

SHOOTING ON THE GULF COAST.

BY W. B. LEFFINGWELL.



MY boyhood days were spent where game was plentiful, and nothing but the exigencies of urgent business has been powerful enough to deprive me of an outing afield in each of the passing years. Last year I was a bond slave to business in Chicago,

while the fever of old-time sport ran with more than its wonted vigor; yet the summer days glided by, and less and less seemed the probabilities that the yoke of labor would be lightened. But the fates were working my emancipation in the person of the Hon. Frank Holland, of Dallas, Texas, who sang the siren song of "A hunter's and angler's paradise, where you can hunt geese, ducks, snipe, curlew or quail, catch tarpon, trout, red fish or Spanish mackerel, and dine on oysters, shrimp and terrapin within a few yards from where your boat is anchored."

Was Anthony ever tempted thus?

I fell from the grace of business, and as such turpitude, like poverty, loves company, I drew into my net, as my chosen companion, the hard-worked secretary of Montgomery, Ward & Co., Mr. George A. Thorne. Together we left Chicago on a wintry morning bound for Rockport, Texas. Our journey was a most delightful one; on the following day we were speeding through the scenic Ozark Mountains, that afternoon through the Indian Territory and at night through Texas.

Our host had gathered his party at Kennedy, where our land journey ended and our outdoor life was to commence, and, mindful that variety is no less the soul of sport than of life, had yoked on a worthy triumvirate of other sportsmen in the persons of three as good Nimrods as ever pulled trigger, Mr. Kirk Hall, of Dallas, and Col. I. L. Elwood and C. W. Marsh, of De Kalb, Ill.

The first morning of our hunt broke as beautiful and fresh as June; the sun arose across the bay as bright and clear

as in summer days; at the wharves the little schooners rocked with gentle undulations, for the wind was just astir and the waters were tremulous. All had been prepared for our trip; and soon the *Alice* and *White Rose* spread their canvas wings.

Captain William Armstrong, of our boat, *Alice*, assumed command, and we profited by his lore of land and sea. The first day we sailed perhaps twenty-five miles up Matagorda Bay, a beautiful sheet of water dotted here and there with islands of green, some small, some quite large, and all beached with myriad oyster shells. We stopped only once, and then to get oysters sufficient for our supper. That night the wind went down, the bay was as calm as a sleeping child and the heavens filled with stars of unusual brilliancy. Not a breath of air stirred, and it was so warm that we sat out of doors in our shirt sleeves. How the stars twinkled that night and were reflected in the sleeping waters! Our voices seemed unusually loud, bitt were hushed when the whistling wings of belated ducks were heard overhead, or the cry of a loon pierced the atmosphere and was answered by another apparently miles away. The next morning we did our first shooting.

The party was divided, Messrs. Holland, Elwood, Marsh and Thorne preferring to go after ducks and geese, and Mr. Hall and myself for quail. We landed on Matagorda Island—an island perhaps twenty-five miles long and from one to four miles wide—where we found a team awaiting us. It was a mule team, reins of rope, tugs of chain, but a wagon of excellent proportion. The parties placed at ponds for geese, Mr. Hall and I remained with the wagon and went in pursuit of quail.

As we drove over the island I could not but notice the scenery and soil. Here and there little bunches of chaparral shot above the weeds and grass and gave a deeper tinge to the waving fields of brown and green, and the sandy soil was made more, apparent at the foot of the cactus bushes. These bushes are the places where quail enjoy their mid-day siestas, for they seek them from ten o'clock till four, and there bask in the

warm sunshine and dust themselves. And such quantities of quail! Never had I seen them quite so plentiful before; almost every cactus bush had its covey of quail. We shot many, and as we drove we were told there were many deer on the island, and that possibly we might get a shot.

Our course took us along the margin of a dry slough, and suddenly there sprung ahead of us from the grass a splendid doe. Instantly the Captain cried to me: "Put in a shell with big shot; there's a buck in the grass."

I did not see the deer, but my comrades did, and almost simultaneously two reports rang out, the buck gave one wild plunge, his head fell heavily against his shoulders, and he crushed to earth. We put the deer into the wagon, and then moved slowly along looking for quail under the cactus. I watched the bush, but I did not change my heavy shells, and 'twas lucky for me that I did not, for as we approached the bush a magnificent yearling buck plunged from it not more than twenty-five yards away. He made a few jumps before I caught him, and, at the discharge of my gun, he made one wild leap and fell dead, his neck filled with No. 3 shot—my wild goose load. Congratulations were showered upon me, and we thought we had achieved quite glory enough for one day, but I was destined to still more and continued sport at the fresh-water pond, where we found Mr. Thorne already busy. I liked the looks of that pond and, as I knew it was the only one for miles, ducks and geese would surely come there for water. Unfortunately I had but a few shells, but I decided to spend the balance of the day there, whilst the genial Captain and friend Hall went to the boat for shells.

The day was quite warm and summer-like, and I divested myself of my coat, awaiting the flight of game. At times a few scattered flocks of ducks came in, and almost invariably paid toll. The noon hour was a drowsy one. The flight of ducks and geese began about two, and I looked longingly in the distance for my companions. I was willing to go thirsty, I was willing to go hungry, but how I did wish for more ammunition! As it was, however, I killed a big bag of ducks and Canada geese before my companions returned.

It was late when we reached the boat.

I had gone hungry for most of the day, and, even had I not, I could have done ample justice to the venison, the quail, the oysters, and the hot biscuits that awaited me.

The next morning we sailed further up the bay, passing islands of the same character as seen before, and saw hundreds of swans and pelicans on the island bars. We were now in pursuit of "redheads," for, while they were abundant in portions of the bay, we were prevented by first one thing, then another, from getting at them. Sailing all the forenoon brought us to a little island which the Captain said was the first red-head grounds. With numerous decoys we sought the coves and inlets, but missed the flight. We killed a few ducks, but others of the party were more successful.

The following morning we started again. Much time was wasted in an endeavor to locate the flight, yet the afternoon enabled us to make the score for the day good. The afternoon was one of observation for me, and, as I had noticed the flight of geese about two miles west of us, I knew that flight led to a fresh-water pond, and I determined to find that pond on the morrow and to get in line of a flight that had been undisturbed for days, possibly weeks. "I am with you," volunteered my colleague, Thorne, true sportsman that he is. Our "Captain," of course, was included.

We had an early breakfast, and a tramp of about two miles brought us to a dried-up swale or low land, through which a belt of dried mud showed where fresh water had recently been. To an inexperienced hunter there was not so much to indicate that one would obtain good shooting here, but, having marked the location the day before, and knowing the scarcity of fresh water, it was a certainty to me that the geese would come here some time during the day for water. We dug pits for blinds, each on the opposite side of the pond; we stuck weeds into the soft soil which margined our blinds and were soon ready for the coming of the geese. At first they did not come, and Mr. Thorne, becoming impatient, wandered away to another pond where ducks were pitching in.

From my post I had ample opportunity to take in my surroundings. On

every side the prairie grass met the horizon; to the south the sand dunes protected the island from the roaring gulf, whose proximity was constantly heard, and once a schooner's topmast glided along as if on the distant land; to the west the hill arose with gentle slope, and cactus bushes and weeds and grass parted here and there disclosing the blue sky; at the north the dried bed island ponds were traced, and far away an old windmill stood like a sentinel. Less than a hundred yards was an old barbed-wire fence, which to our memories will be ever dear, for over it the geese came in trios, sextets and flocks, and oftentimes were compelled to raise their flight to prevent striking it. Those who have hunted geese, or who have studied their habits, know with what regularity they come and go, and I knew that if we were in their line of flight we would enjoy the finest sport of our lives.

The day was beautiful and clear; the wind blew from the east just sufficiently strong to at times catch the strong pinions of the birds and veer them slightly. I had been in my blind perhaps half an hour, had killed eight ducks which I set up as decoys, when afar in the west I saw the first flight of Canada geese trailing along the dried pond beds. I watched them closely, for they were the forerunners of a great army, and I knew that their trail would be followed for the balance of the day by those who straggled behind. Along they came, nearer and nearer; they reached the old wire fence and, responding to my "Ah-unk!" "Ah-unk!" they ceased vibrating their wings, sails were set, and, with vociferous cries, they hovered over my decoys.

I doubled up one with each barrel and the balance hurried away in wild affright. The killing of the two geese afforded me pleasure, but the greater pleasure came from the fact that I had circumvented the birds, had found their line of flight, and was promised a day of rare sport. The geese came every few minutes. Those I killed I set up for decoys, and, although I signaled after the first geese were killed, I had bagged eight before I could get my companion back.

The main flight was now on and, as we waited for the birds to come between us, few flocks escaped paying toll. I

will not describe the many doubles we made, how we at one time killed all of six which hovered over our decoys, and how we often killed birds at seemingly impossible distances and heights, nor will I confess to easy misses which we made by misjudging height, distance and speed.

During a lull in the flight the Captain stopped at my blind, and when I complimented the beautiful day and the mild wind, which had now increased in force, he replied, "The day has been beautiful, but what will the night or the morrow be?" "The same as to-day," I responded. "Don't depend upon that," he replied; "the wind is increasing, the cranes are uneasy, the flight of ducks is erratic, and the sky has taken on a darker tinge at the north, and to-night or to-morrow I look for a 'norther.'" "A norther?" I replied. "I should be more than pleased to see one, for, coming from the North, I would like to see what our winds are like after they have reached you and passed over the entire South." "Don't you jest about a 'norther,'" he replied, "for they are mighty serious affairs, and I reckon when you have encountered one you will not care to see another."

About four o'clock the wind increased in force; it veered to the north and at five o'clock it was blowing a gale. The Captain was extremely anxious to reach his boat, and we reluctantly left our blinds. The ride to the boat was a cold one, and our skiffs were tossed like corks, for a "norther" was upon us and the water was crested with white caps.

Messrs. Hall and Marsh had put in a portion of the day after quail, and we found that unitedly we had bagged seventy-three geese, forty-one ducks, thirty-seven quail, two cranes and one wildcat. Mr. Hall shot the wildcat as it bounded from beneath a cactus bush.

It had been our intention to have gone farther north and to Heinz Bay after red-heads and canvas-backs the next morning, but a head wind prevented, and, acting upon the advice of the Captain, we lifted anchor and started on our return to Rockport, for we were assured the "norther" would last several days and we could not fish or hunt.

We were much disappointed in this, for the Captain of the *White Rose* had promised to draw his immense seine,

when he would catch anywhere from a barrel to a half a dozen barrels of the famous "diamond-back terrapin." Our trip to Rockford was a stormy one; the wind blew a gale, the bay was very rough, and we all escaped seasickness by the narrowest of margins. Our sloop tossed and rolled in the trough of the sea, our mainsail was torn into shreds, our boats were enveloped at times in spray, so, taking it altogether, we experienced a "norther" which, justified the Captain's prediction. We have no desire to encounter another.

When the gale had blown itself out, Thorne and I decided to return with Captain Armstrong to the land of the "red-heads," and so we sailed north again, this time destined for Heinz Bay, other red-head resorts and Port Lavaca. But we were destined not to reach either that night. After sailing an hour after dark we reached the harbor where we had previously landed and killed so many geese. We could not go farther, so decided to visit the geese again in the morning, and once more see that good old wire fence; then in the afternoon to sail for Port Lavaca.

At break of day we were in the blinds. The day broke dark and dismal, and ram had filled all the ponds. I at once saw that we were apt to lose the line of flight, for there was so much water that the geese could find hundreds of fresh-water ponds now. So it proved. We got shots at only four geese and bagged two of them. But the lowering day and north wind, the late "norther" and another approaching, stirred up the ducks so they came in flocks large and small to our decoys. At first, a mist moistened our hands and faces; then it rained, and it kept on raining until we, in spite of corduroys, were soaked. Rain and sand played havoc with our guns. I felt several times like surrendering to the weather, and finally, at about four o'clock, Mr. Thorne's extractor refused to work any longer and we gave up.

One more day we put in on duck, and it was our last. We found a better flight about half a mile east of our former blinds. Then, as the time set for our outing was up, we put about and had a pleasant sail to Rockport. We had found all that Mr. Holland had promised.

WINTER WORK WITH THE CAMERA.

BY DR. JOHN NICOL.

THE photographer who cannot see beauty even in "November sad and drear" does well to follow the example of his kind by laying aside his camera till the birds again begin to sing, and taking up some more congenial source of amusement; but he to whom photography is something higher than a mere amusement, who sees in it a means of recording his impressions of nature's various and ever-changing moods, will recognize in the fall of the leaf, the gem-bedecked branches, sparkling in the early sunshine, the hoar-frosted hedges, as if nature had taken to growing feathers, and the "beautiful snow," covering all else in its mantle of virgin purity, opportunities of picture-making equal, at least, if not greater than are afforded by any other season.

But beautiful as is nature in her various wintry garbs, their simple reproduction by photography does not make pictures, or at least pictures in the truer and higher sense of the term. If

it be true of a sunny summer landscape, with the cattle sheltering from the noon-day heat under the leafy branches or quenching their thirst in the babbling brook, that its beauty as a picture lies not so much in what is seen as in what is suggested, it is much more so of a snow-clad or ice-bound scene, as there is a charm in even a topographical representation of the former not generally found in the latter.

This will be better understood by an examination of the illustrations Nos. 1 and 2. Both are equally topographic, *i.e.*, simple reproductions or records of fact; but No. 2, although beautiful enough in its way or of its kind to attract attention, does not retain it. Its beauty, all its beauty, is seen at a glance, whereas we return again and again to No. 1, and each time find something new to admire.

Nos. 3 and 4 are of a different kind. One well illustrates what is meant by "suggestion rather than depiction," whilst the other illustrates what should