A NIGHT'S SPORT IN CAPE BRETON.

To devotees of rod and gun, Nature unveils the face of a lover, revealing with bewitching abandon the wealth of her rarest charms, her smiles and tears. If lowering clouds scatter the flashing rain-drops, right merrily they patter upon the old shooting-jacket, glancing from its polished surface like buckshot from an iron target. Rare sport when your favorite dog starts the swift-winged partridge, quail, or speeding rabbit. A regal glamor over all the autumn wood, coloring of grandest dyes and rarest hues, the perfumed air pulsing through the tinted trees. Then the old gun speaks sharply and to the point.

But to me there is a greater fascination attending goose-shooting by night. There is a charm indefinable when one rocks in a tiny shell of a goose-boat, white, spectral, frail as a thing of dreams, tossing restlessly upon the ever agitated sea. The day vanishes in royal splendor, the reds and golds pale, fade and die. Night bends luminous-eyed like a dusky lover above the sighing wave. Then every nerve seems to be gifted with a sense of hearing as you listen and wait for the inflying geese.

I slowly paddled toward the sand bar with my boon companions Dan and Joe, idly floating with the tide, lazily dipping the white paddle blades deep in the waves of the Bay, that lay sheltered from boisterous wind by two rugged capes which towered high above the dark water. The southern shore was sparsely settled. Tiny spaces of cleared land dotted with the fishers' whitewashed cottages showed amid long stretches of firs that gazed solemnly down upon the water, and seemed to whisper in answer to the dreamy voices of the water. Upon the north side a wee village nestled down close to the sea, and the ocean wind wandered at will up and down its narrow streets. Over all brooded the mild tranquility of a perfect April day.

Our destination was a far-extending sand bar, bare and brown, and intersected by two narrow water-ways, the north and south channels. Weed covered and desolate, no glamour of glinting sunlight could beautify nor tinted cloud-forms add one charm to the lonely desolation. Far up on the sand lay the slowly decaying ribs and timbers of a whilom stately bark, like the bones of some colossal mastodon bleaching upon a miniature Sahara.

It was yet early evening when we cast our little anchor in the waters of the southern channel. Kenneth McIvor, the "herring catcher," had traveled from his home beside distant Black Brook to tell us that Mira Bay, beyond False Bay Beach, hundreds of wild geese lay encamped. Under night's mantling shadows they would fly over the crescent-shaped beach between the hills to the prairie-like flats—troop in like regiments, marshalled by the most ancient of their host.

"An be shoore an angger your bot shust pelow Shon McTougall's fish house, for the geese will pe coming that way, me poy, and, py gosh, shoe you will pe gitten a ferry coot shanse to them now."

This and other elaborate instructions, the garrulous old Highlander communicated to Joe in mysterious whispers. The bronzed old fisherman knows the habits of the stately migrants. For sixty years, spring and autumn, he has seen them come and go, passing and re-passing his lonely home. He knows when the first geese of the season will wing their way in lines and V's from the south, and when the last will disappear over the long point of Sheppard's Bar.

Cow Bay has always been a favorite resort for the migrating armies. It affords an ample resting place, and its miles of weed-covered sand-bars are unrivaled feeding grounds.

The geese repose in mid-stream until the shadows grow dense, then in the first gloom of night they fly in to the well-known pasture. If too often disturbed they may rest upon the stream until midnight, and when none but veteran hunters are afloat, swoop down silent and swift, as if from the clouds.

Long ere brave Pepperell and his valiant Massachusetts militia rushed against the walls of fated Louisburg, French officers from that city were guided by Mic Mac Indians to the "Bars," during the goose-shooting season. Tradition repeats many a tale of love and adventure wherein the brilliant and chivalrous gentlemen of old France are the principal actors. This I know, many a plump gray goose was bagged.

As the sun touched the long lines of fir-crowned hills, over the cold blue of the Bay was poured a stream of warm golden-red light. A thin white mist came rolling in from the ocean. It twined about old "Southern Head," beautifying the stern headland with matchless raiment. Quickly the shadows deepened, obscuring the entire southern shore and resting like a gloomy mantle upon the bosom of the Bay. Truly, this is a perfect night for goose-shooting. Glide along in your tiny boat, or anchor quietly in the lee of some huge ice-cake stranded upon a sand-bar; there is a clear blue sky above to reveal the passing game.

To me there was something awe inspiring about it all. The pall of fog hemmed us in like the walls of a grave, from which we could see the splendor of the heavens. The stars came peering out of their blue depths, and a tiny canoe of a silver moon went sailing away toward the west in a beautiful sea of azure. We lay upon the warm rugs in the bottom of the boat and, shrouded in our misty ambuscade, waited for the in-flying game.

Joe sat in the stern. Beside him lay an old Queen Anne musket. The shattered wood-work was ingeniously bound with copper wire in a very primitive but apparently effective manner. With one huge brown hand Joe held the idle sculling oar, the other rested caressingly upon the old musket.

To me it was a thing of dread waiting the slight impress of a finger to scatter contents, lock, stock, and barrel in death-dealing fragments. I quietly expressed my thoughts to Dan but he laughed and said: "That gun was never discharged since the great August gale in 1873, and is only carried to insure rare good luck to sportsmen fortune enough to secure Joe for guide."

Clad in white shooting-coat and turban his swarthy face dark by contrast in the gloom, Joe appeared to be a veritable Arabian Necromancer beguiling the lagging moments with quaint stories of the old-time settlers and of the bay that lay behind us. As Morein Bay, it was known to the courtiers of old France and lamed in verse and story for its wealth of rugged beauty. It is now known as the unclassic and plebeian Bay de Vache. Strange legends cling to its caves, cliffs, and mighty bluffs, and to the weather-beaten fisher folk each story is a living truism.

I found myself listening intently to Joe, repeating, as if from his shroud, stories of the Bay that he had heard from the venerable sage and poet "Old Ormond." Assuming a solemn tone he told how in silent watches of the night, notably nights preceding disastrous marine storms, a gigantic cow rides upon the heaving water. It plunges to and fro with angry tossing of ghastly white horns and awful swirl of mighty tail, until the waves roll one angry mass of seething foam; then the awful form disappears with a loud bellow heard by startled seamen miles from land. On the morning succeeding the appearance of this apparition, fishing boats dismantled and broken are found thrown high upon the sands, and the wail of mourning women is heard in the white cottages.

Hark! far away but clear as a bugle note ringing over the hills came the "kronk, kronk" of flying geese. We knew they were miles away, as down the aisles of night came the warning notes of their approach. Nearer and nearer, now over the sand dunes, unseen but heralding their approach by their own peculiar music. I crouched in the bottom of the boat, every nerve thrilling to the clamor of the approaching game. The good old gun was held in readiness for a swift sawing and lightning pull. Suddenly, outlined against the sky, a wedge of dark forms swept into view, visible but for a second in the small space of blue that canopied our ambuscade. Two tongues of fire leaped upward as the gun touched the shoulder, and heavy bodies hissed down unseen, to strike the water with a sounding splash. We paddled over to where they lay, three great gray beauties, their gray-white breasts gleaming upon the dark wave. It was a proud moment for Joe as he slowly paddled back to our anchorage with our fowl beside him, for the geese were plump after a winter in the marshy paradise of the South.

Another hour slowly passed. No sign, no sound of game came out of the darkness. Down behind the veil of curtaining mist the canoe-shaped moon foundering slowly sank from sight. The solemn stars seemed to gaze far into the silent depths. The night wind came moaning over the waters, and as if some unseen presence was gathering her trailing garments, the obscuring fog rolled away.

Another large flock came sailing into view far beyond range, seemingly very near the over-arching blue. They looked no larger than English sparrows. We could only lie back and gaze longingly upon their retreating forms as the great wedge swept in over the mainland. Flock succeeded flock in quick succession. We could hear them settle noisily upon the flats, until we knew that hundreds of fowl were feeding upon the great sand bar.

The noise of their incoming was followed by an almost oppressive calm that was unbroken save when at long intervals the sharp challenge of a sentry rang out. Alert pickets seem to be always on duty when the main body of geese are feeding.

A sudden flash, followed by a loud report, told that hunters far up in the North Channel had poured a volley into an incoming flock. The air was filled with a clamor of wild sounds. Hundreds of geese took wing, and a panic seemed to banish all military regime. Up and down the bay, and over the sand dunes, disorganized bunches of fowl flew wildly to and fro like an army surprised at night, retreating in disorder.

We lay silent, watchful, ready. A sudden hiss of swift wings, a shadow athwart the stars, a flash—bang! and down fell two dusky forms, striking thud, thud, far away on the soft sand. Joe, with many expressions of delight, paddled into the shoal water, grounded the tiny craft, and hastened in search of the fallen game. He soon returned with two fine birds, and with a triumphant flourish laid them beside the others.

We slowly returned to our anchorage and waited satisfied, yet loth to leave without one more rally. It was now almost midnight. The tide came rushing in over the bars, covering them with deepening water. In silence we lifted our anchor and turned our skiff homeward.

Shoreward, with slow-dipping oars, we rowed with all the strange fascination of midnight beauty entreating us to linger, but we knew that when the tide rushed over the flats our sport for the night was ended, and in the quiet cove of Mira River the geese were safe from the loud-voiced breechloader.—*W. H Mac, in Outing for April.*

THE largest sinner is the biggest fool, and he is reminded of it not merely on the first of April, but all the year round.