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The Opening of the Season

By Bonnycastle Dale

THE mighty host of wild fowl that streamed north over this wide continent of America, beginning in early March—when the ambitious Mergansers and merrily whistling Golden-eyes led the great procession and ending in June, with the lazy birds and the adult birds that have ceased mating and rearing a brood—have long since found their secluded nesting places. The big resplendent Mallards settled all through the most northern tier of the United States, and the Canadian provinces. The ever-decreasing Woodducks flittered into many a shaded fresh water brook and there remained. The big silent Black duck and his noisy mate chose nesting places on the shores of the islands of the inland lakes. The Widgeon and the Pintail and the Shoveller and Gadwall dropped out of the migration all along the temperate zone. The Green-winged, the Blue-winged and the Cinnamon Teal hid away in marshy sloughs. All this band of sweet-fleshed gamy wild ducks breed broadcast over the continent. In this sun-darkening

migration flew the mighty Canvas-backs, the Red-heads, the Scaups—big, lesser and ring-necked. Do not think that I use simply a figure of speech. I have seen this spring migration going up the wide valley of the Mississippi, actually covering the sky as far as the eye could reach and lasting for three days and nights. When first I saw it, in the middle eighties, a bird's-eye view of the city of Quincy on the east bank of the river would have shown that the big straggling place must have been undergoing a seige from some aerial enemy, for the gunners were on the house tops, on the steamboats' upper decks, on the tops of barns, in crotches of old trees, anywhere to get under the enemy.

I well remember a laughable incident. I was in a train that was speeding along the bank of the river. It was filled with westerners going to Quincy. All the surface of the "Father of Waters," that big yellow muddy Mississippi, was covered with the resting hosts of ducks. I peered out of the steam obscured window as long as I could stand it, then