

WINTER SHOOTING IN FLORIDA.

BY F. CAMPBELL MOLLER.

WITH the middle of December the upland shooting in the Eastern States comes virtually to an end. To be sure, a couple of weeks remain before the curtain of legal protection descends over the game still to be found in the dead fields and snow-whitened coppices on the first day of the new year, but the remnants of the quail bevvies are wild, and, in much shot-over districts, begin to approach in their watchful behavior and antics the typical wariness of the hawk. As for the ruffed-grouse, one needs to be a thorough workman, both in shooting and stalking, to render even a tolerable account of these birds. The last woodcock was seen nearly a month ago, this mid December day, as one fired and missed him among the black alders, and he is up and away on the next stage of his journey to the swamp-lands of the Carolinas or the Mississippi.

The sportsman resident of the country may at this season of the year have an occasional sun-gilded winter's day with the setters, when the breeze comes Warm from the south. But more often will be listening to the tinkling, musical notes Of his beagles as the brown hare leads them a circling chase through the brier-fields, or the deeper notes of the fox-hounds will strike upon his ear as they echo among the gray cliffs of the brown-treed mountain-side.

Yes, it may not seem to be quite the correct thing to my English readers, but we shoot foxes from a "runaway" in the rough, wooded, hilly country of the Eastern States, where it would be impossible to ride to hounds, and gladly do we accept this chance to rid our farmers of this destroyer of game and poultry.

After the 1st of January, comes the exodus of fashion, sport and ill-health from the rigors and blizzards of a Northern winter, and many are the queries from brethren of the gun, visiting for the first time the land of Spanish-moss and palm-trees, to those who have shot quail among the wild violets and sweet jessamine in the Carolinas during early springtime, or "plugged" alligators in some muddy "backout" of the Upper St. John.

No matter whether he knows how to use a gun or not, nearly every man off for an outing in the South thinks it necessary to

take with him some such weapon for the destruction of animal life. This fact in brief, is sufficient reason for the scarcity of game along the shore and in the waters of the traveled portion of the St. John's River. Continual bombarding has driven the denizens of flood and field to remoter districts, and if one wishes really good sport, he must literally hunt for it.

The majority of men going South solely for sport take the Charleston, Savannah or Fernandina steamers, continuing by rail, if necessary, to their destination, which is certainly the most economical procedure, especially if one's dogs be taken. This should always be done, if possible, as a dog fit for a sportsman to shoot over can rarely be hired or even bought in Florida until the end of the season.

If quail-shooting be the expressed desideratum, one had better confine one's self to the Carolinas or to Georgia, both for quantity and proper ground to shoot over. But if he desires a variety, such as snipe, deer, 'gator and quail shooting, all on diverse grounds, lying, however, in the sweep of a short radius from the spot he makes his headquarters, Florida must needs be his objective.

If one is not going below the Carolinas, a rifle will be an unnecessary encumbrance. Bird-shooting alone will be obtainable unless you visit the wild mountainous country far from the paths of the Northern tourist. Here the shotgun and buckshot are the chief agents used in killing deer, and, in this sport as practiced in that section. of the wildwoods, one must nearly always be able to ride well; and unless one is shooting on some friend's invitation, he must also pay well for the auxiliaries necessary to secure a shot at the denizens of the woods.

The same directions will apply to "jumping" deer with dogs from among the stunted scrub covers of the Florida brakes. One generally shoots from horseback at the small deer of this region, because the saddle affords a much better opportunity of seeing over the clumps of dwarf oaks or palmettos than would be obtained on foot.

For alligator shooting a heavy bored rifle—especially an express—will be indispensable. A forty-four calibre repeater will, however, be found to answer very well

for all-round work on the river. And here, let me at once dissipate any tyro's fallacious belief regarding the invulnerability of the American saurian, save in the eye. I have known them—aye, big ones at that—to be killed with buckshot from a close-carrying shotgun, at a distance of thirty-five yards by planting a few pellets behind the fore-shoulder, and in the thinner skin of the lateral abdominal walls. Frequently a second or even a third shot at close range will be necessary to finish them as they lie floundering in the shoal and blood-stained shore-waters by the side of a half-submerged old tree-trunk. But more of 'gator shooting anon.

Tweed clothes of light color and loosely woven texture should be worn for Florida sporting, as it is warm shooting there even in midwinter. When shooting or outing generally, it is much better to increase the thickness and warmth of the underclothing as the coolness of weather renders such advisable, than to encumber one's movements by heavy coats and trousers. A pair of thick, oil-tanned grained-leather knee-boots with legs made as narrow as permissible, to be worn with thick-ribbed, long hose, will be found the best shoeing to be used in the Florida bottoms. The long boots, coming over the buttonings of the snug-fitting knee-breeches of whipcord—not knickerbockers, mind you—where they fasten just above the swell of the calf, will be found the most comfortable and consistent rig, whether splashing through the sloppy prairies, along the river after snipe, or tramping the waste fields in the clearings between the pine woods. Should you wear ankle-boots and the baggy knickerbockers, always don a pair of thick leathern leggings as an indispensable precaution against the musical and larksome rattler.

Along the St. John's, from Magnolia to Enterprise, increasing proportionately as one nears the latter place, fair sport may be had with all the before-mentioned varieties of game by driving or boating far enough into the recesses of the back country, away from the spots easily reached by the average hotel lounge. But for really good shooting one must get over into the Indian River region, or, better still, the Hummocks on the Gulf coast, and especially about Homassassa, if he wants good accommodation and an abundance of deer, quail, and snipe as well as bass fishing. Below Lake Georges and extending toward the Everglades is an immense breadth of country, comparatively unknown, rich in sport

and adventure to the exploring tourist who is willing to endure much rough travel by canoe and portage, and to pitch his tent o' nights in the great dense swamp-lands.

In Florida, quail are mostly shot in the open of the stubble fields or clearings, or in the slight cover underlying the tall, shadowy pine-lands, for the simple reason that the "thickets" in the far South are almost impassable. I remember once following a bevy of quail, flushed from an old maize field, into a bordering covert of prickly plum, cactus and palmetto, with the same indifference with which I generally plunge into the many-stemmed alder-brake or waist-high cat-briers at home. I shall never do it again. Let the bevy go! Start up a fresh one, and trust to your skill in "driving" them into lyings more favorable for your purposes, if not for theirs.

For shooting in the country back from one's hotel a wagon and pair will be needed, and, unless you are well acquainted with the region, a driver and guide combined, be he "Cracker" "Nigger" or Indian. As most of these gentry do a little pot-shooting" themselves, in season and out, they will generally insure you good sport, particularly if the man is made to understand that an extra "tip" may be forthcoming, when you return in the evening, proportionate with the amount of game found.

A deal of shooting is done driving through the rough country, among the pine woods, leaving at times the sandy road for miles together, provided the undergrowth be not too dense. And with the dogs quartering on each side of the wagon, one has but to get out and shoot when a point is obtained.

I find No. 10 shot, backed by a heavy charge of powder, the best size for shooting Southern quail, which, by the way, are a trifle smaller than the Northern bird, although identical in all other respects. No. 10 shot is also the proper size for snipe. Some capital bags of these migratory birds may be obtained even on the meadows—or prairies as they are called in Florida—suburban to Jacksonville,

But quail and snipe shooting in the South, with trifling differences as to covert, haunt and lyings, inseparable from the richness of the tropical setting and coloring, will be found so analagous to the same sport in the North that further comment is unnecessary. However, it will prove a new and delightful experience to the Northern sportsman to flush birds, as is frequently done, in the scent-laden atmos-

phere amid the glorious coppery splashes of color of an orange grove, and see through the tree-stems the blue St. John's flashing its sapphire width in the warmth of golden sunlight, and the solitary giant palm rising here and there along the far, sandy shore.

A day with the alligators is not bad sport when properly undertaken and provided for; and the hide, teeth and feet will put you in possession of much valuable material to be made into bags, leggings, slippers, shoes, whistles, and gun-racks. But since the utility of the 'gator's hide has been discovered, they, too, are fast disappearing from the places wherein they formerly abounded.

This sort of sport does not demand an early morning start. The best time to approach within easy range of the alligators is while they are taking their siesta at mid-day or early afternoon, sunning themselves on the bog burrocks, which, in lieu of a beach, mark the line of demarcation between the waters of the bayou and the swampy forest bottoms.

Your skiff and man—who, by the way, should be a good paddler and familiar with the haunts of the quarry you intend pursuing—having been engaged over-night, you may breakfast as late and as leisurely as you will, provided you have not too far to row to your proposed ground before high noon. So, enjoy your repast of fresh fish and game of the region, after having previously coolingly and deliciously prepared your palate with a goblet full of pure orange juice from fruit plucked that morning. Your sable attendant is waiting outside in the warm, genial sunshine, in which all of his color love to work for periods almost indefinite, and relieves your waiter first of all, because to him the most important, of the luncheon hamper, grinning the while, and giving a soft "chaw! chaw!" as he hefts its portentous weight and eyes the claret and beer bottles protruding from one of the partly raised lids. This all being to his entire satisfaction, he will pick up your macintosh coat and shotgun and precede the way to his boat. You take a gun as well as a rifle, as doubtless you will get some shots at ducks and shore-birds as you row to the creek and back, especially the latter, because the evening flight will then be on.

Your man may have pulled you for nearly an hour, and as you near a bay which marks the outlet of a creek leading to the lagoon where you intend paddling

for 'gators, an object well out from shore attracts attention. It looks like a water-logged dead branch floating under water save for three knotty protuberances rising above the placid surface. It is the snout, orbital bone and topmost spinal joint of a 'gator, at least eight feet in length, judging the distances between the slightly exposed portions of his scaly frame. No use firing at him; even if one did hit the small mark he gives at 200 yards, he would only be lost, for a dead or wounded alligator will always sink to the bottom, and there, where that old chap is floating in silent content, the water is much too deep to use the long boat-hook or the grapnel to fetch his body to the surface.

Entering the bayou, the darky exchanges the oars for a thing he calls a paddle. Not as delicately shaped it is as are those you have used about Bar Harbor or on the Adirondack lakes, but it will answer the purpose admirably. You seat yourself in the bow of the boat with your repeater across your knees. There is a fascination in this coasting along the weird, shadowy banks of the tropical creek, with its wealth of beautifully and vividly colored birds. Rounding into the entrance of the lagoon one sees a flock of white heron with wings glistening and flashing in the sunlight as they fly over yonder moss-hung headland; and the brilliant flamingo dyes with a gliding streak of salmon-pink his reflected flight in the shaded, still waters underlying the wild tangle of the wooded shore along which your boat is silently creeping. The skiff rounds the headland.

"Look yaar, sah! Dere he be—ole 'gator on a lorg."

"Where? where?" is hastily whispered, as you anxiously scan the shore-line for a hundred yards ahead. Nothing, however, meets the inexperienced eye but a wild reach of water-grass, rushes, bog-burrocks and partly submerged fallen tree-trunks.

"Dar, sah! under dat big cypress, 'bout ten rod ahead, and lying on de lorg on de show. Shoot, or he'll be orf next minit," hurriedly whispers your "gillie."

"Ah! there he is." One holds just back of the fore-shoulder. Bang! "He's hit!" Then his tail wildly beats the air, and he rolls into the water, which just covers but does not conceal his frantic contortions, only to expose himself to a second shot as he flounders up on some sunken logs. The man has grasped the oars after the first shot, and is rowing rapidly to the spot

where the mud and spray are being whirled vigorously about..

"Give him a shot in the neck." Missed! but no matter.

Now we're within twenty yards of him. "Stop, Joe; don't row up any farther. Keep well out of the reach of his tail." Now, pump another ball at his head or neck to break his cervical vertebræ "Good!" He rolls off the log, but "rolled off dead, shoo," says woolly-head, showing his ivories, and getting the long-pointed hook ready for use when the blood-stained waters shall have cleared away.

While the darky busies himself with removing the alligator's skin, you start off for a shot at a flock of teal which has come dangerously near, and perhaps you also secure some plover. There is every reason to be satisfied as you turn your boat down

stream for home. The waters are aglow in the evening sun; not a breath of air is stirring; everywhere calm and quiet. You puff away at your pipe, and as you gaze at the 'gator skin in the bottom of your skiff, you find a use for every tooth and every inch of hide, and you picture to yourself the pleasure you are going to give to numerous friends. It is well to dispose of your cargo in this way before you make your landing, for there at the wharf you will find assembled the usual contingent of pretty girls waiting for the evening steamer and the return of the different boating and shooting parties. Hard-hearted will you have to be to withstand the pleadings for mementos, etc., and there is every probability that when you reach your hotel all that you have left will be the memory of a pleasant afternoon with a 'gator.

THE CRUISE OF THE FROLIC.

BY S. G. W. BENJAMIN.

THERE is no cruising-ground on the coast of the United States equal to that around Massachusetts Bay, and north as far as Portsmouth. The ports are frequent and generally easy of access, and the variety of scenery, the picturesque nature of the coast, the sea flavor about the character of the people, and the quaintness of the towns of that region invest it with singular raciness and an endless variety of charm. Our yachtsmen are fast finding this out, although I think one can better enjoy and appreciate these attractions when cruising in a small five-tonner than in a large yacht, or in the company of a fleet, for there are many curious nooks which only such a wee ship, off on a roving commission by itself, would think of visiting. And it is this very dodging among these odd corners of our coast that adds especial zest to the enjoyments of your cruising yachtsman.

So much by way of preface to the statement that a lot of jolly sons of Gotham made up their minds, on a certain summer in the eighties, to fly the hurry of Wall Street and the temptations of a sinful metropolis for the pure breezes of ocean, following in the wake of the sea serpent and of the Pilgrim discoverers.

No seaport in America offers so many small craft handy for inexpensive cruising as Boston. And hither Benton, our Co-

rinthian skipper, and the writer of this log hied in search of a suitable sloop or schooner obtainable at a reasonable sum. The keel sloop *Frolic* was finally selected, and put into proper condition by the addition of fresh paint, new cushions and curtains, a yawl, and the like. Charts and compass, lead and fishing-lines, a new cable, and a stock of provisions, including a supply of fluids, were also put on board; the rigging was set up anew, and last, but not least, the crew was engaged. It consisted of one pock-marked, grizzly-bearded mariner, whose appearance was not altogether in his favor. But he came well recommended; had been mate of a brig, it was stated, and had also sailed in many yachts. He declared himself able and willing to pilot us into every port as far as Eastport, to do "light cooking," to serve as steward, and bear a hand in working the sloop; he was, in fact, a paragon of nautical excellences. My experience has led me to doubt those who lay claim to such versatility and virtue, whether on land or sea, whether in matters horsey or matters marine. But Mr. Brown was the best who offered, and was therefore regularly enrolled on the ship's list of the *Frolic*.

Scarcely was everything in readiness when Will Hallett and Frank Weller arrived from New York, and made signals,