

her impatient mate, a female eagle seemed anxious to persuade him not to abandon his watch, and accordingly uttered, at three slow intervals, a keen strident cry, which resounded along the river-border. At this signal the male partly opened his wings, and responded with a similar cry, which I can only compare to the wild shriek of laughter that occasionally breaks forth in a lunatic asylum.

“While, with their hands upon their oars, my negroes abandoned the boat to the current of the river, I followed with my gaze every movement of the eagles, who suffered to pass by them undisturbed myriads of ducks and teals, as prey unworthy of their appetites: so I understood a moment later.

“At length my ears were rent by a piercing cry, that of the female. At the same time I heard, like the hoarse sound of a trumpet, the voice of a troop of swans, which were cleaving the sky with snow-white pinions. Turning my eyes northwards I quickly caught sight of the voyagers, beating the air with their short wings, their necks outstretched, their feet closed up against the belly, and their glances ranging the horizon in fear of danger. The flock was composed of five swans flying, as is their custom, in a triangular or wedge-like phalanx; but the one at the head of the convoy seemed more fatigued than the others. It was this poor wretch whom the eagles selected as their prey.

“At the moment of his flight past the oak where the male bird was in ambush, the latter suddenly unfurled his wings, raised a formidable cry, and, like a gloomy meteor, darted on his resigned victim, while his four companions allowed themselves to drop into the waters of the Mississippi.