GAME IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

Shooting Turkeys on Waccamaw Neck.

News and Courier.

Lower Waccamaw Neck was in the gentle clasp of winter. Boreas embraced the woodland as his bride, the gaunt clutch that he laid everywhere on all living things was here soft as the lover's hand when he strokes the hair of his lady love. Leaves had flitted slowly down, Jack Frost had come, but so lightly did he breathe upon the grass that it was barely withered in December.

Outside the calm bay lay smooth as a ribbon, save that now and then, when the tide turned, there was a rippling wave sent up Waccamaw to be brushed aside by that stream with majestic indifference. The dense green of pines became lost in live oaks on the knoll that stretched around Fraser's Point, and but for rice field, dead marsh and Rabbit Island, looking more sombre, there was no hint of aught but early fall.

Turkeys had been numerous; their signs were everywhere; their calls were now and then heard, but the season for gobbling had not come. Somehow one does not go turkey hunting until the winter grows a bit old. Why no one knows, it is the custom. This December, however, Jack proposed that we go down around the point, skirt the old reserve and drive a famous buck, marked by a curious twist on one of his feet, from which circumstance we had a name for him. He was called the "Red Buck," and to kill him was the ambition that lay in several breasts. He had been seen many times, but never when the hunter was ready with gun.

Jack and I had determined to get him and we rarely failed to get what we went after; so far the "Red Buck" was an exception that we were eager to take out of the rule, but in vain!

By early sunrise we had reached a point where Jack told me to dismount and wait until he had skirted a small swamp. The words were hardly out of his mouth when Hector's deep bay came down the wind, followed by one or two sharper notes from Fly; they were way up the swamp. Jack went like mad down the road, dashing out of it where it curved and the last I saw of him was when Saladin cleared a pine top, the boughs crashing against Jack's boots. The danger was that the dogs would carry the deer across to the old reserve below, whence he would inevitably go into it and become lost in the sea of tangled marsh; or go straight away toward Goat Island, landing, in either case, where we could not reach him that day.

My mare, Genevieve, was quivering in every limb; she could not help it. Genevieve loved a chase better than her life, but like the faithful animal she was, she was standing, ears raised, not moving out of her tracks, despite the temptation, although she was not tied. Genevieve was never subjected to that humiliation; she would never have forgiven it; she knew her business.

By and by the dogs came down the swamp in full cry and passed on to the left among the palmettoes where I did not care to follow, although Jack came crashing after like the Wild Huntsman. I caught sight of him for a few seconds and he was waving towards the bluff below me, where I could see everything that passed and where I felt confident no deer at least had gone, but as I turned my eyes the explanation came. An old gobbler was standing on the edge of the bluff, some sixty or seventy yards away, looking me over critically. I swore under my breath. There I was with those miserable buckshot in my gun and the finest gobbler I ever saw in good range for sixes or sevens, but buckshot, bah! Sand would have been better; at that range buckshot would scatter over a ten-acre field. My heart sank as I covered that beard and blazed away; he rose at the flash and sailed off, I pumping buckshot after him from my Winchester like Russian infantry repelling a Jap charge. Not a feather was touched.

I stood on tiptoe watching him and saw him come down right out in the open rushes, by this time Jack had come back, the hounds having got away from him and gone up the Neck out of hearing.

"Did you see that flock of turkeys?" he asked. I told him I had only seen the gobbler and he thereupon said that five or six had gone out into the rushes some two hundred yards below. I took every buckshot shell out of my pockets and put them in my saddle bags. "Now, come on," I said.

We rode in after the gobbler, a risky thing to do, as it proved, but the idea was to come upon him on horseback, whereas we did not think he would be so on foot. That [illegible] we had given him up and Saladin shot into the air with Jack like a skyrocket. I could not blame him—even Genevieve wheeled with me, but as she came round she stood stock-still and I got in one barrel as he was swinging through a pine, a desperate chance, but the load landed right between the wings, where his neck joined his back and I need not tell a hunter what happened, he dropped like a partridge.

Jack's retriever, who had been sneaking after us, now came up and that settled it; we decided to leave the horses, take Brag, the retriever, and go after the rest on foot. This was novel work to both of us; turkeys are not shot that way, as every one knows who has hunted turkeys, but this morning proved to be a record-breaker all around.

Both of us shot repeating shotguns and we agreed to shoot as we shot partridges, turn about, each man to look after the birds on his side. We kept Brag close in and after we had passed the place where Jack said he saw them go down and had about exhausted our patience, Brag spun around and came to a point; he had hardly stiffened himself when a turkey rose, quartering away from Jack and was tumbled over. Just then one rose behind me and met the same fate. We searched those rushes for nearly a half hour before finding another and we must have gone in two feet of him from where he rose. Jack cut him down before he straightened—a fine young gobbler. At the crack of the gun two hens rose and we grassed both, but one was winged and the retriever had to run her down. Just before reaching the horses another hen got up and she fell to me—seven turkeys and all shot like partridges, as tame a morning's work as either had ever indulged. Barring the glorious bag, it was nothing.

After we had tied them to the saddles, giving the horses all the load they wanted and more, we stopped a while to smoke and talk. By and by the dogs came back and Jack suggested driving a small island in the reserve near the woods. He carried the dogs around and put them in; I waited below. They struck scent at once and came on, making splendid music; just as they reached the middle of the island a peg-horn buck broke cover in twenty yards of me and I stretched him; I saw nothing else. But Jack came around the island swearing like a trooper; he was blowing off steam at such a rate that I could not make out the trouble, and all of a sudden, he got non-committal.

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" I asked. "I got him, there he is." "Got the devil," snorted Jack, "you turned the "Red Buck" by shooting that infernal kid, that measly goat."

My jaw fell; I looked at Jack and he looked at me; the "Red Buck" had saved his antlers again, almost by a miracle. We rode sadly home, forgetting the turkeys until we arrived at the barnyard. Drat the luck!

Some time after this found me alone with the boatman, Caesar, (who was proud enough of his African descent to boast that he was a full-blood negro,) deep in the great swamp that forms the upper part of Sandy Island. The rivers do a trick here that is unusual in America. A broad and deep channel runs across from the channel of the two Pee Dees into Waccamaw and and is known as Bull Creek, a name given it in colonial days.

Part of the water of the Pee-Dee goes on in a different channel to Georgetown, where before reaching Winyah Bay it is joined by Black River. Between Bull Creek, the connecting link of Waccamaw and the Pee-Dees and Waccamaw Point, in the bay just above Georgetown, there are innumerable islands, the most northerly of which is known as Sandy Island from the vast sand deposits on its southern edge. Just touching this sand in the river bottoms on the Waccamaw side are a number of plantations, abandoned by their former owners and some of them owned by the negroes. The northern part of Sandy Island is swamp, subject for the most part to overflow from the rivers in time of freshet. The precise area of the swamp is unknown to this day, no accurate survey ever having been made, but it is vast, much of it impenetrable and threaded by small streams that admit the passage of canoes and dug-outs.

It is a most famous turkey range in the Southern States; here that noble American bird can raise a brood unmolested, and feeding grounds abound on islands in the swamp and on the neighboring plantations. All around the swamp are oak ridges and [illegible]

not leave the island until spring, coming back then at night to roost.

Turkeys always roost over water, if it be available, hence it is that a hunter with eyes and training can follow these streams in a boat and be able to do good work just before nightfall and sometimes even after moonrise. But simple as it seems there is required the finest eyesight, the most careful manoeuvring and, above all, quickness when the game has been found. The way an old gobbler can get out of a tree and off into impenetrable gloom would amaze a man who had not seen it done; nothing living is quicker except a fish or an alligator jumping from a bank when he is "good scared."

The streams over which they sit are sometimes too small to admit the passage of a boat and here they are reasonably secure unless some industrious hunter has "roosted" them, that is followed them, calling at intervals with a bone or box until the flock rises for the trees. When this is done the hunter comes back way before day, calls them again and usually manages to score.

Caesar and I had our share of this tedious and uncertain mode of hunting; acting on his advice I was taking to the water. In the growing dusk every object in the swamp assumed a shape strange to daylight; overhead you could see; in front now and then we caught glimpses; once in a while a summer duck flew out with a clatter; but we took no notice. On turning a dismal bend I felt the paddle touch my legs, as the canoe slowly settled against the bank. Straining my head I caught Caesar's gaze fixed on a cypress. No! Yes! M-a-y-b-e, but I doubt it—then all doubt that was passing through my mind faded; he had ducked his head and betrayed himself; now the plump outline of the turkey's form became visible; the boat was stock still, held by the paddle. I drew a bead, the finest I could get in that light, and fired my rifle at the place where neck and head joined; the turkey dropped like a bag of sand and at the crack another flew out of a tree and went sailing across the stream for the swamp ridges beyond. I pumped twice at the last one, but he went on, Caesar stoutly maintaining, however, that he was shot through. Our talking had disturbed others and they went the other way, not one crossing the stream. As the night was coming on we got our turkey, a fair sized gobbler. We had many miles to go, so both took a paddle and the canoe shot swiftly through the bayous. As we reached our destination that night, Pompey Masyck, an old darky, met us and told Caesar of flushing a flock just at sunset in some tall pines by a branch and I determined to be back in time next morning.

It turned off bitterly cold and the wind rose—circumstances both highly favorable to work next morning, but not conducive to comfort. I slept under a fly and woke cold, as the stars were shining next morning. It was half-past three o'clock. Caesar was out of pocket, but soon turned up, having gone off to get lightwood. He had our breakfast ready directly and then brought out from behind the blaze a coffee pot, explaining "dat gal Cindy fetch 'em last night, Mausse." I did not care to pursue the investigation, having no further interest in knowing how Caesar came by the pot of coffee—really a godsend, as by an unpardonable blunder mine had been left with the coffee at the plantation. Swallowing breakfast without ceremony and without a minute's loss of time, we were off on foot for the place where Pompey had seen the flock. I had my box and Caesar could yelp with a turkey bone to fool the oldest gobbler on the range. Long before day we were at the rendezvous.

By one of those sudden shifts that coast weather is famous for, there began to fall a slight drizzle of rain, hardly more than a mist. Caesar's first attempt brought a reply from a pine right over us. I looked up and against the faint gleam of the sodden sky there was silhouetted a gobbler, Caesar had brought my rifle and he softly handed it to me. I fired and that turkey shot away like he was sent from the mouth of a cannon back on the oak ridge. "We git dem; Mausse, she daid dey-dey."

This was in a whisper, of course; we were both too well trained in woodcraft to break cover yet. The smokeless shell made little noise and there was nothing else to indicate our presence. Waiting a sufficient time for the slight excitement created by the sound to die away, Caesar again began to yelp in a low key, a few short notes with rising inflection, and then to wait for an answer. The third trial brought results with a chorus of answering calls and before their echoes had died a gobbler flew by and lit in a neighboring pine, not thirty yards away, but where he could not be seen for the pine needles.

Caesar indicated a tree to me with his eyes right in front, where the last turkey had flown from; I made out through the boughs the distinct outline of a gobbler. I made Caesar hold the shotgun cocked right by me, [illegible]

key have it, this time full in the breast, and as he tumbled I grasped the shotgun from Caesar to get our neighbor as he left the tree, but he did not leave.

Fearing any longer to take chances I made Caesar take the rifle and go around the tree; he had not got half round when the turkey flew and I cut him down. The noise of the gun brought a hen out of the pines, sailing by us to the oak ridges. I was fortunate enough to get her too.

This was the last we saw of the flock; there were more; we heard them leaving the trees, but they all went the other way. Now I told Pompey as we left camp when he heard the shotgun fire to let Ponto loose and in a few minutes he was leaping against my bosom in the ecstasy of dog bliss. He found the turkey I had first shot about two hundred yards off, dead as Hector, shot through and through.

Caesar insisted that we look further on the oak ridge for the turkey I had shot at the night before and we found him also, that is the remains of him—a wildcat had been there just ahead of us and regaled himself with the breakfast we had provided. Our firing had evidently disturbed him at his meal; it was useless to utter regrets and we returned to camp with the booty.

That morning by appointment Jack came up the river in a launch and I went aboard for a nap.

I wondered, and still wonder, when the delicious nap is over and Boston, Jack's cook, is fixing lunch and coffee, how many lives have been saved, how many men made happy, how many careers touched with a gleam of gold as a result of the association with steam launches. The travel may be likened to an aerial voyage on a cloud blown through the empyrean by zephyrs to the accompaniment of celestial harps, heard far off in ether, as angel fingers stroked their delicate strings.

The plan this time was novel and of our own devising. Two old gobblers had been in the habit of going to a certain field every afternoon for a month; they were probably there in the morning also, but had only been seen in the afternoon. We had arranged for Pompey and Caesar to put the dogs in the run from which they came and to bring down the dogs as if they were driving deer; this we thought would drive out the turkeys and they would, nine times out of ten, pass close to us. Jack and I went to our stands; the negroes were a mile above with the dogs. In due time the dogs opened and came toward us in full cry, which at first sounded faintly down the wind and freshened into a swelling chorus that meant business and signified more than turkeys. A hound broke cover above and circled with raised bristles; no hound raises his bristles for a deer, but only for dangerous animals, and I was puzzled to know what it meant, but thought it probably a wild cat and was straining my eye-sight on every bush; when just behind me the worm fence cracked and the rails came down in a heap. Before I could think a bear rose from the dust, making straight by me. I fired before I thought, right at his stomach, but possibly, owing to the excitement, he caught the load on one side and I was knocked down and run over with such force that it nearly knocked the sense out of me. Bruin escaped into the swamp just as the hounds dashed through the broken fence, the whole pack yelping like mad. At that instant Jack's gun cracked twice and I went hastily to him, only to learn that he had not seen the bear but had killed a turkey with one barrel and had fired at another, but with what result he could not tell, as the bird was in the trees. Just then a young hound strayed from the pack and stopped suddenly. I made my way to him and found him on a turkey, an old gobbler. That accounted for both Jack's birds.

We held a short council of war and determined to go after the bear, as we both had plenty of buckshot. The hounds were baying; the game was run to earth or to a tree. Through a tangled canebrake we pushed, with vines and briars scratching the blood at every step, until just before we came to a small run the undergrowth cleared a little and such a sight met our eyes as hunter has seldom seen. The bear was backed against a fallen tree, his front bloody and his little eyes snapping viciously; before him two of the dogs lay gasping in death and as we came up the pack closed again and he sent two to earth, one with his neck broke and the other ripped up like a bank saw had struck him. Met by this terrible onslaught the pack gave way and I emptied buckshot as fast as a Gatling gun could do it. Bruin collapsed; the range was too close and the smokeless powder behind the shot was a deadlier charge than his race had yet met. But we had paid dearly for our victory. Four dogs were dead and poor old Hector, whose discretion was proverbial, had received a wipe that cut a piece of hide from him as big as a napkin. Hector recovered, however, by careful nursing and lived to see many an eventful day after that.

The adventure and accident broke and we returned that night to the plantation. We found upon examination that my first load had torn into the bear's side without reaching the intestines and had done little damage; it was clumsy work, but the time limit upset me—besides neither of us dreamed of seeing bears. They were rarely met with short of Santee and the Big Swamp in Horry County.

One could go on without end telling of turkey hunts. I have killed more than I could count up; the reader will be dismissed with this side-light on another class of turkey hunting, the best of all and one that appeals to the true sportsman—hunting on horseback with a dog.

First it is unforgettable how the doctor and I scared a negro out of his wits on Santee, where we had a pen for baiting turkeys, just because there was a bluff where they flew over in the grey of the morning, fed for a time on the acorns and then went back across the river to the swamp. A negro had found the place and was there ahead of us several mornings. The doctor got a shrivelled hand out of his dissecting room and this was put on wire and placed in the path where Sambo had to go. At two o'clock in the morning we were there and an hour after the negro arrived, coming along whistling a tune. When he first saw the hand he stopped, for he could not make it out; next moment he gave a blood-curdling yell, dropped his gun and hat, and made a world's record for sprinting through those lonely woods. We were not bothered with him after that.

I have not time to tell how the doctor's pretty young wife found us two conspirators over the hominy pot at two o'clock another morning and laughingly drove us out of the kitchen, until with her own fair hands she fixed a glorious breakfast for us, and of how, when going along that morning with a cold wind making us shiver, the log turned as we tried to cross a branch and precipitated the assortment into the icy water, and how after that two frozen fools caught lumbago waiting for the gobbler that never came. But what memories they are.

One early morning when the winter was well on and turkeys were reported on every hand, the doctor and I mounted our horses and, calling to his pointer, Ponto, dashed off into the forest. Ponto knew his business; when he saw the motion of the horsemen he knew as well as we did that turkeys were the game and he let himself loose. We had ridden several miles when his furious barking called us to the edge of a swamp; he was baying just inside. We dismounted and made our way to him as fast as we could go.

He had a gobbler treed and shooting him down was nothing at all; soon Ponto had another and yet another, in each case the turkeys sat for us, apparently unmindful of our presence and wholly bent on watching Ponto.

We bagged five in two hours, two gobblers and three hens.

Then we called Ponto to heel and rode slowly along; after a while Ponto became restless and was sniffing the leaves by the trail. The doctor spoke to him and he circled the gallberry bushes and with tail up ran into a dense patch of sparkle berries; out rose a gobbler dashing by us so fast that Genevieve snorted and reared with me, but the doctor, whose horse stood, got him with the first barrel. Ponto treed two more, one of which we killed. The doctor let the other go on—said he fired a squib shell, but then we all do it and all have a good excuse.

That evening when we reached home a neighbor by the name of Tuttle came over in distress to say that his son, John, was missing since morning, a lad of thirteen years. Being questioned, Tuttle said his son went off with his muzzle-loading shotgun that morning, the gun being heavily loaded.

From what John had told the doctor he inferred that John must have gone to a "blind" or pen to shoot turkeys. We both knew the place and started for it at a gallop, telling Tuttle to follow on foot. Just before we reached the point where the road turned we met John himself. He had a tale of disaster to relate.

The turkeys had come to the bait and the whole flock was eating corn from the little drill where it was placed with their heads together when lying full on his face, John fired through the cracks of his pen at the collection of heads. He learned the result a long time afterward, for the gun flew up and struck him on the temple, rendering him unconscious.

When he came to himself it was late in the day and he had three dead gobblers stretched in front of him. The doctor had to take John in hand and sew up his head; but John wore the scar as a badge of honor ever after and said he would take another for the same reward.

There is no fiery sport in turkey hunting; but it has a charm of its own and a reward worth trying for.

The coastal regions of South Carolina is now the finest territory in America for hunting turkeys and the woods in winter will satisfy the most exacting taste.

The last wild turkey I ate was cooked in a pit on the sand which had been heated for hours and at last the fire removed. The dressed turkey was placed in the pit and allowed to remain there closely covered with twigs and leaves, overlaid with sand, until morning. When the covering was removed next morning a New York financier, famous on two continents, almost fainted at the savory aroma that arose from the pit and missed an international appointment on the plea of sudden illness (a report which played old Harry with the stock market) in order to get another cooked in the same way. Who would not suffer for such a cause?