carving in a very deliberate manner. His dog had made at least thirty miles that day on a slim breakfast of Spratt's biscuit and skim-milk, and was in just the condition to allow his feelings to get the better of his judgment. So when his master dropped a slice of meat into the pan behind his back, Prince gulped it down immediately. Again and again was the poor dog tempted, and as often did he yield. My companions and myself were witnesses of this, and, though very well



HOW PRINCE GOT HIS BREAKFAST.





aware that our supply of mutton was limited to the piece our friend was carving, we enjoyed the joke too well to spoil the fun by warning him. "Let's see, boys," presently said W—, whose back was toward us; "we are just five, and I have cut six pieces of mutton; five will be enough for supper, and if you have no objections I would like to give the piece I have left to poor Prince, who seems very tired and hungry." With difficulty retaining our composure, we assured him that we had no objections; he then called up the dog in the most endearing manner and gave him the bit of meat, meanwhile assuring him that "he was a good dog, y-e-s he was!" Still unaware of his loss, he very deliberately wiped the blade of his knife on the grass, turned and took up the pan!—a startled glance at the empty utensil, another at us now convulsed in laughter, and a third at Prince, who gulped down the last piece and stood regarding his kind master with *such* a thankful look,—and W— took in the situation immediately. And then—but perhaps it would not be fair



to tell how the secretary of a State Historical Society behaves under such provocation. I will only say that it was some time before we got the dog-hairs out of the frying-pan and restored it to its former shape; a torch enabled us to find the boots, paddles and valises that chased the dog when fleeing from his master's indignation.

A coach candle in an improvised socket, fastened to the inside of the tent-pole, sufficiently illuminated the interior, and enabled us to get in readiness for the morning's work. "Chicken shells" were taken out, and suitable ones for duck-shooting substituted; no one forgetting to place a few loaded with



"dbl. B" shot in a certain pocket of the Holabird shooting-coat; these last for a stray goose or two which has been known to fly over this pass more than once, in the memory of our mess.

Such an inviting bed as we had before us could not long remain untried, and one by one our party turned in. The full moon flooded our tent with a subdued light, and brightly illuminated our surroundings. Through the tent-opening could be seen one arm of Little Kandiyohi and the two peninsulas, joined by a rickety bridge of hewn timber, which formed this well-known pass, and over which



A COLD MORNING.

we are to have a "flight" in the morning twilight.

I am quite certain that I have not been unconscious for more than fifteen minutes, when I am rudely awakened by a severe thump in the side, which I am half inclined to return with interest, until I see that my friends are up and dressed. The candle is burning, and a bright fire roars and crackles in the stove, diffusing an agreeable warmth throughout the tent. The steaming coffee-pot sends forth an aroma that is decidedly fragrant, and somewhat suggestive of the Vienna Bakery; though, with a tin cupful of the hot nectar in one hand and a well-buttered biscuit in the other, as we form a circle about the stove, the resemblance to a party of Centennial tourists is not very striking.

All of us are decidedly sleepy, and we should perhaps be still in bed, were our in-

clinations strictly followed, and we show less impatience to face the keen morning air than do our dogs, whom Bill has set free on his way to feed the team. The moon has long since disappeared and inky darkness has succeeded, and we feel our way along as we go down to our stands upon the peninsula. The air, for a September morning, is quite chilly, and in spite of the cup of hot coffee and plenty of wrappings, I am soon all of a tremble, and cannot help contrasting this with the warm and cozy bed out of which we had lately crept. I feel much pity for my two faithful dogs, who are lying crouched at my feet, impatient for the word to plunge into the dark and chilly current for a duck. Some are already passing over, as we know by the sound of wings swiftly cutting the air. By rubbing the phosphorus of a match the dial of my watch is rendered visible, and it is some satisfaction to know that it is nearly five o'clock, and dawn is at hand. In a few minutes we shall be able to discern objects overhead, and by exercising skill and judgment, or "bull-head luck," as an old veteran of the pass calls it, a little execution may be done.

I now proceed to take off my gloves and my "gum coat," which had been donned for warmth, and to fill the pockets of my "Holabird" with shells which are in this instance loaded with five drams of Dupont's ducking powder, and one and a quarter ounces of number six shot, for the early flight. Shells loaded with numbers four and five shot are used later in the day when the ducks begin to "climb" as they cross. The icy-cold gun-barrels strike a chill to my bare hands, but my pulse has gained a number of beats in the last few minutes, a pleasant thrill of excitement pervades me, and I am fast warming up to the work. Standing in a regular skirmish line about thirty yards apart, in the position of "ready," with guns in hand, and both the hammers raised, we strain our eyes to catch a glimpse of the game that is streaming over, but the veil of darkness prevents our seeing. Who will draw first blood? More than once have our guns been quickly thrown to our faces, and our fingers rested on the triggers, but none of us has acquired the art of shooting "by ear," and slowly and reluctantly we lower them again. But now from our junior's stand a blinding flash shoots up into the air at an acute angle, accompanied by a deafening crash, which rolls like a burst of thunder along the surface of the lake, until it is echoed



back by the heavy belt of timber in a faint but perfect imitation. The sound that interests us most, however, is the plunge of the retrievers into the lake, and the splashing in front of my friend's blind as one or more victims flutter upon the surface of the water.

A bunch of four or five swiftly moving, shadowy objects now draw my fire, and before the echo of my double shot has fairly died away, J—— and W—— have each made their first shots of the morning and with good effect. Prince is now climbing the bank close by with a fine drake canvas-back, one of the two killed by the first gun of the morning. My two setters are swimming a race neck and neck for first choice on a pair that fell to my fire. As for Turk, he is absolutely diving for a wounded duck which has so far managed to elude his gaping jaws. At each fresh failure to secure it, Turk gives a yelp of rage, but finally manages to seize the duck by one wing and makes for the shore. The slight hold he has obtained allows the duck to flutter vigorously, filling its captor's eyes with water, much to his disgust.

But the sport in the air eclipses in interest that in the lake, and at W——'s sharp "Mark! east!!" every one goes down behind his blind, out of sight of an approaching flock of red-heads. They come on, unconscious of impending trouble, not over two yards above the surface of the water. Their first hint of danger is taken from seeing the dogs which are swimming for shore, and they make an extraordinary effort to mount high in the air. This gives us a splendid opportunity, for from our point of sight they appear to stand still, and a volley at this instant gives the dogs more work to do. Our second barrels are put in with telling effect, and the badly demoralized flock now presents a far different appearance from that of a few moments before. The Bond boat is now used to recover the birds that fell on the west side of the peninsula and that would drift away before the dogs could attend to them.

A momentary lull in the flight gives an opportunity to look about us and count our spoils. My friends have seventeen ducks between them, while my own string shows six—three canvas-backs, all drakes but one, two red-heads, and a widgeon—not very bad luck, certainly, and the flight is not half over.

The canvas-backs are handled with a degree of satisfaction that even the green-

head and more gaudy mallard fail to inspire. To use the words of the lamented "Frank Forrester": "This is the royalty of ducks. No other water-fowl to him is equal, or second, or in any way comparable." While it is not unusual for a novice to mistake the red-head for the canvas-back, which it is true they resemble, the difference is yet quite marked. The attention once carefully drawn to the head of the latter, no red-head can ever again be mistaken for it. Aside from the color of the bill, which in the case of the latter is light blue and in the other black, the length and shape of both head and bill differ greatly, as may be seen in the sketch (page 833).

But what has become of my ducks? The two I had been fondling a minute before are gone! A search about the stand fails to discover them, and I give it up for the present, for my attention is drawn to the west, where there is some disturbance among the water-fowl, and a number are circling in the air that may possibly be tempted to cross. A sharp growl from Occie causes me to look around, and lo, the culprit! Prince, the rascal, is marching off with one of my ducks in his mouth, which he deposits on his master's pile of game, while the latter is seemingly in the very best of humor over my loss and his gain. I do not wish to imply for a moment that this little diversion of Prince's is the result of special training. No, indeed. W——'s character is above reproach, and, besides, he shoots too well to be compelled to resort to strategy for increasing his string. Evidently the dog and he are friends again, and the little "crookedness" was an effort on the dog's part to touch his master's heart. Whether the latter would have meted out punishment to Prince had he been allowed the time will never be known, for an incident happened which suddenly claimed our undivided attention.

This is nothing more nor less than the steady honking of an approaching flock of wild geese, which have left Kandiyohi Lake and are flying up the narrows toward us on their way to the fields. A bird's-eye view of our party at this moment would have been most amusing, for every one of us seemed struck with a sudden and ardent desire to lay hands on something, and that in a most incredibly short space of time. Each of us had in one or more of the numerous pockets of one or more of our shooting-coats one or more shells placed





THE BRIDGE STAND.

there for just such an emergency as the present. To find and substitute these shells quickly and without alarming the rapidly approaching geese is the occasion of our frantic efforts. Meanwhile, all unsuspectingly, they are rapidly nearing us, the increasing loudness of their honking alone indicating the fact, for we have no time to waste looking in their direction. Those of us who had started out that cool morning enveloped in at least three coats apiece, and had laid them aside from time to time in as many different places, were in trouble indeed. W—— had left his goose ammunition in his shell-pouch by the blind, but having walked away a few rods while his dog was pilfering my ducks, he was now making for the coveted shells on all fours, so as not to be visible, with a celerity that would have astonished the many friends of this usually dignified gentleman. B——, who had in vain searched his numerous pockets, was calling appealingly to his neighbor J——, the only one ready, to throw him a "double B shell, for goodness sake! quick!"

Three of the huge birds are now heading for my blind, and the rest of the flock veer

off in the direction of my comrades. My two expectant setters are already crouching for a spring, when the shell which I have with some difficulty found, and which I am placing with some nervous trepidation into the opened breach of my gun, begins to stick; in the haste and excitement, I bear hard upon it, but it does not budge a particle. I then attempt to extract the shell; but no, it sticks as if it had always been there. Though I struggle like a madman in my efforts to dislodge it I can make no impression, and have the mortification of beholding the geese sail over a rod or two above me, near enough, in fact, to have used even my No. 6 shot with deadly effect. "Bang! bang!" comes a volley from my right, and two of the "old honkers" tumble headlong into the lake, displacing at least a barrel of water as they strike the surface.

The main flight having passed over, and out of which we have taken fair toll, we are favored with more "singles" than flocks; the shooting is consequently more interesting, because more difficult. Clean misses at these swift-flying birds are frequent. It seems at times next to an impossibility to swing the gun rapidly enough to cover and



A TIGHT SHELL.



avoid shooting behind. Shooting into flocks "for general results," without singling out a bird, may be excusable in a Sunday "pot-hunter," or in a novice anxious to give a new Scott, Purdy or Parker a good airing; but in a true sportsman—never. High or long shots should seldom be attempted here, as misses beyond fifty or sixty yards are common, and scores of birds are struck whose wounds prove fatal only after long suffering. Side shots are most deadly; but proper allowance must be made for distance and speed of flight. Opportunities for double shots occur continually, and to make them it is often necessary to use the first barrel of the gun on an incoming bird, and the second will then, in all probability, be a side or quartering shot.

To stop an "incomer," raise the gun carefully in the line of his flight; move quickly ahead of the duck, when you judge him to be in range; and, when you lose sight of head and bill over your gun, pull instantly. The flight of a duck is ordinarily at the rate of about sixty miles an hour; but when accelerated by fear, or a brisk wind, or both, it is nearly double, and must be experimented upon to be fully appreciated. To become a good "pass shot," some of the requisites are: to be able to judge distances quickly and accurately; to be able to cover well the moving bird, and not to check the motion of the gun at the moment of discharge. Because it is necessary for most men to hold some distance ahead of swiftly flying game in close range, it does not follow that this is the best thing to do; it shows, rather, that such a one is in the habit of checking or arresting entirely the motion of his piece as his finger presses the trigger. Most sportsmen flinch at that supreme moment, and unless the habit is entirely overcome, they cannot expect ever to become good wing shots. The "choke boring" of guns, in limited use long ago, has only very recently come into favor and rather more general use. Upon the pass or elsewhere, it adds at least one-fourth more distance to the killing range of the gun. This is done by the effect it has upon the "pattern" made by the shot, causing the gun to throw a greater number of shot pellets into a given circle than can be done by the cylinder, or straight bore. One barrel of the duck-hunter's gun should surely be bored in this manner.

The old tree in the rear of our tent fairly groaned as it bent under the load of game, the total bag of that morning's sport; and the honest Swede farmers, whose teams were

in the habit of passing over the little bridge, must have thought it bore strange fruit.

Kandiyohi was once famous for its black-duck flights; but of late they seem to have abandoned it, and more mallards, red-heads and canvas-backs are found here. *Vallisneria*, often miscalled wild celery (I say miscalled because it bears no resemblance in taste to the common celery), is beginning to grow thickly in places, in addition to the wild rice, and may account for this fact.

It was in this vicinity that the pair of canvas-backs were killed by that veteran sportsman, General H. H. Sibley,—well known to the readers of the old "Spirit of the Times"

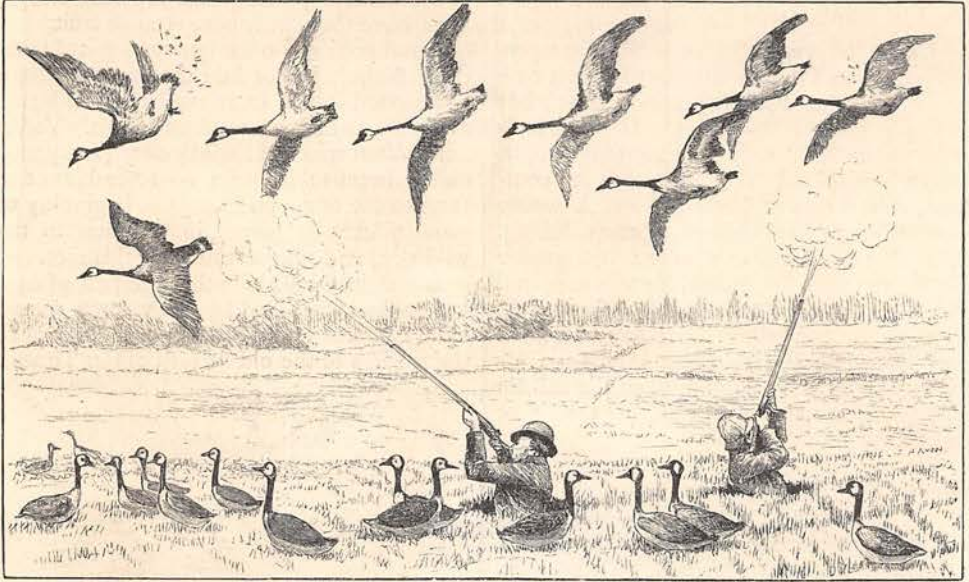


STOPPING AN INCOMER.

under the *nom de plume* of "Hal-a-Dakotah,"—and by him sent to his friend "Frank Forrester," thereby settling a controversy between the two gentlemen, and proving conclusively—what Forrester had before denied—that the true *Vallisneria* is found away from the sea-coast.

To have any thing like sport in the pur-





GOOSE-SHOOTING FROM STUBBLE.

suit of the common wild goose (*Bernicla Canadensis*), the ordinary methods of hunting water-fowl hardly answer here; besides, the lakes they frequent are not large enough to justify the use of the bay-shooting tactics from sink-boats, and from blinds near the water. These birds are exceedingly wary when upon the fields, and are very seldom bagged by stalking. In their watchfulness they have but one rival, and he an effective ally, in the sand-hill crane, which often feeds in their midst, thus adding to the difficulty of approach within effective range. The difficult problem of their successful capture was at last solved for us by Colonel Sam Doughty, of Lake City, Minn., who introduced shooting over decoys from pits dug in the stubble or new breaking, where it has been ascertained geese are in the habit of feeding. The decoys are of the simplest construction and greatest portability, being merely flat forms in good outline painted in imitation of the wild goose; these when seen at right angles to their flat surfaces, at ordinary shot-gun range and beyond, are well calculated to deceive not alone his gooseship but even amateur sportsmen.\*

Two flights a day are made by the geese

\* Ex-Governor A—— will never forget how natural was the look of Major C——'s decoys on that memorable day near Kirkhoven, when, after crawling a long distance, he emptied his gun in riddling them. They had been left after the early morning flight by their owner, who witnessed the incident from afar.

from the large lakes in search of food; one taking place at day-break in the morning and lasting perhaps an hour, and the other at four o'clock in the afternoon, occupying about the same length of time. On these flights they are often accompanied by the snow-goose (*Anser hyperboreus*) and the white-fronted goose (*Anser Gambelii*), which are here called respectively white and black brant, though they do not much resemble the true brant of the sea-coast (*Branta hemida*), which may be found occasionally in the midst of flocks of the other kinds, yet are by no means common.

From about the latitude of Kandiyohi County to the Red River of the north, the different species of the wild goose hold high revel and, upon the approach of the cold weather, may be seen in countless thousands massing for the southern flight. An early morning drive along the wheat-fields which they frequent will disclose them feeding either upon stubble or breaking. They must be allowed to depart not only unmolested, but of their own accord, when an examination of the feeding-ground is carefully made, and the pits may then at once be sunk. If there are two shooters, as many pits are necessary, and they are best circular in form, about thirty inches in diameter and forty inches in depth. The earth of the excavation may be partially utilized in constructing a slight embankment around the edges of the pit. The surface of the soil

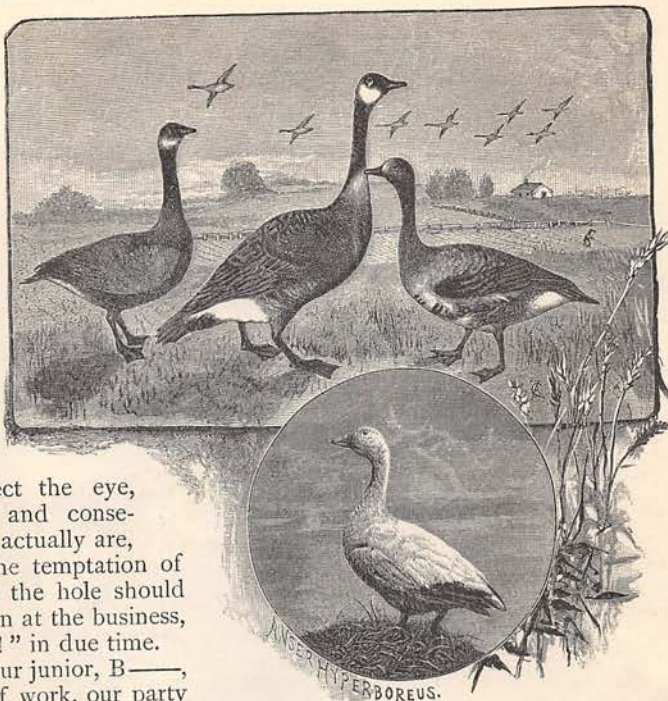


about the pit-openings must be manipulated until it accords in appearance with the natural surroundings. The pits may be near enough to permit of a whispered conversation between the occupants when the game is approaching. The decoys, to the number of a dozen or more, being flat, must be placed at such angles that when viewed from any point of the compass a few apparently solid geese are seen.

In the air, with no intervening object to correct the eye, geese appear very large, and consequently nearer than they actually are, and one is exposed to the temptation of firing too soon; therefore the hole should be "worked" by a veteran at the business, who will command "Fire!" in due time.

Under the guidance of our junior, B—, an old hand at this kind of work, our party bagged, in four times "setting" out, twenty-one Canada, four white-fronted and three snow geese.

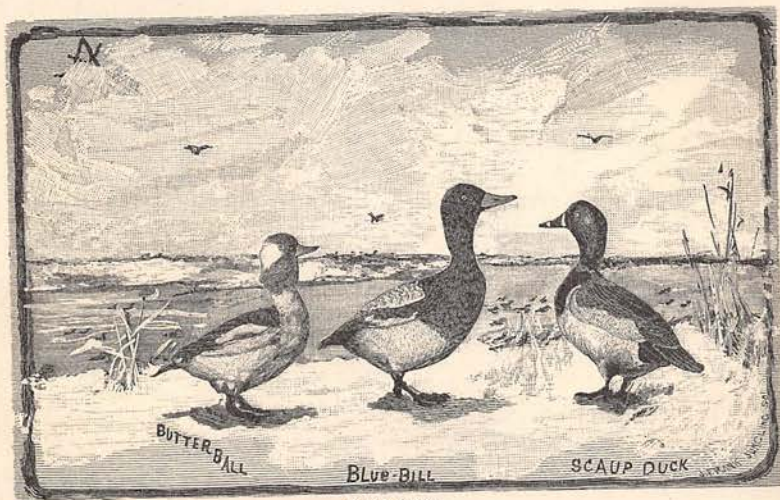
The decoy ducks were put to good use in the lakes about our camp, and as the best of decoy shooting begins here after eight o'clock in the morning, and ends near three in the afternoon, no time is lost that could be better employed on the pass or on the stubble. There is a satisfaction in shooting over decoys that is not found in any other style of shooting, since by the



WILD GEESSE (1, HUTCHINS GOOSE; 2, CANADENSIS; 3, WHITE-FRONTED; 4, HYPERBOREUS, OR SNOW GOOSE).

exercise of judgment in placing the decoys and boat, the ducks may be forced to present whatever kind of shots you most desire.

Our bag for the week's trip was: Geese, thirty-one; cranes, five; pinnated grouse, fourteen; canvas-backs, seventeen; mallards and other ducks, one hundred and ten; Wilson snipe and golden plover, twenty-eight.



WILD DUCKS.