ROYAL RANGER RALPH;

OR

The Waif of the Western Prairies.

BY WELDON J. COBB.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIN-WRECKERS.

"Fire!"

"Who is it?"

"A spy—one of the vigilantes. Down him, or the game is lost!"

These ejaculations, spoken rapidly and excitedly, broke the silence of a weird and tragic scene in one of the loveliest valleys of the far West.

They were directed toward a man who had suddenly appeared upon a landscape which for over an hour had held half a dozen human figures, who had been lurking in the vicinity of a lonely stretch of railroad.

The time was night, relieved by the refulgence of a September moon, its rays just beginning to illumine mountain and valley with a rare crystalline beauty.

Half a mile distant, where the river stretched a dim silver thread of radiance, a lonely station showed, from which glimmered the light of a single lantern.

At the spot where the story opens, the single railway track curved over a high trestle work and then descended on a sharp grade toward the station and the stream.

For years this section, especially the course pursued by the railroad, which was a recently constructed branch of the great Pacific system, had been known as the Lone Canyon trail. The station was called Ten-spot, and the nearest settlement was twenty miles over the mountain at Miner's Gulch.

Beyond that stretched an alternation of plain and hill and valley, infested even at the time of our narrative by marauding bands of savages.

The region was one in which a rough, uncultured set of miners and rangers resided, and outlaw bands found it a favorite field for their operations.

As has been stated, one hour previous to the utterance of the words that begin this chapter half a dozen men rode up to the scene, dismounted silently, led their horses to a thicket near by, and then became massed together near the railroad.

Here for some moments they were engaged in some mysterious movements about the rails. One of their number went down the tracks to the station, returned, muttered an ominous "All right," and then their dusky figures moved hither and thither. Not an audible word was spoken until a tall, full-bearded man, evidently the leader of the party, startled his companions with the exclamation:

"Get to cover! Someone is coming!"

Someone was coming straight down the tracks—a man past middle age, stalwart, rugged, and attired in the garb of a frontiersman.

His gait was a careless and leisurely one, as if he had got tired of waiting for the train at the depot and was strolling about to kill time until it arrived.

All unaware of the perilous ambuscade that lay in wait for him, he was not conscious of the presence of a foe until he turned a curve in the rails and fell back with a startled cry:

"What's this! An obstruction on the road! They're at it again! Redskins or outlaws; there's danger afloat for the night train, sure."

He turned to hasten back to the station. At that moment six dusky forms arose from the bushes that lined the side of the tracks.

"Fire!"

"Who is he?"

"A spy—one of the vigilantes! Down him, or the game is lost."

There was a blinding blaze of light, and six revolvers flashed in the moonlight.

"Missed him—after him! He must not escape and give the alarm!" cried the leader of the coterie.

The stranger had indeed been missed. He must have been magically alert, for as the bullets whistled past him he dropped to the ground and they flew over his head.

"You scoundrels! Come on, whoever you are!"

His voice, clear and stentorian, rang out like an indignant roar of defiance and courage.

He had again sprung to his feet and had drawn his own revolver.

At that moment his enemies made a united rush for the spot where he was. He was forced to retreat a step or two. A creeping vine entangled his foot, and he fell violently backward.

"Take that!"

The words were spoken by the leader, as he reached the prostrate man.

"Despard—outlaw and renegade! I know you. Coward! villain! If I was at fair odds with you——"

The words were silenced suddenly. The leader of the band—the man he had called Despard—had raised a curved iron bar he held in his hand. It descended with terrific force, cutting a cruel gash in the forehead of the courageous stranger, stunning him to insensibility.

Despard's eyes wore a haunted, frightened expression, and his face was deathly pale as he surveyed his unconscious foe.

"You've settled him, Despard," spoke one of the men as he crowded to his side. "What does it mean?"

Despard spoke in an awed tone.

"What mean?"

"That man."

"You know him."

"Know him! Look again, Jim Danton. Ah! I thought you would recognize him."

Despard's companion peered close at the face of the prostrate man.

"Ranger Ralph!" he gasped out.

"Yes. Do you remember when last we saw him, and we left him to die a prisoner in a cave in the Utah hills? He had crossed our trail, determined to bring us to justice for a stage robbery. He swore then that he would be avenged. He escaped. What can his presence here mean but disaster to our plans? His object is the same as our own—to meet the girl who stands between me and a royal fortune. It is an ill omen, Danton. I fear. I tremble."

"For a dead man!" scoffed Danton, jeeringly; "for he is certainly dead this time."

"He may have friends near at hand."

"We can soon find that out. But no, no; he would not walk to his fate that way if he knew we were here or suspected our plans."

Danton turned from the spot.

"Vance," he called, to one of the men.

"What is it?" asked the person addressed.

"You visited the station?"

"Yes."

"There was no one there?"

"No one but the depot agent."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"Go there again and reconnoiter. If there are any others arrived since we came, return and report at once."

"All right."

Danton returned to the leader's side, who had walked away from the place where Ranger Ralph lay.

"Everything is arranged for the wreck, Captain," he said to Despard. "As to yonder enemy—ranger, dective and vigilante—the blow with the iron bar has settled him. You are sure the girl will be on the train."

"Inez?"

"Yes."

"Of course she will. I received positive information. Remember, Danton, that she is of more value to us than the booty."

"That's all right. You and I will look out for the girl, and the others for the booty. But if she should be killed?"

"Then I benefit just so much, that's all," replied Despard, coolly. "What makes me uneasy is Ranger Ralph's appearance here."

"Why so?"

"Because he was one of her dead father's companions."

"Well?"

"Inez's father was one of his old-time friends. He probably warned him of his renegade relative."

"Yourself?"

"Exactly. If so, even if the girl were dead, my claim might be disputed, or my past record would prevent my appearing to secure the fortune. No, Danton, the only way is to get possession of the girl; and I love her just enough to want to marry her. Your men insisted on a wreck to secure what booty the train had. I take the chances of the accident killing the girl. At all events, she must be secured by us, or her death assured before the night is over."

"You are a relative of Robert Tracey, her father?"

"A distant one—but the only one after her."

"And the fortune?"

"Is a mystery, in a way, and was left by Tracey in possession of an old recluse known as Hermit Ben. The story is too complicated a one to relate now. Remember, the girl is our especial care; when the disaster comes, search for her."

"All right, Despard. Let us get with the boys. The train will be due now in a short time."

The two men moved some distance away, to where an obstruction consisting of logs, rocks and iron had been piled on the track.

At that moment the man Vance, whom Danton had sent to the depot, returned.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"No one there but the depot agent."

"And the man we had to settle yonder?"

"I guess he had just arrived, for two horses were standing outside the station. I cut them loose for fear of accidents."

"Two!" whispered Despard, in an intense tone to Danton. "Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"Ranger Ralph expected someone on the train."

"Evidently."

"And that one was the girl who is the object of all our plots—Inez Tracey."

CHAPTER II.

TOO LATE.

"The scoundrels! Dyke Despard, my score against you—deeper than ever, for this cowardly act—will be a terrible one when your day of reckoning comes!"

The words emanated in a pained, gasping tone of voice from the spot where a few minutes previous they had, to all seeming, viewed the dead form of Ranger Ralph, the border scout and detective.

Ranger Ralph himself spoke, but his haggard face and pain-stricken eyes told that the blow Despard had dealt him was a terrible one in its effects.

Under it he had gone down like a shot. Utter insensibility had finally given way to dawning consciousness, but so feeble and confused that he could scarcely raise himself on one arm.

The blood from a ghastly wound on the head deluged his face and showed a deep gash that would leave a scar to his dying day.

His head was dizzy, his sight blinded, his strength seemed leaving him. He essayed to arise, and then, with a groan, fell back exhausted.

Suddenly every nerve seemed to thrill to quickened action, and he forget his wound and his helplessness for the moment.

"The train!" he gasped, wildly. "I had forgotten it. Oh, these villains! They have piled an obstruction on the track. Too plainly I see Dyke Despard's plot. The girl—Inez. He knew she was coming here, and with his renegade associates seeks to prevent her appearing to claim the fortune her father left her. I must prevent this awful crime. I must save the life of the child of my old friend, who intrusted her to my care. What shall I do? Single-handed, I cannot cope with these armed ruffians. There is but one man at the depot, but he may be able to telegraph for aid or stop the train. Ah, it is useless. That blow has robbed me of my strength."

Ranger Ralph spoke these last words in a despairing tone, for a second effort to rise proved futile.

"I'll crawl to the depot, but I'll outwit these scoundrels," he muttered grimly, a moment later.

He was outside the range of the vision of the men grouped on the tracks twenty feet away, and besides they paid no further attention to the foe they believed to be dead. Slowly, painfully, Ranger Ralph began to creep through the underbrush. It was a terrible task for his enervated frame, but he finally saw in the distance the single signal lamp of the station.

Precious moments were slipping by; he realized this, and the thought nerved him to renewed effort.

Ten minutes later the single occupant of the station, a young, handsome man of about twenty years, started from reading a paper as a suspicious sound echoed from the direction of the door.

His hand sought the revolver at his belt, as he remembered the perils of the times, but dropped it to his side, and he uttered an amazed cry as his glance fell upon the strange figure that filled the doorway a moment later.

"Great heavens, man!" he cried; "what does this mean?"

He stood staring in blank horror at the blood-covered form of Ranger Ralph, who had crept over the threshold.

"Help me to a chair, quick!" gasped the almost exhausted scout.

"You are injured—you have rallied!"

"No! I have been the victim of a cowardly and brutal assault."

"Where—by whom?"

He had lifted the scout to a chair and was trembling with excitement as he discerned some mystery in the manner of his visitor.

The latter did not answer his question directly. Instead, his eyes, falling on a clock within a railed inclosure of the depot, he asked tumultuously:

"The train—when will it arrive?"

"It is due in ten minutes."

"Stop it!"

"Stop it?" cried the other. "Why, man! what do you mean?"

"What I say!" cried Ranger Ralph, wildly. "Don't waste time with idle questions. A hundred lives lie on the turn of a moment of time. Telegraph ahead and have the train stopped!"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Because it has already passed the last station."

Ranger Ralph uttered a groan of despair.

"Then secure aid and hasten to the curve!" he cried.

"Explain yourself. Why are you so incoherent—so excited? There is danger?"

"Terrible danger."

"From whom?"

"Train wreckers."

The young man started violently.

"It cannot be!" he cried.

"Yes, there are six of them, led by Dyke Despard, a notorious outlaw. Is there no one near?"

"No one. Rouse yourself, man. Together we may be able to disperse these scoundrels."

"Impossible. I could not walk a step unaided."

The other hastened to a window and looked out toward the south.

"The depot agent will arrive shortly," he said, in hurried, anxious tones.

"Are you not the agent?" asked Ranger Ralph, in some surprise.

"No; I was waiting for the train here. He has a sick family at his home, five miles from here, and asked me to take charge while he took some medicine over to them. But he said he would return before the train arrived."

"And before then it may be too late to stop the train. Oh, cannot something be done!"

With his helplessness, delay and inaction was torture to Ranger Ralph.

"A signal!" cried his companion, suddenly; "I will outwit these scoundrels. Quick, now, tell me where they are."

In brief but graphic language the scout imparted the desired information.

The other listened with the closest attention and interest, his eyes gleaming with latent excitement and courageous determination.

When the recital was concluded he sprang to the projecting window where the depot lantern was.

Ranger Ralph watched him cautiously as he saw him extinguish the lantern.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Signal and stop the train."

"How?"

"With this lantern."

"You cannot pass the wreckers."

"I must and will. Once beyond them, I will relight the lantern, and hasten on until I meet the train."

"Hasten, for heaven's sake!" cried the scout, in imploring tones. "See! the train is almost now due."

Without another word, the young man sprang through the doorway, the unlighted lantern in one hand, a revolver in the other.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

TEMPERANCE.

DROP BY DROP.

Drop by drop! drop by drop!
Filling the glass to the very top,
When will the terrible traffic stop?

How many glasses drinkers hold?
How many treats for young and old?
How much poison, hot and cold?

Ah! you "would know," I hear you say,
How many glasses day by day
Measure the drops in yonder bay.

Gather them up in pints and gills,
All the streamlets and all the rills,
Fresh from the everlasting hills.

Count the sand-grains one by one,
The myriad stars with work begun,
And they'll never compare when all is done!

Oceans and rivers of liquid fire!
Thinking of this no tongue should tire
Teaching the truth to son and sire.
—Mrs. M. A. Kidder, in Youth's Banner.

A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED.

The problem of "hard times" will be solved when the working men of America boycott the saloon and stop drinking liquor. About $400,000,000 a year goes into the saloon from the hard-earned wages of workmen. This money, turned into the channels of industry and commerce, would bring comfort and happiness and plenty to millions of households.—National Temperance Advocate.

A FATAL GLASS.

I was much impressed, says a writer, with what is related of the Duke of Bordeaux. He was the hope of France, the one man who might have saved the dynasty which he represented from the impending horrors of revolution. He was a virtuous prince, but drank wine. He discovered that a certain number of potations could not be indulged in without making him drunk. As a rule, he did not violate the law of temperance, but on one memorable occasion he took a single glass of liquor beyond the limit. Going to his carriage he stumbled on entering it, the horse was frightened, ran off, and killed him.

GREATEST CAUSE OF INSANITY.

Intemperance in drink heads the list of physical causes of insanity, and domestic trouble and grief the moral causes, but out of 2000 cases of insanity we find intemperance in drink the cause of 577 cases, or 27.4 per cent., and domestic trouble and grief in only seventy-two cases, or 3.4 per cent. There can be no doubt that intemperance in drink induces insanity in fully twenty-five per cent. of all the insane cases in the United States, either directly or indirectly. It is also responsible for very much of the imbecility and idiocy of the offspring of intemperate parents. Fifty per cent. of all our idiots and imbeciles are without doubt the offspring of drunkards. Where strong liquors are increasingly consumed we find a proportionate amount of alcoholic insanity. Where the consumption of alcohol doubles, there we find the cases of insanity from intemperance will rise over fifty per cent.

ALWAYS POOR.

Another cause of perpetual poverty is the cause alcoholic. The victim does not last long. He soon crouches into the drunkard's grave. But what about his wife and children? asks a prominent New York writer and public speaker. She takes in washing, when she can get it, or goes out working on small wages, because sorrow and privation have left her incapacitated to do a strong woman's work. The children are thin-blooded and gaunt and pale and weak, standing around in cold rooms, or pitching pennies on the street corner, and munching a slice of unbuttered bread when they can get it, sworn at by passers-by because they do not get out of the way; kicked onward toward manhood or womanhood, for which they have no preparation except a depraved appetite and frail constitution, candidates for almshouse and penitentiary. Whatever other causes of poverty may fail, the saloon may be depended upon to furnish an ever-increasing throng of paupers.

CIDER DRINKING.

We frequently hear that there is "no harm from drinking sweet cider," and temperance organizations frequently have this question brought before them for discussion. Cider commences to ferment as soon as it is out of the press, and the alcohol in cider is as seductive and poisonous as in any other drink, and in many cases more so. A. P. Foster, D. D., of Massachusetts, in a recent letter to the Advance, writes as follows:

"A recent dreadful murder in this State, committed by a man upon his brother, illustrates the evils of cider drinking. The murderer was intoxicated on hard cider, and hence was in an ugly mood, as is invariably the case with those under the influence of this dangerous intoxicant. In New England cider is one of the greatest temptations to intemperance. Every fall piles of small and gnarly apples are gathered, which are marketable only at the cider-mill. There is a profit to be made on them, and the farmers do not feel that they can lose it. This fact has done much to break down the prohibitory law in Massachusetts. Years ago when this law was in force it met with opposition from the cider-raising farmers. To get their vote cider was exempted from the application of the law. But this was a fatal inconsistency. Hard cider is far worse in its effects than many other of the milder intoxicants like ale and beer. But it is easily obtained on New England farms; the boys grow fond of it, beginning with sweet cider, but speedily finding their way to the fermented and intoxicating article. The taste for alcohol thus formed, it naturally does not stop with cider. Thus our New England cider operates adversely to temperance in two ways—it breaks down the strength of those who, but for this, would promote temperance legislation, and by its dulcet encouragement to sweet cider, it tempts our country boys to start out on a path that leads to a drunkard's grave. Apples in New England, rye in the Mississippi Valley, and grapes on the Pacific Coast are, every one, tempters to break down the temperance reform."

WILD DUCKS.

EXPERIENCE OF AN OLD WESTERN HUNTER.

Nothing in Wild Fowling to Equal the Charm of Chasing the Teal and the Mallard—Various Ways of Hunting Them.

WHILE the lover of grouse shooting looks forward with fondest anticipations to the open season when he can pursue his favorite game, the pleasures he finds are not to be compared to those enjoyed by the hardy duck shooter. The latter is like the war horse which sniffs the battle from afar, for the leaden sky, the cool nights and the north winds are messengers to him telling him that the ducks will soon come. The discomforts and inconveniences he has to endure are among the sweetest of his recollections when he recalls the time he had among wild fowl. There is a rare charm about duck shooting which lessens all other shooting in the mind of the wild fowler. Tell to him the delights of woodcock shooting and he will say: "Bosh! who wants to tramp in the island underbrush, where the mosquitoes are claiming possession of the land, and are singing the war cry of their tribes in your ears, or worse still, thrusting a bill into your faces and boring you outrageously?" But ask him to go duck shooting and his soul responds to your invitation, and he will tell you he has patched his rubber boots, has hidden his corduroy suit lest his wife should have the dirt and stains washed from it, has had shells loaded weeks before, and is ready to go on the shortest notice.

The season for duck shooting begins September 1 in the Northern and Western States, and when the day begins to break on that eventful date the marshes are disturbed here and there with splashing oars and creaking reeds which tell of the presence of many hunters.

The teal are among the first water fowl to afford good shooting. They are distinguished as the blue and green wing. The former are the larger and usually the more scarce. They are dainty little ones and love to bask in the sunshine of the marshes, or sit on some round bar, which one often sees in the winding creeks and sloughs. They seldom fly in pairs during the fall, but feed in large flocks, and, as they swoop past the hunter's blind, a single discharge of the gun often results in the killing of from three to a half dozen birds. They love to drop into the little open place, which, from an elevation, gleam like silver in the bunches of rushes, and as the birds swoop along they will suddenly flirt and dart, dropping into their watery oases with a gentle splash, or as softly as feathers drifting into the sea.

Teal shooting can only be enjoyed when one has a good retriever in the marsh. Of course if the flight is such that the birds fly over the open water, then a boat answers as well or better than a dog. But generally the birds dart over the rush tops, and as they go with great velocity they are frequently killed so they drop into the rushes and wild rice, where it is utterly impossible to recover them without a retriever. While the teal are difficult to hit on account of the great speed with which they fly, they are not tenacious of life and succumb to slight blows. The skillful hunter understands the necessity of holding his gun well ahead of the birds, for, while he knows the velocity of shot is much greater than the speed of the birds, he also knows it takes time to decide to shoot, to pull the trigger, for the cap to explode, for the shot to issue from the barrel, and then to reach the bird; all that time, slight though it is, the swift flying bird has flown from eight to ten feet, and, unless the shooter has aimed those distances ahead of the bird, depending on the distance the bird is from him, the pellets of shot will go behind the bird and the shooter will score a miss. Nos. 7 and 8 shot are the favorite size when shooting teal.

There is another buck, very similar to the teal, and yet more like the female mallard, which frequents the marshes and pays tribute to the hunter's skill. This is the gray duck, and known locally throughout the United States as gadwell, speckle belly and gray widgeon. It is very similar in appearance in its flight to the mallard and is often mistaken for it, for after the hunter has killed the bird he finds his mistake when picking the duck up. The gray ducks decoy splendidly and the wild fowler who is shooting mallards over decoys is always sure to have among his birds a good number of them. Their call is very similar to the mallard, but it is shriller and of a tenor tone, whereas, when a mallard opens up her throat and utters her loud quack, quack, quack, noisy at first and dying away gradually with each succeeding quack, the cry causes the hunter to clutch his gun nervously, for there is a something in it that makes his blood tingle.

Mallard shooting begins at the opening of the season, and as these ducks breed in the marshes of the Northern States it is not unusual in Northern Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin to see a mallard with her brood in many of the little prairie ponds or sloughs where the rushes afford protection from prowling animals. At one time while hunting pinnated grouse in Eastern Iowa early in August my dog, which was an excellent one, came to a stand point at the edge of a slough. I supposed he had found a covey of pinnated grouse. On being urged on he pounced upon a young mallard duck and then he successively brought me six or eight which were two-thirds grown.

Mallards do not vary much in size; the males are larger and handsomer than the females, and are always a special mark for the wild fowler. The tyro in duck shooting frequently emphasizes the mallard he has succeeded in bagging by calling it "a big fat mallard." When a boy, the many mallards I used to kill were always "big and fat." Nowadays they are mallards pure and simple. There are many ways to hunt mallards and, at this season of the year, the methods employed are: First by jumping them. This is done at prairie ponds, where one can get near the rushes; then the frightened birds jump out and seek escape. Then, too, the jumping of mallards is done in marshes, when the wild fowler sits in the bow of the boat, and as the pusher propels the boat around the narrow winding stream the birds will fly out, presenting the easiest kind of shots. It is very easy to hit mallards when they fly up out of a marsh, for they invariably "climb"—that is, they keep rising until they have reached a height of from fifteen to thirty feet, when they start off in a direct line. When the shooter shoots at the bird he should hold a few inches or a foot over it to allow for its rise.

The second method which may be employed in mallard shooting early in the season is in flight shooting. This is done by the wild fowler secreting himself at some point or under the line of flight when he has noticed the birds flying back and forth to and from their feeding grounds. At times one can get excellent shooting in this manner, and it is rare sport to kill the birds in their flight. There is no assurance of one getting good shooting in this way, for the birds may change their line of flight, being frightened by some hunter who in his desire for birds forgets, if he ever knew, that there is an etiquette which established rules hold sacred among men in the field as well as at other places.

The third and best way of shooting mallards is over decoys. These decoys are made of wood or rubber and imitate in appearance the kind of duck the wild fowler is seeking. Care should be taken in setting out these decoys, for they must simulate as nearly as possible the living birds in their habits and peculiarities. Ducks always alight against the wind, and mallards select the still water in preference to the rough. The decoys should therefore be placed so that the mallards will approach them coming up wind, for they fly much lower then and are less suspicious than when flying with the wind. If they come down wind they are harder to decoy, for they will then make a detour before alighting, and as they circle around they are suspicious and their sharp eyes will observe the slightest movement of the wild fowler. The more decoys used the better, for numbers seem to dispel all doubt. Mallards when first alighting rarely ever drop in a bunch; they alight apart, and after feeding to their satisfaction they oftentimes swim together, and if the day is warm three or four, sometimes more, will tuck their heads beneath their wings and doze the time away. It is such times as this when the pot hunter gets in his work and kills from six to a dozen at one shot.

The glories of mallard shooting are to be had early in the morning and up to nine o'clock, then from about five o'clock until dark, and when one finds the place where they have been accustomed to come in and feed undisturbed, it is nothing unusual for one gunner to bag from thirty to sixty. The writer has done this frequently, and, jointly with another, has killed over fifty in an hour. When decoys are to set out the experienced wild fowler takes everything into consideration which will aid to make him successful. The spot selected should be an isolated one if possible, where the ducks have been accustomed to alight and feed or rest undisturbed for days or weeks. A feeding place should be chosen in preference to any other, for there the birds come in at times with perfect recklessness, and it seems impossible to keep them out. At such a time the hunter appreciates and enjoys the impossible. As the mallards fly up and down the marsh, undecided just where they will alight, their eyes are constantly watching for a place where other ducks have preceded them. They are companionable and like to associate with not only their kind but with other ducks, and when blue bills are bobbing on the rougher waters of the lakes outside the margin of the wild rice and rushes their presence seems to tell the wary mallards that in the recesses of the marsh and in proximity to the blue bills there are places where the mallards can find a feeding place and regale themselves on seeds and larvæ, which may be skimmed from the surface of the water, or the wild rice, which is as fondly desired by the mallard as ice cream is by the budding woman.

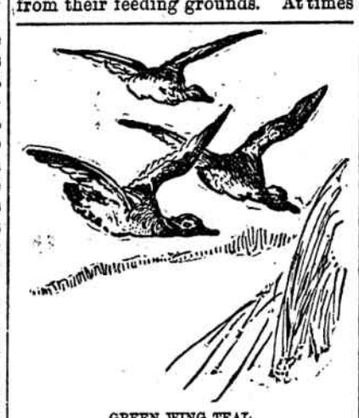
As the mallards come within a few hundred yards of the decoys the wild fowler calls to them, imitating the cry of mallards when they are in the marshes enjoying seclusion and contentment. This call is made by using a duck call made especially for the purpose or by calling with the human voice. The duck-shooter presses his lips and teeth together, and when the birds are within hailing distance he calls softly, "Me-amph," "Me-amph." This cry, if properly given, results in turning the birds toward the concealed hunter, and they fly toward the decoys. The mallards frequently answer these calls; if they do the hunter is sure to get a good shot if he remains motionless and concealed, and, as he watches the birds come to him with wings bowed preparatory to alighting, his heart trobs fast as his eyes rest on the russet and mottled female mallard and then on the splendid drake, whose deep green head and white band around his head draw first to him the hunter's aim. Just as the birds are over the decoys and their red feet are extended and ready to alight, and they are chuckling their satisfaction at finding this place, which they have long sought, the wild fowler selects his bird, a drake by all means, and, as one report rapidly follows another, the stricken birds fall limp and dead, while their mates utter frightened cries and seek escape in rapid flight. It often happens that when two hunters are shooting from the same blind each will make a double, i. e., each kill his pair of birds.

The sine qua non in having good duck shooting is as the Irishman said: "Plenty of very wet weather." Unless there is plenty of water in the marshes one cannot feel assured of getting the best of wild fowl shooting. If there are occasional ponds to be found throughout some extensive swamp ducks may frequent that swamp in great numbers, but the hunter will scarcely find them worth the seeking, for the marsh will be one vast bed of muck and the hunter will soon become tired and disgusted with the situation. The ducks seem to realize the protection they find amid such surroundings, and, instead of flying about, they remain in their secluded places and sip and feed and squawk from morning till night.

A well trained retriever is one of the greatest blessings the duck shooter was ever favored with. Such a dog is almost worth his weight in gold to the wild fowler, for in no other way can the hunter get his birds out of the thick rushes and wild rice. The dog must be obedient, have a good nose, be powerful and courageous. He must be of a neutral color. The best breed of dogs is the Chesapeake. They are a dead color of a faded buffalo robe; are not afraid of mud, rushes or ice, and will dive if necessary to get their bird. I have seen them retrieve in floating ice in a swift current and it was mere play for them. I have seen another mark where a goose fell and retrieve it from a distance of fully one-half mile, carrying a weight of twelve pounds in his mouth as if it was a stick.

The wild fowler of to-day has changed his ideas about the firearms he uses. The large bores, such as six or eight, are but seldom used, and the one who uses them now is decidedly behind the times. The favorite duck gun among expert shots is the twelve gauge hammerless, bored a full choke, shooting 4½ ounces of shot and 3¼ drams of nitro-powder. Such a gun, with the load mentioned, is a far-killing weapon. Black powder is used but very little by the majority of sportsmen. The noise, the report and the smoke incident to black powder are mostly done away with when one uses nitro-powder, and one's pleasures are consequently enhanced. Nitro or smokeless powder has gun cotton for its foundation, and its advantages are slight recoil, very little noise and an almost total absence of smoke, thus enabling the shooter to use the second barrel quickly without interference from smoke, which from powder made of charcoal and saltpeter oftentimes prevents a second shot.—Chicago Herald.

JUMPING BLUE WING TEAL.



GREEN WING TEAL.

SHOOTING MALLARDS FROM A BLIND.

The pedestrian Grandin, who has walked over 14,000 kilometers in America and Europe, is about to embark for Africa, where he intends to endeavor to walk from Oran to Timbuctoo, crossing the dreaded Sahara on the way.

The Marquis of Lorne has written the libretto of an opera, which will be set to music by the Scottish composer, Hamish McCunn. The first performance will probably take place before the Queen at Windsor Castle.

Daniel M. Spraker, of Fonda, N. Y., is the oldest bank president in the United States. He has just passed his ninety-sixth birthday.

The Albatross.

The albatross, a bird of the genus Diomedinæ, and of which there are several known species, is characterized by its great size, its powerfully

THE ALBATROSS.

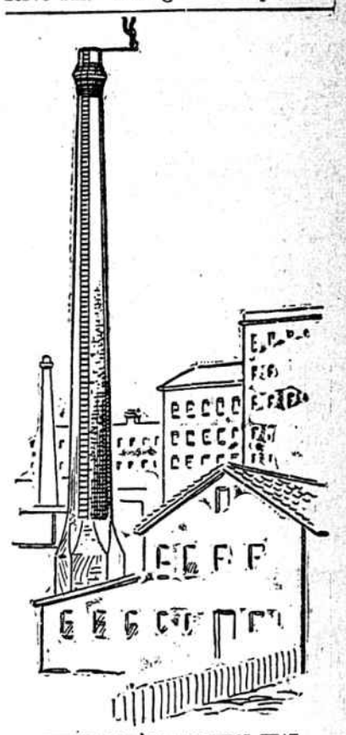
built body, short, thick neck, and long and powerful beak, which is compressed at the sides and curves suddenly downward with a sharp hook at the point. The feet are short, the three toes long and completely webbed; the wings are long and narrow. The abundant plumage is of a grave color, which varies somewhat, according to sex and age, and also, perhaps, according to the season of the year.

The common albatross (Diomedea exulans), of which we publish an engraving—for which we are indebted to Brehm's "Thierleben"—is pure white, except for the black of the wings and a sprinkling of more or less brown over the white ground when it reaches a certain age. The eye is dark brown, the bare eyelid pale green, the beak pinkish white, shading to yellow toward the point; the feet are tinged with red. The common albatross is the largest sea bird known, weighing from twelve to twenty-eight pounds. The usual extent of its wings is about eleven feet, but one was shot off the Cape of Good Hope that measured 17½ feet. Its powers of flight are extraordinary, as might be presupposed from the extreme lightness of its hollow wing bones, which are said to be as long as the whole body. Sailors have many strange notions about it, one of which is that it sleeps on the wing.

Monkey Tricks in Midair.

John William Mayman, known throughout the country as "Steeple Jack," died at Fall River Mass., recently. He had drank heavily. Death was due to exposure.

Some time ago he finished building an addition to a chimney owned by the Smith Paper Company's mill, near Boston. The chimney is 130 feet high. Several planks had been drawn up and placed across the top to hold material, and an iron rod had been put through the top of the chimney. One Sunday afternoon Mayman had been drinking and went to the top of the chimney to show how steady his nerve was. Taking a stout plank he

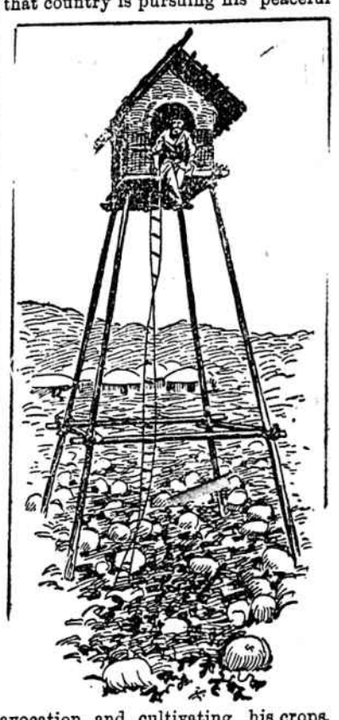


STEEPLE JACK'S TERRIFYING FEAT.

inserted one end under the rod, letting the other end project into the air about eight feet. He first tried the plank with his foot; then walked slowly to the end, stooped, grasped the plank with both hands and stood on his head at the extreme end. All the spectators grew faint at the sight and most of them turned away, being unable to look at the terrifying performance.

Peace and War in Korea.

While the Japs and Chinese are warring over their mutual "rights" in Korea, the humble agriculturist of that country is pursuing his peaceful



avocation and cultivating his crops. The picture represents the method employed by a Korean farmer to guard his field of pumpkins from thieves and foragers.