in the line of boats trying his hand at shooting; but his greater pleasure, especially in later years, was to sail out in his little sloop and enjoy the sport of cod and haddock fishing. He was ever a generous and beloved landlord among his dependents, and the kindest of parents, ever delighted to have his sons with him, on marshes, over the farm, or in the boat. The elder one, Fletcher, a colonel in a Union regiment, fell in battle during the late war, and the youngest, Major Edward, died of disease during the Mexican War. It was a sorrowful day when the remains of the statesman were interred, on a hill-side overlooking the ocean and the meadows.

Shooting on Upland, Marsh and Stream
Ed William Bruce Leffingwell
Chicago and New York
Rand, McNally and Company, Publishers
1890

THE WOODCOCK.

By William Jarvis ("Mont Clare").

IN the list of birds pursued with dog and gun, there is one that has a lasting claim upon the affections of a sportsman, both on account of its beauty and the mystery that surrounds its ways; a bird of mighty wanderings and daily rest; a bird with eyes large, dark, and deep, in whose depths the glories of an autumnal sky and landscape are reflected in miniature; a bird with the magic power to turn its admirer from all other feathered game, if once he hears the whistle of its wings or sees its form glide stealthily down the glade.

Its plumage above is mottled with rufous, slate, and black, the first two colors softly blending upon the sides of the neck, while below, upon the shapely breast, there is a tinge of pink, which changes to a rufous toward the wings and thighs. This color—full upon the breast of a perfect-plumaged bird, fading away as it nears the tail to the shade of a bit of sedge—reminds one of the reflection of an October sunset. Its legs are of moderate length, delicate in their molding, and flesh-tinted; the toes are long and slender; its bill dark in color and very long, and the full dark eyes, set quite to the top of the head, that it may more safely feed without injury to its eyesight, give to this bird a most singular appearance. Its length is about eleven inches, and its weight from five to eight ounces, the female generally being the larger. Such is

the woodcock, a bird once known, never to be forgotten.

It has, too, a claim upon the epicure as well as the sportsman, and, from those days when the Pontine marshes furnished woodcock in such numbers that the Romans feasted upon their tongues until to-day, this bird has been regarded as one of the daintiest morsels ever tasted by man.

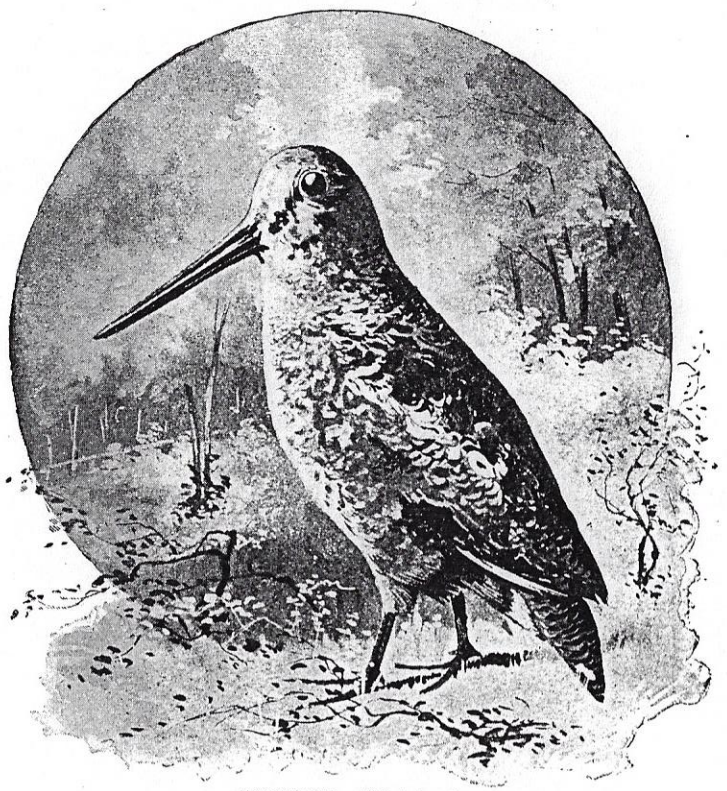
Of woodcock we have but one variety, inhabiting Eastern North America, and breeding in various sections of the United States and Provinces, called by orinthologists *Philohela minor*, to distinguish it in a scientific manner from its cousin, the woodcock of Europe, which differs from ours in shape of wings and general markings, being less beautiful in coloring, and in size a third larger. Wherever the woodcock may be found, it is a migratory bird, although in the most southern of its breeding-grounds its migrations are of short duration. It is something of a Bohemian in its ways, bound to live well for the day, or rather the night; no matter for the morrow; governed in its choice of home by no provincial laws, but by the climate and the food which it loves so well; fearing the cold, the sleet, and the snows, and altogether being a lover of the sunny side of life.

The woodcock of the Northern States is the woodcock of the Southern—no difference in its markings, no difference in its size, nor in the flavor of its flesh.

The bobolink of New England is the reed-bird of the Pennsylvania marshes, the rice-bird of the South; its food varies, and so does its flavor.

The ruffed grouse in certain winter months feeds upon the buds of the birch, and its flesh at such times is bitter to the taste, and unfit for food. The canvas-back searches for the wild celery, revels in its fragrance, and then furnishes to the epicure a far more delicate viand

than at other times. But the woodcock, no matter where it wings its way, in all of the many sections in which it may be found, at various seasons legitimate for shooting, is much the same sort of bird, and woodcock-shooting



WOODCOCK.—Philohela minor.

is much the same sort of sport throughout the length and breadth of the land; yet no other in the list of game birds is so little understood by mankind in general; no other has so wrecked the many theories which from time to time have been advanced concerning its modes of life, and no other has been subject to such relentless persecution.

In the dells and covers where woodcock breed, they are birds of curious ways, and it is in such places, with no evil intent in one's heart, that he can best learn their nature, and get at those secrets of their forest lives which are beyond his reach when, with dog and gun, he beats the covers in autumn months.

The arrival of woodcock upon their breeding-grounds varies with the season and the sections of country through which they scatter. They leave their winter resorts, where for a short time they have enjoyed a southern sun, and commence their northward pilgrimage late in January or early in February, advancing with the spring-tide, until they find grounds suited to their habits. In their most southern grounds they breed as early as the last of February, and in their more northern as late as April or May, depending upon the season.

Their breeding in the Southern States is rare, if the season be favorable for early migration, as they prefer grounds farther north; but the season being cold and backward, some make short migrations, and go at once to breeding. Again, there may be a few broods raised near their winter habitat, on account of the inability of the old birds to accompany their tribe; so everywhere may the woodcock be considered a migratory bird, as the isolated cases of their breeding in the far South are the exceptions.

In sections where the woodcock breed as early as February, they may rear a second brood; but in their northern homes they do not, unless their first nesting is destroyed, when they go to work at once to repair the injury.

Usually reaching the Middle States in March, the New England States in April, this desire to return so early to their breeding-grounds often meets with a cold reception. The great storm of March, 1888, was, no doubt, the shroud of many a woodcock.

When first the bluebirds twitter in the orchards and the robins sing their morning songs, then may we look for the coming of the woodcock; for the deep snows of our northern clime have nearly gone, and the warm rains have swelled the rills to rivers and moistened the loam along their banks.

Although it may freeze somewhat at night in the more open glades, there are many streams flowing among the hills and winding through the sheltered lowlands where Jack Frost has performed his last work for the winter gone.

Here upon these banks, softened by the sun's warm rays, woodcock feed, and here, later on, amid the alder-covered environs and down in the bottom-lands, they nest and rear their broods.

Although they are well-known lovers of fens and alder-glades, and generally nest in such places—doubtless from the fact of its being much easier to feed their young—still an occasional pair, wiser, perhaps, than their generation, or more willing to work for the support of their family, will select some spot high and dry, even though quite distant from their feeding-grounds; and whatever the labor, they are well repaid, since there is not the danger from heavy rains that continually threatens the lower breeding-grounds.

The woodcock, unlike the ruffed grouse, is satisfied with a single mate, the choice being made in the course of their flight, or just before setting out on their northward journey; for soon after their arrival, the weather being propitious, they commence a skilled and careful inspection of the breeding-grounds, to find a suitable nesting-place. This skill consists not in building—for a woodcock's nest is rather a poor specimen of bird architecture—but in selecting some spot where little effort is required to construct a nest, and where the immediate

surroundings are such that there is nothing to distinguish it. In this nest, built among a few loose twigs and leaves, or, perhaps, in a slight depression amid a bunch of withered grass, the eggs are laid. They are four in number, quite round in form, of a dull clay-color, covered with brownish spots, and in size corresponding to those of the pigeon.

The male bird, no doubt, assists his mate in incubation, since they are such voracious feeders that a great deal of time must be consumed in obtaining food; and as they feed in the cool of the early evening and morning, the eggs would soon become chilled unless protected.

During this period, which is about three weeks, the sitting bird is quite easy to approach, as she seems to know that silence is her best protection, and indeed it is, for the coloring of her plumage so blends with the surroundings that he must have sharp eyes to find the nest which she so silently protects.

The young being hatched, a transformation scene takes place, for then, especially at eventide and early morning, all is bustle and activity, the parent birds having a busy time in caring for their little family, which is more helpless than that of the grouse or the quail, and sometimes, before the fledgelings are able to fly, have to be carried from one feeding-ground to another.

It is stated by some authorities that the young are carried upon the back of the parent bird, clinging there with bill and toes; again, that they are carried between the thighs, being held there partly by the aid of the bill and the tail; the position of the bill, pointed downward during flight, unless distinctly seen, would tend to convey this idea. I have never seen the young carried in either of these ways, but have seen them transported from place to place, grasped by the long, slender toes of the old bird and drawn up closely to the body.

The young woodcock, when first hatched, very much resemble bantam chicks, with the exception of their eyes and bills, although even in these respects the difference is not marked.

The parent birds are very solicitous for their little ones, and when their domain is encroached upon, endeavor by all the arts known to bird-land to attract attention to themselves, with a warning to their downy chicks to drop silently and closely to the ground or to scatter in different directions.

How her cry causes the little ones to disappear upon an approach! How she flutters and feigns to be lame and wounded, leading you a merry chase, if you will only follow, anywhere, everywhere, through the glades, to guard against any possible danger to her family!

She will lead you a winding course, and then you see her no more, for having successfully decoyed you, she is off on pinions swift, noiseless, and strong from maternal love. Taking a wide circle in her flight, she returns to the vicinity of her young, and dropping quietly to the ground, listens a little for the step of her pursuer; all is still; her ruse has been successful; not a sound or movement, save here and there the song of some forest thrush or sparrow, or the hopping of the tiny wren from bough to bough, either of which contains no terrors for her little ones, who are listening for that call of safety which never yet deceived them.

The mother's large dark eyes gleam with eagerness, as her low, guttural "peek, peek, peek" draws forth the fainter answers from her little ones, that, rising slowly from the ground, or appearing from under leaf or twig, rush with flapping wings to meet their mother, who, with a tender care that would melt a poacher's heart, guides her fledgelings through all the dangers that beset their

paths by day, and when the sun has gone from sight, directs them through the pleasures of the night.

Woodcock, in their intercourse with each other, display none of that pugnacious spirit possessed by the quail and grouse, and are altogether more loving in their ways, and seemingly better satisfied with their surroundings.

It is during the warm spring evenings that one may hear, by visiting the breeding-grounds, the song of the woodcock; and the love-notes of the male, though not so soft as those of the thrush, are far sweeter than the strains of many a well-reputed songster, doubtless sounding as sweet to his lady-bird down in the ferns as any serenade ever sung by ardent lover.

With guttural prelude to his song while on the ground, he circles upward in his flight through the twilight, till, lost to sight, his notes are heard high in the air, not unlike those of a night-hawk; but it is in his downward flight that the full melody of his love-song is heard, as he approaches the female who is awaiting him; resting a few moments, he repeats his upward flight and song, and at intervals repeats this performance until darkness has shut out the last glimmer of the daylight. Who would suppose that this bird, indifferent as he seems in the day-time to all sentiment, could sing such love-songs in the gloaming?

There is no bird family of all our fields and forests so peculiar in its ways, or any whose ways are so hard to study, and consequently so little understood. Woodcock do not fly about during the day for either food or pleasure, rarely taking wing unless disturbed, seeking rest and quiet all day long away from human eyes; but when the sun has set, and most good birds have gone to bed, they start out for their feeding-ground.

They seem to know by intuition what loam contains

the fattest, freshest worms, what bog contains the choicest loam, and by their borings leave for us, otherwise unsophisticated in woodcock logic, indications of their presence.

I know of bogs, meadows, fens, and alder-covers that topographically, and from all evidence gained by man in general, are seemingly as worthy of a woodcock's choice as those wherein they dwell and feed, but, for all that, are never inhabited by these long-billed birds. No matter how favorable such grounds may seem to the casual observer, they contain none of the worms and larvæ upon which woodcock feed; and such grounds, upon a careful examination, will be found to be either sandy or so hard that woodcock supplies can not exist, or else sour and rank, as the growth of grass may indicate. I know of a favorite cover, through which a tiny brook picks its course, whose waters are strongly tainted with iron, and yet woodcock bore upon its banks, and are amply rewarded for their labors; possibly they are invalids, who go there for treatment; if so, they are fortunate in having mineral springs so easy of access.

Woodcock have no choice as to the locality of their feeding-grounds, if only the proper food may be found, and in many a country village there are rich vegetable gardens which furnish fine feasts to wise old woodcock, who do not hesitate to take advantage of the dusk to visit them, and whose only danger at such times is from the telegraph wires or from the prowling house-cat.

Often, when the feeding-ground is quite distant from suitable covers, the birds may be seen at dusk, rising spirit-like from the deep gloom of the woods, and, darting athwart the sky, dropping to the low, wet meadows, bogs, and brook-sides beyond.

They well know where to find the proper food, how to get it when found, and the exact moment in which to

present their bills—they are long ones, too—for payment.

It must not be understood that woodcock never feed between the hours of dawn and sunset, for I have caught them at their borings where a dark morass, studded with pools, each bordered with deep, rich loam, furnished the choicest food, and where the alders were so thick that the sunlight could not reach the ground beneath, and low upon the earth all was dark and still, save the hum of insects and the purling of the brook. Again, one day in early autumn, I came upon a woodcock in a meadow corn-field. I watched him for some time probing the soft, moist soil, until, either becoming weary in well-doing or suspicious of my presence, he walked slowly away, with bobbing head, from his last feast, for I then flushed and shot him. And again, one dark, rainy morning in July, about 8 o'clock, as I was driving along a road which had recently been repaired from the rich soil of a neighboring alder-flat, a woodcock flushed in front of me, and then another, and another, and another. As soon as possible I stopped my horse, and again saw them, only a few rods distant, busily feeding; punch, push, probe, pull, and worm after worm, brought toward the surface by the warm rain, was drawn from the soft road, not by suction, but by the good muscular efforts of those long bills. Driving on, they flushed again; but loath to leave such a delicious breakfast, they would not take to the covers, and stopping, feeding, flushing, for more than fifty rods, that quartette of woodcock kept the highway until there were open fields upon either side of them, when, with a curve in their flight, they turned back and disappeared in the cover.

Curious birds are they, forever presenting to him who studies their modes of life new phases of character. Their complete history has never yet been written.

I have often pictured them upon stormy nights feeding beneath the cover of overhanging tree-lined banks, or in open marsh and fen, and wondered if their actions were as solemn then as in the daylight. It must be sad work in such weather, indeed almost funereal, and the joy, like that of many a human life, be the anticipation of the coming rest.

In festal moods, no doubt they pass many a night in revelry, by the margin of some favorite pool, whose mirrored surface reflects the star-lit zenith, with the moon high above for a chandelier, and the wind-anthems through the tree-tops for music. Perhaps, too, they have some knowledge of astronomy, understand the twinkling of the stars, study the signs of the zodiac, thereby learning when to time their flights, and placing great reliance upon the moon's phases, and the tale which she tells them, as they watch her course; for they take their migratory flights by the pale light of the moon, rather than by the bright rays of the mid-day sun.

What other of our upland game birds enjoys such nightly revels? The upland plover flies by night, and its plaintive call, half sad, half glad, may be heard wavering upon the evening air; but it feeds by day, and does not, like the woodcock, indulge in nocturnal feasts.

Woodcock are a riddle to the sportsman, who knows them best, while to those without the pale of field-sports they are known only as their name is read upon some tempting menu, or as they are brought to the table, served with highest culinary skill.

To him who, in the early summer, with rod in hand, follows some trout-brook as it dashes down from among the hills and out through the interval, they often, for an instant, show their mottled plumage ere they whistle from sight in the thick, green foliage, and leave him gazing with eager eyes at "what might have been."

To the rustic lad, and the farmer, upon whose land, among the glades and swamps, they breed, they are unseen, unknown, or, if seen, known only as "whistling snipe," "timber doodles," or by some other such provincial name; and should one make an inquiry for woodcock, he would probably be directed to the old trees in the orchard or upon the hill-top, but almost never to the proper covers; for the farmer is not as familiar with these bird-tenants of his freehold as with the quail, the ruffed grouse, and many others of the feathered tribe who encroach upon his domain.

Sometimes in the early summer mornings, as he mows the swale, they spring from before him, and are seen only for an instant ere they drop farther down among the low-grown willows, leaving him to wonder whether he saw a bird or spirit; and I myself often wonder that it is not the spirits of woodcock only that are seen, considering the warfare that has been waged upon the tribe for so many years, in season and out of season—north, south, east, and west, from the rising to the setting of the sun, and indeed from the setting to the rising again—by that execrable practice of fire-hunting practiced in some sections of the South. Truly, their time of peace is very limited. Permitted by law, in some States, to be shot before they are fairly fledged, they know no safety from that time on until they once more return to their breeding-places, and for a few weeks out of the fifty-two are granted a short respite during their nesting and hatching.

Summer cock-shooting must be everywhere abolished, to save the tribe, already becoming scarce in many sections which formerly held them in great numbers. It is true that, owing to the increase in population, large tracts of swamps, rich with the best of soil, have been cleared, drained, and reclaimed; and now the field-sparrow sings

and nests where woodcock used to breed and furnish shooting.

Again, as woodcock have decreased, the men who shoot have increased, and just so much more should their intelligent protection be enforced. As for summer shooting, it is cruel and wrong, both in theory and practice, and no manner of logic can make it right.

It is strange that the selfish pleadings of a few should have the power to enact laws permitting summer shooting; or, if enacted in times past, when it seemed folly to be wise, should have sufficient force to overrule all those who would legislate from a higher standpoint, and seek to preserve one of the choicest game birds known. Granting, for the sake of argument, that summer shooting has but little to do with the decrease in the number of woodcock, no one, not even its most zealous advocate, can deny that there is not only a possibility, but a probability, of its having some deleterious effect upon these birds. Why not, then, keep upon the safe side, and forbid killing woodcock until the season legitimate for field-sports shall arrive.

After all, what is there in summer shooting to draw one forth? It can not be that they are more easily killed than in autumn, for, although not so swift and strong of wing, their flights are fully as erratic, and the covers, thick with their wealth of leaves, block the aim.

It can not be the desire for healthful pleasure afield with dog and gun, for a summer day holds no exhilaration when the sun shines hot upon pasture-lands that lie dried and withered beneath his scorching rays; when the grass upon new-mown fields is struggling to show a tinge of green; when not a cloud flecks the sultry sky, and the cattle upon the hill-sides stand beneath the friendly shade of wide-spreading trees; when down in the alder-flats, although the sun may not reach the sportsman's path,

the air is stifling, and the mosquitoes are in swarms about him, while his dog is nearly exhausted from his efforts to find the half-grown birds.

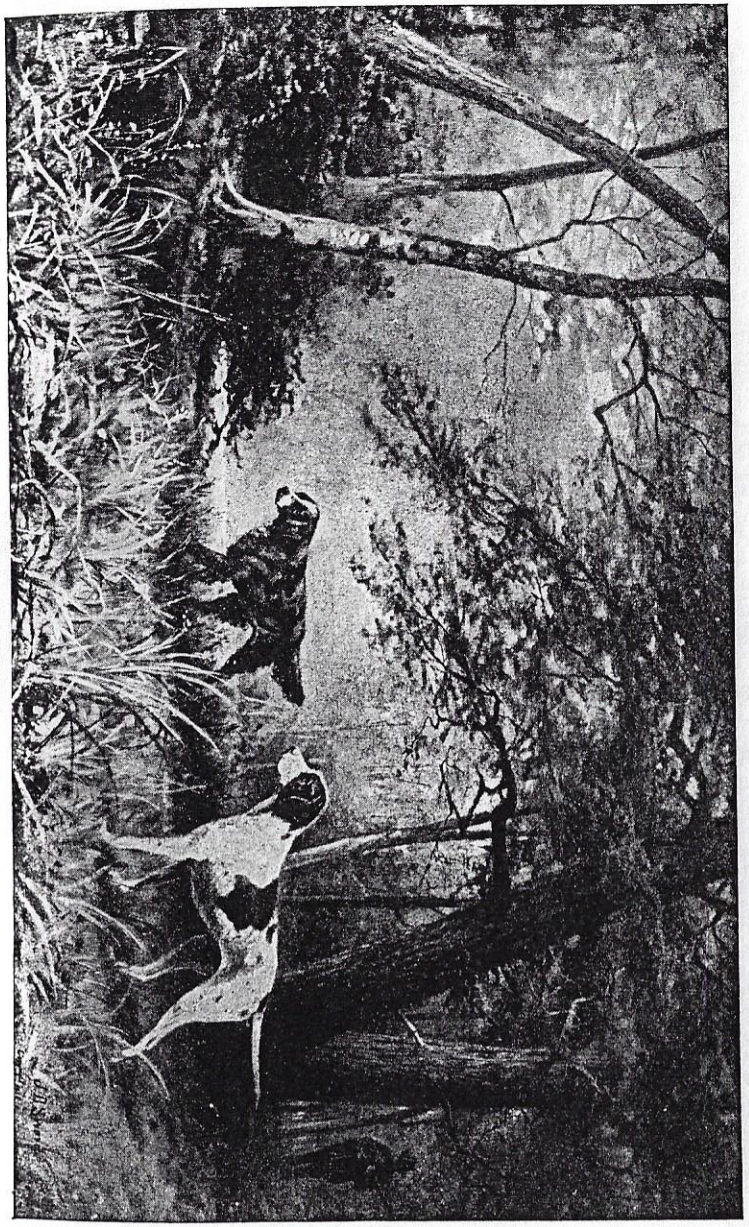
Where the law permits this summer shooting, some feign to enjoy it, because there is nothing else to shoot; others—and there are many of them—are drawn forth by the market price of the early birds; while still others claim that in certain sections, unless hunted before leaving their breeding-grounds, there can be no shooting, as the birds do not return, but, when through their moult, start on their southern flight—which will prove true in the near future, if this pernicious habit is not abolished, for there will be no woodcock to return.

The uncertainty of our seasons is another very excellent reason why July cock-shooting should everywhere be abolished. One year the season may be early, and favorable to their nesting, hatching, and rearing their broods; the next year the heavy snows may retard their early migrations and nesting, and later the floods destroy the nests or young, so that the second broods are not half-grown by July, and are in no way suitable for gun or table; but, supposing that July of each year finds the young well grown, still the habit of hunting them at this season is disastrous to the race.

These are happy nursery days for the young woodcock, and should be guarded by every true lover of Nature.

Many a young ruffed grouse meets his death at this season, for "shooting woodcock," by men who never shoot them later, is simply an excuse for being in summer covers where many a fledgeling grouse helps to fill the bag.

Someone may tell you that *he* never shoots half-grown birds; but "to err is human," and when a bird flushes in thick cover before the setter's point or the



WOODCOCK-SHOOTING.

spaniel's spring, where the quickest snap-shot is required, he must have a prophet's eye who can tell whether it be fledgeling or full-grown bird. Avoid such uncertainty, and do not put temptation in the sportsman's path.

There has always been a mystery connected with the woodcock's disappearance during the moulting season, and various theories have been advanced in explanation; some claim that they remain in their breeding-grounds, but can not be found, as they give no scent, and will not flush; some, that they betake themselves to the corn-fields, and can be found there in numbers; some, that they fly to the high mountains and ridges, where no one ever thinks of looking for them; while still others assert that upon leaving their breeding-ground they migrate farther north. Each and all seem to attribute this disappearance to their moulting, without taking into consideration the fact that there may be other causes. Do not all birds moult? and why should these not disappear as well, if the cause be only the casting off of an old gown, and the taking on of a new one?

After a careful comparison of the different years in which I have studied the habits of these birds, and recalling some unusually wet Augusts, when they seemed to remain in numbers in their summer haunts, my conclusion is that their disappearance is not so much due to their moulting, as to the effect that the season may have upon their feeding-grounds.

Woodcock are great gourmands, and the drought, which usually comes about the time they begin to moult, dries up and hardens the places where they have lived, loved, and fed all the summer long, thus necessitating a change, and so they scatter; and if, in certain sections, they disappear, although their grounds are apparently capable of furnishing food, it is only that appearances are deceitful, and the food is not there in reality. The

young are able to take care of themselves by this time, and do not need the parents' solicitous attention, and whether found alone by some secluded spring, deep in the recesses of the hills, or in numbers in some back-woods swamp, it is simply another phase of that great question which agitates so many minds—that of supply and demand.

There may be a few birds willing to eke out an existence in the wettest portions of their old haunts, others who choose the corn-fields, if they be moist enough, and still others who know of springs among the mountains, which early in the season reached the lowlands, moistening the loam, but now lose their waters in more immediate surroundings.

Among the hills there are swamps rarely visited by man, which, flooded in the earlier summer, now expose their soil, furnishing fine feeding-grounds for woodcock. In such places I have found woodcock in fair numbers during the period of their moult, and I know of a pond nestling in the depression of a high ridge of pasture-land, forty rods away from the nearest grove of birches, pines, and maples, where, in the spring, the dusky-duck stops to rest and feed, that in August, when the hot sun has absorbed its waters, shows countless woodcock borings, while in the covers near, the moulting birds may be flushed. After a week of sunshine, the soil becomes parched, and that place knows them no more until another season shall have run its course.

Even now, though one know where to find them, there is no more real pleasure in their pursuit than in July, for the chill of autumn is not yet in the air, nor are the birds plump of body, or smooth and glossy of feather; but when the heat of summer days and nights is on the wane, and the forest is changing its robe of green to one of many colors; when the crops have all been garnered,

and the grass and clover are springing green again in the stubbled fields; when the corn is ripe and ready to be husked—then, and not until then, can the sportsman take the field with dog and gun, restrained by no twinge of conscience, forbidden by no law; and he who has waited all these days is well repaid for waiting, for the woodcock is altogether a different bird from what it is when found in the summer months; its dress is richer in its coloring, its body fast gaining that rotundity which comes only when free from the worry of moulting and finding food where food is scarce; its flight shows far more vigor, and the whistle of its wings is sharper, louder, clearer than before.

This whistle is another of the peculiarities of the woodcock which are so puzzling. It does not come from the throat and bill, as would naturally be supposed, but from the pinions as they cleave the air. I have held a woodcock by the legs, and heard this whistle as it fluttered to escape, and to satisfy myself that the noise was made by its wings, have grasped it by the neck and bill, and still that whistle; but when the wings stopped beating, the whistle ceased. The woodcock possesses vocal powers of no mean order, as its love-songs during its breeding-season testify; but the whistle when the bird is flushed is not the result of vocal effort.

Examine the pinions, and you will find the first three feathers altogether different from the others—shorter and narrower—and in this difference lies that mysterious whistle. It takes great force to start the woodcock in its perpendicular flight, and the resistance offered to its wings must be immense, since its body keeps about the same relative position, with bill pointed downward, that it has when its course is horizontal, and the air rushing through the first three feathers of each pinion makes the whistle, which ceases when the angle of resistance is

varied by the change of flight. No other of our upland game birds whistles in its flight, for no other possesses these peculiar characteristics.

I have flushed moulting birds when these first three feathers were imperfect, and only the faintest whistle caught my ear; and I have seen them glide away from their nesting-places with full-fledged pinions and make no noise. But when their course is upward, or at a certain angle, in their startled flight, the whistle tells of their presence—a sound as sweet to the sportsman, when out with dog and gun, as was ever the music of Æolian lyre to Apollo's ear, and, like that, variable, irresponsible, sounding only to the rushing of the wind.

During the cool moonlight nights of September—that golden month of the harvest moon—woodcock commence to leave their sylvan boudoirs, where they have changed their summer dress, and visit the southern hill-sides, sunny glades, and tinted brakes, there to linger until the sharper frosts shall warn them to be on their journey, ere the winter snows fly among the naked trees and cover the brown hills and meadows.

But it is when October's scenes are full upon us, and their beauty reigns supreme by the dashing streams, in the woodlands, and along the furrowed hill-sides, that the finest woodcock-shooting is enjoyed throughout the northern covers. And what can excel an October day, when the morning is clear and fresh, and the frost of the night before, harbinger of the woodcock's flight, whitens the fence-tops and fallen trees, and hangs sparkling and dripping from the lichen-covered tree-trunks, and from every leaf and twig, while the grasses, wet with the dew which came at sunset, are one mass of fretted silver? or what, when the midday sun casts over land and water that misty veil so peculiar to autumnal months, giving to the pine and hemlock a softer hue than at any other

season, and to the swamp maple and the oak a deeper tinge, blending so perfectly with the yellow of the birch and beech? Or what can surpass the setter's work—the eager, swift, yet cautious, pace, the quick turn on scent of game, the poise so stanch and true? or what the active roading of the cocker-spaniel and his merry yelp when the bird is flushed? Truly these are glorious days; golden links between heated summer and cold winter; and of all who love these days, woodcock seem to love them most, and are wont to take advantage of them as they wing their way to southern grounds, furnishing in their flights the best of sport; for though one shoots a favorite cover clean, two or three moonlight, frosty nights will bring others to it again.

But when the cold blasts of November rush through the leafless trees, and the cold nights freeze the loam too hard for the woodcock's bill, then they whistle their adieux, and are off for a warmer clime, moving southward, as in the early spring they came northward, with the change of seasons, until December finds them again established in their winter quarters.

How the whistle of a flushed woodcock on an autumn morning stirs the blood! what a thrill it sends dancing along the nerves! None can excel it; not even the ruffed grouse, as he springs like a feathery rocket from the bank above one's head, or from the evergreens almost at one's feet; nor the grouse of the western plains, as he rushes from the stubble; nor the quail, as he whirs from the sedge or corn-field; nor yet the snipe, as he twists away upon the wind.

The woodcock, too, is unlike these birds in the manner of its flight. When flushed, they are up and away—one may be very sure of that; but the woodcock is quite as likely to come into one's face as to go elsewhere, for there can be no dependence whatever placed upon its

flight; and that very uncertainty is, perhaps, one of the magic ties that bind us to its pursuit. Yet the woodcock is no dullard, but as great a rascal as ever flushed before the gun. It will rise straight from before you, as though impelled by some hidden spring; then, taking a dash over the tree-tops, pitch just behind, not two rods from where it was started; or it may dart through the thicket to the outside, and skimming the edge quite close to the ground, drop upon the very margin, or, suddenly rising, dart back into the deepest portion of the cover; or if the dog fails to catch the scent, it may wait until you pass; then, when your back is turned, steal away without even a note of warning.

Again, it may flush rods away, a veritable coward, or sit in an open spot, like the bravest of the brave, seemingly indifferent to yourself, dog, and gun, and watch you with big, staring eyes. Keep still, stare it out of countenance, if you can, and it will soon take flight, but in which direction no one can tell—possibly down the open pathway, probably straight into the thickest bush, where a sparrow would find hard work to force its way.

It is truly wonderful how the woodcock directs its flight, for no matter how thick the trees and branches to mar your aim, it skillfully avoids them, and leaves you wondering how it possibly escaped their network. These leafy labyrinths are open sailing to this dark-eyed bird.

Its knowledge of curves and angles is shown with mathematical certainty; and in the moderately open woods it knows the exact position of all the trees, and will dart away, twisting its flight behind these bulwarks, so safely that you can only catch the shadow of its pinions, while some tree catches your charge of shot. At the report of a gun, it will often pitch headlong down

into a tuft of grass or a bunch of brakes, even if caught on the open hill-side, thereby giving to the novice the idea that it is killed or badly wounded.

But put no faith in these antics, for unless well skilled in the manner of its flight and lighting, you will be deceived, and upon rushing up to gather the bird to bag, find only a strong pair of wings whistling in mockery at your eagerness, as with a sudden spring it is away for the cover.

Although the woodcock springs from its resting-place, when startled, with rapid, vigorous, and not too graceful wings, yet, when it lights in a moderately open spot, its action is as graceful as a falling leaf; its wings fan the air for a moment, its slender legs drop down and gently touch their resting-place, and the bird squats slowly to the ground, or, the spot not being favorable, runs a few rods before finding rest. Again, it will suddenly turn, as if losing its balance, and dart to the ground with half-closed wings, lying wherever it pitches until routed by the pursuer. I say the ground, as woodcock never light upon trees or fences—another of their eccentricities.

To hunt these birds successfully, one must thoroughly understand their habits, know the time of their coming and going, and the grounds they frequent at certain seasons, whether wet or dry. It is not chance that keeps half a dozen or more birds resting for several October days along a stretch of moss-covered rocks shaded by pines and maples, for down in that interval the soil has been turned up moist and fresh by the farmer's plow, the feed then is delicious, and those scattered trees afford sufficient cover. It is not chance that brings to that hill-side of birches, pines, and hemlocks these dreamy-eyed birds in autumn weather, for here and there, by tiny springs that moisten the surrounding soil, enriched by the mold of fallen leaves, they find good feeding. You

did not find them there last year, nor the year before, for both years were dry, the loam of that field was not turned up, and those little springs had not force enough to reach the surface. Woodcock love a sunny spot to lie in on cold autumn days, but the selection of this spot is governed by their appetites.

The slopes, covered with brakes and sapling pines, are the choice of some; the knolls, covered with birches, of others; the alder-patch and willow-covered interval the favorite resort of others. When the season is wet their feeding-grounds are more extended, and they more scattered, consequently it requires more tramping to secure a bag. When it is dry they are harder to find, but when discovered, are in numbers. A moderately wet autumn furnishes the best woodcock-shooting, all other things being favorable.

In their autumn flights, I have found them on the highest hills and in the lowest covers, under hemlocks near large woods, and among the briars in the open pasture; and one day, while walking along a river, my setter wheeled to a point among the rocks under a thin line of alders; I walked up and saw a woodcock lying on a little patch of sand, headed toward the hills. Telling my companion to shoot, if the bird should start, I went down the stream a short distance, then out into the shallow water, stepping from stone to stone until opposite the bird. I tried to flush it by throwing pebbles; it would not flush, and did not, until the young dog, becoming restless, rushed in, when with characteristic obstinacy the bird turned and came straight over my head. My companion dared not shoot, and in turning to get a shot my feet slipped on the rocks, and into the water I went. Apparently having accomplished its object, the woodcock, when half way across the stream, turned, and just as I arose, dripping from my bath, darted past me for

the hill-side cover, where it should have gone in the first place. It was particularly gratifying to see that bird fall before my companion's shot.

They are curious birds in their ways before the gun, and just as strange when performing in the privacy of their woodland homes; and I well remember the antics at which I caught one, when with a friend, one autumn day, I was beating a high hill-top for ruffed grouse.

Our setter came to a point toward a clump of pines, and we expected to hear the rush of a startled grouse; but not a sound. Peering beneath the trees, there upon the carpet of pine needles we saw a woodcock, strutting about just like a turkey-cock in miniature, with tail erect, spread like a fan, and drooping wings, nodding its head in time with the movement of its feet, as though listening to music we could not hear. It was a droll scene, and at the same time picturesque—the tall, green pines above their carpeting of red-brown needles, a red dog standing in perfect pose, with outstretched neck and glaring eyes, a small, long-billed, dark-eyed, mottled bird marching to and fro with all the pomp of a grenadier, and two sportsmen on their knees as silent spectators. After watching it for some time, we flushed and shot it, and in beating out a patch of pines not far away, bagged four more.

Although woodcock are much the same sort of birds wherever found, and woodcock-shooting much the same sort of sport when followed legitimately, still there are slight variations, depending upon the topography of the different sections in which they rest and feed.

In certain parts of the West they are numerous in extended swamps and corn-fields, while in other sections it would be useless to look for them in these places, because of the one being rank and sour and the other dry and sandy.

In the South, in the alluvial and swampy portions of Louisiana, they are found in great numbers from December to February; but upon the higher land, covered with open pine forests, they are rare, except where such border lakes and streams. In the thickets along the rivers and ponds, in the little branches, in the low switch-cane, and among the dwarf palmetto near swamps, they rest by day, and feed at night in the wet savannahs and neighboring cultivated fields. Here, as in their northern quarters, they are very uncertain as to localities, for to-day a certain thicket may be full of them and to-morrow not a bird be found.

During a period of unusually severe weather, they collect in the warmer swamps in vast numbers; and in the streets and gardens of Mandeville, a town upon the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, they have been known to collect in such numbers that a boy killed five dozen in a single day.

Their winter habitat extends from the Carolinas along the southern coast; but in that vast undrained territory of the Texas coast, which is claimed to be the finest feeding-ground for the jack-snipe on this continent, and where they abound from October to April, woodcock are never seen.

In certain sections, when they take to the wide, open fields for feeding, the pot-hunter kills great numbers by the light of torches, which so bewilders them that they are easily shot or beaten down with clubs. Although in many places this fire-hunting has been given up, along the Mississippi, as it nears the Gulf, and on some of the bayous, notably the Bœuf, and along the Atchafalaya, it is still practiced to some extent, owing to the physical characteristics of the country, which, it is claimed, make it almost impossible for one to find and shoot them in their day-time haunts. This may be exciting, but has

none of the inspiration of true sportsmanship, any more than has the yarding and killing of deer when the snow lies too deep for their legitimate pursuit.

When given a fair field and fight, woodcock can hold their own against all comers, and seem at times to set all human knowledge of their ways at defiance, puzzling the most experienced hunter to find them with success; but it is usually when he, unmindful of the peculiarities of the country, or of that particular season, looks for them in their usual haunts, or depends upon their flights being at the same period as in some other year, different in itself, and preceded by a different spring and summer.

Woodcock, before their migratory flights, are somewhat nomadic in their ways, changing their feeding-grounds frequently, thus leading many to believe that they are on their southern journey.

The autumnal equinox, if followed by two or three sharp, frosty nights, usually starts the first flight southward, and when once the birds commence to move in numbers, one may be sure of good shooting. A still day is the best for woodcock-shooting, especially if following a rain, for then the scent lies better, and so do the birds. On windy days, woodcock are wild, and usually flush with the wind, no matter which way it blows. The idea that when found in their autumn flights they always flush toward the south, and continue in that direction, no matter how often started, is simply a theory not borne out by facts.

These birds being unlike all others in their field tactics, he who hunts them should have a somewhat different outfit from that used in pursuit of other game. The choke-bore is out of place in a woodcock cover, for it either misses or tears the bird in pieces, and a heavy gun has no advantage, for the range at which woodcock are shot is usually within the killing power of the cylinder-bore and light charge, and even half a pound makes quite a difference in a long day's tramp. A seven-pound, twelve-bore gun, with barrels twenty-eight, or even twenty-six, inches in length, loaded with three drams of powder—that which gives least recoil and smoke preferred—and one ounce of No. 12 shot if early in the season, or No. 10 if later, will, if held straight, render a good account of every cock that rises.

The successful woodcock hunter must be the quickest shot of all who follow the dog in autumn months. A woodcock gliding down an open glade straight away is the easiest of birds to kill, but when one springs from its resting-place among the trees, he who hesitates is lost, or rather the bird is, for, like time and tide, it waits for no man. There are covers where one can take careful aim, but even there, owing to the uncertainty of a woodcock's flight, the snap-shot is the most successful. But for the fullest enjoyment of this sport, whatever one's skill with the gun may be, he must bring to his aid the intelligence of the dog, and the choice depends upon the character of the covers in which the birds are found. In some covers the spaniel is no doubt the most killing dog, provided he is well trained; while in others, the setter or the pointer is to be preferred. When woodcock are found in covers where the underbrush is thick and matted, along the banks of streams, and in ravines where alders, willows, or briars grow so thick that it would be impossible for the shooter to walk, or the pointing dog to work, a small, well-trained spaniel could penetrate and work out every spot and tuft, giving warning, by a stifled whine, of the flushing of the bird, while the sportsman remains on the outside, and gets an open shot. But of all dogs, unless thoroughly broken, he is the most exasperating and useless. A well-trained spaniel should range within a few paces of the gun, drop

to shot and wing, and retrieve; he should do all this without a constant hallooing from his master; but to teach him requires careful attention in the field, strict discipline, and great patience at all times, and the tuition must begin at an early age. Personally, I prefer the pointing dog—and he is without any doubt the most popular with woodcock shooters throughout the United States—for it is half the pleasure in upland shooting to see the highly trained setter or pointer at work; and even if he does, in his higher-headed range, now and then pass some dense thicket that contains a bird, he will more than make up for it in the pleasure derived from watching his graceful attitudes when pointing, and by the intelligence displayed in giving one a shot in some difficult location. Killing the birds is not all there is in upland shooting.

The successful woodcock dog, whether setter or pointer, must, first of all, have a very sensitive nose—for the bird gives out but little scent—be very obedient, moderately fast and stanch, and a good retriever. He should work in a restricted range, around the shooter, otherwise, many a bird, with its habit of turning backward in its flight, will be passed. A very fast dog is to be avoided, but a slow, pottering one will try the patience of the thorough sportsman fully as much, and is perhaps the greater evil of the two. A dog that knows his business may go through a cover with speed, until his nose tells him birds are near; then all is changed, and his caution is not excelled by even the pottering dog, who would be far behind, nosing about some tuft of brakes, or jogging along, poking into each clump of brush or bunch of weeds.

I hunt my setter with a soft-tinkling bell attached to the collar, and from its tone judge of the working of my dog, whether slow or fast, near or far away, and find it of great assistance, while it seems to make no difference in the lying of the birds. Although there are many dogs over which good shooting may be had, yet a first-class woodcock dog is rare, and invaluable to his owner. Many dogs do not particularly care for the sport, but prefer to hunt the grouse and the quail. I once had an English setter, of a strain noted for its field-work in both cover and open shooting, that although a bold and capital worker on ruffed grouse, seemed to fear the woodcook's scent, and would stop hunting, drop his tail, and come to heel the instant the odor reached his nostrils.

But whether you use setter, pointer, or spaniel, there is a peculiar charm about woodcock and woodcock-shooting that no one can deny who is at all acquainted with the birds, or has ever tried the sport. You have seen the gamy quail tumble into the sedge before your aim, and gathered him to your game-bag, with the knowledge of a deed well done; you have felt a glow of pride as the lordly grouse, rushing on pinions swift and strong, fell before your prowess, and struggled in his death-battle upon the autumn leaves; but there comes a feeling that can not be explained when you take the woodcock from your setter's mouth, and watch the dark eyes close, and that soft, velvety sheen over head and neck fade away until there is only left the dull gloss of a mottled plumage, and the bird-life has passed beyond recall.

How the memories of days passed amid the woodcock's haunts crowd in upon our reveries when the land is snow-bound and the streams are ice-locked! and how we long for the time to come when these dark-eyed birds shall once more breed among the alder-dells, and sing their love-songs in the gloaming of warm spring evenings!