

THE WILDFOWL OF SCOTLAND.¹

THE possession of artistic talents of the exceptionally high order of those with which the author of the beautiful volume before us is endowed confers, it must be confessed, an advantage over his brother naturalists to whom such accomplishments are denied the value and importance of which it is almost impossible to over-estimate. Most naturalists who have to depend upon the labours of others to illustrate their works (and they are the great majority of their class) have but too often to deplore either the lifeless and "wooden" character of the sketches with which they are supplied, or, when higher things are attempted, the sacrifice of accuracy of detail to artistic effect. For, among at least a large percentage of professional zoological artists, the combination of lifelike posture with strict attention to details of form, colour and anatomy seems to be almost unattainable. An artist like Mr. Millais, on the other hand, who is well acquainted with the special characteristics of the animals he portrays, and is at the same time an accomplished landscape and animal painter, is enabled to combine zoological accuracy of detail with scenic effect in the happiest manner. And we have in consequence pictures of animal life which satisfy the professed naturalist in regard to fidelity, and likewise appeal with full strength to the connoisseur in art and the lover of the beautiful in nature.

In an earlier work, "A Breath from the Veldt," Mr. Millais gave us some startling, but apparently truthful, sketches of antelopes and vultures in their most active phases of movement; and in the present volume he has done the same for the British ducks and geese and certain other of our larger wild birds. Examples of the artist's power and originality in this style are displayed in the plate of a peregrine swooping down on a flight of frightened teal; in the one of wild geese arriving from the Arctic regions, where the figure in the foreground is a marvellous example of artistic skill in representing a bird in what seems an almost impossible attitude; and, again, in the plate of herons moving a party of wigeon; and also in the sketch of Loch Spynie at sunset, in which the whole scene is alive with bird-life. Equally bold and original are the sketches of flocks of wildfowl when raked by a shot in their midst; but we confess that such scenes of slaughter are much less to our taste than those of birds under more normal conditions, and we should have liked the coloured plate of a flying mallard far better had the bird been unwounded. Nor is the artist in any way less at home in his pictures of bird-life in repose or slow movement, of which the plates of mallards feeding, of wild geese throwing out sentinels, and of teal in "bunched and scattered formation" may be cited as charming and exquisite examples. As an example of illustration of this nature we reproduce, by permission of the publishers, the annexed text-figure of mallard feeding. The flight, too, of ducks and geese, as we shall have occasion to mention again, is a favourite subject with Mr. Millais; and as an

example of the V-formation nothing can be better than the plate, entitled "brent and their satellites."

To those who have had no experience of wildfowl shooting in Scotland and the isles, nothing can be more wonderful than the profusion in which ducks and geese occur during winter in their favourite resorts; and few sights in the world can be more marvellous than the flocks of these birds when assembled in their thousands and tens of thousands. Most wonderful of all, perhaps, must be the arrival of wild geese from the Arctic regions. By rare good fortune, as he tells us, the author has on two occasions witnessed this marvellous sight. On the first occasion, in October, he writes:

"I heard the first 'honk' of the season coming from far away up in the vast expanse of the blue heaven. For a long time nothing could I see, until at last a tiny speck appeared in the sky as far as the eye could reach, and, watching it intently, I saw it grow into the form of a goose that was slowly descending in great spirals. This bird was followed at regular intervals by others of the tribe subdivided into little parties of from six to ten individuals. . . . The prime leader came down immediately above the Inch, and while she was preparing to alight there were still small companies evolving themselves from the blue expanse, until at last there must

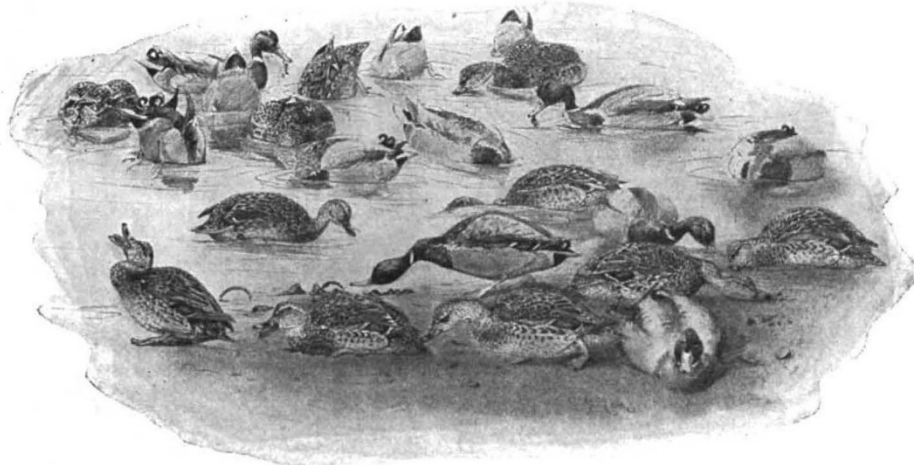


FIG. 1.—Mallard feeding in the shallows and on the mud. From "The Wildfowler in Scotland."

have been some fifteen hundred birds actually on the wing, all in process of descent, and all following one another at regular intervals. By and by, when the leading geese had settled, the parties at the rear seemed to straggle more, and longer intervals occurred between them; yet they kept coming in all day as I roamed round and about the lake, till by the evening, when I disturbed the company, there must have been between two and three thousand geese sitting on the island."

A keen and enthusiastic sportsman himself, Mr. Millais writes mainly for his brother sportsmen, and much of his work, apart from the illustrations, will be interesting to them and to them alone. And this being so, he has done well in alluding to the birds whose haunts and habits he describes so graphically by their English names alone. But the author may also lay claim to be regarded as a field-naturalist of no mean ability, and many of his observations with regard to the flight of ducks are not to be found in any of the ornithological works with which we are acquainted. Several of the more interesting of these observations are given in the appendix, which is specially devoted to the appearance on the water of the different British ducks and the localities they especially affect in Scotland, and is accordingly

¹ "The Wildfowler in Scotland." By J. G. Millais. Pp. xv + 167. Illustrated. (London: Longmans and Co., 1901.) Price 30s. net.

the section of most importance to the naturalist. The following passage, from p. 37, may be quoted as a good example of the closeness of the author's observations:—

"Most sportsmen," he writes, "will have noticed that duck when travelling prefer flying over water; even when passing from one sheet of water to another they will avoid the land if they can. This may be said to be a hard and fast rule with all the true diving ducks, but not with the surface feeders, such as mallard, wigeon and teal; for when they in their flight observe the waters for which they are heading, they are as likely as not to cut over large extents of land to reach their desired haven, especially if they have been much shot at at any given point on their usual water route."

The text-figures in the appendix are especially intended to illustrate the modes in which different species of duck rise from the water, and the formation they assume when in the air. One exhibits the manner in which mallard and teal "scoot" along the surface of the water in close phalanx before rising; a second (herewith reproduced) displays the "bunched" formation assumed by eiders

COOPERS HILL COLLEGE.

THE report on this institution by the body called, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, the "Board of Visitors," was published last week so shortly before the House of Commons adjourned for the Easter recess that there was not time to take any parliamentary action.

The day after we went to press a letter appeared in the *Times* from Colonel Pennycuik, the president of the College who preceded Colonel Ottley, from which we make the following extracts:—

Sir,—The final decision of the Secretary of State for India, after the inquiry promised in his letter to Sir William Anson, has now been announced, and has justified the opinion expressed by every one acquainted with the facts, that the inquiry in question would be a farce, the Board of Visitors, by whom the inquiry was conducted, being already committed to an opinion, and its own competence being one of the very questions on which an inquiry was most urgently required.

Lord George Hamilton's letter to Sir William Anson repeats the libels contained in his reply to the deputation which waited on him earlier in the year, that the college "is in such a condi-

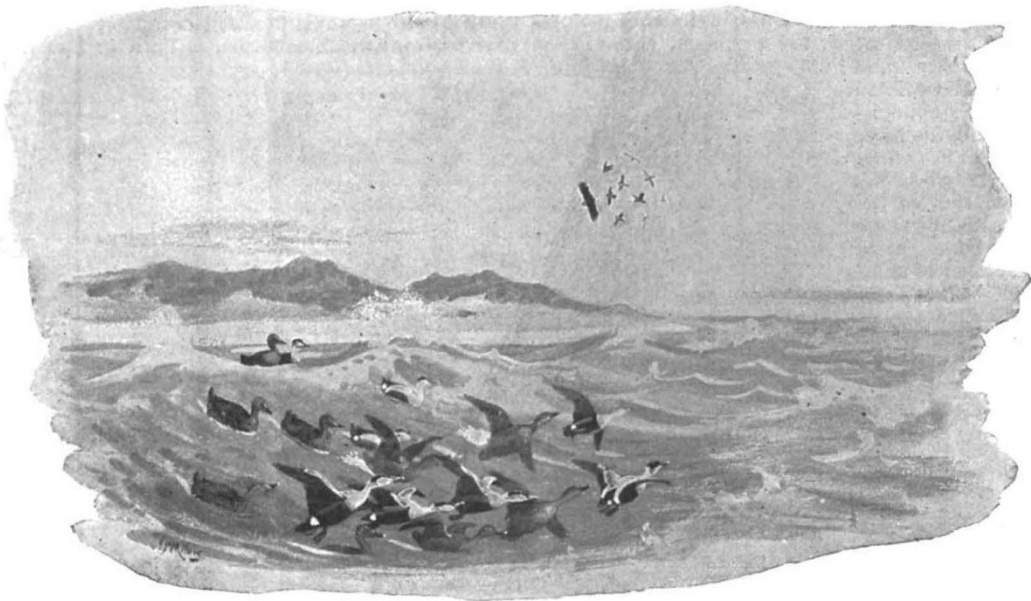


FIG. 2.—Eiders rising and showing bunched formation. From "The Wildfowler in Scotland."

when rising; while a third shows the swallow-like flight and linear formation so characteristic of the long-tailed duck.

For many of the species referred to the author well says that the illustrations best display the manner in which they severally leave the water when alarmed. When illustrations are lacking, excellent descriptions are given, as witness the following:—

"Shovellers are easily recognised when they rise from a marsh by the rattling noise they make, and I have heard them designated as 'rattle-wings' in more than one locality. They ascend abruptly at first, and fly rather like wigeon, but more easily and gracefully. They are adepts at turning, and seem to enjoy in spring beating up and down for hours together over the marsh which they intend to make their summer home. They do not fly very high as a general rule."

With this quotation we take leave, regretfully, of what is in every respect a very charming book, acceptable alike to the lover of art, the sportsman and the naturalist, and forming a handsome addition to the works allowed a permanent place on the drawing-room or library table.

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tion that it must be either reformed or abolished," and that it is "a burden upon the Indian revenues." Both these statements, unless they have been justified by something that has happened since the end of 1899, are absolutely untrue. At that date the number of candidates for entrance far exceeded the number for whom accommodation was available; the standard of the entrance examination had been steadily raised during the three previous years, and was still further raised in 1900; the college accounts during the same years showed a handsome surplus of income over expenditure; and the reputation of its students for practical efficiency stood at the highest possible level; its associate's diploma was accepted by the Institution of Civil Engineers as equivalent to their own associate's examination, and this latter examination was passed, while still at the college, by many students who did not succeed in obtaining that diploma; every student who obtained the ordinary diploma of the college, and some who did not, obtained useful employment within a few months after leaving the college. When and whence arose the necessity for "reform or abolition" in an institution which eighteen months ago was producing such results as these?

In his reply to the deputation Lord George Hamilton stated that shortly after he came into office—*i.e.* in the end of 1895 or early in 1896—he "determined to reorganise" the college as an alternative to abolition. If he did, I can only say that he