OUTDOORS

A BOOK OF THE WOODS, FIELDS AND MARSHLANDS

By

ERNEST McCAFFEY

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NOTE

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OUTDOORS

THE MARSHES IN APRIL

THE marshes in April begin to show a livelier green, and to deck their edges with various bright colors. Nearly every trace of winter has been blotted out. The dead sedge is hidden by sheets of emerald grass, and only in some out-of-the-way corners is there a hint of the ravages which mark the path of the months gone by. In these nooks one may find a clump of faded cat-tails, their stalks broken or bent, their rusty brown heads flaking off and scattering as the winds go over. Violets spring up on the outer skirts of the swampy spots, together with little starry flowers of white and yellow, hardly noticeable to the careless comer. Bulrushes rise in olive-green masses, their graceful tips tilting to the silent waters. Willows, stunted and sparse, stand here and there, the furry "catkins" of March having been superseded by the more mature buddings. The distant timber-lines are still black, but

soon will lighten with countless hosts of shimmering leaves. The rushes and canes, the wild-rice and tawny marsh-grass, brood over a waste of dreaming pools and lonely stretches.

Musk-rat houses dot the shallower portions of the marsh, dusky heaps of rushes, piled high by the industry of these cunning water-rats. In many places the water is amber-hued, darkened by slivers of decaying reeds and shadowed by the overhanging cover. In some niches it holds the sunlight as a goblet holds wine, with sparkles at the rim, and beaded bubbles welling up to break upon the surface. All this marks the silences of the marsh, the ineffable sadness tinged with a yearning joy—as a nun's face might light with a smile at sight of a sleeping child.

The weather-beaten lines of an old skiff, deserted and rotting, lie in one of the coves, and beside it a school of tadpoles wriggle in inky density. On the boat's bow a solitary mud-turtle dozes in the sun, his black and yellow markings proclaiming his ancient and honorable race. Myriads of glistening water-bugs dart back and forth over the water, weaving a maze of invisible lines across its

glassy floor. Marsh-spiders stretch silky threads, filmy with dew, from reed to reed, and this tether sways in silvery lightness with every wandering gust. The little black rails dodge in and out of the rushes, their rapid, noiseless movements giving only a hint of their passing. Further inshore, where the denser growth tangles into a brake, the hollow, guttural cry of a bittern comes mournfully out at intervals.

Sometimes a red-winged blackbird perches on a cat-tail stalk, and sends out a joyous whistle of the most care-free abandon. Sometimes the cow-blackbirds fly over in long flocks, without a sound. And at odd times the crow-blackbirds, the red-wings and the cow-birds sweep across in a scattered mass, chattering and clacking, to spread suddenly in irregularly fan-shaped curves, and light when they reach the trees beyond. Occasionally a journeying "flicker" is seen flying from one point of woods to another across the marshes. His strong wings flail the atmosphere with regular strokes, his curving flight, with its up-and-down dips, soon covers the distance between, and perched on a topmost

branch of some oak or hickory he poses statue-like, a bright fleck in the sunlight.

Marsh-hawks, or "harriers," their broad wings tacking here and there, sail warily about these wildernesses. They are great hunters of mice and such small deer, and the plover, snipe, rail, and other birds are their lawful prey. And woe to the wounded duck that has escaped the hunters when this freebooter discovers his whereabouts. There is a poise, a dart, a finishing of what man commenced, and only scattered feathers to tell the story. If you push a duck-boat into the more remote fens you may be rewarded by seeing a brace of belated mallards rise from the bogs, their long necks reaching out, and usually a startled "quack, quack, quack" issuing from their opened bills.

Or maybe a lone teal will scurry past, the very sense of music in his flight, the least possible crisping of the air to mark his symmetrical course. No painter can draw a line on canvas like the flight of wild-fowl along the sky.

Where the shallow "slues" extend out from the marsh the "tip-ups" stay, those

spotted sand-pipers whose grotesque bobbing up and down have given them their nicknames. They are oftenest found singly, and they assume such an absurd air of importance at the sight of a man, that it might be imagined they were first in the list of game-birds. They will run a few paces, tilt their bodies up and down, skim along a few yards farther, bob again, and finally take wing in a jerky, irregular way with a petulant cry at being disturbed.

Along the sides of these little "slues," at the edges and among the boggy spots, the jack-snipe, true game-bird and cunning, hides. You will not see him one time in five hundred until he flies. And then with what a bound he is in the air, twisting, gyrating, and reeling off the yards of space. He usually gets up with a startled "skeap, skeap," as if he could not rid himself of nervousness at the nearness of man. If he has not been shot at much, he may pitch down seventy-five or a hundred yards away, spreading out his wings as he lights so that you can see the barred appearance of his under wing feathers. In the fields next to the

marshes the slue-grass is occasionally cut by some marsh-dweller and piled along the drier reaches of land. And here, especially if cattle have tramped it over and wallowed it about without breaking down, but only scattering the cover, the jack-snipe are often found in great numbers. They will rise singly and in doubles, some starting up into the air, and some skimming along close to the ground.

If a pair of them flush, and they are birds that have been hunted much, it is interesting to watch their manœuvres. They will rise high in the air until they are mere dim specks, and only an experienced and steady eye can follow the irregular pencillings of their flight through the sky. Here and there they will swerve, veer, and tack, passing from one cloud-vista to another. Finally they will begin to descend. The speck becomes a dot, the dot grows to a small shadow, the shadow is etched into a bird. And after a few minutes, if a man remains motionless, they will swing in toward where they were flushed and dart into cover, sometimes within fifty yards of the spot from whence they first rose.

In spite of the life and light and color about it, the key-note of a marsh is its extreme sense of loneliness.

"A land that is lonelier than ruin," and the pervading essence of it all is a gentle melancholy. Storms are out of place here where no trees loom to rock before the blasts. Much rest and languor seem natural to these wide savannas of waving grass and sleeping water, framed in by far-down rims of uttermost horizon. The signs of man are few—perhaps a decaying fragment of a "pusher's" paddle, or the dismantled outlines of a duck "blind." At times the faint report of a hunter's gun and its accompanying wraith of pale smoke, tell of some sportsman plodding along in the marsh.

Above the reeds there is a level sea of silence. And there is little to tell of change. The trailing folds of a snow-storm fade and sink in these watery coverts of marsh growth, and the sleet finds no twigs to girdle with clinging ice. All tokens in all seasons bear with them the message of deep reserve and a drawing away from the world's clamor. And even in the varying moods of April the

swift-winged showers emphasize this feeling, as a man stands midway of herdless solitudes while the storm descends, and sees

" the empty pastures, blind with rain.'

The sky is as changeable as the wind in these early days. Sometimes it is very blue, with now and then light flakes of snowy clouds scattered across; and then it will be a leaden gray, with wimpled skeins of cloud-film blown across. And sometimes the vast void is a majestic dome, pictured with a moving panorama of cloud, wind, and sunlight, and troops of wandering wild-fowl. The shade of a cloud cast on the sun may etch a silhouette of Titanic boldness for a fleeting moment; and then the sunlight reappears, to fall in the space below, a golden cataract that floods the shining marshes. The heights where the blue deepens overhead seem arched against the rafters of heaven. Below the depths are boundless. The whistling call of a flock of plover comes warningly, their white breasts flash as they wheel solidly past, they fade quickly over a slope, and the silence is accentuated.

Perhaps it may be the dry sedges of yesteryear, overtopped with the living green of fresher herbage. Maybe it is the flutelike, plaintive whistle of the greater yellow-leg plover. Or it might be that it is the change from sun to shade, from shadow back to sunshine, that steeps the marshes in such a tide of passionate regret. At least, the touch is there. And lying on one of the tumbled heaps of forgotten grass, with the sigh of late afternoon winds through the yellowing cane, an autumn wraith seems moving across the dusky waters. Old loves, old days, old tendernesses come back to haunt you, and an echo floats wistfully down the sweet spring air.

"Oh! death in life, the days that are no more."

PLOVER SHOOTING

WHEN the spring days begin to send scattering showers over prairies, marshes, and rivers, the plover come in from the southern states, and even from South America. They have wintered in the south by sea-shore and marsh, by lake and river, and with the migratory instinct of their kind, have flocked north at the approach of warmer weather. Almost at the breaking up of winter the kildee, or ring-necked plover, has come. He is the advance guard of an army of different species of plover which soon follow.

The kildees, or kildeer plover, so called from its two-syllabled cry, are small birds, grayish brown on the back with a pure white breast, and with two black collars encircling the neck. They are the most restless of all the plover tribe, and often move about uneasily when in the fields, or along the edges

of streams and ponds. The golden plover, called also the yellow or green plover, come in the spring and autumn in large flocks. They fly swiftly, and mass close together, over stretches of burned prairie, meadows, and newly ploughed ground, and are the most eagerly sought after of all the plover kind.

A golden plover is a compactly built and hardy bird, about seven inches long and weighing from six to seven ounces. The back is black, spotted with white and spangled with golden specks. Their call is short and musical. They are not easily approached on foot, but are not afraid of a buggy or wagon, and many are killed by driving up on them with a horse that is used to guns, and shooting them as they rise. One of the best ways to hunt them is to put out "stools," as they are called, or wooden decoys, and shoot from a rough "blind." These decoys are painted to resemble golden plover, and the legs are represented by a single peg, which may be stuck into the ground so as to keep the body upright. If a "flight," as it is called, or, more properly speaking, a succession of flocks of the birds, fly over the

country, the hunter will find that a pit dug in the ground to hide in will give him the best concealment.

A good-sized flock of "decoys" or stools should be used. With such an array of "decoys" the plover will turn in, where the ground is good feeding-ground, and good shooting can be had right along when the "flight" is on. If a pit cannot be dug, there should be a slight blind of grass, reeds, corn-stalks, or even some loose branches thrust into the ground, to conceal the hunter's figure. Care should be taken to place the "decoys" or stools between or along lakes or marshes, if possible, and in localities where plover would come to feed, such as freshly burned prairies, pastures, ploughed land, and meadows where there is wet, bare ground. There is, of course, more or less luck in selecting a place to set up the "stools," but if you notice after a while that the birds are flying across other fields, it is an easy matter to shift the "stools" and build another "blind."

Sometimes a flock of sand-snipes, or, technically speaking, pectoral sand-pipers, will

dash in over the " stools " for a moment and then wheel away. And these may circle after a shot and return to give the sportsman another shot. These sand-pipers, called also grass plover, are colored something like a jack-snipe, although lighter in hue, but have no cross bars on the tail like the jack-snipe, and their bills are short. They live like the jack-snipe, chiefly by suction, drawing up animalculæ from the wet ground through their bills, by means of their sensitive tongues; and they grow to be very fat. I have seen them break open and split when falling from a height of sixty or seventy yards, on account of the accumulation of fat about the breasts and shoulders. They are delicious eating, but are not nearly so handsome a bird as the golden plover. Like the golden plover, they are swift of wing and irregular of flight.

When the " stools " are set out near a pond or marsh the hunter is likely, if well concealed, to get a shot at the greater or lesser yellow-legged plover. The larger of these is a bird almost as big as a good-sized spring chicken. They come in flocks of from four to a dozen or more, and their peculiarly

melancholy, flutelike call sounds weirdly in the loneliness of marsh or prairie. The lesser yellow-legs are in larger flocks, usually, and are a much smaller bird, although heavier than the golden plover or the sand-snipe.

In plover shooting innumerable shots of various kinds come to the sportsman. Straight-away shots, right and left quarterers, rising quarterers, right and left rising side shots, cross shots from either side, overhead shots, and twisters are among these. In all shots excepting the plain and twisting straight-aways it is necessary to hold ahead of the bird, keeping the gun moving at the same time. How far to hold ahead depends on divers contingencies. The distance the bird is from the shooter, the speed at which the bird is flying, and the wind, if any is blowing, all enter into the calculation. And it has got to be a "lightning calculation," too. A man who is a good duck or jack-snipe shot can bring down plover easily enough, even on windy days. But a man must be born with the knack or he will never become a "crackerjack."

A good retriever is an excellent comrade

to take along. He is companionable, and he can find a dead bird in one-tenth of the time that a man can; and will also find birds which a man would otherwise lose. A gun of almost any ordinary good make will answer very well for this class of shooting. It should be a twelve or sixteen gauge, with the right-hand barrel cylinder bored and the left-hand barrel modified choke. A six-and-a-half or seven-pound gun is amply heavy. Number eight shot are the best size, and smokeless powder is always an advantage. The smokeless powder acts more quickly, requires less holding ahead of the bird, and leaves the air unclouded for the hunter to use his second barrel.

In tramping for plover the sportsman will usually find many grass plover, or sand-snipe, some of the spotted sand-pipers, a "tip-up" or tilting sand-piper occasionally, kildees on the drier spots. In the pastures and meadows he may run across a pair of true Bartramian sand-pipers, called also upland, pasture, field, grass, and prairie plover. Their tremulous, fluttering flight as they rise from the ground is peculiarly their own, and their rippling whistle when they are high in the air is one

of nature's most melodious sounds. They are the only members of the sand-piper family that light upon the fences around a field, and when they do this they will often spread their long and rather narrow wings, and give their quavering and sweet cry in a long-drawn-out ripple. These birds are the most richly plumaged of all the sand-piper family, with soft, golden-yellow feathers bronzing into brown and tufts of grey under the wings. And at rare times Wilson's phalarope is found, daintiest and most aristocratic of all the waders, the female being the larger and handsomer of the two. Never shoot more than a pair of phalaropes. They are not to be eaten, but should be mounted by a skilful taxidermist.

The best place for sand-snipe is found near the big marshes and around the adjoining wet country. They will be found feeding in the short grass in low places, and in flocks of from seven or eight to fifteen, and even one hundred or more birds. A sportsman in tramping around good plover country will often get shots at passing flocks and at single birds, especially if there are other hunters in

the vicinity who are keeping the plover on the move.

Plover shooting is nearly all spring shooting, although good golden-plover shooting is possible in the fall. It takes a man out on the marshes and prairies, and gives him exercise and sunshine. As to clothing, the regulation brown duck, grass-colored, is the best. Do not wear rubber boots. Wear an old pair of stout shoes, together with a pair of heavy woollen stockings, and clamp your shoes and your trousers with a thick pair of leather or duck leggings, and the combination is almost water-proof. And at any rate it will not be weighty. When you get back to your starting-place, you should have dry shoes and stockings for an immediate change. A good, hard rub-down for ten minutes before you make the change, and you will not catch cold or suffer any ill effects. But rubber boots may lame you for weeks.

There is a peculiar delight in lying on a stretch of uncultivated prairie or marsh land and watching for plover. The absence of trees in such a place gives the idea and effect of a sea. The sky comes down to the horizon

as blue as a violet, and the sense of utter remoteness from the towns is like wine on the lips. The fresh winds blow, and occasionally clouds float past. Sometimes a prairie-hawk will fly across, or a lone crow; and a belated duck may be seen at times with his easy, graceful flight, high in air. It is usually very still. The faint report of a shot-gun is heard infrequently, and the rustle of the grass often. The air shimmers, and the day drifts slowly and royally down the pathway of the sun. And in the blue-and-white vaults between earth and sky will come now and then a gleam of white breasts and swift-flying wings; a faint, sharp "tweet, tweet"—a parting, fading glimpse of

"Deep-toned plovers gray, wild-whistling o'er the hill."

THE MELANCHOLY CRANE

THE melancholy crane lived in a marsh which stretched away to the river on the west of a wide expanse of wet prairie. He was a heron, as a matter of fact, but the hunters and people who frequented those waste places called him a crane, and he was entirely too disconsolate to deny it. He was tall and gaunt, and he lived on frogs and fish and snails, and anything else in the creeping and swimming line that came to his notice. His plumage was of a greenish blue, and his wings were broad and capable of carrying his ungainly form easily over the marshes.

His favorite haunt was a spot in the marsh where seldom, if ever, the foot of the hunter penetrated, and where the spirit of solitude dreamed and slept through the long, golden days of early September. There the winds came creeping past the tall grasses and ruf-

fling the amber waters of the silent pools. Soft winds these sometimes were, hardly daring to breathe lest the sound might disturb the lone bird poised in his quaint desolation, a living scarecrow of the wilderness. And then there were also the rude winds, rushing by with their wake of trailing black clouds, and roaring through narrow lanes where the furrows of their comrades had been ploughed to make them an exit, and then away to the north, bending the trees beyond and dying behind the hills.

These ruffling gusts annoyed the melancholy fowl. At the sound of the high winds he would shake his feathers with a gesture of disapproval, curve his snaky neck down, and stand stolidly waiting for the storm to break. And when the rain came in slanting gusts and darkness fell, and all the sky was blotted out, as with a giant hand, how dismal it was for him there in the wastes! How different from the luxury enjoyed by the canary in a lady's boudoir! And when the storm passed, and the sun shone again, it was a distressing-looking object that it beamed upon in the shape of the melancholy crane.

And even when days were rich with sunshine and breezes flowed over the lake like sifted swansdown, and haze stood over the far-off hills in a purple veil of glory—even then there was a withering chill in the heart of the melancholy crane. For what was to him the rose of the dying sunset beneath a dazzling west, the very strength and heart of the passing day in one lingering farewell? What mattered the gray blossoms of dawn falling from the east when daylight shook her white and fleecy robes of morning down to the horizon line and stepped out to waken a sleeping world? All color and change were but the rounds of a weary time, a senseless repetition of light and shade. For, mark you, a ruthless hunter had shot his awkward but faithful mate, and thus nevermore was there peace in the breast of the melancholy crane.

How like a slanting shadow he appeared as he drifted across the marshes. Just such a shadow as a vagrant cloud will cast on bending wheat, or on the billowy sweep of prairie-grasses when the sun flashes from shade to brilliance, and back again to shadow — so

swung he from the silences of the wide marsh, as a leaf might be tossed out on unreturning winds to fall wherever fate might list, and none the wiser. Morning and evening the blackbirds flew over with noisy chatter, and a kingfisher gossiped along the shores of the lake or sat sculpturesquely on dead limbs of a lightning-blasted tree. The sooty terns, wavering of flight and querulous of cry, wandered by and left him standing in severe contemplation. And in the spring and fall the wild-ducks, with their sharp-cut lines and curves of aerial travel, darted on past him and disappeared beyond the wild-rice and willows.

Down there in that nook of the swamp, where tadpoles swam and the black water-bugs wove shining jet tracery over the pools, and where gaudy dragon-flies hovered, was the last retreat of the melancholy crane. For there was at last the spot where the sun came least obtrusively, and where the hush seemed more sacred, and where all nature lay wrapped in shadowy garments of absolute repose. Hardly the white water-lilies, snowy hearts in green setting, with golden-

petalled centres, stirred under the wanton kisses of the bold winds. Hardly the grave moccasin moved from the blackened log where he lay, as the old blue crane dropped down to his accustomed place. Silence was there, and wildness. Nothing more.

But there came a day when all this was changed. A boat crept up into the reeds, and as the bird, disturbed by the rustle of a skiff, sprang up and out from his hiding-place of tall marsh-grass, a report sounded, and the stricken crane fell to the marsh. And the hand of a hunter drew him to the boat, and the mist from the marsh rose and met the sun and faded away. And there was a long interval, and then a miracle of skill and science, and again the great bird stood erect in a glass case, and beside him was his lost mate. For the same hunter had killed both, and his hand had been the one which had set them in the glass case, and so even in death they had not been separated. And many people came to see them, and there was a learned professor who told of their habits and their life as birds, much of which he had

learned from books, and little of which had any breath of the lone, gray marsh about it. And many curious and even scornful eyes were cast upon the two ungainly birds standing there.

But out on the wide stretch of marsh-grass there was a something stiller than silence in the spot where the crane had fallen. For to satisfy a base curiosity, a harmless bird had been slain, and there was a loss to the picturesqueness and life of the lonely marsh, and no recompense was given. No longer would his figure float across in hazy flight as the sun sank in the west, and in vain would the friendly winds seek him in the place where he had found haven.

Wind, sun, and rain; the flight of birds overhead and the whirl of dry leaves from November-harassed trees; the waving grasses and the shadows—all now was alone and unheeded, excepting by the ebb and flow of changing seasons. The blackbirds might pass over and the kingfisher scold along the reedy shore; the dusky wings of the wandering tern might tack and beat against delaying winds, and the grim crow paint ebon lines in far

blue vaults above, but nevermore could come to the marsh and lake as a part of its picture, a shred of its loneliness, and the very spirit and sprite of its haunted pools—the form of the melancholy crane.

FISHING FOR BIG-MOUTH BASS

BASS fishing, whether in river or lake, has more devotees than any other piscatorial sport in America. There are very many lovers of trout-fishing, and to some the lusty muskallunge is the king of fish, but north and south, and from the Mississippi to the Atlantic coast, the black bass is deservedly the favorite. He is known by many names in different localities. He masquerades under various titles, such as the Oswego bass, jumping bass, grass bass, chinquapin perch, tiger bass, and green bass, and in the south he is called the green trout.

The big-mouth bass is the most democratic of fishes as to food, but he associates only with his kind when it comes to society. He will be found with his brother, the small-mouth, the wall-eyed pike or pike perch, the pickerel and the muskallunge in the lakes and rivers, but he does not fraternize closely with any except the bass family. Bass fishing is

carried on to an extent hardly to be estimated. And, notwithstanding the incessant fishing, the hardy bass manages to thrive and keep its numbers up to an average from year to year.

The big-mouth bass will strike at a frog, a metal spoon, a minnow, small perch, or a shiner, the different bass flies, and, sad to say, at a piece of pork rind cut in a crudely shaped imitation of a minnow. The "pork-rind" fishermen often get large strings. The big-mouth will also take crawfish, angle-worms, a live mouse, or a piece of perch meat. Early in the season he will "strike" at the "spoon," or spoon-hook, and many are caught in that way. It is a good, sure way to get fish for the pan, but the "bait-casters" despise it.

Fishing with a spoon may be by "trolling" or trailing a "thumb-nail" spoon on the water some distance from the boat, or it may be by "casting" the spoon and dragging it in circles and lines, or by letting it sink and reeling it up after it has gone down a few yards under water. It requires skill to land a three-pound fish with one of these toys,

as the hooks are very small and give the bass a chance to fight and to break hooks. With the large " spoons " the fish have little chance to escape.

Bait-casting, using the frog or live minnow, the shiner or small perch, is justly claimed to be a science by its advocates. It requires a deftness of wrist movement, an eye for distance, accuracy in placing the bait, lightness in dropping it, and various other accomplishments, besides a thorough knowledge of the habits of the fish and of what is " fishable " water. If the fisherman intends to use minnows for casting, he should by all means, if possible, get his bait at the lake or river where he intends to fish. Minnows are very fragile bait, easily killed, and practically gone at the first " strike." Some experts do great work with a dead minnow, but they are the exceptions among the bait-casters, and a live minnow is the best bait.

A frog, when cast, can be brought back to the boat with an enticing ripple, his legs stretched out as though he was swimming through the water, and he presents a most alluring spectacle to hungry bass. The surg-

ing rush of a big-mouth at such a moment, when he churns the water over the frog and goes down with the bait in his jaws, is worth travelling a long way to see. The bass seizes the frog crosswise in his jaws and goes to the bottom with him. There he holds him for a few seconds and then, shifting his prey, swallows him.

Then he moves away, feeling very comfortable. And as he starts, the line, which, after the first rush has slackened, begins to straighten out again. And then is the time for you to "strike." A sharp twist of the wrist and your bass is hooked. And then comes trouble. It comes right away, and in chunks. A three-pound big-mouth is a fighter, although not so fierce a gladiator as the "small-mouth" bass. He may dive to the bottom and sulk awhile. He is sure to cut the pace in a number of swift curves and turns, and he may break your leader in one of those mad plunges. He also has a gentle habit of making back for the boat and knocking the hook loose by switching the line across the bottom of the craft; or by tangling the line with an oar and flopping off.

If he can get the line wound around a weed or a bulrush or a tuft of grass, away he goes. In lakes where there is a growth of floating moss, as in many of the lakes, he often twists up in bunches of this and manages to wriggle from the hook. His only ambition after being hooked is to get rid of the troublesome barb, and his efforts are determined and vigorous in the extreme. Not an inch of slack may be given him. And he cannot be lifted into the boat with proper tackle, but must be " played " until he can be drawn to the landing-net. The rod must be able to stand the strain; there must be no knots in the line, and if the reel slips or acts cranky it means good-by to the bass. So, from the moment a big-mouth first " strikes " until he is tumbling around in the boat, it is one round of excitement and uncertainty.

One test of the skill of the bait-caster is to be able to plump a frog down in the small pockets of open water around floating lily-pads and near the bulrush beds close in shore. Big-mouth bass have quite a fashion of lurking in these spots, and a frog cast skilfully into such a hole very often brings

a "strike." The bait should be dropped lightly, so as to produce a liquid and alluring "plunk" in the water.

This mellow sound rouses all the ferocity of a bass, and he will take the frog with a "kerchug" of the water around where it lit and a triumphant sweep of his broad tail. In these little pockets the water growth of submerged weeds and grass makes landing the fish a difficult and delicate task. Often a bass gets the line tangled in the weeds or rushes, and it is necessary to row the boat to where the fish is stuck and slip the landing-net under the bass, weeds, moss, and all, so as to save the fish.

A man fishing with a long cane pole, without a reel, can pop a frog into these lairs and snake a bass out by main strength and awkwardness. It is not scientific fishing, but simply brute force. The fact is that a good bait-caster, with the proper rod and appliances, can get bass where the cane-pole fisherman cannot get them. He can cast farther from the boat, and the bass, which is a shy fish and a suspicious one, has less opportunity for seeing the boat or hearing the oars of the

boatman. If the frog is a large one, more time should be given the bass to swallow it, and the fisherman should never "strike" to hook a bass when the fish first takes the frog.

A good boatman is a prime requisite in bait-casting. Sometimes a man can go out alone and drift or anchor his boat and cast and get bass, but this is an unsatisfactory way. It gives only a limited space to work in. A good oarsman responds to the exigencies of the situation, watches the rushes of the fish and swings the boat, tacks it or rows ahead, as the nature of the case demands.

A rod with a stiffer tip is used in casting than in still fishing, and extra tips should always be carried. Lancewood rods, split bamboo, bethabara, and even steel rods are used by some of the experts. A good green-heart or lancewood casting-rod is very serviceable. The hooks should be regulation bass hooks, with either single- or double-gut leaders. Lines may be of linen, braided oil-silk, raw silk, or enamelled water-proof silk. A round braided silk line gives the best results. A tackle-box and a minnow-pail are also required. It is as well to take a frying-pan

along and cook a couple of the fish on shore to eat with the lunch you bring out. A big-mouth fried an hour after leaving the water is delicious eating.

Even in July and later, the big-mouth will rise to a frog in the morning and evening, and a light wind over the water is often advantageous. But all signs fail occasionally, and I have caught some fine, lusty bass in mid-August, at the noon hour, casting with a frog in water unruffled by a single dimple of the breeze.

FLIGHT OF COMMON BIRDS

IN walking through the woods or fields, by the shores of a lake, or along the river-banks, there is apparent always a woven tissue of bird flight. There are few persons who have noted the distinctive peculiarities of the more common birds, so as to be able to tell one from the other at long distances. Observation and experience will give one the power to read the channels and winding aisles of light and air as a book's pages may be scanned, and in this sympathetic perceptiveness the veil of Isis lifts, be it ever so little, and nature's secrets are mistily revealed to the gazer. It is not to be thought of as study, for that presupposes the judging, dissecting, photographing, numbering, and theorizing which kills the freshness out of such things.

Bird flight is the warp and woof of the seasons, spun in the wind's looms, visible as it passes, yet fading as it is seen. No painter

has limned its motion, nor have the poets caught its myriad complexities. In morning's dew-sprinkled paths, over the noon's broad gates, and when twilight weaves the sombre threads that darken toward the west, the birds fly past, each with its own individual sweep of wing, each distinct in its place, etched dark against the timber-lines, or tipped and gilded by the trailing streamers of the sun. The swallow, the dove, the yellow-hammer, humming-bird, robin, blackbird, blue-jay, nighthawk, wild canary, shrike, meadow-lark, bat, and many more. And the average man looks and sees—nothing—as he did in Wordsworth's day:

> "A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him
> And it was nothing more."

The swallow's flight I class as most gypsy-like, roving and revelling in curves; most buoyant, least hinting of exertion, and graceful as a vine. Around the lakes, over the river-currents, by meadow and slope the swallow flies. The purple martin, or house-swallow, also known as barn-swallow, is one

of the most common of the family. He often chatters to himself as he wings his way over a barn-yard, and his long, sweeping curves are a beautiful example of the possibilities of aerial motion. One habit of the swallows is to dip to ponds or running water as they pass above it, and this has suggested to one writer the figure:

> "Short, swallow-flights of song that dip
> Their wings in tears and then away."

The chimney-swallow, which is really a swift, is usually abroad when the swallows are circling about the roofs, and its erratic, scallopy movements and its shrill twittering as it cuts through the air make it easily known from the true swallows. The perfection of swallow flight is found when the birds are flying around some bit of meadow-land along a river where small ponds are scattered about. When sunshine and shadow blend in such places, and the birds dip to the water and away, with their glossy breasts dripping, each curve of their wings is a lyric, written on impalpable air, the subtle poetry of wind and sun.

I sing you a song of a swallow—
With a purple breast and buoyant wings,
Curving down where the south wind springs
From out of a grassy hollow.

The turtle-dove's course through the air is almost noiseless, swift, sustained, vigorous, and suggestive of power. His feathers lie closely to his body, and his wings are strong and capable of carrying him at a high rate of speed. On rising from the ground, before getting under full headway, his wings beat in a nervous flappy way, and when settling to a perch there is a fluttering of both wings and tail before the bird quiets down. But when fairly launched the flight of the dove is very striking. It seems fairly to pierce the air, and at times appears to be a succession of long drives through space, the bird shifting its direction and even partly turning its body with the utmost ease when at top speed. They go a great deal in pairs in the summer-time, but as autumn comes on they will be found in the cornfields and stubbles in flocks.

With the yellow-hammer, or, more properly speaking, the golden-winged wood-

pecker or "flicker," the wing movement is practically the same as the other woodpeckers, the members of the sapsucker family and the tiny wild canaries. His flight is a succession of billowy curves, as a wave will slide from crest to base, and rise from base to crest again. The red-headed woodpecker, the downy woodpecker, the "quilt," the log cock, and the sapsuckers all have this see-saw motion through the air. But I should say that the yellow-hammer's flight was of longer and less abrupt curves, and that his poise was more graceful and not so jerky. I can tell him easily from the other woodpeckers at any reasonable distance, and have always admired his swinging, forceful stroke of wing.

And then across an open place, between the serried trees,
High up in sun-surrounded space a golden shadow flees,
In curves that rise and curves that dip,
As graceful as a curtseying ship,
With measured stroke of pinions bright
That marks the flicker's flight.

The humming-bird's motions are two, being the hover and the dart. See him poised above a flower. His wings whirl like an

electric fan, and his brilliant colors gleam in the sunlight. He is a toy, gemmed with jewelled green and gold, radiantly bright. Suddenly he has slipped from sight, as a shining dew-drop might glide into the depths of a red-clover blossom. He has darted twenty feet as swift as thought, and again is poising, in a kaleidoscopic glitter, above a spray of honeysuckle. The humming-bird's movement is the most spritelike of all the birds. You can neither hear it nor trace it, and only partially divine it by mere sight. It is a sudden blossoming of wings in mid-air, a ceasing, a reappearing, and then a void where had hung beauty, grace, energy, color, and life.

The robin's flight, like his manner, is sedate and unobtrusive. It is a succession of flittings, and not marked by any particular individuality. It is easily distinguishable, however, from the other birds. The blackbirds, red-winged, crow-blackbird or purple grackle, and the cow-blackbird have a long, wavy flight, with not very much dip in the movement. Their habit of flying in flocks makes the flight very noticeable. The rudder-

like tail of the crow-blackbird seems to be used by him to steer his course with. Single blackbirds have a fashion of flying high, and this will sometimes aid in determining what kind of a bird is in the air.

The blue-jay flies on a more level course than most of the common birds. He will start on a line and keep it, and his bright blue wings beat the air lightly but steadily as he passes by, neither rising nor falling, but keeping the even tenor of his way. The shrike, or "butcher-bird," has a somewhat similar way of flying, but the shrike haunts the hedges and the open field, the blue-jay the woods. And even with this difference of environment, the shrike's flight is smoother than the jay's. He reels off space as you might unravel an old yarn mitten. In size he is almost the same as the jay, and in color of a subdued gray and brownish black. But a hunter can tell which is which when both are flying from the same hedge, even when it is too cloudy and far away to distinguish colors.

The meadow-lark soars, skims, and flutters. When flushed from the fields he rises

with a series of short, fluttering beats of the wing, and usually settles to earth after flying fifty or one hundred yards. At times he will dart away almost like a quail and curve sharply to left or right. When he is on a fence-post his tail will bob and bob as a person approaches, and when he flies from such a perch he invariably rises with short, jerky wing beats. His flight is not usually swift. It is a good test of knowledge as to the flight of the common birds to name them when looking through the car-window of a train that is whirling through the country at a good rate of speed. To one familiar with these birds their various peculiarities are as easy to read as print. Crow, dove, yellow-hammer, shrike, meadow-lark, blackbirds, and sometimes the fluttering, tremulous flight of the upland plover will be seen, and it takes the practised vision of the outdoor man or woman to name them as they are seen.

Over the woods and pastures and above the fields as twilight approaches the night-hawk flies. His flight is made up of darts, swoopings, and sudden pauses. His raucous cry is heard as his sharp-pointed wings sweep

through the upper spaces. His motion is exceedingly irregular and full of sharp angles. It is a herald of the night, and after it comes the aerial wrigglings and twistings of the bat over marshy nooks where

" Steadily up from their swampy forge the sparks of fireflies rise,
In the pool where the wading lily makes love through half-shut eyes,
To the whippoorwill, who scolds like a shrew at the fluffy owl,
While the nighthawk shuffles by like a monk in a velvet cowl;
And the bat weaves inky weft through white star beams that peep
Down through the cypress boughs, where the frogs all sing knee-deep."

FISHING FOR CRAPPIE

FISHING for crappie, or, as they are more familiarly known, croppie, is a sport which numbers many devotees among anglers. The crappie has a wide-spread range within his territorial limits, and is equally at home in lake or river. In some localities he is known as the "new light" and the "bachelor." And in certain lakes I have always heard the fishermen call him the "silver bass."

In form he is something like a bass, but with a weaker outline and a more showy set of fins. In color he is a silvery olive, with a brassy sheen, and mottled with greenish hue. Crappies weigh from a fourth of a pound up to nearly a pound, the majority of them running about half a pound in weight. I have seen some large ones of a full pound in weight, but these big fellows are scarce. The crappie is a true sunfish, so far as his technical place among the fish is concerned.

And because he is a handsome fish, with his gleaming sides and mottled scales, he is quite a favorite among those lesser anglers whose minds do not aspire to the " jumping bass," the lithe pickerel, or the sturdy wall-eyed pike.

The crappie will sometimes strike at a " spoon " when a man is trolling for pickerel or bass, and a few are caught in that way every year. But with his comparatively small mouth it is plain to be seen that nature never intended the crappie as a swallower of large baits or lures. When he " strikes " a spoon and hooks himself, he makes a very feeble fight, and is easily lifted into the boat. But he is only occasionally caught in this way. The recognized method to fish for crappie in the lakes is by still-fishing for them and by " drifting." In still-fishing in the lakes the boat is anchored in water twenty or thirty yards from the shore, and the fisherman sits hopefully in the bow or the stern of the boat and waits for the crappie to engulf the bait.

There is nothing on earth that can equal the patient serenity of expression which rests on the sunburned features of these living pictures at such times. The fatter a man or

woman is, the better, and a broad-brimmed straw hat makes a good frame for their rubicund faces. The pole is grasped firmly, and the cork, or "float," if one is used, is scrutinized with painful fixity of gaze. The sun beats down, strikes the water, and glances into the eyes of the immovable angler. He never even winks. As though moulded in bronze, he watches the cork. Should a boat approach as though coming to disturb the water near the boat, his tense brow wrinkles in disapprobation, but he watches the cork.

If the occupants of the oncoming skiff should hold up a fine string of fish, he will eye them hungrily with just the tail of one eye, but he watches the cork. If news is brought of war, pestilence, treason, sudden death, throne-agitating happenings of dreadful import, news of vast and awful portent, he simply closes his jaws tighter, mutters "um, hum," or "ah-ha," and still watches the cork. For statuelike contemplation, stolidity of expression, and stoic patience, not even a graven image can equal the face of the fat man or woman who, on a hot day, when crappies are biting, watches the cork.

But how beautiful is the metamorphosis on this stony, reddened visage when a slight ripple around the "float" betokens a nibble! The stern lines about the lips begin to relax a little, and the eyes of the watcher soften. The pole is rigidity itself, lest the slightest movement might frighten away the finny denizen below, who is pursuing his investigations warily. As the nibble becomes more pronounced, a well-defined gleam of hope comes into the eyes of the fisherman, and a tremulous crease of expectancy dimples his puffy cheeks. And lastly, as the "float" goes under, and with neatness and celerity our corpulent friend whips a fine crappie from the depths, what a smile irradiates his features. A calm grin of contentment billows his countenance with an unctuous happiness, as with half-closed eyes he looks out over the water as he rebaits the hook, with an expression as much as to say, "Oh, it's a good world, I think; a good world."

In still-fishing for all fish the temptation is to keep on catching them as long as the fish will bite. This is a very short-sighted policy. A string of twenty-five or thirty

crappie will make a meal for several persons, and only the hoggishly inclined will keep on fishing after they have caught a good string. Contemplation, as a matter of fact, is one of the true beauties of still-fishing—just to loaf and invite one's soul; to take it easy, and not care particularly whether you are going to get a big string of fish or not. There is everything around you to encourage this *dolce far niente* feeling. There is a world about you, if you will just take a little notice of it. Pictures and dreams all spread out before you, and music, too, of subtlest sort.

In the morning around the lakes you can see the sooty terns, with their wandering, aimless flight, dipping and shifting about the shores. Occasionally they give their quaint, shrill, skreeling cry as they pass. Long lines of blackbirds cross over, sometimes in perfect silence, sometimes with a reassuring "clack, clack," from one of the travellers. An old blue heron may slant past like a patch of smoke blown from a cannon's mouth. And the "flicker," or golden-winged woodpecker, with his scallopy curves, flies by with steady wing. Over the water the wind wrin-

kles a web of ripples and a dead leaf from the hills lies brown on the bright water. The sun comes down with sheen of gold, and the bulrushes stand in olive-green masses that droop to the lake's edge.

Many of the western rivers are first-class streams for crappie, and one of the popular diversions along these rivers is the " fish-fry," at which the harmless, necessary crappie has a useful and an honored position. He is the handiest fish to catch, for he can be depended upon to bite when some of the other fish refuse to touch a hook, and in numbers sufficient to furnish forth the feast. Fried in cornmeal the crappie is delicious, but he should be put in the pan soon after leaving the water. In some streams there seems to be an inexhaustible supply of these fish. As fast as you pull one out another comes to take the place of the departed. And if you haul out twenty or thirty there in the morning, there will be an equal number ready to take the hook in the afternoon. They are apparently always willing to come out and occupy the post of honor at a " fry." It is a dreamy, lazy way of fishing to sit in the shade and watch the

" bobber " as it rides the current. And when the " bobber " begins to turn and swing and bob, and finally goes under, what a calm satisfaction there is in lifting out a wriggling crappie and letting him lie on the thick grass under the trees. How you admire his bright tints and with what good-nature you " heft " him before you put him on the string!

Still-fishing on the river-banks for crappie is more essentially philosophical and Waltonian than the lake-fishing, for several reasons. In the first place, the crappie does not make a fight, as a bass does, and you are not apt to be disturbed by a bass in the river-fishing. And then a river has a great deal more individuality and expression than a lake. A river is going somewhere and is doing something. It suggests a final picture of the sea. So that even in the dreamy summer freshness, under the trees along the river-banks, you can call up salt seas and the snows of myriad wings of restless gulls. A lake, on the other hand, is purely pastoral and receptive. No current to speak of and no carrying down of any message to the sea. Still-fishing for the smaller fishes is conducive

to the highest development of the reflective faculties.

No man who truly loves angling can be wholly bad. It requires a love for the beautiful in nature, a gentle sorrow for the deluded fishes which swallow the bait, a chaste and tempered joy in their capture and a serenity of faith and optimism in the outlook upon life.

Take, then, your long cane pole and your gayly colored "bobbers," equip yourself with hooks and lines, with basket, and a pipe to smoke betimes. Go to some quiet stream where the amiable and innocent crappie may be found. Select a shady and unfrequented spot under a broad-spreading tree and bait your hook with worm or grub. Toss the hook gently in and lie down on the grass with your pipe, if you are a worshipper at the shrine of Lady Nicotine. Look at the sunlight sifting down through the leaves above and think how cool and bright, how sweet and still the day is. And do you be properly thankful for your golden opportunity to "goe a-fysshynge."

IN THE HAUNTS OF THE LOON

THE loon, or great northern diver, occupies a unique place among the water-fowl of America. He is a bird set apart from the rest, a frequenter of loneliest lakes, a weird speck on shadowy waters. In old days, when the Indians roamed the hills and valleys, they believed the bird was an evil spirit, but nevertheless captured him and used his skin for tobacco-pouches.

His stretch of wing from tip to tip sometimes attains five feet, but is usually from four to four and a half feet in a full-grown bird. The head and neck are glossy black, excepting some small streaks of white at the base of the neck, and this coloring of head and neck gives out green and purple metallic shades. The under parts of the fowl are white. The back is regularly marked in black and white, and the bill is black and pointed. Besides the great northern diver, there are

the yellow-billed loons and the red-throated and black-throated loons.

In the lake country, where the land round about is rough and hilly, is a region where this peculiar bird may be studied to advantage. I say studied not in the sense of classification and ornithological accuracy as to habits and surroundings, but in the idle and curiously speculative spirit. This will take in as accessories the lakes and hills, the woods and sandy shores, the skimming flight of sand-pipers, and the seesaw of sun and shadow on the rocking ripples. Do not take a camera with you. Take a rifle and shoot a few times at the loons you see, simply for the excitement of watching them dodge. The chances are a hundred to one that you will not hit a bird.

The best place to go is to some high point overlooking a cove or bay that loons frequent, and when you have found a pair, you will first notice their fondness for solitude. A pair of them will float a few hundred yards from shore, in as secluded a spot as they can find, for hours at a time. They do not heed the blackbirds that fly across, nor the hawks

that circle in stately rings above the trees at the edge of the lake. The flight of the bluebill, ringbill, teal, or merganser ducks is unnoticed by the loon, for a more unsociable bird never existed. Sometimes, though, a pair of loons will lure ducks away from the decoys that a hunter has thrown out, thereby earning a decided opinion of the sportsman as to loons.

For hours, then, you can watch them drifting here and there, apparently serenely unconscious of the world beyond the edge of the lake. But if you send a thirty-two-calibre rifle bullet out over the water at the head of the nearest bird, he will dive down at the report like a flash, and your missile will waste its force on the water, where an instant before he was swimming. During the time when he is undisturbed he will dive occasionally, and sometimes he stretches his broad wings in cumbrous flight down the middle of the lake to another refuge. There he will swim about until the lack of any disturbing element finally arouses his suspicions, when he will return to his former retreat to float and dive, and dream the hours away.

The loon adds to the picturesque charm of these lakes, but, unfortunately for his love of peace, he is not allowed to pursue the even tenor of his way in quiet. The taxidermist covets him, shoots him, and mounts him on a board. But the taxidermist cannot reproduce the framing of water, shore, sky, and woodland which completes the picture, so the stuffed and mounted loon of the glass case exhibit is the most patent of frauds. And therein taxidermy always fails. Fortunately for himself, the loon is a marvellous diver and swimmer, and at the report of a gun he will dart down and out of danger in almost every instance before a bullet reaches him. His poise and motion while on the water are graceful and strong. In the air he is clumsy but effectual. In fifteen years' experience around the lakes I have yet to see one on land. But they must be as awkward as penguins when they attempt to walk.

One of the most remarkable things about the loon is his call, or cry. To the superstitious it is appalling, and to every one it is one of the most grewsome sounds in nature. It is a kind of cackling, maniacal laughter, ris-

ing at its height almost to a scream. There is nothing like it in the mysteries of outdoor sounds, and when heard in the gathering twilight it is the ghostliest of all echoes. The faces of drowned men rise, they say, when the loon's mocking merriment sweeps over the lake, and the solemn notes of bull-frogs sink in silence as the cry floats past. As the sickle of the new moon is etched beyond the hills, and shadows hover over emerald-burnished rushes, and the sands are dusky in the stillness, there comes the raucous complaint of the great diver. And, if you are a believer in the ghostly and the supernatural, you will say it is the cry of a lost spirit, the wail of a soul from the confines of " night's Plutonian shore."

The loon is hunted as a " specimen," to be mounted and set in store-windows or museums, and hunters sometimes shoot loons to adorn a " den " with. But this is only done by the unthinking. For the proper place for all birds that are not strictly edible game-birds, is their native haunts. It would be very difficult to shoot a loon with a shot-gun, as he almost invariably keeps out of shot-gun

range. Occasionally, however, he will swing in near enough to a "blind" to invite destruction.

Web-footed as the loons are, with short, muscular legs, swimming and diving is their forte. They are adepts at either branch of aquatics. They will dive and remain beneath the surface for a long time, swimming under water with great rapidity. They live on small fish, which they catch under water. What a picture such a scene would make could it be reproduced by photography—the long neck of this great bird stretched out to its full length, its body darting through the water, propelled by strong strokes of the webbed feet; the eyes gleaming, and the sharp bill ready at any instant to seize the prey; the fish, fully alive to its peril, dodging and curving about, only at last to be caught and swallowed; and then a swift uprising to the surface, and a parting of the water when the snaky head and neck reappear. There is a natural touch in the idea of one fish preying upon another, but the thought of this weird black bird whizzing through under depths of green water seeking its food, is a reminder

of old forms of animal life—of days when strange creatures crawled and swam and flew, part fish, part bird, and part reptile.

The name of the loon has been taken in vain by the writers, for it has been used to denote a foolish or a distracted person, and the great diver is not at all wanting in sagacity.

> "Hold off; unhand me, gray-beard loon!
> Eftsoons his hand dropt he."

"Loon" or "lown" is also used to signify stupidity. Any one who has gone out with a rifle to secure a specimen for taxidermy will hardly accuse the loon of that failing. He has a proper suspicion of, and a deep-seated respect for, that arch-slayer, man. The big diver will swim away quietly, always keeping a safe distance between himself and the boat, and if fired at he will dive at the flash of a gun, very seldom taking wing. He will rely almost always on his power of swimming and diving to take him out of harm's way.

The loon, the heron, the bittern, and the bull-frog are the oddities of the lake and

marsh country, and add appreciably to the pleasures of those who love to drift idly over the lakes or penetrate reedy edges of lonely bays and inlets. The bull-frog, with his thunderous gutturals, chants basso notes in the deepening twilight, and these echoes are carried across the lily-pads and bulrush-beds. The heron floats westward with the dying sun, and himself seems a faint, gray fragment of belated cloud, blown by on tardy winds. The bittern, rising awkwardly from the reeds on elongated wing, doubles his legs under him and manages to swing away like a balloon, shifted from side to side by opposing air-currents. And the lone loon, black-headed and alert, rocking in secluded cove or silent bay, laughs loud and mockingly at the twilight as the sun fades behind the hills.

The chorus of frogs dies away and is forgotten. The flight of the heron, dim as passing mist, melted like mist and claimed no remembrance. The bittern's scrambling exit left the reeds tenantless, with only the night-winds creeping through where his ungainly body had made broken spaces. But

the cry of the loon, that cynical, garrulous cachinnation which you heard last in the gathering dusk—that was the final eerie touch to coming night, an ebon note of wild glee which ended in a wail.

> No weirder echo was in hell;
> The loon laughed, and then silence fell.

BLUEBILLS AND DECOYS

DUCK shooting over "decoys" has always been a favorite sport with hunters of wild-fowl, and of all the ducks that fly none decoy more readily than "bluebills." The greater scaup duck and the smaller scaup duck, popularly known as the big and little bluebill, or broadbill, are shot in great numbers in the spring and fall both along the coast and on inland waters. The larger bluebills are about nineteen inches long, with a spread of from thirty to thirty-three inches of wings. Their plumage is black, green, and white, mostly; white on the belly, and black on the breast and rump. The head is black, with a greenish tinge in the drakes. The bill is broad and dark blue. These birds are heavily plumaged, swift of flight, and extremely tenacious of life. When crippled, it is very difficult to recover them, and means a chase after them often for a mile or so, the bird diving at intervals, and

showing only its head to the pursuing hunter. It can safely be assumed that every time you get out of the "blind" to chase a cripple you will lose a couple of shots at other birds which will meantime come in to your decoys.

Bluebills are so stupid sometimes that they will fly in over the decoys while the hunter is standing up in his boat throwing out the wooden lures. When they make up their minds to come in, they do not seem to mind the presence of a man, but set their wings and sail right in. The bigger bunch of decoys a hunter has, the better sport he is likely to have. Bluebill decoys are the best to use, and a flock of one hundred will be found not too many, especially where the birds have been shot at to any considerable extent. They should be well weighted, and have sufficient string, and heavy enough anchoring lead to keep them from dragging in a stiff wind. In both spring and fall the days are often very windy, and the direction of the wind is likely to shift, so that decoys should be properly equipped to stand rough water without drifting. The throwing out of decoys is easy enough, but the arrangement of them into

flocks requires experience. They should not be bunched closely together, but separated so as to present the natural appearance of a flock of live birds. When some of them turn upside down, as they may do when tossed from the boat, they should be righted at once, it being one of the dispensations of Providence that live ducks do not swim on their backs. Little omissions of this sort may cause some shy old drake to give your "blind" a wide sweep.

"Blinds" are either shore "blinds" or "blinds" built around a boat or natural growth of grass, bulrushes, or reeds. The best "blind" is that of the natural growth, when that can be had; although a shore "blind," when made out of a hole dug in some sandy point, with a slight fringe of dead grass above, is a very "killing" place of concealment sometimes.

A shore "blind" made of willows, rushes, and a little hay is good, and to build a "blind" around a boat you need brush and willows for the skeleton or poles and twine, and grass and reeds to fill in the spaces. A first-rate "blind" can be made around a

boat by sinking half a dozen or more stout stakes at the sides and end of the craft, binding these together with thick, strong cord, and thatching the cord with grass, rushes, or whatever natural growth is common to the locality. Building a " blind " is a matter of the greatest possible importance. It should not be too high or too conspicuously heavy. It should present as near as may be from the outside a semblance of natural growth similar to the growth about the surrounding shores.

As a rule a low " blind " is the best, especially when the hunters build one about a boat. They must depend considerably on crouching low and on keeping absolutely immovable. There is nothing so exasperating in duck shooting over decoys as the man who persists in getting up to stretch himself, and see if the ducks are coming. The ducks can see him as far or farther than he can see them, and they will sheer off when they catch a glimpse of him squatting down when he notes their approach.

Some men sit with the barrels of their guns sticking up over the top of the " blind " and then wonder why the ducks don't come in.

They might as well be waving the American flag to the accompaniment of a brass band. Even the bluebills, stupid as they sometimes act, are not entirely fatalists.

When a bunch of bluebills come in they sometimes keep close together until within a couple of hundred yards of the decoys, and then they separate and whirl in all over the decoys. This is varied with exhibitions of swinging in and settling down close to the decoys, with their wings outspread and their white bodies shining in the sunlight. Or they may dip as if going to settle, and then swing away without stopping. Pairs and singles usually decoy with hardly any hesitation. It is usually hard to get a raking shot at bluebills, although cross shots, where two birds are killed with one barrel, are of frequent occurrence. The best practice is to select your duck and not bother about the other birds in the flock.

A bluebill needs the centre of the charge to kill him, or a shot through the head or neck. He can carry off shot in his body better than most ducks. Number six shot in the right-hand barrel and number four in the left bar-

rel has been my load for them, backed up by plenty of powder. For cripples a number of shells loaded with number eight shot will come in handy. When a bluebill falls you can often tell whether he is dead or only wounded, by his wing-action; if wing-tipped, or only hard hit, he will usually swerve, or sail down to the water; if killed stone dead, he drops like a plummet. If wounded, slip in a shell loaded with number eight, and when he starts to swim off give it to him in the head.

The best way to get good shooting for these ducks is to find where a flock of them have been feeding, in some cove or bay. If possible, find a flock that has not been shot at. Paddle down to them and scare them away without firing a single shot at them, no matter how good a chance you get. Build your "blind" where they have been and throw out your decoys. If there was a big bunch there, say, one hundred or so birds, they will afford shooting all day for you. At first, when frightened from their feeding-ground, they will fly out to the main waters of the lake and drop down with some other big

gang. But after a while, say, in an hour or so, they will begin to yearn for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and will get up in small bunches—five, three, and even pairs and singles—and start back for their former feeding-ground.

As they see your decoys they will set their wings and come in bravely to your "blind." Now is your time. For doubles, let them get well in before you rise to shoot, for it is surprising how quickly a bluebill can get away from a dangerous spot when he sees and realizes the necessity for so doing. He is a winged athlete, and the way he will whirl away as you stand up in the boat will make you hustle to get him.

Sometimes a pair of suspicious bluebills will anchor off your decoys and browse around for awhile. Let them alone. The chances are good for their eventually giving way to their curiosity and swimming in close enough for you to get a shot. They are in the habit of giving a curious purring, chuckling noise as they feed or float about, and some of the hunters imitate this sound so exactly that the deluded birds will come in readily to their decoys.

"Travellers," or ducks that are on their way south or north, do not decoy so readily as the birds which have settled down to feed in some cove or lake and have been undisturbed for some time. Ringbills, ruddies, butterballs, red-heads, widgeons, pintail, and mallards are apt to come in at times during the day with the bluebills, but bluebills and ringbills will be the most numerous. The red-heads are getting scarcer, and mallards mostly stick to the timber with the pintail, but good bluebill and ringbill shooting is had every spring and fall in the lakes, rivers, and marshes of many of the states.

There is, naturally, much attendant hardship in duck shooting. The throwing out and picking up of decoys in cold or stormy weather is hard work, the rowing of a heavily laden boat in rough water is sometimes dangerous, and, generally speaking, shooting over decoys is sport that tests the patience and physique of the hunter severely. It ruins a complexion, and unless you use gloves, your hands are a sight after a couple of days. The chill winds sweep down when you sit in a boat for a few hours and preëmpt the

choice spots in your marrow, and at other times the sun burns and cracks your lips; and altogether you must have patience and "sand" to be a "thorough-bred" when it comes to a week's shooting in the early spring or late fall over decoys.

WALKING AS AN ART

WALKING as an art has almost fallen into disuse in these days of wheels, electricity, and horseless vehicles. Yet to some of the old-fogy class, pedestrianism still has charms. At the lake summer-resorts and the farms where city people go for their mid-year vacations, you will find many bicycles and very little evidence of stout walking-shoes. This is not as it should be, for, with its many advantages, a bicycle is not fitted to carry a person into the inner sanctuaries of the woods and fields where nature has her choicest treasures hidden.

You have been at the lake for a week with your wheel, and you have gone to town a couple of times with it and skirted the fields and forests. You have dawdled in hammocks and trifled at lawn-tennis, and imagined that you were enjoying yourself and seeing the country. In reality, you have been

looking at nature through the wrong end of an opera-glass. To-day, as you promised, we will go around the lake together on foot. No gun, no fishing-rod, nothing but a light stick and a substantial lunch, not forgetting a couple of apples apiece. We will wear stout shoes and old clothes, for this will be tramping, pure and simple.

We are away now, and this is the first slope, where these oaks are. The grass is thick and green, and a robin is hopping sedately along at the top of the hill. The lake shines and shimmers through the trees, and a crow is cawing somewhere overhead. There is the very breath and feeling of out-of-doors among those massive trunks and waving branches. See how the sunlight scatters fine flakes, as a sower might send with his palm shining handfuls of grain over a March field. There is a singing in the very bosom of the hills, a palpitating of life in the leaves, that tells of the fervent passion of summer, the blossoming of June.

Down in that pocket of the slopes, walled round by alders and brush, is a little pool, shallow, and hidden from everything but the

prying eye of the sun. If an eager-eyed water-spaniel were to browse around in those alders to-day he might find nothing for his trouble. Later on, in July, possibly, he would disturb a spritelike bird, which would rise out of the alders like a ray of light and disappear as swiftly as a shadow—a woodcock.

Now here we dip toward a sandy point that extends into the lake, and we will wait awhile on this high bank and take an observation. A little distance from the lake's edge a grebe is swimming. The boys and hunters call them "hell-divers." They are greatly in use as targets by ambitious riflemen and boys who go about with revolvers peppering away at everything alive. Their miraculous swiftness in diving renders their persecution almost entirely harmless. Those two small, dark specks just about to alight on the end of the point are spotted sand-pipers. And now up and around to the first bridge. There goes a big garter-snake. He is perfectly harmless —don't kill him. A golden-winged woodpecker is calling from another hill, and now he flies across, dipping and rising as he goes. You should walk in the fields and the woods

year in and year out until you could tell all of the common birds by their flight a quarter of a mile away. Get your ornithology direct from the woods, streams, and fields.

In walking, hold yourself well together. Walk erect and from the hips, swinging your arms easily. Never hump along or toe in. It is perfectly simple to do this, and the easiest thing in the world to have a style and *verve* in walking. And not more than one man or woman in a thousand walks decently well; the rest amble, sprawl, slouch, or weave along in a manner to disgrace pedestrianism. Cultivate a chest well forward, the soft flannel shirt, the hip movement, and the carriage of a man and a soldier! Notice a West Pointer! Why, he handles himself like a greyhound. Seek for an erect carriage, so that when you are seventy, men will turn and say, " he carries himself like a man! "

Here is the bridge. The water is low now and you can see sunfish swimming in the shadows of the bridge timbers. Do you remember the " pin-hook " days of your boyhood? Lily-pads are thick here, and farther up the creek you can see snowy water-

lilies floating on the surface. The red-winged blackbirds are down here at the creek, and their liquid clean whistle, "oak-a-lee, oak-a-lee, clack-clack, oak-a-lee," sounds sweetly over the water. In those tall rushes and grasses you would "jump" a bittern if you were to push into the cover with a skiff.

We turn into the woods here and begin to go around the head of the lake. This timber is squirrel-timber. That tree there — what would I call it? A massive trunk with no branches for a height of fifty feet from the ground. It isn't an oak, an ash, an elm, a hickory, basswood, or sycamore. Oh, you have noticed that bead of gummy sap in that crack of the trunk, have you?—a wild-cherry tree. You would have hardly believed that they could grow to be such splendid trees.

There goes a fox-squirrel. He is just stretching himself across the grass and, doubtless, believes himself to be in imminent danger. We will give him a chase for the nearest den. Now he goes up an oak, and in the very top he whirls around a limb and the wind dangles the tip of his fluffy red tail from the treetop.

Down there to the left is a tamarack swamp. Years ago I shot ruffed grouse there, but the grouse are all gone from this part of the country now. There are quite a number of rabbits in there yet, and a few owls. How dark the dense green of tamaracks shows against the lighter shades of the surrounding woods! The blue glint of a jaybird's wings gleams in the branches here and there, and woodpeckers and nuthatches are numerous. Now to the lake again, and we shall find a myriad of gorgeous dragonflies darting about the edges of the water. That ripple extending out into deeper water was where a bass or a pickerel slid away as we came toward the lake. He was sunning himself in the shallow water and our appearance frightened him away. There's a frog by the side of that stone. A bull-frog? No, a meadow-frog. A bull-frog has a very much darker color; this one is bright green with dark spots. You have walked seven miles and are not perceptibly tired.

From this opening you can see across the pasture, which is really a meadow. A sparrow-hawk is poising high in the air, his wings

beating the ether vigorously, as his body keeps in one place over the field. The mouse creeping about is in immediate danger. That graven image on the side hill of the pasture is a woodchuck. He is watching the scenery lest any of it should slip away. He will squat in that same position for hours if he is undisturbed. Contemplation is the chief end and aim of the woodchuck.

As we come over, and start to cross the meadow a half-dozen bobolinks are pirouetting and tumbling in the air, drunk with the wine of summer and riotous over a wilderness of clover-blossoms. They have routed the red-winged blackbirds from the rushes and are undisputed masters of the field—a tipsy crew of aerial Bacchanalians, with nothing to do but rise on fluttering wings and sift melody through the sieves of sunlight that are wavering above the grasses. Such a madcap, disreputable band of joyous songsters! Such a disregard of all theories of moon-filtered passion of nightingale, or sky-flung music of English lark! Here is the bubbling over of the beaker of summer at last—the plash and tinkle of raindrops on glass—the gurgle of

reed-fretted rivulets—the very pipes of Pan. Over and over the strains rise, fall, and waver, to break forth again and again. And well may you listen, far from the roads, far from the town, in nature's secret cloister, to the June-spun tissue of the music of the bobolinks

> " Crying 'Phew, shew, Bob-o'-Lincoln!
> See, see, Wadolincoln;
> Down among the tickle-tops,
> Hiding in the buttercups,
> I know the saucy chap,
> I see his shining cap,
> Bobbing in the clover there. See! See! See!
> Bobolink,
> Whisk-o'-dink,
> Tom Denny, wait, wait, wait.' "

This is the stone-wall. Nine miles, and we are half-way round. We have loafed, we have walked, we have observed. Honestly, now, would you have seen one-tenth as much from the road? Would you have lugged your wheel with you into all the by-ways and nooks where we have been to-day? What do you think of walking as a lost art, anyway?

FISHING FOR "BULL-HEADS"

THE bull-pout or horned pout, also called the "bull-head," is a meek and lowly fish, with a voracious appetite for anything which he can cover with his ample spread of jaws. He rarely goes over a pound in weight, but he is both willing and anxious to endeavor to gulp down a piece of bait six inches square. In some parts of the country they call him the "mud-cat." He is the most serious-looking fish in these United States. And although not heralded afar, as the brook-trout and the salmon are, as a food-fish he is one of the most delicious of the fresh-water tribes. He has a tough and leathery skin, which should be removed before he is cooked, and there are two ways of preparing him for the table. The first way is to fry him, with thin strips of bacon to lend that delicate, poetical flavor of the pig to the dish. The second way is to smoke

him, just as you would a white-fish. He is vastly superior to the white-fish in the smoked state, and when fried, with bacon accompaniment, he divides the homage of the palate with the aristocratic brook-trout and the flaky black bass.

It is true, of course, that the first necessity for a dish of fried "bull-head" is the "bull-head." And you cannot go out carelessly and amateurishly and drag out the "bull-head" from his lair without any knowledge of his haunts and his peculiarities. He belongs to a very exclusive, though humble, species of fish, and if you do not understand his habits and humor, and his little eccentricities, he will have none of you, nor you of him. With his large and engulfing mouth, his piggish little black eyes, the three sharp horns, one in the centre of his shoulders and one at each side of his fore-shoulders, he is not a beauty from a piscatorial stand-point. His oily mustachios, similar to those of an Algerine pirate, do not add anything to his looks.

Neither is he a lover of the sunny side of nature. The sweep of sunlight over the water he shuns. The mud and the contents

thereof are what he delights in, and the wise fisherman who laughs to scorn the bony pickerel and the elusive black bass as table-fish, well knows the "bull-head's" plebeian instincts and profits nightly by his knowledge. And, look you now, most enthusiastic and scientific angler, adept at the "cast" and loquacious as to the proper "fly," this is no speckled tiger of the icy brooks, leaping high in air when he feels the barb, and performing no end of skilled gymnastics when hooked. This is but the slothful "bull-head," dark of color and sedate of life; a denizen of sluggish waters, and, being exceedingly good to eat, the natural prey of designing man.

The best rod to catch "bull-heads" with is your good right hand. An old umbrella handle makes a nice pole. Any piece of stick, from a section of barrel-stave to a base-ball bat, is good enough for this kind of fishing. The line should be a fairly stout line of any kind or color. The hook shouldn't be a hook. There are fishermen, rank amateurs in the noble sport of "yanking" out "bull-heads," who use hooks in the business, but they are new at the trick. The "bull-head," as has

before been remarked, has three horns connected with his anatomy, any one of which is woful sharp, and decidedly painful when inserted into an angler's frame. These horns are shifted from side to side by the wriggling of the fish. The "bull-head," when hoisted from his native heath, twists a great deal when you try to remove him from the hook. And he has an awkward fashion of swallowing the bait clear down to the end of his tail.

If you get one of these horns into your hand it is one of the most painful and ugly of hurts. It may swell up and cripple your hand for a week or more, and it stings and throbs and gives you infinite trouble. With those three horns, each pointing a different way, it is a delicate job to get the "bull-head" off the barb without getting "horned."

But how easily all this vexation and possible pain is avoided by the knowing seeker after "bull-heads." He simply ties a square chunk of fat pork to the end of a line and lowers it, with noiseless movement, into the water.

Then, when the unsuspecting and glad-

dened "bull-head" swallows the pork down to the end of his aforementioned tail, a gentle "heave-yo" is made and the surprised fish begins to ascend from his turgid retreat. The flavor of the pork is very dear to him, and stubbornness is one of his marked characteristics, as is also his lack of perceptive faculties—whence the name "bull-head." So he hangs on to the fat and is up out of the water before he realizes the situation. A gentle jerk or a moderately brisk one and the smooth bait slides out of his body and he flops helplessly at the feet of the fisherman, who, with appropriate ghoulish glee, takes him gingerly by his tail and drops him into a convenient basket.

And even thus the armored and stubborn "bull-head" may be, and, indeed, is, circumvented, and the weapons nature has provided him with are made useless by the wiles of man. Therefore leave all fancy paraphernalia of rod and creel, of fly-hook and landing-net, of bait-can and minnow-bucket at home when you go forth to capture the unsophisticated "bull-head."

It must not seriously be supposed that this

branch of fishing is without its delights. Come with me to the old bridge now and you will see what I mean. Twilight is coming on, and over the hills the nighthawks, long and sharp-pointed of wing, are moving with jerky, irregular flight. Their short, querulous cry echoes constantly as they dart about after insects in the upper spaces. Blackbirds are flying past in long lines, and for the most part in sober silence. Robins are coming home to their roosting-places in the tamarack swamp beyond, and after them the turtle-doves, drab meteors in flight, swiftly follow. The bull-frogs are beginning to chant, and veiled shadows are forming thickly toward the east. Distant hills stand like black monuments, and up from the west comes the call of a whippoorwill.

Let us sit by the centre of the bridge as the night comes on. Now the bats are beginning to dodge about, and the shadows grow longer and deeper, and the stars are commencing to show themselves above the trees—some of them faintly and timidly; others quite confidently and brightly. The birds are gone, and a strange, gloomily shimmering warp

and woof of night envelops the creek and spreads out into the lake across still waters. The country road lies, a brownish-gray streak, along the bridge and on the hill beyond, and there is not the sound of a wandering wheel to disturb the silence. Once in a long while there will come the hardly heard tinkle of a bell, but in the main there is only an indescribable lisping murmur of the night.

The "bull-heads" begin to roam around when night comes, and they are partial to old bridges like this. They are found in schools of twenty or thirty sometimes, and a basketful can be caught in a short time. They do not seem to become alarmed by the abstracting of their comrades, and the last one of a group of a dozen will take a bait with that same trusting confidence which characterized the action of the first one to come out of the water. Sometimes the "bull-heads" will act capriciously and you may not get a bite for a long time. The "bite" that the "bull-head" gives is simply a steady pull on the pork as he proceeds to engulf it. When you think he has got it down as far as it will go, hoist away

slowly and easily. When he comes out bring him right over the basket, if you can, and snap him off in it.

"Bull-head" fishing is great "family" sport. Two or three families can go down to an old bridge, where the stream is too shallow to drown the children if they drop in the water, and have solid enjoyment in this way. The men can smoke, and the women can gossip; the children can fish; and altogether, for a quiet little time outdoors, the pastime of fishing for "bull-heads" must not be despised. And, so far as the fish are concerned, there are no better "pan-fish" in American waters.

And supposing, as it sometimes happens, that you do not catch any fish; it is pleasant on an old bridge, as night throws off every lingering vestige of day and rides the heavens in sable splendor. There is a great concourse of trailing night-winds that now and again lift the rustling rushes and then cease on a floor of tranquil waters. There is, perhaps, the tremulous cry of an owl from the woods and the sound of whispering leaves. Always, if you will listen, there is

high above, a sound as of long waves in the uttermost vaults where the pale stars lie.

On summer nights the signal stars
  Flash o'er a wide, wild waste of seas
The signal lights of ruddy Mars,
  Orion and the Pleiades,
And down the wind a murmur sweeps
  Like whir of wings in circling flights,
The ebb and flow of mystic deeps
  On summer nights.

ALONG A COUNTRY ROAD

THE dust is very thick and white and soft, like a woollen blanket. The road is broad in places, and especially at the bottoms of the hills, or in level stretches of land. On the crests of the hills and in the woods it narrows sometimes to a dusty streak. There is an individuality in a country road if one takes the trouble to observe. Where the road widens out in the sunlight by meadows and fields of grain it seems to invite the confidence of the traveller. The invitation is emphasized by hospitable clusters of blackberries on the way-side bushes. But in the cool, secluded depths of the woods, where the sun's rays are beaten back by shields of oak and hickory foliage, and where the hush is broken by only an occasional bird-note, the old road seems to say, " I have my secrets, too."

Where this road runs there was an Indian

trail many years ago. In the timber next to the river-bank the aborigines buried their dead in branches of trees, with winds and the ripple of water to mourn for them. On the tops of these hills are yet to be found bowl-shaped stone mortars where the Indians ground their corn in early days.

They say the ghosts of departed warriors travel this road, and that on summer nights ponies go by, dragging the poles on which are laid the " wickiup " and camp trappings. After them, the warrior and squaw and silent pappoose go through the deep woods down and out to the prairies beyond. Always these phantom caravans are going to the west. But where the unshod hoofs of ponies trod, and the plumes of mighty chiefs waved, came the iron destiny of the white man, and this trail blended into a highway, while the Indian faded as mist melts at the touch of summer sunlight.

The river dips and bends under high bluffs and against low shores and reedy shallows, and seems to be running a race with the white ribbon of dust that stretches past over valley and slope. The road is a silent racer that

runs breathlessly to the great hills, noiselessly passes the woods and hollows, and leaps with shadowy flight to the prairies. Echoless it traverses all space before it.

But the river is singing as it gallops down the rocky reaches and out over pebbled shallows, and its song is as varied as the never-ending change of season and circumstance. There is a perfect liquid babble of laughing gossip across the shingly bars, and a whispering of stealthy secrets to the reeds along the island sedges. Where the hills hang over the water there are deeper echoes; and a long wash of spent ripples flows on the steadfast barriers that sink their foundations in the river's flow. There are trebles and minor tones in many keys; and now and then, where a town's steeples whiten the blue and the chimneys of factories send curling smoke-wreaths aloft, there is an organ roll of prisoned waters—the roar of mill-race and sluice-vexed currents, the fretting of the river in its chains.

Here now, as we pass, is a country post-office. It is a weather-beaten little building with a block in front of it to aid people in mounting their horses, and a long pole sup-

ported by two posts to hitch teams to. Far away on the hills and in the woods are lone souls to whom this dingy spot is Mecca, and hither, and especially on Saturdays, they set their faces in hopeful pilgrimage. Through dusty lengths of uneventful miles they come to test the fiat of fate—to see if somewhere a hand has reached out to open the door of solitude. Among these seekers are the aristocrats of the post-office who have their own boxes, to which boxes the country weekly comes.

In the wheat- and oat-fields all day the lights and shadows run riot. Ever since the gray veil of morning was brushed aside, and

> "A light wind blew from the gates of the sun
> And waves of shadow went over the wheat,—"

have these alternating cloud-woven pictures flashed and faded. All day, while the chipping sparrow sings in fence-corners and clumps of hedge, and rattling wheels stir up powdery dust, does this panorama of the winds and clouds pass on. The quail's clear whistle echoes gallantly from posts or top-

rails, and a warring hawk "chirrs" menacingly from over the corn. The chink of grasshoppers sounds at intervals, and mayhap at the dead level of noon a horn's mellow blast comes faintly across the fields. All these rustic interludes come and go and are forgotten. But over the canvas of cloth-of-gold, on the wheat, and the lighter gold of bending oats, all day the shadows chase the sunlight and the sunlight follows the shadows, and a myriad wind-wrought landscapes are painted as they pass.

By the bridge in the woods the river widens out into a reedy pool where a single water-lily rests like a snow-flake on the tawny waters. Here the reeds grow tall and thick, and sighing grasses echo of Pan. Here the dragon-flies dart in and out, and the hills stand guard. And here might Pan himself have plucked a reed from the depths and set lip to the bruised stem to send out a wail of marshy music till the listening earth had cried:

> "Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
> Piercing sweet by the river,
> Blinding sweet, O great god Pan,—"

and the ghosts of all the departed Naiads waited with dripping locks for such dulcet clamor to cease.

The road through the woods has all the solemnity of an aisle of the Druids. There is something in an ancient oak which will not be dismissed lightly. How many storms have rocked this veteran to sleep in winter stress and turmoil? How many suns have shimmered among his leaves when summer ruled the land? Squirrels have played in his branches and the dove moaned through his leaves. The stars have spangled the skies above him, and a thousand rains have quenched his thirsty roots. The moccasin of the Indian has pressed the trail which led by him, the white man's footstep has followed, and both are now as the dust they crossed. But the oak bides.

Through stretches of vine-tangled thicket, by open meadow and fields of grain the road winds. It passes by pools where cows stand knee-deep in water and blue flag-lilies rise in hosts, each one veined as delicately as a lady's hand. It passes slopes that flame out in embroidered banners of wild-flowers, brilliant

against thick grass which surrounds them. Here a windmill is creaking in the summer breeze; there a lone tree stands sentinelling the entrance to a pasture. Occasionally one meets a passing team and is greeted with the careless wave of the hand or "good-day," the salutation to the stranger which marks the etiquette of country highways. In city streets you meet the thousands and you greet the few. On the rustic thoroughfare, if you are to the manner born, you will drive to the right and salute all whom you pass, beggar or horseman.

Of birds along the road you will see many. The shy cat-bird dives into the bushes as you go by and complains of your presence. The robin flies over and blackbirds scold and chatter in the woods. Meadow-larks perch on the fences and make many preparations for flight as you approach, before they finally take wing across adjacent pastures. The golden-winged woodpecker flits along the road, keeping a safe distance from you, and occasionally giving his piercing call. Crows stalk in the meadows, out of shot-gun range, and eye the passers-by warily. The jay dodges

about in the treetops, and the cruel shrike or "butcher-bird" haunts hedges by the side of the road.

And when the shadows droop to the hills and the light fades from the waters; when the singing of twilight comes in faint-drawn chords of softest minors, then the old road takes on a dusky gray that fades to brown, and in near-by woods the line of brown deepens. All sounds of river-music have lapsed to silence, and the harvest-moon bends like a bow in western skies. By way-side ponds the frogs have already begun to sound their castanets, and home-bound birds have gone past swiftly and silently to the harboring nests which awaited them. The hush of night draws near. There is only one touch more to close the chapter; one sound to lull the sleepy birds and fill the woodland spaces with drowsy melody. And presently, as the first note of a whippoorwill comes from the more remote thickets, there follows a medley of jangled brass, a clangorous and broken chorus of bells. And in the shadows, followed by a shadow, the cows come through the reaches of odorous dust, and by the bars as you pass

they surge with a great cling-clanging into a barn-yard ahead, and night folds down a leaf, while darkness settles on the country road.

WOODCOCK SHOOTING

WOODCOCK shooting in most of the states is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Yet to those few sportsmen who swear by it, this sport is the most fascinating that the gun affords. The increase in drainage and the clearing away of the natural cover, together with injudicious game-laws, is gradually putting an end to this branch of shooting.

The woodcock, wald-schneppe, longbill, bog-sucker, timber-doodle, or big-headed snipe—he has various other names—is a bird of the night, a frequenter of thickets and brushy cover. He likes to be as far from the madding crowd as he conveniently can get, and hence he is not so approachable and easily found as his half-brother, the jack-snipe of the prairies and boggy pastures. And yet he will plump down into little spots of cover very close to the habitations of men, and return there year after year. I have shot woodcock along the rivers so close to a main

travelled road that an ear of corn might have been tossed into the place by any passing country-man. They lurk in little coverts around lakes in the hills within gunshot of "campers" and cottages, and only the prying nose of a good dog, or the persevering efforts of a persistent hunter can rout them out. It is possible to shoot woodcock without a dog, but it is not pleasant.

A good pointer or setter, of course, can find the birds when they are in the country, and in fairly open ground a man can follow the dog and shoot over "points" after a fashion. But there are places which a man cannot very well "beat" thoroughly—jungles where a dog can barely worm a passage—and in these almost impenetrable tangles of "pucker" brush, alders, and twisted undergrowth the woodcock is quite frequently found, stowed away in the shadiest of moist corners—very seldom on the edges, but often right in the "dead jimp and middle" of the maze. There a spaniel is needed to stir him up and make him fly over, around, or through the cover. It is true "snap shooting," with no time to follow the bird or enter into elab-

orate instantaneous calculations as to where to "hold." It is just a matter of throwing the gun to the shoulder and firing at the spot where you think he ought to be when your shot reaches that spot—what might be called instinctive marksmanship.

The spaniel, either a cocker- or a water-spaniel, is fitted for the work, and will rummage around in the brush and fairly nose the bird into taking wing. I remember an instance of a dog catching a full-grown woodcock. The bird had started up through the thick brush and had struck a twig, probably, and fallen back. The spaniel caught it by one wing as it rose the second time. I heard the first fluttering, and next the second start, and then a prolonged fluttering. On breaking through the cover I found the woodcock in the dog's mouth, fast by one wing.

Let it not be imagined for an instant that woodcock shooting at any season is parlor-sport. In the summer, in thick cover, a man would not need more than a seal ring or a deep blush for his costume, if it were not for the brush and briers. As it is, some of the hunters strip down to shoes, trousers, and un-

dershirt. The perspiration pours down from you in streams. It is a regular out-doors Turkish bath, and the work in boring into the dense thickets, stumbling over fallen logs, and kicking through vines and tangled underbrush enlarges a man's vocabulary. Frank Forester's favorite sport was shooting "timber-doodles," and New York State was formerly the "happy hunting-ground" for these birds. In some of the eastern and middle states, together with two or three of the southern states, fair woodcock shooting can still be had in favored localities. In Canada, by reason of greater attention to the game-laws, the shooting has not gone back so rapidly as it has in the United States.

The flight of the bird is eccentric, swift, and puzzling to the average shooter. Sometimes a woodcock rises straight up through the trees; at other times he is up and over a clump of bushes like a ray of light flashed through a shutter; and again he will rise, dodge around a tree, and with one long, quick swerve, be out of gunshot. His flight has not the whir of a quail or the ruffed grouse, nor the sudden start a jack-snipe

gives. With the woodcock the motion is vaguely, impalpably swift. You see a golden-brown streak in the atmosphere for the briefest second. You see the long bill and hear the creaking whistle. But how suddenly that phantom flight ceases; how short a space the picture hangs in the summer air!

The woodcock bores for his food like the jack-snipe, and his appetite is prodigious. He will eat his own weight in angle-worms in a very brief time. He loves the ground about the spring-holes by a river-bank, and the brushy, soft spots around creeks where they empty into the rivers. He haunts shaded thickets where the ground is moist and easily penetrated by his long bill. He feeds at night, and the places he frequents are easily distinguished by his borings, which give the ground a pepper-box appearance where he has stalked about investigating the yielding soil. When alarmed, he is away like a shadow into thicket or adjacent cover. He is not a bird of extended flight, but when flushed darts into some convenient hiding-place near at hand rather than fly a consider-

able distance, as ruffed grouse or quail will fly when hunted persistently.

In color the woodcock is most richly plumaged in golden brown, with darker markings on the back. His head is round and large, his neck thick, and his bill is only a trifle shorter than the bill of the jack-snipe. The female is the larger of the two. From five to seven ounces for a full-grown bird is fair weight, although exceptionally heavy birds are occasionally brought to bag which will weigh eight ounces and over. The European woodcock will run to twelve ounces and is much larger than his American cousin. A true game-bird, the woodcock has an aristocratic air about him. All true game-birds are as cleanly put up and handsome as blooded racers. Nature doesn't build on guesswork principles.

In the days of Lucullus and other Roman epicures the long-billed feeders were in great demand; and as long as the last woodcock is alive he will be relentlessly hunted. In the south many are killed by fire-hunting at night. An iron basket is filled with blazing pitch-pine knots carried by one man, while the

other man shoots the birds at short range with a sawed-off shot-gun.

In hunting woodcocks the lightest and toughest kind of clothing is a necessity. Stout, light shoes, duck hunting-trousers, and a coarse-grained "hickory" shirt, with a linen handkerchief in lieu of a collar, make a good combination. A peaked fore-and-aft hunting-cap of light duck or canvas is a good thing to keep twigs and bushes out of your eyes. Use a belt to hold your trousers with. In thick cover a coat, however light, is too hot. A dozen or so shells in your pocket will be enough ammunition, and a game-carrier is preferable to hold your birds instead of jamming them into the pockets of a coat. Draw the birds at once after shooting them, and fill with grass. Keep them in the open air and in the shade as much as possible. The gun should be very light, cylinder-bored in both barrels, and of twelve or sixteen gauge. Use smokeless powder. Number eight or nine shot is amply large. Don't forget to take a dog along. Get a spaniel if you can, and if not, get a pointer or a setter. A pointer can stand the heat better and a setter can

stand the rough going best. Take your choice.

A hard day's woodcock shooting, followed by a swim in the river, will put an end to any case of insomnia. It is also excellent for "the blues." It is great sport, and to some men more fascinating than any other branch of field or marsh shooting. In the fall the weather is, of course, much cooler, but I do not know myself of any place where good fall woodcock shooting can be found. Occasionally woodcocks are shot while hunting quail, in old orchards and wet cornfields, and alongside hills sloping to creeks in the timber.

UNDER A GREENWOOD-TREE

NORTHWARD over a long, sandy slope the woods may be seen—hard and soft maple, beech, and sycamore; mostly hard maple and beech, with a mere sprinkling of sycamores. Occasionally there is an ash-tree. In the pasture this side of the forest a glacier has left its sign-manual across the hills. More ages than a man could guess have lapsed since that huge mass came drifting down from the north, but even in these days a hint of its grinding course is evident in deep valleys cut through the hill-tops, and scattered along its path the farmers have found "float" copper, which the icy mass dislodged and brought down in its powerful grasp. The dense green of the woods stands firm against the sky, and an old rail fence hugs close to its borders. Far above, a solitary crow crosses, and higher still a buzzard swings slanting pinions and

executes a masterly curve whose precision is like that of a wheeling line of perfectly trained infantry. A flicker's golden-brown wings beat regularly as he flies over the field, and a blue-jay's call comes querulously as we clamber over the fence and enter the forest.

The first thing that fixes the attention of the intruder is the sense of silence that broods among the squat trunks of the beeches and the taller figures of the other trees. The beech, more than any other tree, seems built on almost human lines, so smooth is its bark, so graceful are its outlines, and so solid is its general appearance. A little way up from the ground its subsidiary branches spring out, and so thickly that the growth is as close as that of a bush. Everywhere the limbs shoot out, heavily covered with lesser twigs, and all of these are thronged with compact, dark-green leaves, small and pointed. Birds seldom seek the beech-tree, and rarely animals. So dense is the foliage when the branches start from the body of the tree that it is almost impossible to make any progress toward the top of the tree or in any direction from the trunk.

The hard maples are among the tallest and most graceful of all trees. They grow farther apart than the beeches, and do not begin to branch out until their trunks have reached to a considerable height. Among a clump or group of these trees, with the sunlight falling through on their delicate leaves and fine outlines, there is a sense of some interior of a vast cathedral, so much is the feeling of arch, pillar, dome, and fresco suggested.

There is little to be seen here either of bird or animal life. Sometimes a small red squirrel, white-bellied, and with eloquent tail, will scurry up a tree, pause on some lower limb, curl his tail over his back, sit up, eye you curiously, and then unhinge himself and lie close to the bark as if to escape observation. If you frighten him from his perch or his hold on the bark, he will dart up the tree like a streak of sunlight and put the tree-trunk between you and himself. He is a very curious little creature, and will come back if there is an interval of silence, and with inquisitive, beady eyes, survey you until you make another movement that sends him out of sight.

The sycamores are marvellous shapes

among all this greenery. Tall and sombre-colored for perhaps fifteen feet from the ground, they begin to shed their rusty reddish bark as they climb higher, and soon appear in a beautiful creamy white that shines like marble among the surrounding trees. And numerous slender and pallid branches are thrown out from the main trunk, adorned with many leaves. The whole effect is sculpturesque in the highest sense. No splotch or blot mars the marble-like contour of many of these woodland Apollos. They seem hardly ever ruffled by the winds that sweep across. Birds flit in their branches and along their symmetrical outlines the sunlight falls, weaving many a lacelike bit of golden tapestry between the shadows of the leaves.

A slender, feminine quality is perceptible in most of the sycamores, but occasionally some sturdier one stands like a young Greek stripped for a race, with arms outstretched and long locks ruffling in the breeze. There is a caste and distinction among forest-trees, and the sycamore is one of the stateliest and most aristocratic.

The lone ash stands like a fighter, its close-

grown fibre telling of its strength. It is not so columnlike in its lines as the beech, nor so tall as the maple, nor anything like as elegant as the sycamore. But the herculean power is there, and a certain suppleness as well—something that tells of tough timber, of slow growth and resolute, defying storm and wind, reliant and contained. Its roots dive deep into the dark earth and spread through and under, gripping fast to the soil. The lightning may fall on forest-aisles and thunder come in the wake of roaring winds, but the ash holds its branches sturdily to the blasts, secure in the knowledge of its matted foundations. It is the type of constancy among trees, strong, pliable, and enduring. It is seldom, if ever, uprooted, and nothing but a lightning-bolt can suffice to lay it low. Among the other trees it is almost a forest Ishmaelite, for its brethren are seldom seen among these gatherings of beech and maple and the lordly sycamore.

Of bird life in these woods there is not one-tenth the variety of the southern and middle southern woods.

The watchful and sable-pinioned crow is

here, and often in quite large numbers. He sails above the woods and alights on the tops of the tallest trees, keeping a sharp lookout for suspicious-looking characters, especially any one with a gun. When he nests he usually does so in a high oak somewhere along the banks of a river or in places where the oak-groves stand. His monotonous cawing and his black wings are common enough in these forests.

The woodpeckers—the golden-winged, the red-headed woodpecker, and the downy and hairy woodpecker — are seen sometimes on the outskirts of woods such as these, but seldom in their innermost depths. The redhead is the only one who ventures into the inner sanctuaries, and he is usually found perched on some lightning-blasted trunk, beating a tattoo, and at times sending his shrill call through the treetops. The golden-winged woodpecker skirts the edges, flitting from rail to rail of the environing fences and flying to the fields when disturbed. The other members of the woodpecker family frequent the scattered portions where trees grow farther apart, and here they seek the dead

trees to climb and forage on. Blackbirds are sometimes seen in flocks, the redwinged and the crow-blackbirds going together. They go into the edges of the woods, and sometimes, where hard maples form a grove, they will fly in and chatter until something scares them away. The cuckoo, or "rain-crow," as he is sometimes termed, haunts thickety portions of the woods, the undergrowth that stands along some portions of the forest. He will not fly at the approach of an idler, but will wait on a fence-post or twig and eye the intruder fearlessly.

Blackberry vines and ferns are scattered all through the timber, and splotches of moss girdle the bottoms of tree-trunks. Sometimes a ruffed grouse thunders up from a covert, his strong wings carrying him out of sight quickly. Rabbits are scarce, but at times a brown body will scamper away through the brush, a white tail bobbing up and down as he goes. Snakes do not seem to frequent these woods at all.

Of all things that seem most significant in bird or animal life in these gatherings of heavily foliaged and silent trees the turtle-

dove or mourning-dove comes first. Its mournful, melodious call comes sometimes at midday and sometimes in the evening. Always it is the essence of a chastened melancholy, a saddened moan for the stillness that wraps the forest—"coo, coo, coo; coo-ee coo." Sometimes a pair of them may be seen whirling in graceful flight through the sky, coming back to their roosting-places.

When twilight gathers on the hills and descends on the woods, the dark vistas of the forest gloom and gather their robes of shadow about them and wait. The stars come out and the moon rides by, and through the loom of night wriggling bats dodge and cross. The mink and weasel are abroad now, and dozing owls have ruffled their feathers and opened their large, unwinking eyes. Under the moon and stars the woods brood, and over the leaves the whisperings of night-winds come softly, telling of darkness and the dissolution of the day.

PAN-FISHING

IN the art of "casting," or the science of "still-fishing" for game-fishes, the average woman or boy rarely becomes adept. In vacation-time, when their thoughts turn lightly to angling, they content themselves with the lesser grades of fish and the more tranquil methods of capture. The sport of "pan-fishing," or fishing for those particular fish whose excellencies shine brighter in the frying-pan, is a most popular pastime about the lakes and rivers. It is in vogue principally among the ladies and small boys. It is a true art in itself, but can easily be made common and ignoble by an inattention to details. It is a soothing sport, entirely devoid of the excitement attending the capture of black bass or muskallunge, and yet there is a gentle fascination about it.

The first fish in the scale of excellence as a pan-fish is the perch — the American yellow perch, with a string of local names on his escutcheon. He sometimes weighs as much as

a pound and a quarter, and is really a very handsome fish. The small perch are just as eager to take the hook as the large ones. The bait may be either angle-worms or a small piece of perch meat cut from a lately deceased perch. The perch-meat bait is cleaner to handle than worms and the fish to take it quite as readily. Perch are free biters, seldom dilly-dallying about a bait, but just grabbing it and starting away for a quiet spot wherein to enjoy it. A bright red "bobber" adds to the pleasure, for in seeing the "bobber" go under there is a thrill of enjoyment which no mere tug at a plain line could ever give. A blue or white "bobber" is not nearly so effective. It seems that blue and white, and even yellow, blend too easily with the water, sky, and sunlight, while the red "bobber"—the true danger-signal—always presents a vivid contrast to the surroundings, and any motion on its part is immediately apparent to the angler.

The grass bass, sometimes called the calico bass, red-eyed bass, and goggle-eyed perch, is found in the same places frequented by the yellow perch, and he is a very easy fish to

land when hooked. Blue-gilled sunfish and the common sunfish also haunt the spots where perch are found, and are susceptible to the same temptations, as regards angle-worms and fresh-cut perch meat.

Fishing for pan-fish is very good sport if properly managed. In the first place a spick-span clean boat should be selected, one that is clinker-built, wide, and not easily tipped. Get the prettiest girl possible to go with you. Let her do all the fishing. It will keep you busy attending to baiting the hook, taking off the fish, stringing them, cutting bait, and keeping up a running comment of airy persiflage. A girl who is not indifferent to the joys of yanking out the toothsome and inoffensive pan-fish is the kind you want—one who is enthusiastic about clouds, landscape, the ripples over the surface of the lake, and the hornless cattle grazing on distant slopes. Beware of a *blasé* girl. Nothing is worse, excepting the *blasé* man.

The particular nooks where pan-fish hide are along the shores of lakes in the lake region, and around bulrush-beds they can generally be found all in a democratic gathering

—yellow perch, sunfish, bluegills, goggle-eyes, and occasionally the crappies. Each one is patiently waiting to be lifted out of his element to adorn a "stringer." A word as to the stringer. Get a steel chain stringer and never trust a cord or fish-line, however stout. For in your overweening pride you may find occasion to "hist" the string up to show it to some one and the string may break and sow your fishes broadcast back into the depths of the lake again. This often happens. With a wire chain stringer or a steel chain stringer you can do this display business with the utmost impunity.

One of the beauties about pan-fishing is that the biggest fish do not get away — at least, not permanently. If you inadvertently lose a fish, bait up again and try him once more. A perch will munch and munch until all is gone and then return to the charge as often as bait is renewed. The bluegills and the rest of the crowd all follow suit, and when a crowd of pan-fish begin to take the hook they bite fast and furiously. The small hooks used enable the anglers to put back into the water unharmed all the smaller fish.

It is not every day that a good catch of pan-fish can be made. The wind and the weather must be right. When the sun falls blindingly on level stretches of water which is unwrinkled by a solitary ripple, except when a turtle's head is thrust above the surface, then the pan-fish get lazy and seem to lose their appetites. They drop down to the cooler depths of the lake and look listlessly at the dangling bits of perch meat, and eye askance the wriggling and ruddy-hued angle-worms. It is too hot; too still. The lazy cattle stand motionless on the hill-sides and birds seek the coolest recesses in the woods. It is not the time to fish. But when the morning breaks in a web of cloudy streaks, and a wind comes from the south, rippling the water into a maze of gray wrinkles, then dig your worms and get ready for the fray. Cloudy days are the days to fish in. In open spaces among the bulrushes, where the water is about five or six feet deep, is a good place to anchor the boat.

The spectacle of some women fishing for the first time is a sight worth a day's journey to witness. The fair angler pities the fish

she catches and execrates the ones that wriggle off the hook and slide back into the water again. She smoothes back the locks of hair that the impudent wind has disarranged, and carefully tucks them away with the aid of the ever-mysterious, ever-present hair-pin. She takes care occasionally that her hat is on straight, and fishes in a bewilderingly attractive costume that ought to reconcile the fish to their fate. Her exclamations are many and varied, and her good-humor is intensified with each fresh capture.

The proverbial patience of women is not at its best in angling. Where a down-trodden worm of a man will sit meekly for hours glaring at a cork, a woman will lift the bait twenty times in half an hour to see if there was not a nibble. She is impatience itself if the fish do not exert themselves to bite, and she rapidly gets disgusted if they quit biting after having started in with promising suddenness. If she is of a dreamy, poetic nature she will be calling attention to some lovely bit of color in the west or north at critical moments when sturdy perch or obtrusive bluegill have gone down with the cork.

When she recovers her angling instinct the bait is all gone, and she will straightway forget the glory of the shore and sky in lamenting the perfidy of the fish that got away. She enjoys the sport as you used to when you were a boy.

A cloudy day, and one when the wind is blowing from the south or south-west, and with occasional lapses of sunlight through the shadows, is a typical fishing day. There is a seclusion to such days that full-lighted days do not possess. The wind writes liquid messages on the surface of the lake that fade in the writing and sink swiftly into shadow, like the names of all the long-forgotten dead. The sun strikes seldom through the barriers of trailing cloud, but when striking his flashes are as sword-cuts with a jewel-hilted blade. The birds do not sing and only at long intervals is their flight marked from the gently rocking skiff. The hills are like huge, crouching mammoths, shaggy with forest and thicket, and buried in a century-old repose. The shadows rule, and the wind is as rollicking as a boy on his summer holiday.

Pan-fish are very good eating, some people

preferring them to the more generally esteemed black bass. They should be rolled in cornmeal and fried. When they are rather small, if fried crisply they can be taken in the fingers and eaten — bones, fins, and tails — everything but heads—with a relish. At the ordinary camp, where a change of diet from canned goods is a source of great delight, a skilful pan-fisherman is looked up to with something bordering on reverence. He it is who leads the campers out of the wilderness of baked beans with tabasco sauce and canned buckwheat-cakes.

Pan-fishing is the true Waltonian style of angling, minus the charm of absolute quiet, the repose "which marks the caste of Vere de Vere." This infraction of silence is furnished by the lady who is doing the fishing. Do not wince if she thinks that a passing kingfisher is a jaybird, or that a turtle's head bobbing up a few yards away is a snake. Leave her to those broad generalizations of outdoors which make up in enthusiasm what they lack in accuracy. And be very proud and glad to think that she has this sense of fresh enjoyment in the sport that you once

had yourself in the old, old days—days when you set your "bobber" afloat by a certain bridge across a certain creek so long ago that it makes your eyes misty to try and see across the years and find the place.

A NORTHERN NIGHTINGALE

HOW many years ago the cat-bird received his name history does not exactly record. But it was all on account of his scolding, mewling cry when disturbed in the thickets where his nest was built. Just so soon as an intruder's footstep came near his retreat he was out and complaining about it. It did not matter whether the stranger was merely a curious observer, anxious to study the habits and peculiarities of the slate-colored songster, or a prowling boy intent on robbing nests. The presence of the disturbing element of man was enough, and the bird's feline protestations gave him the name which has clung to him ever since. And a very misleading and inappropriate cognomen it is, too. The cat-bird is of the mocking-thrush family, and enjoys the distinction of being full first cousin to the mocking-bird, and is himself a mimic of no little

power. His aversion to singing in public is well known to his admirers, although he can never be said to be without his notes. In some of the earliest "Hoosier" dialect ever written, Edward Eggleston celebrates this peculiarity as follows:

"The cat-bird poorty nigh splits his throat
Ef nobody's thar to see;
The cat-bird poorty nigh splits his throat,
But ef I says: 'Sing out, green coat,'
'Why, I can't, and I shan't,' says he."

But in the throat of this most modestly plumaged bird there is a perfect marvel of melody, and when the spirit moves him, and then only, does he sing. What a pity that some of the poets do not wait for their inspiration like the cat-bird!

The cat-bird is a brush-bird, a frequenter of bushes and thickets. Not for him the lofty perch of the robin, the tip-tilting pose of the golden-winged woodpecker, the far flight of the blackbird. Like a true-hearted minstrel he is a modest singer who seeks in shady retirement a spot to pour out his music. While the bobolink spills bubbles of joy in the midst of sun-thrilled days the cat-bird

hides in deepest copses and builds his coarse nest gossiping between times with his mate. He is chary of his song, as if he knew its worth and matchless melody. The robin flutes in the elms when the sun's rays wheel slantingly toward the west, and after the rain the brown thrush sings from a treetop, but only rarely, in my experience, does a cat-bird choose the daytime for his gift of song. Possibly he listens, for he has the notes of many a morning and evening songster in his *repertoire.*

His coat is of a subdued tint, as betokens the rarest vocalists of the woods and fields. It is true that the red-bird, brilliant in color as a torch at midnight, sings sweetly. And the orioles, with their orange and black and other bright diversities of plumage, are singers in the true sense, but not such lyrists as the cat-bird and the mocking-bird. How quietly has nature robed her chief favorites—the cat-bird, the mocking-bird, the thrushes, the song-sparrow, and the robin. The lone exception among the birds whose songs rank highest is that saucy harlequin, the bobolink, for the tanager and the oriole, sweet as their

songs are, belong to the lesser chorus of the fields. How the gaudy and impudent jay suffers in comparison with such a bird as the cat-bird!

When the leaves go, and gray winds of the north smite hard on branch and thicket and the snows sift over valley and meadow, the cat-bird spreads his wings and disappears. The loss of summer's young delights he never knows, for with the fading of the season his tarrying time has passed. The ice-bound pools, the empty nest and naked branches, the thickets piled with glittering drifts, come after he has migrated. In happier valleys, where the sunlight comes in a yellow flood to grassy hills; where the fire of summer has again been kindled and mild winds blow in secluded woodland aisles, the cat-bird finds the season that departed from the north. Let the world's worn axle turn as it may, the cat-bird's flight will follow the sun, however the jay and crow stay on to brave out the eager and nipping airs.

But as the earth turns so does the bird's instinct swerve to the northern hills. Over Mason and Dixon's line, with the other north-

bound wayfarers, he comes. The thickets where he hid and chattered welcome him again, and again the cat-bird builds his nest in the bushes and watches his fledglings through the long, warm days, while grass grows underfoot and the sun shines overhead. And when night comes, when the west is a full-blown rose and the valleys and slopes take on nunlike folds of twilight and deeper darkness, comes the cat-bird's matin time. His most beautiful song is of the night. And if ever a bird had a soul, some subtle trace of sensibility to stars and moon, and the tide of summer languor, surely this bird has.

Where we used to fish at a little lake locked in by the hills, there was a cat-bird that made his nest in a thicket in the orchard. Sometimes he would come at midnight to a cedar-tree close to the house and sing. We never saw him come to the tree, but we heard him sing several times in the moonlight. At about twelve o'clock he would begin, and the song would continue for possibly twenty minutes, with some short intervals of silence. He never came except on clear nights, and the cedar where he sang stood dense and

black at the orchard's edge. Those of us who had heard the mocking-bird in Mississippi forests and Floridian hammocks, and the hermit-thrushes on eastern hills, decided that the singing of this cat-bird surpassed in sweetness both northern and southern wood-vocalists. After all, is not moonlight the time for music? And the song of this northern nightingale seemed to us the poetry of bird-music, the lyric voicing of winds and waters trembling up into the moonlight, and softened and saddened by the night.

We were certainly an appreciative audience. Whatever the boys were doing, whether playing cards, oiling up reels, winding new lines, or telling fish-stories, the word that the cat-bird had begun to sing was the cue for an adjournment to the side porch. It was very still out there. The moon at that time of the night would be rolling high and free from trailing clouds. The bird seemed to prefer those nights when only occasional gusts of wind stirred the apple-trees, the cotton-woods, and the tufted cedar. There was no other house for miles and the loneliness was emphasized by the near-by presence of

the heavy timber which skirted the lake. The song was clear, voluble, and very sweet, having in some portions of it notes of other birds. Its own proper song was its rarest quality, apart from the imitations or mockings of the common songsters of the fields. There was a mellowness in these notes, a liquid quality, which came like little cascades in a mountain-brook. Sometimes it would seem as if the bird were in an ecstasy of happiness, and then there would be a tone of sorrow which would broaden into an interlude of pain, and this again would change and soar into a triumphal passage of bubbling music till the cedar rang with the melody.

Some miserable vandals destroyed his nest and killed his mate maybe, for the boys found the torn nest and the broken eggs at the side of the road the day before we left. But on that beautiful moonlight night the bird came to the cedar-tree and gave us a farewell burst of the finest bird-music possible.

The cat-bird sang in the cedar-tree,
  Where the argent flood of a midnight moon
Poured down as a river flowing free,
  All white and bright as the light of noon,

And the dusky depths of the cedar thrilled
  As the echoing music rose and rang,
And the clouds bent down and their dews distilled
  Like tears of joy, while the cat-bird sang.

The cat-bird sang in the cedar-tree,
  And never a wave of breezes fleet
O'er apple-blossoms, or minor key
  Of flowing water, was half so sweet;
And the winds were hushed by his matchless song,
  And the dumb trees sighed 'neath the moonlight pale,
While the shadows came in a muffled throng
  To hark to the northern nightingale.

So blest, so curst by the touch of fate;
  Give note, though thy nest no longer be,
Or if thou wander and find no mate,
  And sing alone in the cedar-tree.
Aye! tell thy pain to the night forlorn,
  Sing on, sing on, lest thy heart should break,
For the breasts of those shall press the thorn
  Who live for naught but the song's own sake.

SQUIRREL SHOOTING

ALONG in the early summer the squirrel families are bringing their young hopefuls into sylvan society, and man, base man, with a palate tickling with anticipations of squirrel-pie, is preparing for the woods. East and west, north and south, the squirrels are found, and the earliest experiences with the gun for most boys is in the line of squirrel-hunting. Gray squirrels, fox-squirrels, black squirrels, and red squirrels, they are found from the Lakes to the Gulf and from Maine to California, and in their pursuit wood-craft is a prime essential to success.

The novice may go through the woods and over the hills and never see a sign of game. His dog may chase rabbits or hunt moles and mice, or if he is a dog that is posted, he may tree a squirrel which the " tender-foot " cannot find.

But after the greenhorn may come the experienced hunter, who has followed the sport

from boyhood, and then there is a different tale to tell. To be successful in this sport requires a keen eye and patience, some little wood-craft and out-door knowledge. The woods in June are dense with foliage. Every tree is a mass of emerald, and when the wind blows, the boughs and branches wave and intermingle in a blending of dark and light green. It is very hard then to distinguish the movements of so small an animal as a squirrel. And the squirrel is a crafty little customer, too. Well he knows where the hollow trees are, and the holes in them as well. And when there are strange noises in the woods the fox-squirrel furls his red and feathery tail close to his sides and glues himself to the side of a tree until he is flattened out like a postage-stamp. And there he clings until all sound has ceased excepting the tattoo of the red-headed woodpecker on the dead limbs or the petulant cry of the uneasy blue-jay. The sounds that first startled him may have been the careless steps of a "tender-foot" squirrel-hunter, thrashing steadily through the woods, looking up into all sorts of trees, big and little, and wondering why he

doesn't see a cluster of squirrels on every other branch. He is very likely to be a reckless fellow with a gun and the song-birds are apt to suffer as he goes along.

Sometimes, however, the sound of footsteps dies away and the sharp-eyed fox-squirrel holds to the bark and listens, and all is apparently safe again. A crow flying over sends out his challenge of "caw, caw," in an impudently assertive manner, and the downy woodpecker busies himself on the very tree on which the squirrel is fastened. There is a faint breeze stirring, and the broad green leaves of oaks move softly and waver between shade and shine. The peril seems over. Now, the squirrel, at the first echo of approaching steps, runs around to the opposite side of the tree and clings there. Consequently his line of vision is limited. If he could look around the tree or through it he would see a wily man, an experienced hunter, watching for squirrels. This man has come up the slope and has noticed a number of fine oaks scattered about here and there, with occasional logs and stumps in different places on the hill. A quarter of a mile away is the

lake. Its blue waters are visible through the trees to the right. Down the slope, at the very bottom, is a narrow pond with a brushy covert on two sides and open on its other banks. It is shallow but clear. There are frogs around the shores and possibly a woodcock in the brush at its edges. At any rate, it would be a good place for squirrels to slip down and drink out of, and the timber certainly looks favorable. "Mr." man resolves to wait, not for a minute, nor for five minutes, but for an hour or so if necessary.

There are no squirrels in sight, it is true, but there is much to observe and enjoy. For instance, there is the fresh greenwood charm of forest-aisle and grassy stretch of hill-side, the companionship of birds, and the searching rays of sunlight peeping down through lattices of leaves.

> "Under the greenwood-tree,
> Who loves to lie with me?"

There is the call of the sable crow, the blue-jay's noisy clatter, the querulous note of the red-headed woodpecker, the long-drawn-out, chattering call of the "flicker" or

golden-winged woodpecker, and the clack of passing flocks of blackbirds. There is also a nervous little nuthatch bobbing around on that big oak yonder, gradually zigzagging up the trunk and — softly, softly, what is that dark spot edging cautiously over the top of that third limb of the oak?

It is a squirrel, by all that is lucky. He has become emboldened by the security of sylvan bustle into doing a little peeping on his own account. That small spot is his nose. The observant hunter has immediately noticed this, but he has not moved an inch; has not " batted " an eye or twitched an eyelash. He has seen the inquisitive nose of the squirrel and waits, statuelike, for further proceedings. Presently the squirrel's head comes over the limb and then his body follows. Then he springs to another bough and goes around the tree again. Instantly the hunter raises his rifle to his shoulder, aims a little above where the squirrel has disappeared, and again awaits developments. He has not long to wait. Over another limb the little animal gambols, now feeling quite secure from any foes. Something causes a momen-

tary pause and the squirrel halts for an instant on a limb half-way to the top of the tree.

Then the crack of a rifle, spiteful and short, sounds in the woods, and a twenty-two-calibre bullet has whizzed through the squirrel's head. Death is instantaneous and probably painless, and the nimble forager of the woods drops plummet-like to the ground below. The hunter slips another cartridge into the breech of his gun and waits a few minutes before going forward. Sometimes there are two squirrels playing about together, and the other one may show itself, looking for its comrade. If there is no sound the hunter presently moves up and takes his game, smooths the broad bushy tail out, and carefully tucks the squirrel away in the back of his hunting-coat. Then he shifts his position, say fifty yards or so, to another part of the grove, selects a likely looking place near some old logs under a clump of fine oak, and sits down on a convenient stump.

The day dozes and drowses over cloud-vistas and across masses of emerald foliage, but the sun finds few chinks to sift through

his golden light to the mossy depths of the woods. The hunter sits motionless on a stump, his eyes scanning the tree-trunks and branches, the logs and slopes and timbered hills beyond. Suddenly a squirrel appears on a log some forty yards or more distant from where he is sitting. This squirrel is entirely unsuspecting. He has probably come some distance through the woods and evidently has not heard or seen anything suspicious. His back is to the hunter and he switches his tail to one side and cocks his head up saucily. The little rifle is raised quickly, again the bullet speeds through the air and the second squirrel drops from the log, stone-dead. Again there is a pause, and then the game is picked up and all is still again.

The woods first, and next the rifle-ranges, have made Americans a nation of sharp-shooters. For squirrel-hunting any one of a dozen American rifles, repeaters, or single-shots of twenty-two-calibre will give entire satisfaction. For myself I prefer a single-shot rifle, as it conduces to more care in shooting and a consequent tendency to greater accuracy. For dress, stout shoes, hob-nailed, so as not to

slip on the grass, duck trousers, negligee shirt, the lightest possible duck hunting-coat, and a straw hat. Go thinly clad for this summer shooting.

You will find much that is lovely in the summer woods — wonders of yellow lace woven on the grass by the wandering sun, the flight of birds and their calls, the shimmer of far waters, the breath of winds, the sense of peace and beauty. And you will not wonder that in olden days the Druids worshipped

"Those green-robed senators of mighty woods—
Tall oaks branch-charméd by the earnest stars."

DOWN THE ST. JOE RIVER

THE St. Joe River is one of the most winding streams in the world. Its tortuous course flows through highlands and lowlands, now with steep banks overhanging the water, now with shelving banks of sand dotted with mussel shells. Springs rise along its shores and creep lazily to the river, there to mingle with the current, and along the timber-line higher up the crows fly past. Shallows follow on the paths of deep pools where black bass lie, and swallows dip and cross above the river's surface. Blackbirds linger along the shores, sometimes among roots of trees at the water's edge and at other times whistling from maples and sycamores in the low grounds. Beech-trees, sturdy of stature and compact of texture, rise on the slopes and oaks grow on hills higher up. There is an infinite variety of scenery where the river weaves in and out of the hills,

and sun and shadow are forever alternating on its surface.

Its tawny waters are forever hungry. Swift and impetuous the current sweeps around the bends, and insidiously gnaws away at the soft banks. The earth crumbles off and slides into the river, the water takes on a trifle darker tinge, and the current again arches up and rubs off a little more of the soil. When the moon comes up the process is carried on more stealthily. There is the same disintegration, the same chipping off and carrying away, but it is all done noiselessly. Finally a part of the roots of some towering sycamore, elm, or maple is exposed. The current keeps grinding on like the paddles of a water-wheel, and at last the entire body of roots is left without any support save for those fibres that reach back in the bank beyond the wash of the current.

After awhile these weaken, and the tall tree takes a slant toward the river. The river can afford to wait. Later on, there comes the regular spring freshet and the water rises high above the banks and carries off the last vestige of soil from the exposed roots. The water

falls, and the following summer the sun bleaches these tangled roots till they look like the wild gray hair of an old witch. The river purrs under the tree like a cat. The tree heaves in its uncertain moorings and takes a longer slant toward the water. And some time soon after, either at midday when the sun shines strong on the sandy bars, or at night when the moon trails like a ghost through the pallid top limbs of the sycamore, there is a thunderous crash. The tree is torn out from the bank as a lock of hair from a Titan, and plunges into the river with its green leaves swashing the current and its form marking a long ripple on the water. The tragedy is complete. The treacherous river, the voracious river, has claimed another victim.

Afterward, long years hence, with its branches stripped clean of twigs and leaves, with many of the small limbs washed away by the force of the current or by the brunt of driftwood, the tree, denuded of its bark and rising stark from the river, has become a "snag," a bane of steamboat-men, the haunt of black bass and something to be avoided by any idler who comes down the current in his

light skiff. For there the river runs swiftly, and an overturning at that point will surely be dangerous.

For many miles these mute evidences of the river's power are strewn along, most of them in the current still, some of them dragged up on the bank and left there by steamboat-men to make clear a passage for the boats. Some are there green in the pride of summer, not yet stripped of leaves and branches, and the great holes above show where the sly current has wrought its work so well. Year in and year out this goes on, and the timber-line recedes from the edge of the water and marches back into the woods beyond.

On these bald snags turtles lie in long lines, or solitary, as it may chance. Some of them are the soft-shelled kind, jelly-like in appearance, awkward, reptilian, and hideous. The "hard-shells" are not so ugly, but they are all repulsive when they have attained any size. The smaller turtles, the wee baby turtles, especially the hard-shelled infants, are smooth little fellows, and entirely without the ugliness of those of a larger growth. These

turtle groups, piled on the snags, will "follow their leader" when a boat draws near, first one and then another slipping silently into the water. Some of them are nearly as big as the bottom of a wash-tub, and when they are seen swimming under the surface you can almost imagine you are wandering in the days of the monster reptiles whose unpronounceable names and terrifying figures adorn the books on natural history. Their long, snaky necks stretch out and turn from side to side, and their four legs oar vigorously as they move about. If one of them happens to see a dead fish below the surface he will rush for it and nose and shoulder it down under the snags with an energy that you would not expect from the sluggish-looking specimens who take their sun-baths on the snags at noonday.

One of the most noticeable bits of life about the river is the kildee, or ring-neck plover. This bird, jerky of flight and querulous in call, travels up and down the river constantly. It lights on the sandbars which jut out into the river, or on the shingly shores where the willows have been washed away.

The kildee is essentially a graceful bird, flying with a wavy, irregular flight and running swiftly and easily when on land. It has a curious habit of ducking down sometimes as a boat draws closer, and this means that it is going to fly away. Its colors are black, brown, russet, and white, and are very clear and distinct when the bird is alive, and for a few minutes after death. But once the bright black eyes are glazed, the bird actually withers, as a flower might, and the gleaming tints of its plumage grow rusty very quickly. They fly singly, in pairs, and in groups, and when disturbed take wing with a piercing, melancholy cry. Sometimes they follow the line of the river, and at other times they are away over the surrounding hills, mere specks in the sunlight.

They are scarcely worth shooting, for their bodies are no bigger than those of blackbirds, and their meat is hard and dry. But it is great sport to take a small rifle and plant a bullet close to them just to see them spring into the air and dart away, their long wings flashing in the sun and their strident cry of "kildee, dee, kildee," coming back as they

disappear. They do not associate with the other birds that frequent the river-banks, the little spotted sand-pipers that skim about the sandy shores or dodge around the banks. Sometimes the kildee comes like a sprite, voiceless and gray, alighting on a bar and standing absolutely motionless. At other times he is particularly noisy and exceedingly active. Later in the summer they get more together in flocks and whirl up and down the river and over the treetops, filling the air with their cries.

It is not necessary to do much rowing when on the St. Joe River if you are going down-stream, except when you strike a sandbar. The current will take you along fast enough, and in some places with a rush. If you want to go up the river, however, it will tax your rowing abilities to their utmost. Snags must be looked out for, and each riffle on the river's current should be studiously watched to avoid a possible upsetting of the boat. In going up the river with a boat, if care is taken to pick the water, there is always one course that can be taken where the rowing will be easiest. Sometimes it is on one side,

and sometimes on the other. Where the water is still, whether deep or shallow, there is the best rowing.

Sometimes a herd of cattle make a pretty picture in the current, standing belly-deep in the water and cooling their hides as the river washes by. They will scramble ashore as a boat drifts past, if it comes too near for their comfort, and lazily chew the cud till the disturbing element has passed. Then they will slide into the water again. On the steep banks of the river where the beech- and maple-trees hang in clusters, the tinkle of sheep-bells is heard and the blatant baaings of the lambs. The old sheep call back and the slopes resound with the echoes.

It is a drowsy, dreamy way of blotting out a summer day—drifting down with the sun and shadows, with an occasional bump against a half-submerged log to arouse one to a sense of danger — lowlands and highlands, wood, fields, and stream, and the wild-blackberry vines clinging to rail fences that straggle toward the tops of the hills.

BROOK-TROUT FISHING

IN all the annals of fishing the trout has held a distinguished place of honor. In the gentle art of angling, as poetically set forth by that prince of the noble pastime, Izaak Walton, the trout is approached with a degree of reverence accorded to no other of the fishes. In all English literature the trout is the subject of comment, simile, and apt illustration. Books have been written about him and poet and painter have combined to do him proper honor. The reasons for his prominence in piscatorial lore and legend are many. He is easily the most beautiful of American game-fishes. His home, in the icy and clear-running brooks of the mountain country, or the cool brooks and streams of the northern pine-woods, is romantic and picturesque in the extreme. He is to be found from the forests of Maine on the east to the Rockies, and on to the farther north and north-west—

"Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound
Save its own dashings."

The trout is a fighter from the start, and it requires skill to land him as well as cunning to hook him. And, last and least, he is one of the most delicately flavored of food-fishes—to some epicures the best fish the market affords.

The average trout-fisherman would scorn to use anything but an artificial fly in the sport. The different "flies," made of feathers, tinsel, gimp, deer-hair, and various other materials, have as many and as fancy names as a string of trotting-horses. The trout-fisherman of the old school is scientific and precise to an appalling degree, and arrays himself in proper costume of formal cut and secures the regulation trout-fishing paraphernalia before stepping into a stream.

The trout is a cold-water crank, and will not live in a brook or river unless the water is up to a certain degree of coolness. In the mountainous regions of the eastern states, in the brooks running down the mountains, the true *salmo fontinalis* is found in fairly plentiful numbers, and the scenery is wonderfully

beautiful. The aggressively scientific fly-fisherman I very seldom ran across there, but the trout-fishing was good, especially after the summer rains.

The fish were as active as cats, and when once hooked they would show the greatest possible interest in the proceedings until the incident was closed by their going into the creel. I used to get up early in the morning after a rain and start up the mountain with a pole over my shoulder and a lunch in my pocket. The path led over the hill-side behind the house, across the brook at a little bridge, and from there windingly up the mountain. The rains would wash the trout down from the crannies and pools higher up on the mountain, and it was necessary to walk only a mile or two up the mountain before commencing to fish. It was perfectly glorious on those cool mornings climbing the mountain-side. Great hemlocks, pines, and spruces rose on either side of the path and bowlders along the way were banded and mottled with close-clinging gray and green moss. The music of running waters came gurgling through alder bushes, and in the clear spaces it was sounding fresh

and free. The cows were abroad betimes and occasionally a brown hare would hop awkwardly away deeper into the thickets. Sometimes a covey of ruffed grouse, with a roar of wings, would flush and scatter away to the trees.

The path was never far away from the brook, and after reaching a point about a third of the way up, the turn to the brook was only a matter of a few yards. Pushing through the brush I would come to the stream and begin operations. The rubber knee-boots which I had brought along would be transferred to my legs in a few seconds, and I would fasten my line to the end of my cane pole and select a hook from a cap-box full in my pocket. The way I fished habitually for the noble and aristocratic *salmo fontinalis* would have made "a follower of the faithful" shudder. My fly-book, I am compelled to say apologetically, was simply a can of worms—just plain angle-worms. The trout in those brooks may or may not have been acquainted with the virtues of the various hackles, coachmen, millers, Seth Green, grizzly king, bucktail, and other arti-

ficial flies—they were a retiring, rural kind of fish, easily frightened, and yet hungry after a rain — but they certainly doted on fish-worms.

And with a red and circumlocutory fish-worm on my hook I seldom failed to lure the gaudily tinted trout from his most secret refuge among the rocks. The brook was full of bowlders, big and little, and the water was usually about a couple of feet deep. I fished downstream, and it was easy enough to get twenty fair-sized trout in a morning's fishing. Sometimes two good fish would be taken out of one pool.

There is nothing in out-door sport exactly like the rush, tug, and get-away of a lusty brook-trout. When he makes up his piscatorial mind that it is all right, he comes for the twisting angle-worm like a hornet for a small boy. He nails it, feels the barb, and the trouble is on. He instantly develops a wild yearning to climb trees, dig into the banks, split the bowlders, pull the brook up by the roots, spit out the hook, rasp the line to a frazzle on the rocks, bolt through submerged brush, and in numerous earnest ways

disconnect himself from the end of your line. It isn't one rush, but a dozen. He jumps out of the water, ties himself into a double bow-knot, unties himself, executes the grapevine twist, and goes down again. His aerial gyrations and subaqueous contortions are a combination of the movements of a dodging bat and a bucking broncho.

Keep a steady pressure on the line and don't give him even a quarter of an inch of slack. Of course, if you are fishing with a rod and reel of approved fashion, you can catch him in regulation style, which is probably a great balm to his feelings. It " gravels " a true *salmo fontinalis* to be hoisted out with a cane pole, without a reel, and all on account of a wriggling red fish-worm. To snake them out with a " come-all-ye," not playing them through a succession of mad rushes, but yanking them aloft by main strength, is considered extremely bad form by both the trout and the æsthetic angler.

The brook-trout's colors are superb when he first comes out of the water. A creel should be carried, partly filled with wet grass or leaves to lay the fish on. When a trout gets

dry he takes on a furniture-polish glaze that spoils his beauty. In the mountain-streams where I fished it was the rule to throw back all under six inches long. They ran from a third of a pound to nearly half a pound, and on rare occasions I got several half-pounders on one expedition. In a meadow reaching up and into an intervale lying close to the lower slopes of a New Hampshire mountain, I caught a brook-trout of a trifle over a pound, by tossing a grasshopper across an alder bush into the brook where he was lurking.

The scientific fisher with his "flies" can do great things in trout-fishing. It is not the barefoot boy "with cheeks of tan" and bent pin for hook who catches all the trout, excepting in the comic papers. One of these "scientific fellers" fished with me one day, and he caught trout right along. He would stand and whip a fly into the brook, maybe a half-dozen times in rapid succession, right under overhanging roots or projecting shelves of rock by the pools, and the first thing I would know some wily old half-pounder would come out with a rush and nab the fly. He certainly was a good fisherman. He told

me in strict confidence—and I repeat it in the same spirit—that long "casts" in trout-fishing were not winners, but that they were good for bass. In the north woods and in the mountains of the west they get trout with a bit of salt pork for bait, and grasshoppers are very attractive also to the speckled beauties. In fly-fishing there are the devotees of the long "cast" and of the short "cast," but the short "cast" is probably the best method in the small brooks. Real trout-anglers are apt to be "cranks" on the subject, and are especially intolerant of the bait-fishermen. They consider that any way except fly-fishing for brook-trout is as bad as dynamiting the fish.

Trout-fishing is a sport that takes you where Druids might worship. In the vaulted depths of the pine-woods there is a sense of immensity coupled with the titanic calm of the great hills beyond. You would not be surprised to see signs of the mastodons in those tremendous forest-arches. And the sound of winds in the tops of the trees seems as far away as the wash of surf on Atlantic coasts. It is ghostly and strange in the

depths of such retreats—primitive as creation, and lovely as the dawn. The air is scented with the tang and spice of pine and fir. The trailing arbutus with its delicate rose-colored bloom lends fragrance to wooded aisles, and wild red-raspberry vines cling to the rocky shelves beside it. The sun is shut from the brook by the tall green pillars of ten thousand pines. No tongue can tell, nor painter prove, how surpassingly beautiful are

"The hills, rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun;
The vales, stretching in pensive quietness between."

A MASQUE OF THE SEASONS

IN sheer midsummer the little lake in the woods where I used to fish is as variable as the winds that sweep across it. Walled in by the hills, it glooms or brightens under sun or shade, and glasses the floating clouds above it. Lying under the apple-trees in July days there is no need of books to while the hours away. The first striking characteristic of the season is a feeling of utter peace—tranquillity in a large sense of wide-vaulted blue skies, dark masses of distant woods, and the furled, yet glowing, banners of the sun.

Almost all the color-plan is green. The thick leaves of apple-trees, the fruit suspended from the boughs, the timothy, the stretch of waters below, the oaks at the foot of the hill, the grasses at the marsh's rim, the field-flung guidons of the corn, all are dressed in sum-

mer's garb, wind-varied shades and tints of emerald. The red clover and the white are lost in the maze, and only wild pinks and the "nigger-heads" at the meadow's edges can compel recognition. Even the creamy water-lilies are overwhelmed by great quantities of green pads, and shadowed by the grass and leaves that mark the shores where they dream.

The crow drifts over the woods, the red-tailed hawk circles high above the crow, and the buzzard blackens the spaces above where the hawk flies. There is little of bird-music save an occasional song-sparrow's sweet piping. Blue-jays scold and chase one another along the stubby brush by the lake, and a dandified kingfisher rattles by to perch on a stake in a shallow bay near at hand. In the orchard occasional shreds of breeze creep in and out of the leaves, mousing about and letting in the sunlight, and then they slip past, out and on to the corn beyond. Crickets creak in the grasses, and in the sun-throbbing waves of heat which seem to flutter on the hills there is a hint of the "chink" of importunate grasshoppers. Sometimes you

can hear the pioneer echo of an axe. It leaps across from a far-off slope with hollow sound, and you can picture the swaying, bending, crashing downfall of some sturdy oak or hickory as the measured echoes are carried past. Every hour is a dream, every dream a delight.

> For Summer's hand has rocked the world to sleep,
> And smoothed the wrinkles in her brow of care.

When lily-pads begin to darken and grow crisp, and waters change from green to amber and brown, the view from the hill is vastly different. Now oftener the ripples at the lake's edge are tipped with a feathery spume, beaten out by the flailing, restless winds. Hickories toss down yellow, irregularly shaped leaves, and oaks turn to red and brown and glaze smoothly under the glow of autumnal suns. Sumach flames from fence-corners and on the slopes, and the grass is rusty in spots and taking on a darker green. The wandering tern go back and forth along the lake-shore, tacking and veering on labored wing, and with their creaking cry sounding harshly above the bulrushes. The loon's black head appears on

the water and occasionally his mocking laughter sounds in the twilight.

Wild ducks go by, singly, in pairs, and in flocks, and down on the " points " and around sheltered coves the " decoys " of the hunters are bobbing up and down. Bluebills, ringbill, red-heads, butterballs, and occasionally a merganser, dip to the decoys and are met with a whizzing hail of shot. In the woods the fox-squirrel leaps nimbly along through the leaves, or swings in the top of some tall hickory. Hickory-nuts are ripening now, and the thick green hulls begin to split and discolor as a late October sun searches them out among the branches. Rabbits flit along the roadside as evening approaches, and doves and robins come past to roost in the swamp as the sun goes down. The colors are myriadfold now—red, green, yellow, brown, black, and gray.

There is a richness of tinting that tells of maturity where " the flying gold of the ruined woodlands drives through the air." The banners of the corn have shrivelled into rusty tatters, and golden-brown tassels peer out from crackling husks. A woodchuck stands by his

burrow, and notes the slant of the sun's rays, the rippling wash of waters by the lake, and the flight of wild-fowl. Breast-high the reeds swim, and the hills are bathed in molten light. There is a hint of even greater change in occasional tingling gusts that flatten the bulrushes to the water and go whistling up the slopes—a menace to all this color and life and glowing landscape. So drift the days, so runs the world away.

> While autumn, like a sweet-faced, holy nun,
> Shades with a trembling hand her sad brown eyes.

And as the bleak winds scatter drifted snow under the old apple-trees still another dream is spun from nature's loom. How still the lake is!—a shield of dazzling white with never a trace or sign of life above its barriers. Under the snow lies the armor of December, blue ice of sixteen inches, and below that the imprisoned waters, locked in the grasp of winter. Yet even now in the days when the sun shines bold and free there will be found color and form in the woods, by the fence-corners, and along the banks of the creek—blackened reeds, some vagrant leaves

with faint red splotches that have not yet turned to russet, and in the fields a redbird's wing painted among the drifted thickets. There never has been a wind too chill to drive the crow from the country, and an occasional blue-jay still braves wintry days in the woods.

In the lanes and along and across the roads and through the pastures and brush there are innumerable rabbit-tracks on the snow, the fresh ones clearly cut, the old tracks crumbling away in the light of the sun. So, too, in the heavier timber there are deep, rounded spots in the snow at regular intervals, that lead from tree to tree. These are where squirrels have jumped from one tree's base to another with a succession of long leaps.

The wily mink's "pad" is seen around the bridges across the streams, and sometimes the snow on the creek is brushed where the ruffed grouse has stood. Early in the morning, especially if snow has fallen the day before, the woods are marked in all directions with the traces of animals and birds that have set their sign-manuals on the glittering expanses among the trees. White and black are the

predominating colors now. Snow-flakes hang furrily from naked branches, and the trees stand sombre among drifted banks of dazzling brightness. The land is tranced in icy dreams. It is the stillness of death.

But when the days grow longer and the bitter, wandering winds lose their keen-searching qualities, the blossoming of earth's tenderest season comes. "Spring, with that nameless pathos in the air," is arriving already. The sap in the heart of the hickory and elm has stirred at the recurrence of softer lights and less harsh breezes. Again the roots of the grass unlock, like the fingers of an awakened sleeper, and under the melting snows the spirits of a thousand flowers are yearning for the light. The last year's nests in the hedges have lost their lonely look, for how swiftly shall the living green speed from thorn to thorn and all the land laugh into blossom. The kildee's piercing cry will sound above the pastures, and on the fence-stakes the bluebird will warble, first messenger and herald of March. A myriad of brooks flow tawny in the sunlight. The lake's broad shield shall crack and break and shiver into

smallest fragments, and these will melt rapidly and wash against foam-piled shores. The wings of scurrying wild-fowl cut swiftly across from cove to timber, and in long lines and ribbons about the sky, and the clang of Canada geese sounds harsh overhead.

And by the slope where apple-trees wait, a mist of filmy lace weaves along the dead leaves of a dead year, and the wing of a jaybird flaunts saucily in the empty branches. Surely in this season, of all others, nature has shadowed forth hope, and garbed her in many a color from the water's edge to the wood coverts. There is a hint of mouse-colored buddings on the willow twigs—catkins or "pussy-willows." There are green dottings along many a branch, and the snows have melted and gone. The rabbit—a gray ghost now—ambles haltingly along dim orchard spaces. The flicker's golden wing flashes across and the sober brown of a robin's pinion follows. There is a breath of freshness that ripples in the sunshine and dances in the winds and waters. And the elusive spirit of April, with many a blossom in her hair, leads onward through meadow

and thicket, past stream and by sleeping pools, till one might say with Æglamour:

"Here she was wont to go; and here, and here,
Just where these daisies, pinks, and violets grow,
The world may find the Spring by following her,
For other print her airy steps ne'er left;
Her treading would not bend a blade of grass
Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk;
But like the soft west wind she shot along
And where she went the flowers took thickest root,
As she had sowed them with her odorous foot."

WOODCHUCKS

IF you happen to be walking along the slopes around any of the northern or eastern lakes or ponds, you may come across a large hole in the ground. Or there may be two holes. It looks like the burrow of some animal, and possibly it is located close to a stump of a tree. Or you may come across such a hiding-place in a coign of the woods not far from the water's edge. And in pastures that are rolling and high, there are found the same kind of burrows. These are the chosen abodes of the woodchuck, sometimes called the ground-hog, famous for his prognostications as to the weather.

He lives in these holes, and forages from field to field in an unassuming effort to gain an honest living. He has not a single friend on earth, and his countenance is a melancholy and serious one. Life for him is a constant menace, for the hand of man and boy is against him, and the teeth of dogs are ever ready to close on his hide. The hawk which

soars in even circles high above him he does not fear, for he is too heavy to be carried off as its prey. The big white owl he is not afraid of for the same reason. Nor does he fear dogs very much.

It takes a good dog to kill a full-grown woodchuck, for the beast will fight desperately when cornered, and is so tough and tenacious of life that he will take a deal of killing before he is really dead. Sometimes it is a drawn battle between him and his canine enemy, each combatant being quite willing to creep off, with various deep bites and scratches to remind him of the fray. And yet the woodchuck, despite his rather formidable appearance, is the most peaceful of animals. He prefers very much the solitude of nature and the beauties of field, wood, and lake to a duel with the dogs. He is a quiet citizen of hill-sides and pastures, and were it not for man and man's prowling and aggressive companion, the dog, his days would flow along as smoothly as the sun slides into the west, when twilight darkens down the shadowy ways and beckons to night with a veiled and mystic gesture.

The woodchuck is long, large, heavy, and hairy. He is neither hog, dog, nor rabbit, yet having some characteristics of each. A large one will measure nearly two feet in length, with brownish and grayish tints on his upper fur, and brown and red coloring on his belly. He will eat gormandizingly like a hog, he will fight viciously like a dog, and he burrows like a rabbit in the hill-sides of the northern counties of the state. He lives almost entirely on vegetables, but I have heard farmers accuse him of carrying away young chickens when the vegetable supply ran short.

Fortunately for him, he hibernates in the winter, and when the jay and crow are flying about for something to eat, and the rabbit and ruffed grouse are picking up a precarious living from the drifted woodland ways, the woodchuck is comfortably asleep in his warm burrow. He is curled up in there like a bear, and not till spring will he come out to forage for an existence, save on the historical 2d of February, when he emerges to decide the momentous question of what the weather will be for the next six weeks.

In the late summer days and early fall the

woodchuck may be seen, a hairy philosopher of the woods, sitting on top of his burrow or on top of some stump close by, enjoying his favorite occupation of sunning himself and ruminating on the perfidy of man. Motionless as a monument, and yet warily observant of his surroundings, he will sit in this way for hours at a time. It is believed by many people that the woodchuck really enjoys the pleasures of woodland meditation. The soft winds go by and the sun slants lingeringly along the broad slopes about his home. Swallows swing gracefully above the apple-trees on the hill, and from a barkless limb comes down the tattoo of the red-headed woodpecker. Doves go past, swift as light, their lead-colored wings striking sharply across the treetops. The waters of the lake drift idly in and as lazily recede. The summer dreams and dozes, and clouds of whitest fleece lie furled in upper harbors of bluest ether. And the brown stoic of the fields looks out over all the peace and beauty of this landscape, and wonders why man was made to interrupt the thread of his musings, and waylay him with rifle and shot-gun,

or bring savage dogs to rend him limb from limb.

One of the troubles the woodchuck gets into is with the early boy—the boy of fourteen years or thereabout. This youth will cheerfully study and plan for a month to catch any particular woodchuck on the farm. The "chuck" is his sworn prey, and when such a boy has fully determined to get one, the "chuck" might as well take his belongings and depart for another locality. If the burrow is near a lake or anywhere close to water the boy will lug bucketful after bucketful of water to the hole and drown the prophet out. He will set traps for him—"dead-fall," steel trap, or box-trap—and if all these arts avail not he will sit as patiently as an Indian for hours near the hole. In his hands he will have the family howitzer—a bored-out musket or a single-barrelled shotgun — and when the woodchuck stealthily creeps out he will be saluted with a deafening roar of artillery, and a handful of good-sized shot will come straight for his devoted carcass.

Shooting woodchucks with a rifle is quite

exciting sport, for very choice stalking is often required to get within shooting distance of the game. A woodchuck can be seen a long way off, and he can see a man about twice as far away as a man can see him; so that even in a region where they are fairly plentiful there is no certainty of getting a shot at one. One of the best ways to assassinate one of them is to get acquainted with him and learn something about his daily walks in life. He is sure to be somewhat methodical in his mode of living, and will appear quite regularly at the door of his home from day to day. He is only able to face one way, but his powers of hearing are remarkably developed.

But with a rifle of large calibre — one which will do execution at five hundred yards —a woodchuck can easily be killed by a good marksman. However, a woodchuck at five hundred yards is a very easy object to miss. The rifle-shot of the galleries who is used to the level shooting at targets, will find himself very much at sea when shooting in the open. So I would advise the ordinarily good shot to creep up as near as possible before turn-

ing loose. It is a regrettable occurrence, of course, for one to crawl about a quarter of a mile through dusty surroundings in order to gain a point of vantage, and on peering out to discover that his fat friend has taken the alarm and is now in the safety-deposit vaults some twenty feet underground. But maybe you arched your back a trifle when you were edging through the timothy, or perhaps you moved the top rail of that fence you wormed through. Sit down and think it over. The woodchuck is gone and will not show his nose until to-morrow, likely.

A " chuck " is not good to eat, and his hide is only good to make whip-lashes of, so far as my experience goes. But they say that, along with the rabbits, he gnaws the apple-trees, and eats the turnips, and generally makes himself obnoxious. And so, like the Indian, he has to go. In some localities a price is on his head, and wherever that is the case he is, indeed, in a hard row of stumps. But much persecution makes him all the warier, and there are neighborhoods where the same old woodchuck haunts a hill-side year after year with a pertinacity and a cunning

which certainly call for some degree of admiration.

In the pictures of out-doors he is one of the quaintest of objects—harmless, meditative, and grave as Solomon himself. He is of no particular use, it may be cheerfully admitted, but he is certainly picturesque from any point of view. In the spring, the summer, and the fall he takes his stand by the side of his burrow or on a stump, and, all statuelike, devotes himself strictly to his passion of contemplative musing.

When squatted on his burrow in the fall, he hears the guns of the hunters on the points where the "decoys" are floating, and sees the lines of wild-fowl turn and scatter at the sound. The cat-tails by the bridge have turned sere and brown then, and the sun shines with a more steady and persistent glow on slope and pasture. The buzzard swims in the blue like a black frigate on far-away seas. Cattle graze at the edges of meadows, and the fox-squirrel is preparing his winter store. All day the winds are active and hickory-nuts come rattling to the ground, and yet the woodchuck has no

need to take heed for the future. When the cold winds come, and the surface of the lake is shining emerald and the land is wrapped in white blankets of finest snows he will be in the Land of Nod, dreaming of days when no blight is on the earth and there is no lack of leaf and blossom. And so, careless of the dying year, and knowing only of sun and shower, bud, flower, and waving grass, the woodchuck poises by his burrow; a graven monk whose winter of discontent never comes; but who loses sight of the last blade of grass that October's banners flourish, as he descends into his earthy cloister for the winter, to find it again in the rumpled, tossing tresses of the spring, as his brown muzzle reconnoitres, for the first time in the new year, the old remembered landscapes.

FROG-HUNTING

THE bull-frog and the meadow-frog have a hard time of it. They are pursued and persecuted by various enemies. The snake family are partial to frogs, and the subtle raccoon is also a frog-eater who gathers in the nimble batrachians and places them where they will do him the most good. Boys, dogs, and men complete the list of the frog's destroyers.

"Say, have fiends in shape of boys,
With wild halloo and dreadful noise,
Hunted thee from marshy joys,
With a dog,
Expiring frog?"

The reason for the capture of these solemn-voiced croakers is that their hind legs, or "saddles," as they are called, are particularly delicious to eat. Broiled frog-saddles are much more delicate and toothsome than the most carefully selected spring chicken.

Frogs are found in the marshes and lakes

and in ponds and wet, boggy meadows. Sometimes they are caught on a hook by fishing for them with a piece of red flannel, which excites their wrath when it is waved before their noses. The adage regarding "a red rag to a bull" seems to hold good in the case of a bull-frog. But the two most common ways by which the hunters take the frogs for the market are by spearing and shooting. Spearing frogs is an art, and is practised in the marshes and around the shallow shores of the lakes, where frogs are plentiful. The hunter must necessarily be a light-weight man, or a boy, considering the craft he employs in the business. This is a canoe or the smallest or lightest possible duck-boat, pointed at both ends, and able to run smoothly in a few inches of water. A double-bladed paddle is dipped into the water from side to side, and the little boat glides over the surface as smoothly as a water-bug.

The hunter sits in the centre of the boat and conducts operations from the right side. He has a small box in front of him and a short, sharp-bladed knife lying on the box. This knife is used to cut off the saddles as the

frogs are brought into the boat. The spear used by the hunter is very light and with a shaft fully eighteen feet long. At one end of the shaft is fixed the spear, which has three small barbs, each with an arrow-shaped head, which prevents the frog from slipping off when transfixed. The shaft or pole of the spear is usually of pine, sometimes of cane, and is absolutely straight and symmetrical. It is balanced with the fingers and thumb of the left hand and propelled by the fingers and thumb of the right hand. The spear slides along the left hand without leaving the hand, and can be drawn back readily by that hand after the throw is made. The boat is sent noiselessly along the shallow stretches of water by light dips of the paddle, and as the hunter nears where the frog is floating in the water he stops the boat with a turn of the paddle. The spear is then raised, adjusted, and literally sighted at the frog.

The stupid quarry is meanwhile looking "all eyes" at the hunter. Nothing but the top of his head showing above the water denotes that a frog is floating there. The spear is darted toward and under the frog with a

" whish " as it slides along the fingers and thumb of the left hand. It strikes the water with a sound like " chuck," transfixing the frog's body, and is then brought back quickly by the left and right hands until the frog is just over the box in the boat. A swift stroke of the knife and the " saddle " is severed and is in the box. The hunter may have seen two or three frogs quite close together, and if he is an adept with the spear he will harvest them all, one after another, without their taking alarm. The best of tools and the lightest of boats is required, and the hunter must have had years of experience to be able to handle the long, light spear with accuracy and comparative silence. Splashing will spoil everything. Frogs are not speared excepting while they are in the water, and a skilful hunter can pick up five or six dozen frogs in a day easily when they are at all numerous.

Skill with the spear and paddle and a knowledge where the best places are for the game are the requisites for success. A " crackerjack " with the spear will get a frog ninety-nine times out of a hundred. The frogs lie about in the very shallow water, and

the coming in of a light boat does not seem to alarm them. Frog-legs are sold in the market according to size and by the dozen.

Shooting frogs is quite another matter, and requires skill with the rifle and patience in stalking. The bull-frog on the bank is quite a different party from the bull-frog in the pool, and he views with the utmost suspicion any attempt to cultivate his acquaintance. When alarmed he will launch out into space and dive down into the water with a more or less resounding "plunk," according to his size. He is morbidly alert to approaching footsteps, and is willing to vacate a nice cool spot on the edge of a pond or lake at any time when he hears a man or boy approaching, so that stalking him successfully requires a keen eye and some knowledge of the wily frog. Just as his stupidity in the water is apparent, so is his sagacity on land patent to his foes. Sometimes there will be a dozen frogs squatted along one little stretch beside a pond, and usually as one leaps into the water the rest follow, one after another, with hollow "plunks," until the shore is bare.

To shoot them before they jump is the

trick, and to do this from the bank requires a cautious approach. They should be shot through the head, as they are extremely tenacious of life, and often jump into the water and sink if shot through the body. The best way to get them with a rifle is to shoot them from the water, wading along at the edge of the shore, a little ways out, and shooting them as they sit on the bank. A twenty-two-calibre rifle is amply large enough for this kind of shooting, and short twenty-twos or even the half-size bulleted caps can be used. A man should have rubber knee-boots or hip-boots for this kind of wading and must move slowly in the water, keeping a sharp lookout for his game. In the spring and summer days frog shooting is a sport which will afford considerable amusement, besides giving practice with the rifle and the opportunity to loaf in the midst of pleasant surroundings.

At the lake's edge the kingfisher patrols, now clattering along over the bulrushes, and now perching on a dead limb, or a stake by the water. The hill-side oaks throw a veil of shadows to the ripples and an occasional

splash tells where a black bass leaped for a roving dragon-fly. The surface of the lake, alternately smoothed and ruffled by winds and flecked by sun and shade, is an ever-changing picture, framed by the massive hills. The creak of a rowlock announces a passing boat, and a lazy buzzard draws inky circles high up in the blue. The sun shines in drowsy meadows where katydids cling to the grasses, and down in the woods the spirit of slumber folds idle hands and dreams the long day through.

If you want frogs for bait — and what more tempting bait can be offered to a big-mouthed bass?—you must take them alive. This will require a small linen sack and the "know how" of live-frog catching. Meadow-frogs are your game now, and you will find them in little boggy, damp spots on the hill-side, or deep in the woods in grassy "sloughs" that lie in the timber. There you will find the meadow-frogs ready to be caught. They can jump about seven feet at a clip, and to catch them by hand requires an eye for distance and some practice. It is pretty good fun surrounding a lusty meadow-

frog in tall grass and trying to grab him between jumps.

These frogs make excellent bait for bigmouth bass, and if the linen sack is kept wet, they will live and be lively for several days. The bull-frog is not good bait, being too large to be engulfed, and too heavy to cast successfully, when at his full growth.

It is a pity to shoot and spear the true bull-frogs, for their sombre bellowing in the evening is one of the oddest sounds in nature. When the dusk threads of twilight are woven in with the afterglow of the west, the bull-frogs sound sonorous chords, which reverberate along and over the reeds and rushes, far-reaching down the night. Long ago, they say, when Pan was driven from the marshes, he called the frogs to him. They were his favorites,

"And all around him on the wet,
Cool earth the frogs came up, and, with a smile,
He took them in his hairy hands and set
His mouth to theirs awhile,

"And blew into their velvet throats;
And ever from that hour the frogs repeat
The murmur of Pan's pipes; the notes
And answers strange and sweet."

THE CROW'S WING

FROM the Gulf to the Great Lakes, from California's Golden Gate on the west to Far Rockaway on the east, a broad and sable wing beats the air. In sun and shine, through rain, hail, or sleet, long lines of black at the coming of twilight mark the airy, distant trails where the crow flies. The ebon pinions of his Ishmaelitish clan darken the skies in most states of the Union. He is himself an undaunted robber and pirate, with the black-flag always flying and a harsh challenge of sombre note that menaces and beats back the fates. Every bird's beak is against him, and he is at war with the rest of the feathered tribes. Not in all of my out-door life have I ever noticed sociability on the part of the crow toward other birds. He often robs their nests and kills their young. When the kingbird, or bee-martin, as he is sometimes called, attacks the crow, that hardy freebooter spreads wing and is

away, scarcely noticing the assaults of his bold little tormentor. But when a hawk or an eagle appears on the scene, the crow himself becomes the aggressor, and he follows the larger bird pertinaciously, plucking out a feather now and then, and driving his enemy down wind with resistless energy.

The hand of man is against him everywhere, and well might it be.

The crow descends on the fields in countless numbers, and as he must and will live, however scanty the fare, his philosophy is that of the conscienceless forager. He regulates his conduct by "the good old rule, the simple plan, that they shall take who have the power, and they shall keep who can." In cornfields, orchards, and in meadows he gleans with a sharp bill whatever may be found. He does not hesitate to attack young chickens and rabbits, and even puny lambs, when reduced to dire need. The world owes him a living, according to his code, and he collects it in person.

His is the most familiar figure in bird life, because the most universal. His plumage is coal black, but on the back and at the base of

the wings and neck there is a purplish gloss which is very noticeable, especially on the younger birds. His eyes are brown, very bright, and more than usually intelligent. From the tip of his strong bill to the end of his tail a full-grown crow will measure close to nineteen inches in length. His wings are broad and strong, and are remarkable for their power of sustained and unflagging flight. Crows build their nests in the timber, rough-lined and coarse ones of sticks, and the she-bird lays from three to six eggs. These nests are in the tall trees as a rule, and sometimes many of them are close together. Carrion, crawfish, frogs, apples, corn, meat —almost anything he can get his thievish claws on he will devour. And if necessary, he will go hunting in the pastures for bugs, worms, insects, field-mice, or even young rabbits. All he asks is an opportunity to forage. There is no craven cowardice in his defiant "caw, caw," and if winged by the hunter's fire he will turn his shining dark eyes courageously toward his arch-enemy—man—and fight with wing, beak, and claw to the very last.

Of the crow's flight much could be written.

> Curving sweep of a burnished wing,
> Black as the gloom of a winter night;
> Strong in a sense of hardy flight
> Over the woods and the mountain height,
> Winds and the white moon following.

Along the larger rivers crows gather in many thousands, and when twilight comes stealing on, and the silvery sickle of the new moon is etched pale against the curtains of night, they go by in long lines and companies to their distant roosts in some far-away forest. They fly high as a rule, and for hours their steady travel blots the red glare of the sinking sun and throws sombre streaks athwart the leaden tapestry of shadows that follow. You will wonder where they all come from, where they are all going, and how they manage to exist. If all mankind were as stout-hearted as these vandals of the waste places and pathless highways, what a race we would be! The crow is truly a survival of the fittest, if endurance and sagacity be a test. Some of them live to be eighty or one hundred years old. Little, indeed, do those resolute pinions care for

rain, hail, or sleet, the rattle of menacing thunder, the lightning's crooked darts, or the roar of gathering tempests. "As the crow flies" has become a proverb for directness of flight, for the nearest line between two distant points. His awkward sweep of wing will carry him along without apparent effort at a rate of from forty to fifty miles an hour, and in staying powers there are few birds which can match prowess with the crow.

His song is not a varied one. The querulous, inquisitive "caw, caw" that he sends out is loud and curt, and carries with it an apprehensive tone, as though he would like to hear a responsive and assuring cry from one of his own kind. For with bullet, trap, and shot-gun he is remorselessly sought, and as he is more and more hunted he grows exceedingly cunning, and his habits of retiring modesty become almost a mania with him. About long rifle-range is as near as he is comfortable with a man in the average neighborhood. Where a person is in a buggy or wagon the crow, like many other birds, does not get so suspicious of the occupants of the vehicle as he would be of a pedestrian. And

yet if a man sets out deliberately to hunt them day in and day out for any length of time, on horseback or from a rig, they will soon get the drift of his scheme and refuse to be gulled. In only two states that I know of are the crows mentioned in the game-laws, and there they are named only as not being protected. In many parts of the country there is a bounty for them the year round.

From two to five cents a head is paid for them in various sections of the states. The boys and men of these particular localities hunt them perseveringly. I hunted crows with a double-barrelled shot-gun one summer, with very fair success. The birds frequented old orchards a good deal, which were usually inclosed by stone walls from three to four feet high. I used to prowl around until I saw a crow keeping a sharp lookout from the top of an apple-tree. This bird was the temporary chairman of the meeting of the crows, a sort of "sentinel-am-I" crow. After he had been up in the tree for a few minutes he would fly down, and presently another bird would fly up and take his place. In this short interval between guard-duty I

would make a run and crouch behind the stone wall nearest me. It then became a cautious stalk to get within range, by running a little way each time the guard-mount was shifted. It worked to a charm for some time. I would approach within twenty or thirty yards of them, and when a lone sentinel flew down after I had crept within range I would get in one barrel at the bunch on the ground and another shot as the survivors rose. I averaged at least three crows to each double discharge. Of course it was "pot-hunting," but I considered the crows as "vermin," and shot them "on the wing, on the head, on the tail—anywhere."

It was very exciting stalking for a while, but they stopped it by a simple method of bird-reasoning. The sentinel-crow finally got to waiting until his "relief" flew up into the tree before he flew down to join the gang in the orchard. With a "lookout" always in the tree my occupation as a crow-hunter was gone. I could not begin to get within shot-gun range of them. The minute I tried to make a sneak on them the alarm was given, and away they went to some other part of

the township. I killed a few with a rifle after that, but not many.

Since then I have not done any steady crow-hunting. They fly over in the spring and fall when a man is in the " blinds " hunting ducks over the decoys, and sometimes I take a crack at one, but not so often as I used to. They do say—some of the wise ones—that he is a great friend of the farmer. I don't think so. But for his pertinacity, sense, love of freedom, strength of flight, and honorable suit of black I nevertheless salute him, and respect the best of what he stands for.

Send my soul on a sable wing,
Death, when the darkness falls on me;
Let me wander by land and sea
Free as the crow's flight; yea, as free—
Winds and the white moon following.

PRAIRIE-CHICKEN SHOOTING

IN many of the states where prairie-chickens were formerly found in the prairies, there is now comparatively little of that kind of cover left for the birds. Agriculture has made farms of the wide-rolling savannas, and these grouse nest in the " slues " and meadows and feed in the stubbles and cornfields. In the far western and northwestern states there are still prairies left, but much of this kind of hunting is done nowadays on oats and wheat stubbles, in cornfields, and in " slues " adjoining marshes.

The pinnated grouse is a splendid and hardy bird, standing as high as the ordinary good-sized barn-yard fowl, and weighing, when full-grown, from three and one-half to four and one-half pounds. He is of a brownish color variegated with gray, lighter on the breast and speckled, and with rich, dark streaks of coloring on the back. His

head has a partial crest, and there are two little tufts of feathers on the neck. The tail is broad, and the legs are fairly well feathered. He is capable of enduring a great deal of cold weather, and will manage to pick up a living in the fields, hedges, and orchards in severe winters when quail freeze. He will feed on grain, insects, bugs, and possibly even buds, as the ruffed grouse does, when hard pressed for food. He understands the value of timber as a shelter during cold weather, and will fly a long way to get there from the piercing winds of the prairies during winter months. He is a handsome bird, and lies well to the dogs. The coveys run from eight to a dozen, fifteen, or twenty-five birds. Years ago the coveys, or aggregations of coveys, called " packs," made flocks of hundreds no rare sight.

The flight of the prairie-chicken is rather peculiar in the beginning. When the bird is first flushed he rises with a rocking, cradle-like motion, his wings beating the air strongly. He presently steadies down to an even, sailing movement, broken at short intervals by a whirring of broad, strong pin-

ions. Long ago, when prairie-chickens were not hunted so much, and there was more prairie, the birds would fly a short distance when disturbed and settle in the grass again. But now they fly from a half-mile to a mile or even farther, in localities where they are most hunted. They are not hard birds to hit on the wing, but the old ones can carry away quite a grist of shot, so that a man must hit them hard to kill them cleanly.

The main precaution in shooting chickens is to take time when the birds rise, and not shoot too quickly. They don't fly swiftly like a quail, or make erratic twists, as a jack-snipe does, and you will have plenty of time to get in both barrels at a single bird, or make " doubles " when the coveys get up, if you don't spoil things by firing too soon. It is a rare thing to have an entire covey of chickens rise at once. Sometimes the main bunch rises and then a few scattering ones follow. Sometimes all but one fly at the first alarm, and occasionally a stray bird flies up, followed by the rest of the covey, except the one which usually waits until the rest have gone. This is a peculiarity of the pinnated

grouse. There is nearly always one bird which waits until the covey has flown before it gets up out of the cover. And so it pays to hunt around when a covey has flown, in search of this laggard bird before going on.

It is very laborious and difficult work hunting chickens without a dog, especially in September, when the birds are young and loath to fly, and the cover is thick. Chickens will skulk and hide and squat in the grass or stubble and let you pass within a few feet of them without their rising. A well-broken dog, or even two dogs, must necessarily be taken along. And a crippled prairie-chicken can dodge along in the cover and sneak away through corn-rows in a manner to defy anything but a good dog. When a covey scatters in corn and high grass or weeds a dog can locate them one by one, and it is no trick at all to bring them down in the open. In tall grass it is not so easy. You are obliged to shoot quickly then, and the waving blades of corn on a windy day are not easy to see through. But in stubble, or on the prairies, a September chicken at from twenty to forty yards is an easy mark.

They feed in the stubble in the morning and in the evening, and generally take to the cornfields in the middle of the day. They lie in the shade there or roll around in the cool dirt to rid themselves of vermin. It is hot work forcing one's self through the heavy green corn in September weather, and without a dog a man would be almost helpless. Even with the dog along the chickens will sometimes play " hide-and-seek " through the corn and elude the dog in many ways. They will run from the dog and not lie so that he can point them always. If there are weeds in the corn they will hide there and the shooting will be improved. The present generation of pinnated grouse nearly all dive into the fields after being flushed from the stubble, and you have to push right in there and " dig them out " to get any shooting. The only sensible way to hunt chickens is to have a rig which will carry yourself and partner, the driver, the lunch, and the dogs. Take feed for the horses and water for the dogs. In this way you can be driven from one place to another and cover a vast deal of territory in a day. You will find that you will have

to do that to get any shooting worth mentioning. As the birds sometimes fly a mile, it is handy to have the team pick you up to get to them again without walking yourself into a state of combustion to reach them.

The gun for shooting chickens should be a twelve-gauge gun, modified choke in the right-hand barrel and full-choke in the left-hand barrel. A six-and-a-half- to a seven-and-a-half-pound gun is heavy enough. A pair of heavy stubble boots is an advantage in walking, and stout duck hunting-trousers and coat will keep you dry while tramping through the wet weeds, grass, and stubble, not to mention the corn. If you don't wear stubble boots have a pair of strong and thick duck leggings to wear over your trousers. The best way is for two men to go together, beating the cover about twenty-five yards apart. They can then command close to one hundred and fifty yards of space with the two guns as to width, and, say, forty to sixty-five yards ahead. This will give the chickens a good opportunity to get in the way of the shot, and as for the bird that gets up within the inner circle between the men,

he is as good as dead, unless the hunters are "duffers."

When a bird gets up in front of a man that is his shot. If it gets up between the men, the man who has invited his friend out to shoot will give him the shot. And the friend will insist on the inviter taking the next shot of the kind when the dog makes a point of that character. Should a covey rise, each man will pick outside birds to prevent both shooting at the same birds. It is perfectly allowable for a man to fire at a bird his companion has missed with both barrels, and to fire at either bird of "a double" which his companion has missed. But if a man has missed his first shot of a double rise and follows the bird shot at with the evident intention to get his second barrel in at the same bird, then his companion can shoot at the other bird of the double. Two men who have hunted together never have any difficulty about whose shot it is, or who should take any particular shot. It is always as much pleasure to see a friend make "a double" as it is to make the shots yourself—oftentimes more.

In shots that go straight away hold so that the gun is level with the chicken's back, if the bird is sailing. If he is rising, hold a trifle above him. If a quartering shot, hold a few inches ahead of him, keeping the muzzle of the gun moving as you pull the trigger. If the shot is a cross-shot, and a long one, hold farther ahead. Just how far depends on the speed the bird is going, the velocity of the wind, how high he is, how far away he is, and other things. Number seven or eight shot is heavy enough for September birds, although some of the shooters stick to number six shot for both barrels.

Take some dry hay along and draw your birds as soon as they are shot. Stuff them with the hay, and as soon as practicable get them to the wagon and keep them in the shade. When you get to your hotel or stopping-place have them hung in a cool spot and dry until you go home. If you are going to stay out for several days "draw" and stuff the birds and then express them to your friends. Never kill over twelve birds in a day. A man cannot comfortably carry more than a dozen birds, and should not shoot more than he can carry.

A FOX IN THE MERAMEC VALLEY

THE Meramec river flows down through the Missouri hills with a rush, speeding its way to the Mississippi with the ardor of a courier carrying a reprieve. It is deep in places, and at a few fords shallow, with a world of music where its current babbles over the bars. It has a distinct individuality among rivers, a sort of turbulent energy, as though disdainful of all the restraining influences of man. A wild river always, seldom bringing with it any of those peaceful, slumbrous influences so common to the lowland streams. Even where the land slopes to the lesser levels the Meramec shakes the ripples that crown it, like the mane of an unruly colt, and leaps forward, as if anxious to gain the sheltering shadows of the hills. It is the type of restlessness, of

strength, and of activity. Like a lithe and sinewy Indian runner, it stretches out for its race to the sea, and night and day, with unswerving patience, it holds to the appointed course. Around it rise the timber-covered ridges of the south-west, studded thick with hickory, oak, butternut, elm, sycamore, ash, and other trees. Above it, in the autumn days, shines the sun from the bluest of semi-tropic skies.

Along these hills a hard-riding, hospitable class of farmers live, and they ride to hounds as their fathers did before them. To them the life of a fox is sacred, except as caught by the hounds and killed in honorable battle. Their dogs are pedigreed and carefully bred, and their lineage is proudly preserved both in traditional and in book form. The horses they use for the chase are not condemned to the servile toil of the plough, but are only taken for saddle uses, chief of which are the fox-chases along the hills. In their homes is still preserved that genuine, hearty hospitality which includes friend or stranger, and is the delight and wonder of those not to the manner born—a kindliness and simplicity of

speech and deed which tells of real nobility of character, unspoiled and still unspotted by the world.

In the late October or early November days a man can lie on one of these slumbering hills and dream away the time, wrapped in an Indian-summer haze which envelops the land in a mantle of surpassing beauty. And if he is fortunate enough to be near by to a fox-chase he will have a variety of music and color and conjecture to keep all his senses keenly alive for hours. They hunt the fox along the bluffs, and even down into the thickets and woods which stand on the steep banks below. Bold riders they certainly are, taking risks which would appall the ordinary sportsman. And on such a day, and with such an opportunity, I once whiled away a long October afternoon among the Meramec hills.

The river wound past amid tall and abrupt rises, dense timber covering each bank, with the autumn sun streaming down on its current as it went by. Where the light had full sweep on the water a flood of molten gold glittered, and where the leaves beat back the

sun a wall of shadows brooded. On the slopes the sumach blazed, the wine of all the seasons red-gleaming in its clusters, and below, the severe gray of faded thistle-stalks lent an ascetic contrast. Sometimes the shadow of a hawk's wing etched a floating picture on the grass, and occasionally a blue-jay's bright pinion lit up a patch of sombre shrubbery as a blue flame will shine in a darkened chamber. The woodland road lay breathless and dusty far below, and in dense thickets the earth's pulsations heaved softly or were still. In drowsy spaces along the hills a soft wind drifted in and out, and the leaves rose and fell as the breeze lifted or sank, and a smell of burned vines and of ripening nuts was in the air.

Suddenly there came from a distance the bay of a hound — "Woo - oo, woo - oop, woop!" It was in the indicative mood. It conveyed the idea of a discovery. The sound came nearer, and over a hill, opposite, passed a silhouette of a dog, his nose to the ground, his whole attention directed to the trail. After him came others, and soon a livelier and more eager chorus began as the trail became

warmer. "Boo-oo-oo-woo-Boo-oop," swelled the burst of dog-music.

"My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung,
With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed and dew-lapped, like Thessalian bulls.
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
Each under each."

The echoes weave in and out of the trees, and that fox is certainly somewhere directly across the river—stealing sinuously among those russet thickets, doubtless, and probably calculating to a nicety where the dogs will be at fault; for there is a small creek that runs into the river at this point, a mere brook, in fact, and it will not be presumed that Reynard has not taken advantage of this. He has run half-way across a log spanning it, and then turned and jumped back to the same bank from which he mounted the log. He has wet his feet in the water and run along in the shallow edges of the stream for a few yards. Then he has jumped on a leaning tree which half crosses the narrow current, and from there he has jumped into the water

on the opposite side, and waded along for a while before going up on the bank. What a sly look he wears on his crafty countenance as he goes into the brush!

Up on the hills, back in the fields and lanes he has been leading the dogs a merry chase for some time. He has run over ploughed ground where the scent is hard to carry, and he has taken a whirl through a flock of sheep to throw the dogs from the trail. Along a rocky hill-side, where the winds have swept the stones bare, he has trotted, and on several occasions he has mounted fences and sprung wide from them, leaving the wisest of the pack in perplexity for a while. All the tricks and capers that his wily nature is susceptible of he has played, and still the pack clings to the trail, loses it, regains it, and the chorus of their baying comes by on the wings of the autumn wind.

There is that in the intonation of a dog's cries that tells the story of the chase. What an eagerly voiced cry rolls out as the reeking scent comes fresh upon his nostrils! Then swells the sound of triumph, the exultant baying which foretells the approaching " death."

But what a disappointed, mournful cry wells up when the scent stops, and the baffled hound comes to a pause. How complainingly he starts again, the reproachful tone of his music drifting along the hills. And when he is running free, with the trail neither hot nor cold, there is a businesslike twang to his baying, as if he were keeping the finer points of his music for the more exciting phases of the chase. Then there are the shorter barks of the puppies, sanguine, saucy notes, with a tenor ring in them. At times there is a mingled uplifting of many bayings, as if there were a canine council of ways and means, with no moderator present. Then will come the dying away of most of the clamor and the grumbling bass of some old hound as he takes up the puzzling trail once more.

The trail leads over the top of the bluffs, and presently all noise of the chase is gone. A pair of gossiping red-headed woodpeckers swing up to a dead sycamore's trunk and quarrel petulantly, with short flights to other trees and back again. A solitary nuthatch dips, ducks, bobs, and hops about the green

girth of an old elm, and a buzzard sails over like a loosened thunder-cloud. Sumachs burn steadily on the hill-side, and along the lonely road a farmer's wagon rattles past. The scent of many woodland perfumes, scattered from October's censer, swung by the restless breeze, swims through the forest-aisles and settles on the flaming leaves that splotch the tawny earth. On the river the light descends like a yellow leaf from above.

Now a new tumult sounds from the edge of the bluffs farther on, a horseman appears sharply outlined against the sky, and a hurtling group of dogs sprawl down the slope. Again the cries of the hounds throng in the woods, rising and falling—" Boo-Roop, Boo-oo-oo woorp, Woo-oo-oo-oop! " The crash of a horse's hoofs resounds through the woods, and there are calls from above, where other riders assemble. The line of dogs spreads over the hill, ascends and swings down the slope, and finally goes out and on over the bluffs to the fields again. And now once more the golden dreams of autumn set sail from violet skies. Again a velvet veil of utter languor falls, mistlike, from the

clouds and all is silence, shot through with myrrh and spice of wind-swept woods.

The noise dies out, and wood-birds call
From quiet, leafy coverts dim,
And acorns, from the oak-trees tall,
Drop, plummetlike, from topmost limb.
All now is hushed, sweet silence reigns,
And yet an echo seems to say,
Soft whispering through the fields and lanes,
Gone away, away, gone away.

FALL JACK-SNIPE SHOOTING

TO many hunters the sport of jack-snipe shooting is the finest of all field shooting. There are men who have hunted the tiger in Ceylon, the elephant in Africa, and moose, elk, grizzly-bear, and antelope in America, who avow their preference for wild-fowl shooting over any other sport, and principally for snipe shooting at its best. It is a separate and distinct kind of shooting, and in the middle western states it is best in the spring, although in the fall the opportunity for using a dog is better. The jack-snipe has what is termed a " cold scent," as distinguished from quail and other upland birds whose scent is much stronger and easier to catch by the dog. In the spring the snipe find cover in shorter grass and reeds, as a rule, than they frequent in the fall, and do not lie so close as the autumn birds do. In both seasons they are hunted in the middle,

northern, and eastern states, and in the south in the winter; and thousands are killed every year.

The jack-snipe is a most aristocratic and handsome bird. He is about ten or eleven inches long, and his wings will measure close to twenty inches when spread. His back is dark, almost black, intermingled with tawny streaks, while his breast and sides are lighter, the sides being light brown with darker specks until the belly is reached, and that is white. The tail is barred beautifully, and when the bird stretches it, as he sometimes does when he is shot and falls to the ground, it shows in a fan shape, something like a ruffed grouse's tail when it, too, spreads its tail in the death-agony. The jack-snipe is built on race-horse lines, for speed and agility. He is as light on his feet as a thistle-down is in the air, and when disturbed he is up and away in a quick dart that puts the sportsman on his mettle. In the old days it was supposed to be the proper thing to shoot a jack-snipe at forty yards or so, the calculation being that the bird by that time would have concluded his course of twisting

and dodging and have settled down to a steady flight. But the shooters of the new school, for the most part, do not wait that long. In the first place, the birds are apparently a trifle better educated now than in the days of "auld lang syne," and if a man waited until they were forty yards away they might take advantage of some convenient clump of willows or a hay-stack or a bunch of tall-growing cane or some one of a number of different bits of cover to disappear from sight. So, too, they are wilder, especially in the spring, and, generally speaking, they are advanced in their methods. The best way to shoot snipe at ordinary ranges of from twenty-five to forty yards is just when they jump.

Their flight is exceedingly elusive, and men who are good quail, chicken, and duck shots may be very poor performers on jack-snipe. Once mastered, however, it is easy enough for a crack shot to get his birds with quite a degree of regularity. As a rule that meets with few exceptions, the average of three shells to a bird when the snipe are at all wild is a good average. But in the fall, when the birds lie closer, and when they can be put

up before the dog, a man should do better. In the fall snipe lie in higher, heavier cover, especially on windy and cold days, and it is beautiful sport then. Take some old cow-pasture, wet and grown up with cat-tails and a swampy and marshy growth, where cattle have trampled down the cover, leaving boggy spots here and there through the field, and there the birds will always be found when there are any snipe in the country. Such spots will be found to be full of snipe during the season, and even when the birds are driven away they will come back again, drifting in all day to such a favorite haunt. On cold and blowy days they will lie well to a dog, and a good setter or pointer will be able to make a dozen points inside of half an hour in such a field. One of the great beauties about snipe shooting, so far as the getting of the birds is concerned, is the character of the shooting. It is all single or double bird shooting, as jack-snipe do not fly in flocks. Occasionally a wisp of from three to five may be seen flying over the meadows together, but when they light they scatter, and when the hunter moves up to

their vicinity they will rise singly or in pairs. This gives a man an opportunity to pick his birds which no other shooting gives, for in woodcock shooting the cover hinders the shooting, and in other shooting the birds rise often in a bunch, thus distracting the sportsman's aim.

Not the least of the charms of this kind of sport is the wonderful exhilaration of the open country. The air comes fresh with the breath and vigor of wide expanses, and the sun beats full and free on waving grass and bending reeds. The brown cat-tails stand rusty and sere under autumnal skies, and the winds dance past to the marsh edges and ripple over amber waters to the water's edge again. Marsh-hawks hover above, and sometimes a sparrow-hawk flutters for minutes at a time without moving from one space in the air. Sometimes a clumsy yellow bittern scrambles out of the grass with a rush of broad wings, stretching his long neck and looking back as if he expected to be brought down by the hunter before he could get out of danger.

In the fall the jack-snipe have less country

to feed in, for the summer suns have dried up much of the ground they occupied in the spring months. In some parts of the country there is no shooting except in the spring. In the autumn months these birds linger in the country until sometimes the ice rims the edges of the pools and chill winds sweep across the pastures. But if the grass and reeds afford cover high enough the snipe will skulk in such cover, and many a dozen of splendid, plump birds may be shot when the morning of the day which gave them their quietus was cold and stormy, with ice on the spring holes. But when the sun comes out in the afternoons and the ice melts, they seem to come back, and as long as the ground softens and gives them good feeding, and the cover shelters them from the winds, they linger until the advent of the conquering snows.

A good dog will not only enable a man to find birds better in the fall, but he can make "doubles" when he has a dog along, trusting to the animal to find all the birds he drops. In high, dense cover, the jack-snipe is a very hard bird to find. Indeed, he is

often lost in comparatively open places because he is so like the cover he falls into. But with a good dog, whether he is a retriever or not, a man will find about all of the snipe he shoots. When snipe are fairly plentiful the chance for making "doubles" presents itself constantly, and yet, if a man is hunting without a dog, he will lose many birds, especially in thick cover, if he makes "doubles" and tries to get the birds. The safest way when shooting without a dog is to get your birds one at a time, unless the hunter has a chance to shoot in fairly open cover. He can then take more chances. When he drops his first bird of a pair, let him mark it down by some particular weed, clump of cat-tails, or other object, and then go to where his second bird was shot and drop a handkerchief where he thinks the bird fell. Then back to the first bird and find that, if possible, at first. In the meantime, if other birds get up, and they are quite likely to, let him get them one at a time, never forgetting the landmark that he noticed in marking the first bird. If he gets the first bird, the second is an easier task. The handkerchief will be a base from

which to take observations, and by beating around he can usually find his game.

If the birds are wild, it is a good scheme, as I have found it, to use number six shot in the left-hand barrel. Number eights in the right-hand barrel are all right, but when you shoot a second time at the same bird—and that is something that will happen to every one—you may have to shoot a long way at your bird. Now on windy days the light shot are at a disadvantage. And it is surprising, and at the same time instructive, to see how many birds a man can shoot with number sixes if he holds his gun right. If you will hold your gun so that a jack-snipe is in the centre of the pattern of a load of sixes he will not get away. Some of the shot will hit him, and generally one is enough if it hits him in the body, wing, or any place but the leg.

Some hunters invariably use hip-boots in snipe shooting, while others stick to rubber knee-boots. The water may not be very deep along the "slues," or in the pastures and around the marshes where the snipe lie, as they feed in the vicinity of the shallowest pools and wet spots. But you will sometimes

come to a place where you will want to go in almost waist-deep, in order to reach other territory. And at times you are obliged to shoot a bird over water, where you would lose him if you could not wade in and retrieve him. But rubber boots are hard on the feet, and if you do not care to use the mackintosh wading-trousers with a rubber boot at the end, wear the heaviest leggings you can get, firmly clamped down on a stout shoe, and wade in and take whatever ducking you happen to meet. Wear as light clothing as possible, for the tramping will be extensive. A sixteen-gauge gun will do nicely for snipe shooting, although my preference is for a twelve-gauge.

As to the number of birds to be killed in a day, there are different restrictions in various states, and divers ideas among sportsmen in different parts of the country. No matter if they are as thick as blackbirds — and it is wonderful how plentiful jack-snipe may be at times—twenty-five birds are enough for a day's shooting for one man.

IN DIM OCTOBER

BACK of the crumbling farm-house was an orchard, and back of that, the woods. We took a drink of well-water from a bucket that had just been hauled up, and then started for the timber. The trees in the orchard were ruddy with fruit, and some of it that had been blown down by gusty winds had marks where the jaybirds and woodpeckers had been sampling it. Between the woods and the orchard there was a genuine stake-and-rider fence. As tedious as it is to mount one of these, it is highly preferable to the barb-wire monstrosities that scar the land in so many places. A little stretch of clover was at its edge, and from among a strip of corn a crook-necked squash and two pumpkins glowed. An old and half-blind dog followed us to the fence and then turned back. It was absolutely a perfect Indian-summer day, a mass of color, a dream of sunshine.

As we got over the fence, a convenient log lay at the edge of the oaks, and, resting there a moment, we saw a chipmunk dart from a crevice in the fence and poise himself on his hind legs. How graceful he was! Striped, alert, saucy, and inquisitive. He would run with incredible swiftness for a few yards, stop, arch his body, look back, and then glide along again as smooth as a snake. He would pick up an acorn or a nut, hold it after the manner of the squirrel tribe, gnaw at it a moment, release his hold, and then stand with his beady eyes glittering. He would run close to our log, and then slip into the short bushes and disappear for a few moments, and then vary the performance by running back and forth across the path. It was like nothing so much as a small boy "turning cart-wheels," "skinning the cat," and showing off generally.

At the side of the path, as we turned into the woods, a garter-snake, slender and bright-colored, wormed into the short grass, and on being closely approached, opened its mouth and silently sent its tongue scintillating back and forth in a series of quick movements. It

was a badly frightened reptile, but as we were mercifully inclined toward such a harmless member of the snake kingdom, it soon dodged into taller cover and we saw it no more.

On a slope among the heavy timber we paused by a giant oak-tree and sat down to wait. The trees here were mostly oaks, with a few hickories scattered farther along, where the hill beyond showed dimly through the timber. The tints on the leaves were very gorgeous. The foliage had not been thinned to any extent by frosts and was yet thick on the branches, and some of it was even yet green with the youth of the late summer. But for a long distance in every direction there was a vast drapery of the most vivid red, russet, yellow—with hundreds of variations in these colors. It had the effect of a painted wood. And there was something of a funereal grandeur to it all, as though autumn had flung herself on the funeral pyre of a dead season to fill the spaces with the glory of her blazing sacrifice. There were aisles and niches hung thick with splendid garlands, and paths brilliant with spendthrift

leaves, whose garish hues lent contrast to the thick green grass. A jaybird's wing went unnoticed across this panorama; the very wing of a cardinal, were he flying past, would have been swallowed in this sea of color.

The gnarled and twisted oaks were bathed in a tide of yellow sunlight that dreamed drowsily among all this beauty, and the air was hushed and the winds folded down into utter quiet. Only the tiny gray sapsuckers dipped, ducked, and bobbed about on the tree-trunks, and their movements were as noiseless as those of spiders. There was a cathedral-like nobility in these great spaces, with a suggestion of stilled music, the faces of sculptured saints, the ghosts of Druidical ceremonies. The breath of morning brooded in the shadowy places, and the steps of noon came slowly up the eastern hills. It was a day snatched from paradise—a day of days.

Presently the harsh cry of a crow sounded and his black wings for an instant flung a shadow on the grass. Then the "skir" of a hawk came in a challenging tone, and a broader shadow followed where the crow's flight had gone. Then all was deeper silence

than before, and the woods dilated in the streams of golden sunshine that ebbed and flowed on a coast of shimmering leaves. Below us, and to one side, a tamarack swamp stood, some of the trees long since dead, their bristly forms standing stark in the sunlight. Back of them and on either hand there were dense masses of living tamaracks, their green colors sharply contrasting with the oaks and hickories. At the edge of the swamp there were great quantities of sumach, their russet globes still partially hidden by the scarlet leaves. In this swamp the sun had little opportunity to enter, as the trees stood like serried lances, thickly huddled and shadowy. This swamp on one side was skirted by a small pool, and there some rusted cat-tails rose, their blades broken and drooping, their heads rising stiff in the October air.

We moved deeper into the timber, and everywhere was this lavish festooning, this bewildering array of tints that shone and glinted in the sun. A rabbit jumped up from a glare of dazzling bushes and scurried through the brush, the cover rustling as he fled. Beyond the woods as we reached an

open space there was a glimpse of corn-shocks standing brown and packed on a hill-side. Still farther on was a rolling green meadow, and beyond that a lake of consider-able size. Turning to the left we found a wood of small trees, their colorings as bright as any in the larger timber. Every bush and vine was in holiday attire. The occasional green splotches added a pleasing variety to the effect.

Overhead the skies were cloudless, a never-ending expanse of blue. Sometimes in this smaller timber there would be a rus-tling ahead that told of the disturbing of a rabbit, and once a fox-squirrel scampered across a path and trailed up a hickory, jump-ing from that to an oak, and finally going out of sight around the trunk of the oak. We followed him and finally discovered him at the very top of the tree. The wind by this time had blown up quite a breeze, and this squirrel, a young one, was clinging to the uppermost twigs. The wind blew him back and forth, and he swayed a brown shadow among the leaves. At times the wind would swing his long, red tail out from his body,

and then he was more plainly outlined. We shouted at him and threw sticks at him, which fell short of his retreat by many yards, but he did not mind our efforts in the least. We left him riding in the wind, his bushy tail flaunted tauntingly down.

Cattle grazing in the woods stared at us as we went along, and some of the more curious of the cows attended us to the next fence. The quality of curiosity is very strongly developed in the lower animals, and a colt, a cow, or a pig will often follow a person patiently for a long time merely on that account. As we crossed a marshy strip of ground between two reaches of timber, a lank heron scrambled up from the reeds and started away, its awkward flight and hanging legs making a quaint picture as it went. On the edges of this wet spot there were a number of small frogs, and it did not need a shrewd guess to warrant the assumption that the heron had been a-frogging. The grass here was still thick and green, showing the mildness of the season so far, and only here and there was it tinged with russet or tawny splotches. There was not a sign of a dragon-

fly, and there were no tadpoles to wriggle inkily in the amber water. By the side of the grass, where a single flower stood, a lone butterfly poised, his bright variegated wings moving slowly back and forth as he rested on the flower. Here was a waif of summer whose temerity was like to meet a killing frost before long.

The paths among the trees were dimmed by leaves of many colors, and yet the foliage seemed thicker than in days of June. On the one wagon-road that stretched through the forest dust lay thick, and the trace of wheels was indistinct occasionally and faintly outlined sometimes again on the sod along each side of the road. Once a farm-wagon bounced and clattered past and when it was gone the woods settled into a more positive stillness. At the edge of the timber we came across a troop of robins, and they flew over the pastures and away toward the tamaracks. At a pasture's corner, next to one strip of woods, there came the sweet note of a bluebird for a brief moment, and eight of them, their wings flashing in the sun, flew southward high in air.

As the day waned, long troops of blackbirds flew over, making for the marshes at Grass Lake. They flew high, well out of the range of guns for the most part, although scattered groups would occasionally dip low and sweep close in to the trees. Some of them gossiped as they went by, but the cow-birds came and went like shadows, leaving the noisier red-wings to herald the flight. The sun went down in red and gold. Then twilight crept after swiftly, and the woods began to lose their glory in the haze of approaching nightfall.

RUFFED GROUSE

THE ruffed grouse, sometimes called partridge, "cock of the woods," or pheasant, have a wide range of habitat in the United States, no less than twenty-six of the states mentioning them in their game-laws. They range from Maine on the north to Dakota on the west, south to Virginia, and are in most of the central and northern central states. They are probably the hardiest birds in many respects of the grouse family. I have never heard of one of them being frozen, however severe the winter, and have been out hunting when traces of their scratching would be found, which indicated that they were digging down over a foot in the snow to get at buried rose-buds or the roots of willows. What they live on when the snow is deep is a mystery to many of those who have travelled in the woods where they are found; but live they do, and apparently thrive.

The foliage in autumn is so thick in the woods (and the ruffed grouse is rarely found in the open) that hunting him is a very difficult matter. In the places he frequents the trees are usually close enough together to make it practically a sheet of leaves during much of the time he may be shot. And no bird in the timber is harder to bring down than this same ruffed grouse. His flight is very swift, strong, and hard to stop as he whizzes through the woods. He seems to be able to get past the trees without the slightest difficulty, and, like the woodcock, has the happy faculty of putting a tree-trunk between himself and the sportsman when opportunity offers. The most difficult shot I know of, in all the experience I have had in wing-shooting, is the shot at a ruffed grouse as he dives from some tall tree to the cover below. It is the hardest angle to gauge successfully that I ever tackled. Ruffed grouse also make very deceiving marks when they fly straightaway, either up or down hill. If it is an uphill shot, the novice usually shoots too low, and under the bird. If it is a down-hill shot, he is apt to shoot behind the grouse. In a

number of the states they have become very scarce where not many years ago they were comparatively plentiful. Just why, it is not so easy to determine.

Of course, they have been relentlessly hunted; but so have the prairie-chickens. It is not because they have been frozen out by the severe winters, for the very Indians themselves have no more endurance and stoicism than the ruffed grouse. The woods are there yet, and to a great extent the chance for getting a living is as good, but many thousands of acres of timber-land near the railroads are almost entirely deserted by the birds. It may be that the gradual destruction of the underbrush and the cleaning-up of the woods by the habit of making them pasture-grounds have made the birds leave. At any rate, they are gone, where twenty years ago they were found in very large numbers. Restocking the woods might be the means of affording occasional shooting, but where the timber has been denuded of the brush ruffed grouse will not stay in any numbers. They are sometimes found in tamarack swamps around lakes in the hilly portions of the

country and in the woods along streams and rivers.

The ruffed grouse is a true game-bird, lying well to the dog, and giving exciting sport wherever found in numbers large enough to furnish fair shooting. In some states he is found in the same cover with quail, and the hunters there get them when hunting for the latter bird. In other regions of America the quail have nearly all disappeared in the grouse-country, the cold winters having frozen them out or driven them to more temperate portions of the country. Like that of the quail, his flesh is white, inclined to be a trifle dry, and very delicious eating. Like other grouse, they go in coveys, although in many places they have become so scarce that a single old cock or a pair of birds is about all a man will find in walking through the average "neck of woods."

Their colors are dark brown, blended with gray and with black, and they have a crest on top of the head. The ruffs are a prominent feature of the bird's appearance, and are two in number, one on each side of the neck. They are composed of from twenty to

thirty feathers each, and the bird takes its name from them. The tail is long, broad, and banded, and when stretched out and dried makes a handsome fan. The ruffed grouse is about sixteen to eighteen inches long, and will weigh from two to two and a half or three pounds. He is an exceedingly handsome bird, excelling the pinnated grouse or prairie-chicken vastly in this respect. His wings are short and rounded and capable of surprising bursts of speed. There is no lumbering awkwardness when this bird rises, as after the manner of the prairie-chicken. He springs from the brush with the speed of a rocket and it takes quick shooting to get him. To make a " double " on ruffed grouse in thick cover is one of the most difficult feats in shot-gun shooting. They are strong birds and require to be hard hit to be brought down, unless when a stray shot breaks a wing or hits them on the head or neck. Like other birds of the grouse family and the quail, the ruffed grouse when struck in the head, if not killed outright, will " tower," as it is called, flying straight up into the air to quite a height. When a hunter

sees a grouse " tower," all he has to do is to watch where the bird falls. When he finds the game it will be a case of " dead bird."

In the alder bushes and in the foot-hills of eastern mountains I have found the birds in flocks of from a dozen to twenty grouse. The natives sometimes hunted them there with a cur-dog and a shot-gun or rifle. The dog ran ahead and scared the birds up into the trees, barking at them vigorously after they were treed. The grouse would not fly, but would watch the dog. The hunter, according to the stories told to me, would slip along as soon as he heard the dog barking and " pot " the birds as they sat on the limbs. When a shot-gun was used the flock would generally fly after one or two shots; but with a small rifle a number of birds could be shot from one flock by shooting the under birds first and the scattered ones and keeping perfectly quiet. If these tales were true, it was a murderous way of getting grouse, not much better than snaring them with " twitch-ups," and gave the birds not the slightest chance for their lives.

The " drumming " of the ruffed grouse is a

peculiar habit of his, and has been the subject of more discussion and dispute than almost anything else except the merits of dogs. I have heard this " drumming " in New Hampshire forests, and in the woods of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, and other states. I have flushed grouse from near huge bowlders, and from the vicinity of fallen logs, but never saw one in the very act of " drumming," although within a few feet of them several times while the " drum-beats " reverberated through the timber. The " booming " of the prairie-chicken or pinnated grouse is acknowledged to be produced from the bird's throat, but how the partridge does his " drumming " is a mooted question. But he does " drum," and the resonant woodland roll of the tattoo is one of the striking sounds of nature, as are the sonorous notes of the bull-frogs.

" The hills were brown, the heavens were blue;
A woodpecker pounded a pine-top shell,
While a partridge whistled the whole day through
For a rabbit to dance in the chaparral;
And a gray grouse drummed: 'All's well! All's well!'"

Like the quail, the ruffed grouse is suscep-

tible to deceit, and he is trapped and snared in the eastern and northern states particularly in great numbers by farmer-boys and by the market-hunters. He is especially foolish about snares and puts his head into them with a fatuous confidence that is rapidly thinning out his numbers, even where he was once numerous. Only the most rigid application of a non-selling game-law will effect any adequate improvement in the situation. When the deep snows come he is sufficiently hard pushed to take almost any chance to get food, and box-traps and "figure fours" take him in out of the inclement weather into the hospitable frying-pan with dismal frequency. Yet, like all the grouse family nearly, he shows great cunning when wing-tipped, and he is sagacious enough when hunted. But the traps and the snares are too much for him and are responsible in great measure for his depreciated and depreciating numbers.

Hunting ruffed grouse requires about the same paraphernalia as in ordinary quail shooting, except that number six shot instead of nines or eights should be used. A twelve-gauge gun is heavy enough, and a good dog

of either pointer or setter blood will answer. The setter in ragged cover will stand the going better, and in most ruffed grouse cover there will be water enough so that a setter can get a drink occasionally.

IN PRAIRIE-LANDS

THE glory of the prairies of old, like that of Ichabod, has departed, save that in the far north-west there still remains the wilderness, untrampled by the hoofs of cattle, unscarred by the steel of the ploughshare. In some of the Minnesota and Dakota counties many a mile of virgin prairie lies, with bronzed masses of true prairie-grass waving about the sod, and ironweed and resinweed mingling with its harsh masses. There, in the remote solemnity of the hills, walled in by the bluest of distant horizons, the waste lands dream of the days that were, when all the earth was wilderness and the hand of the white man had not blotted out the vision. On these huge mounds the buffalo roamed, cropping thick grasses and drinking at the streams and pools that were scattered among valleys which lay between the slopes. Their numbers ranged into hundreds of thousands, and now all that is left is tra-

dition and a leaven of dust from their bones deep sunken in the yielding soil.

The deer and antelope were there then, and the great gray wolf, fast following on their trail. Millions of wild-fowl bred in or frequented the lakes and rivers, and the roar of their wings in the spring and the fall was as the rumble of thunder before a summer shower. The white bulk of swans, the wedge-shaped phalanx of the wild-goose, dotted the heavens in their annual flight, and the darker hordes of brant swept down on the bosom of the waters and gabbled among the reeds of the northern wilderness. The beaver built in the lakes and creeks and the fox prowled among the thickets about the lakes. The prairie-hens rose from the grass in great coveys and sharp-tailed grouse flew over and back from the surrounding hills. The jack-rabbit, quaintest of the denizens of the prairie-lands, sat with his long ears extended, listening for the approach of any one of his numerous foes. Game was everywhere. In the lakes amid the dome-shaped mounds the muskallunge, the giant pike, sprang up from the lily-pads or lurked

close to sandy shores. Bass swarmed in the colder lakes and wall-eyed pike were taken by the Indians, with the bow or spear.

From one end of the land to the other the Sioux roamed—proud, revengeful, and suspicious. Then the smoke of the council-fires rose and the skin tepees of Indian villages shone brown in the sun. Tethered-out ponies cropped the prairies and little pappooses lay wrapped in their curious pouches, silent and stoical. War and pillage were the order of those days. As the settlers began to drift in and jealousies seethed and smoldered and burned, the fire of passion sprang up in the breast of both white man and red, and the land was drenched in blood and ablaze with the light of burning dwellings. The Sioux uprising came like a searing flash of lightning across the northern steppes and the edifice of northern civilization was christened and consecrated by the sacrifices of the early pioneers.

The sword was beaten into the ploughshare, the bayonet into the reaping-hook, and slowly but inevitably the course of progress, stayed for a moment by the fierce hand of the

aborigine, swept resistlessly over the land. Roads cut their way over the hills, and the white-topped wagons of the early settlers came eagerly in search of the unbroken acres of the north. Log-houses, rude and one-storied, topped the hills in scant force, and from their clay-daubed chimneys the smoke of a white race had followed the dying camp-fires of the red men. Agriculture was levelling forests, building homes, ripping up the prairies in every direction and driving before it the buffalo, the bear, the wolf, antelope, and beaver. Cattle drank at the streams where the buffalo had wallowed, and the outlines of the first farms, faint but prophetic, were spread upon the canvas of rolling and lonely prairies.

The moccasined foot of the Indian turned to the far west, and, except as an occasional wanderer, he was seen no more. The teeming life of the billowy plains went with him, and the shriek of the locomotive came to startle the wilds where the war-whoop had sounded. The canvas covers of the "prairie-schooners" faded from the roads, the free acres of primal days were all taken up, and

as years rolled on the traces of the original prairies were almost all blotted out. But there still rests in remote corners of this region the recollection of tameless tribes and ancient days, the flavor of times when never a shod hoof of beast dinted the grasses, and no face but the copper-colored face of the savage was ever seen.

Standing on one of the great hills of the north-west and looking out over the yet trackless miles of uncultivated prairies, there is the glamour of the past in the air, a halo of by-gone years faintly discernible in the clouds that hang above. These vast amphitheatres have all the significance of banquet-halls deserted, with floors of level grasses and folding draperies of sky and cloud. What panoramas of moving Indian villages and battle-etched pages the old days furnish! Now there are only long reaches of tumbled hills, grass-lined, and the galloping tread of the winds. There is here, and here only, that sense of outdoors which the treeless stretches of the prairie give, extending on as a sea, till the far-off horizon drops like a curtain to meet it. Great forests do not bring

this feeling, nor does the ocean, when one is out of sight of land. It is not a feeling of desolation, but one of age, as if the world were a million times more ancient than man had ever pictured it, and on the bosoms of these hills lay brooding the shadows of uncounted centuries.

When the sun shines here he seems to send his beams down from remoter heights than elsewhere. There is a strange familiarity in the shapes of the rolling mounds, as though they might be the forms of mighty mammoths engulfed by some prehistoric tide, which lay down as the floods swept across them, perished there, and became encysted in the débris of the cycles that followed. On still days there is a mournfulness that appeals to the imagination keenly. Bird life is very rare, only the black wake of the buzzard, the varying slants of a hawk's wing, and the flights of wild-fowl to paint the skies; no last-year's nests or stray feathers to tell of song-birds lingering there. There is something high, austere, and calm about these dumb wastes. Down in the valleys the winds sleep by shallow creeks or hide in the rushes that line the

shores of the secluded lakes among the hills. On the tops of the mounds the ironweed stands stiffly erect, the sun's rays beating across until weeds and grasses both are burned to darkest brown.

When the winds blow they will often continue all day long and in many moods and keys. Sometimes they smooth the grass in one direction as a mother might smooth her children's hair; sometimes they tumble the weeds and flowers and tilt the grass as if they sought something which was hidden beneath. But always the breath of these breezes is as pure as spring-water. They come for hundreds of miles, and bear on their wings an aroma of flowers and streams, a tang of resin-weeds, and the odor of nameless dried prairie-grasses. When the sun catches the grass as the wind sweeps it aside, myriad pictures flash and fade. Steadily as the folds of a far-flung banner the tall growth of the prairies flaps in the gales that swing across the hills, and sun and clouds beyond lift and dip as the winds go by, and lend a change of form and color to each flying moment.

Over it all the life that was casts spectral

shadows. The white top of a wagon goes past, with tow-headed children peeping from the sides; the smoke of a camp-fire steals up in the colorless air; the ring of an axe sounds faintly; the feathered war-bonnet of a Sioux chief gleams in a tuft of sun-illumined grass; vanished hordes of buffalo thunder down a distant slope, and shots of battle echo in one's ears; the gathering tumult of cities smites on the senses, the far wastes disappear, and a forest of chimneys and spires rises to take their places. The sails of cloud-armadas furl slowly in the harboring skies, and the sheets of commerce float in and usurp their anchorage. All about is change. Standing on these eternal hills there comes with crushing power the realization of how insignificant is man, how absolute is nature. A thousand races may rise and fall; the ploughshares of one tribe may scar the slopes, and the hoofs of a following tribe's war-horses may beat back the harvest into a wilderness. Man alone is least to be reckoned with. For time and tide here rest the prairies, supreme in the sense of an immortal repose, unfretted by the lapses of the years.

HUNTING WITH FERRETS

THE sport of hunting rabbits with a ferret is bitterly inveighed against by some hunters — but it all depends. In a country where there is plenty of brush, and where the game stays in the cover to a considerable extent, there is no need of a ferret to rout them out. In some places a man can go out and get all the rabbits he wants even without a dog. And when rabbits are hunted with a dog they get a scare that begins when they jump before the hound and ends only when they are dropped by a charge of shot. In using a ferret they are given just one big fright, and then they bolt and are killed by the hunter, who waits by the burrow. It would be difficult to determine, from the rabbit's stand-point, which mode of being killed it preferred. Long pains are light ones; cruel ones are brief. The chances are that it would infinitely pre-

fer that it should not be killed at all. But there it would so unquestionably be wandering from the point that all discussion would be unprofitable.

I have hunted rabbits in some localities where you might tramp all day and not see hide or hair of one unless you "toted" a ferret. In such parts of the country the underbrush and cover have been pastured and burned out, and a plentiful supply of brush is not to be had. If you go out after a light snow has fallen you will be surprised at the number of rabbit-tracks which you will see, and also mystified, if you are unfamiliar with that kind of country, by the scarcity of rabbits. If you have a first-class dog you may stir up a couple of bunnies out of the shocks in some cornfield, or you may pick up two or three in out-of-the-way corners of fences and fields. But in the woods you will go along over miles and miles of territory, literally carpeted with rabbit-tracks, without jumping a solitary rabbit.

Along some of the northern and northwestern rivers and among the woods and hills through which they run, there are quite a

number of rabbits. If you did not know how to hunt them, and went there with or without a dog, you would undoubtedly believe that it was the poorest place on earth for the sport. Yet, as a matter of fact, dozens of well-fed and respectable rabbits are to be found comfortably stowed away in the bowels of the earth underneath those same hills. They are of the cave-dwelling brand, and feeding, as rabbits do, almost entirely by night, they retire to their burrows or holes in the daytime and are not to be got out except by means of the offices of the harmful, necessary ferret.

The ferret is not a pleasing beast to look upon, or to handle. He is a long, sinuous, weasel-like looking " critter," of a dirty black or tawny yellow color, and he is always out for blood. He is very fond of rabbits in a sanguinary way, and the sight of him, even in the subterranean gloom of a burrow, gives the average rabbit " the fan-tods." The ferret's walk is a sort of creepy glide, very snaky, very sinister; he pokes along, snuffing the air stealthily, his beady black eyes wearing a thoughtful expression, and his whole

attitude suggestive of extreme sleepiness. But he is, when the occasion demands, as swift as a rattlesnake to strike. His narrow head shoots out, and when he fastens his keen teeth in anything it is with a bull-dog grip and a tiger's thirst for blood. One of the ferrets we used to hunt with we called "Ivy" because he went "creeping, creeping everywhere."

Hunting with ferrets is not always the easiest work in the world, for the beasts have an ugly fashion of grabbing off a rabbit occasionally for themselves. Rabbits have a habit of snoozing away the days in their burrows, and when a ferret finds one in a doze the end comes quickly. And when he finishes up the animal he takes a little nap himself, say, for two or three hours. Sitting out on a bleak hill-side for a quarter of a day waiting for a ferret to report for duty is one of the most vexatious things in the annals of sport. And at other times your ferret may take it into his narrow head that it is more comfortable down there than it is out in the cold, cold world, and he will cuddle up in the burrow and compose himself for a little

siesta anyway, rabbit or no rabbit. This is very distressing to the hunters, especially when the thermometer is away below the zero mark. On these occasions the blood can be quickened by travelling over the hills to the nearest farm-house and getting the tools with which to dig the ferret out. When the ground is frozen for some ten feet or so this is not an easy job. Tying a chain or a stout cord to the ferret's leg will not work, for there are often labyrinthian twists in a rabbit's burrow, and an attempt to drag out your assistant may only result in fetching out part of him. This ruins a ferret for hunting purposes, no matter how much it may soothe your wounded feelings.

By shouting down the burrow a moment before the ferret is introduced into the aperture you can almost always awaken the rabbit. This will do away with the dangers of having the ferret fasten on to the rabbit while both are underground. But for the inclination that a ferret will show to stay in the burrow sometimes, game or no game, there can be no precautions taken except a large vocabulary of uncomplimentary remarks for such

a brute. The tracks of a rabbit can easily be followed to a hole, but often the holes are drawn blank. A lively ferret will creep through a burrow in a very short space of time and be ready for another trip instanter. Some of them are quite vicious to handle, and great care should be taken not to be bitten. They should be grabbed by the back of the neck as they emerge from the hole and chucked into the sack or box which is brought along to keep them in.

The rabbit "bolts" when he hears or sees the ferret coming. He does not wait upon the order of his going, but literally darts from the burrow at top-speed. Sometimes there are two and even three rabbits in one burrow, and then the shooting is exceedingly lively. It is no great trick to bowl them over as they come out of the burrow, although you cannot tell which way they are going to come, however nicely you calculate before sending in the ferret. Sometimes there is a hidden entrance to the burrow, out of which the rabbit will suddenly emerge, and before you can bring your gun to bear he is away down a steep hill-side. But you can easily follow

him by his tracks to the next hole, and his fate is seldom uncertain.

If a man, or two men, go out and shoot a dozen rabbits in a day, using a ferret, and do not keep up the sport day in and day out, but take different localities and hunt about three or four times in the season, they will not exterminate the game. On a bright day and not too cold it is first-rate and exciting shooting. A light twelve- or sixteen-gauge gun and number six shot will answer for the rabbits. A road-cart and a stout horse are extremely important. The distances between favorable places and the weight of a dozen or so rabbits will make a journey on foot a very unhappy affair of it.

In the short winter days you must use your time in "drawing" the holes, and coaxing out the ferret, and not in walking. My rabbit shooting has been in country where it was mostly hilly, and the shooting was generally up- or down-hill. The rabbits are darker-colored than where they stay above ground, and they are usually of good size and fat. One of the knacks of this kind of shooting is to find holes or burrows when the snow has

been melted away and there is nothing to guide you in locating the holes. You will find them on the hill-sides and often near the edges of a creek or a ravine. You will also discover them under tree-trunks and around stumps. It is safe to try almost any hole. It is unsafe to send a hungry ferret into a hole where there is no outlet, for he will have too much of an opportunity to seize the rabbit and gorge himself under such circumstances.

All sport has an element of cruelty in it, viewed from the sentimental stand-point. I once heard an eloquent discourse against hunting rabbits delivered by a gentleman of tender sensibilities, his mouth full of a turkey whose head he had hacked off with a dull axe to grace the Thanksgiving feast. The sensible way to look at this branch of sport is that rabbits were created for man and not man for the rabbits.

THE BARE, BROWN FIELDS

WIDE stretches of rolling country, with here and there a clump of leafless trees, where the farm-houses stand, and scattered hay-stacks adjacent. On the slopes sometimes are lines of yellowish corn-shocks that rise like tents silently against the clear horizon. Around those shocks may be found, when a hunter happens to draw near, signs of industrious rabbits, inquisitive field-mice, and foraging prairie-chickens. Occasionally there is a slight whorl of faint snow drifted in the spaces between the shocks, and if this be so the tiny tracks of the mice dot the place, and perhaps the tracks of the prairie-chickens. The wind dallies with the loose blades that project from the shocks, and a whistling of fluttering strips marks the flight of northern breezes. The soil is hard and crumbly to the heel, and the infrequent little ditches or pools of water are

often rimmed with ice, and more especially in the early morning. Then the sun comes up redly enough, a burning disk that lights the by-ways and ridges of the bare, brown fields.

When prairie-chickens are seen it is usually early or quite late, skirmishing in spots where cornstalks have been left standing, and rising with a splendidly strong sweep of pinion as they spring from the ground. They " pack " now, bunching together in the open meadows and pastures, and being exceedingly wary of man. They are hardy and fearless of the approaching inclemencies of the season, for when storms blow up they will seek the timber and thickets, and shelter themselves from drifting snow and biting winds.

In the little " slues " that extend through the fields the sumach-stalks are blackened and denuded of their leaves, and thistle-stalks cluster in gray masses on the sides and slopes of ravines. The cover in these places — blackberry vines and a tangle of low brush —extends thickly along the edges of the " slues," affording splendid hiding-places for quail. Sometimes there is a clump of willows where the " slue " widens, and farther

along toward the timber scattered trees and sparse patches of brush dot the line of the depression in the field. Rabbits are always found in these places, and especially where there is a cornfield at hand, or an old orchard. The grass along the " slues " is rusty brown and crisp underfoot and burrs stick in the clothing of the passer-by, and " beggar lice," the most pestiferous form of clinging weed, gathers in great quantity on coats and trousers. Tall weeds, some of them disputing the way, and others broken and scarred by the frosts, rise in all directions.

Over open pastures the crows stalk, perching on fences, walking about the bare spots, persistent gleaners of edible trifles, and certain of a living where aught can live. The birds have mainly flown south, all but the resolute jaybird; he flies across the fields, over thickets, and through the woods—alert, mischievous, and confident. His bright blue wings trail glintingly among sombre treetops; his challenging cry echoes amid the autumn silences. The robins are to the southward, the swallow no longer dips in the meadows, the thrush's spotted breast is ab-

sent from the woody lanes, the bluebird and song-sparrow have fled with earlier days; but the jay still lingers to brave the elements and carry a herald of resistance to the snows.

Where a seed may be plucked from a fence-rail, or a frosted apple dinted with his strong bill, he wanders—a feathered Ishmaelite—with little heed for chill winds or dark skies.

Where the ploughs have cut their wake through the land long furrows lie dark in the shadow. There a plough-boy has followed once, the blackbirds in his train. One lone harrow has been marooned on a waste of clods and slanted sideways toward the north. Miles and miles of this ploughed ground stretch away in all directions, and under and over it all, even in this iron dearth, there is a promise of harvest. The fences, the barbed-wire ones, are monotonously practical, and the weeds and vines shun them. But where rail-fences separate the fields the grass hugs the line, and divers vines and weedy growths rise by corners and along the route. Here black-capped chickadees dodge about; and here, too, the rabbits lurk, with rolling eyes

and timid ears, palpitating at the least sound of approaching footsteps. The old rail-fence has assumed new dignity and individuality since the wire strands came into use. Each is now a pioneer, with a history of its own, reminiscent of the old red school-house, the husking-bee, the snow-drifts piled against it.

Above shorn stubbles, now blackening in the advancing season, the hawk flies, painting broad circles in the skies, surveying his dominion below with regal deliberation. The fields are his demesne. The wandering mouse may well hesitate to emerge from his covert, the defenceless rabbit has in him an enemy vigilant and hungry. Even the farm-yard is not exempt from his levies, and the squall of hens, the fluttering of wings, and a rush for the family artillery form an accompaniment of his daily round for food. Betimes he sits on some dead limb in a pasture conveniently near the timber, and meditates serenely. A pirate of the upper air, a wandering free-booter, he has no excuses to make, no morals to mend.

In one corner of a pasture an old windmill creaks in blasts that drive westward, and

around a trough where the cattle drink the mud is ridged with many hoof-marks. It is the bleakest corner of the fields. There is no grass here, and the wind has a free sweep on the boldest days that sets the mill dolefully wailing under steel-blue skies. Farther along, and near a pair of bars, stands a lone walnut-tree. Under it are scattered the hulls, and on a smooth bowlder near by is a dark stain which accounts for a heap of shells close at hand. Here the harvesters have loitered and cracked the nuts, and sticks and clubs lying about tell of various assaults on the old tree to bring down the coveted prizes.

On one sandy rise, when later rains wash the soil into gullies and polish pebbles and bits of flint that are exposed, there have been Indian arrow-heads found. Here, then, the savage wandered, and before him the mastodon, maybe. But against the sky, however the flint-points tell of primitive days, there comes the figure of the sower. Always on these rises this figure seems to pass or wait, the right hand outstretched, the left carrying a bag of grain. In the day of the scythe and cradle, the by-gone days of boyhood,

this picture was a familiar one and was seen usually on the higher ridges. A patient form and a steady one, with awkward rhythmic motion scattering the seed. And so even in these times, when he is but a memory, he is a vivid one enough to stand apparition-like in the gray November weather, the right palm thrown sideways, the left hand holding a sack of grain.

Where the stubbles lie in deep-rusted, wide stretches from cornfield to country road, the ploughs have tumbled them into bristly furrows now, and nothing but the winds may glean a stray kernel from them. The winds are seldom quiet in the fields after October has passed; even on the stillest days there is always some mousing zephyr dipping down now and then to dance a dusty saraband with a stray cornstalk, or whirl a miniature funnel of dust along a road-side rut. Winds go in flocks and vary as birds do in their movements and peculiarities. In dry standing stalks they flutter and chase about in great glee, rattling dangling shreds of stalks and sometimes shaking the whole field furiously. Or they will capriciously bend the tops of a

clump of willows in a "slue" amid the fields and not lift a leaf from the ground below. They harvest the oak-leaves and the yellow leaves of hickories and then disperse them in flying windrows, sticking them in thorny hedges or wasting them over the fields.

But always to the keener sense of one who loves and is familiar with outdoors there is a mirage of harvest even on the gloomiest days. There is sight of waving tassels of cornsilk and bending sheen of wheat; there are buckwheat blossoms and dronings of the bee, the flash of swallows in the sunshine, the clatter of reapers on the hill. In the fence-corners there are gay bits of color—the purple of the thistle, the green of the hedges, and the slate-hued shyness of a prying catbird. There is music in many keys, pictures from every side. So even now, with a harp of wailing November breezes to mock the vision, one can stand by naked meadow and "scarecrow" guarded spaces and find Elysium in the bare, brown fields.

QUAIL SHOOTING

IF a vote were to be taken among the men who hunt with dog and gun from the Mississippi valley to the Atlantic coast and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, to determine the question of the most popular game-bird, the quail would get the overwhelming majority of the votes. "Bob-white" is a bird who fully deserves his popularity. No bird in America gives as great sport with the dog, the opportunity for fine work in the field being unlimited in quail shooting. The quail is a bird that has a friendly feeling for man, and is found following the march of civilization and the confines of the farms. The valley- and mountain-quail of the west and south-west cannot be compared to the true "bob-white" for sport, being birds which depend a great deal upon their legs to elude the hunters, and living in a country where good work by the dogs is almost impossible. Then, too, these western and south-western

quail go in bunches of from fifty to two hundred birds, and will not lie nearly so well to the dogs as their brown cousins of the eastern, southern, and middle states do.

Notwithstanding the great increase of hunters and the introduction of breech-loading guns, the quail in the middle states are holding their own in point of numbers. This is mainly owing to the strictness of the game-laws and a general feeling among sportsmen that these birds, above other upland game, must be protected at all hazards. One of the chief pleasures of quail shooting is to have a good dog along that has been well broken to this kind of shooting. A quail-dog or "bird-dog," as he is often called, takes as much interest in the sport as his master does.

In hunting the average run of country most of the birds will take to the thickest cover they can get to after the bevy has been flushed. They feed in the morning, and after about ten o'clock retire to the thickets. Disputes have risen from time immemorial as to whether they feed again regularly, late in the afternoon. Frank Forester says that they do. That they sometimes do I believe to be

true, but that they make a regular practice of feeding in the afternoon I doubt. To a man who has hunted quail for years the country wherever he goes is an open book, so far as the best place to go for the birds is concerned. He can tell at a glance where the likeliest places are. In a wheat and corn country the birds will be found in the edges of the stubbles and in the cornfields up to nine or ten o'clock, and after that in the sloughs, thickets, woods, or hedges adjoining their feeding-grounds. They are birds that require water, and as a rule they will be found along bushy creeks next to the fields after feeding-time. Old orchards are fine places for them, especially around deserted farm-houses. In a strictly prairie country the osage orange hedges are their favorite haunts after feeding in the morning.

When a bevy rises, with that rush of wings so characteristic of the birds, the novice may think there is going to be a great destruction of quail. But the first shots may be the last at that particular bunch. Or maybe one or two other shots may be had, and no more. The quail is a very puzzling bird at times, and a

bevy occasionally scatters all over the adjoining country when it gets up. Of course, with a good dog a man will generally start a few birds from each bevy, but in heavy cover, and where the birds have been shot at several times, they get "educated" and play tricks with the hunters. It is not at all uncommon to put up a bevy of twenty-five or thirty birds and then only get two or three quail out of it. The bevy scatters in all directions on first rising, but most of them will drop down in one direction. A few stray birds may go in an entirely different direction from the main body of the flock, and they may be hunted later. Quail do not fly far as a rule, generally darting into cover again at from two to three or four hundred yards. Sometimes they will fly farther, and again drop in closer. It depends on whether they have been hunted and on the nature of the cover.

It is simply amazing what a small bit of cover will hide a quail, and how he will stick to his hiding-place. Sometimes he will hug the ground in the open woods under a tree where the leaves are thickly scattered on the ground, and although the dog is fairly slob-

bering with excitement as he points the bird, you will not be able to see "bob-white" until he flies. They have a great trick of slipping under the overhanging fringe of bank along a creek when driven into that kind of cover, and a dog is needed to get them out of these hiding-places always. Sometimes they will fly into the trees and fool a hunter, and they will take advantage of fences and tree-trunks when they get up, putting such objects between the hunter and themselves. They will get up back of you, too, after you have passed, and sometimes fly close to the ground, or spring straight up through the trees at times, and in many ways elude the hail of shot.

They get into full speed from the jump, and yet a quail is not a hard bird to shoot, excepting in thick cover or in tall standing corn. It takes quick shooting, but at close range, as most of the work is done, a man should get three out of five in fairly open cover right along. The birds are fully grown by the first of November, and well able to take care of themselves. It is curious to note the difference between birds that are found

in the prairie country and "timber-quail," as they are called, that are found in the creek and river-bottoms, and which feed to some extent on acorns. The timber-quail are darker colored and perceptibly larger than the prairie birds, and are swifter and stronger on the wing. Timber-quail are, generally speaking, remarkably fine birds—big, strong, and affording splendid sport. There is, of course, absolutely nothing to differentiate the quail in the timber and the quail of the prairies, excepting these points of size and generally darker coloring. Their flight is stronger and swifter because they are bigger birds.

For quail shooting a sixteen-gauge gun, cylinder-bored in both barrels, is the best gun. Nine-tenths of the shots are made within forty-five yards, most of them within thirty or thirty-five yards. The choke-bored gun in quail shooting cuts the bird to ribbons or smashes the flesh into a jelly. A straight-stocked, cylinder bore, six to seven pounds in weight, with nitro powder and number eight shot, is the right combination for this kind of shooting. You don't have to hold ahead of a quail much with the nitro powder, except

in cross-shots. In the quartering shots a few inches ahead is enough in twenty or thirty yards. In the straightaway shots the bird is usually rising at first, and the gun should be held a trifle over. Quail, when full-grown, can carry away quite a few shot, and even when hit hard will manage to flutter off and hide. Give them the centre of the charge. On the cross-shots you should hold ahead several inches when the birds are close, and farther when the bird is some distance away.

Either a setter or a pointer dog will do the work acceptably if broken to quail shooting. Don't keep shouting at your dog. Be patient with him, even if he does poor work, and try to help him do better. Nothing in field shooting is quite so disagreeable as the spectacle of a man shouting at his dog and making every one along feel uncomfortable. "Jolly" the man who has the dog by rapturous exclamation at every point the dog makes. Tell him that you wish you had a camera along to take the picture; the most suspicious man on earth will accept as gospel-truth any flattery you may give him about his dog. Get him to talk about his dog when

you stop for lunch, and tell any strangers that you happen to meet that the dog is the greatest dog on earth. The dog will know better, but his owner won't.

Never travel more than three in a crowd. Two are plenty, but more than three are dangerous. Some enthusiastic member in a quartet is apt to pepper you with a few pellets of shot in a moment of temporary aberration and his "By George, old man, I'm awfully sorry!" is only partially soothing to the victim. Do not, above all things, clean out a bevy of birds, even if quail are scarce. Leave a few for next season. Twenty quail to a man are as many as should be shot, even in a country where fifty or more could be bagged.

IN WINTER WOODS

THE prevailing tints of white and black in the January woods give an erroneous idea of solemnity to one who views them at a distance. The bleakness, the isolation, and the staring colors which lend such sharp contrasts emphasize this feeling. To those who are strangers to the delights of a tramp through snowy forests, the wintry wastes hold no mysteries of sound and silence, no revelations or suggestions. But to those who have for many a long year followed the gun, the woods in winter are especially significant of life and wonder, of beauty and of music.

To begin with, there are everywhere the microscopic effects of the season. Each tree, stripped of its foliage, stands nakedly in the crisp and clear atmosphere as a mast with all sails furled stands out at sea. Here and there perhaps a brown leaf clings to a branch of

some old oak or hickory, but the impression in general is that of absolute starkness. The drifts below add to this, and under them the summer's greenery has long since been disintegrating and assuming new form and substance. The clearness of the atmosphere is very marked near at hand, but farther away, and particularly if the surrounding country rises into hills, a faint blue haze gathers like the smoke flung from a farm-house chimney. Stillness is what will be found paramount in the by-paths and thickets unless one is disposed to be curious and plunge deeper into the woods in search of its life and inhabitants.

The birds for the most part are gone. The robin, the bluebird, the blackbirds, the woodpeckers, cat-birds, thrushes, and orioles, have fled away before the hurrying vanguards of the north. But down along the creek-bottoms the blue-jay's challenge still sounds, and his bright blue wings flit through the dusky treetops. Wind blow north or wind blow south, his hardy nature rises equal to the test of either burning sun or driving snows. The hawk, at odd times, may be seen circling high up, but he is an infrequent sight during the

colder weather. The owls couch in the thick brush or perch in sheltered crevices in the hollow trees. The chickadees—pert, black-capped gossips—dodge about at the edges of the woods and busy themselves along the rail-fences by the fields. Nowhere is the iron hand of winter felt so harshly as in the meadows and fields. There a few broken and discolored cornstalks flap or creak in the winds that sweep by, and the winding-sheet of snow is unrelieved by aught to break the cheerless monotony. Overhead in the timber a shadow sometimes falls across the snow, the shade of a broad and wandering wing, and the hoarse, harsh cry of a foraging crow echoes raucously in the trees. The course of a crow's flight through heavy timber is hardly discernible, so well do the dark branches blend with his dusky pinions. Most brilliant of all colors in the woods of middle America during the winter months is the red-bird's wing and the jaunty set of his crested head. Alert, saucy, and suspicious, he appears in the thicket beyond, drops from sight, reappears, and again is gone. His beautiful flaming flight is a line of fire along the drifted

brush-wood—" the light that never was on sea or land."

The philosophy and inner revealments of snow-enveloped woods are not to be enjoyed with a gun. If you bring the gun along the hunter's instinct will urge you on, and some things will escape you, however successful you are with the game you seek. A stout stick, a lunch, and three or four apples are all you need for one of these tramps through the timber. The snowy whiteness of a creek's frozen surface is a page where all sorts of pothooks and hieroglyphics are written by the animals and birds that haunt the woods. Chief of all of these indications is the rabbit's track. Here, there, and everywhere these tracks turn and cross, and in some places they are crowded as closely together as the tracks of a flock of sheep are sometimes massed. The mink's track will be found there, and the foot-note jotted down by the wily " Br'er Coon." Sometimes a sweeping aside of the snow and the marks of a bird's feet will show where a ruffed grouse has stood on the ice and brushed the snow away with his tail-feathers. Mice-tracks, wee dots on the snow,

lead up to some harboring log, and the sign-manual of the quail is seen crossing over to disappear in a neighboring thicket. Where the chickadees have been dodging about on the thinly strewn creek's bed their tiny claws have etched sharp little marks which fade quickly when the sun comes up and over to investigate.

Out in the heavier woods you will find occasionally where bowl-like depressions in the snow at regular intervals lead from tree to tree. These mark where a squirrel has jumped along. In the winter days when the sun shines and the woods begin to warm up a trifle a fox-squirrel will be tempted out to make society calls, and he goes bouncing along at such times in a series of undignified jumps. If you care to rout a rabbit out, go into the thickets and around fallen logs in the timber where the underbrush is pretty thick, and you will find one there somewhere. He will soon put a good distance between your path and his, and will, doubtless, wonder at not hearing the crack of a gun or the bark of a dog as he scurries away.

Down along the creek's edge, under old logs, you may find mullein leaves, still soft and the lower leaves yet unblackened by the frosts. And there, too, will sometimes be found moss which is still green and vigorous. The grass for the most part is absolutely dead and of a tawny brown color, and yet it lies thick and heavy underneath the snows. Hickory-nuts and acorns are scattered through this withered growth, and many a patient woodland forager has knowledge of that fact. Below the icy shield over the creek the current flows; and cold as the water is it holds the music of summer in its minors and trebles. Every day when the sun shines there is a glamour of April in the air, a mirage of brighter and sunnier hours. That black reed by the frozen pool—the red-wing is tilting it down, and his whistle sounds as clear as running water. The shaft of sunshine across that limb—was it a golden-winged woodpecker's wing? Even the woods themselves, blackened though they be, seem only slumbering and waiting for the clarion of March to blow them into sap drapery of green leaf again. Only when the days are dull and the

drifts pile high are the woods wrapped in gloom. Then, when the skies are gray and skeleton clouds hang like cobwebs on a wintry ceiling, and the bitter winds blow desolation of wraith-like snow-flurries along the paths, the tall trees mourn. Their branches creak and sway sadly in the blasts. Then the kindly evidence of beast and bird is blotted out by the shifting, furry blankets which tumble among the tree-trunks. And the lack of sunlight is the loss of life. The jay and redbird dive into densest cover, and the grim old crow huddles somewhere out of the storm as best he can.

But when the wind dies away and the generous sun dips down to the earth once more the woods are glad again, and many a subtle hint of change is heralded and shadowed forth. There is promise and suggestion in the sun's light whether in January or June. And desolate aisles of the forest flame up as the sleeping colors of some old cathedral's art-stained windows wake when the western fire flares across. Bud and blossom seem near at hand, and a feathery drift of toppling snows might almost be a bank of daisies—

Sweet daisies, by the vagrant seasons thinned,
Born of the sun and cradled in the wind.

Color then there surely is, and life and beauty and music in the lilt of hidden water, of wailing branches and aeolian harps above. But surely not to the careless or unthinking natures, nor to those who do not feel uplifted and exhilarated by the dreams and fancies that lurk beneath this hood and shade of winter, which, after all, is only the mask of spring.

If you care to, you may find enough to make a bouquet of as you stroll through the woods on a bright day, even if the season of snow has already entered on its reign. The violets and wind-flowers are mere ghostly memories, of course, and the harebells have faded. The blue flag-lilies of the marshy pools and the primroses of the slopes are under the snows. The dainty honeysuckles are dreams of a summer yet to be. Notwithstanding all these absences, there are still color and life and beauty if one but will seek for them.

Gray thistle-pods, all rifled of their seeds,
Swaying and trembling in each passing gust;
December grasses, tarnished deep with rust,
And fluffy blooms of nameless tufted weeds;

And here, where shelvingly a slope recedes
Down to the prisoned marsh's icy crust,
Thorn twigs are seen, their daggers outward thrust,
And blackened stems of brittle river reeds.

These you may gather; all are nature's own,
Touched by the sunlight, gladdened by the rain;
And beautiful if you should deem them so,
As here they dream among the byways lone,
Illumined by the bitter-sweet's bright stain,
Red as a winter sunset's afterglow.