

interstices of the reeds, and you may walk past, and even over them, where there are hundreds, without seeing a single individual. On their first arrival they are generally lean, and unfit for the table; but as the reeds ripen, they rapidly fatten, and from the 20th of September to the middle of October are excellent, and eagerly sought after. The usual method of shooting them, in this quarter of the country, is as follows. The sportsman furnishes himself with a light batteau, and a stout experienced boatman, with a pole of twelve or fifteen feet long, thickened at the lower end, to prevent it from sinking too deep into the mud. About two hours or so before high-water, they enter the reeds, and each takes his post, the sportsman standing in the bow ready for action, the boatman on the stern seat, pushing her steadily through the reeds. The Rail generally spring singly, as the boat advances, and at a short distance ahead, are instantly shot down, while the boatman, keeping his eye on the spot where the bird fell, directs the boat forward, and picks it up as the gunner is loading. It is also the boatman's business to keep a sharp look-out, and give the word *mark*, when a Rail springs on either side, without being observed by the sportsman, and to note the exact spot where it falls, until he has picked it up; for this once lost sight of, owing to the sameness in the appearance of the reeds, is seldom found again. In this manner the boat moves steadily through, and over the reeds, the birds flushing and falling, the gunner loading and firing, while the boatman is pushing and picking up. The sport continues till an hour or two after high-water, when the shallowness of the water, and the strength and weight of the floating reeds, as also the backwardness of the game to spring as the tide decreases, obliges them to return. Several boats are sometimes within a short distance of each other, and a perpetual cracking of musketry prevails along the whole reedy shores of the river. In these excursions it is not uncommon for an active and expert marksman to kill ten or twelve dozens in a tide. They are usually shot singly, though I have known five killed at one discharge of a double-barrelled piece. These instances, however, are rare.

The flight of these birds among the reeds is usually low; and, shelter being abundant, is rarely extended to more than fifty or one hundred yards. When winged, and uninjured in their legs, they swim and dive with great rapidity, and are seldom seen to rise again. I have several times, on such occasions, discovered them clinging with their feet to the reeds under the water, and at other times skulking under the floating reeds, with their bill just above the surface. Sometimes, when wounded, they dive, and rising under the gunwale of the boat, secrete themselves there, moving round as the boat moves, until they have an opportunity of escaping unnoticed. They are feeble and delicate in everything but the legs, which seem to possess great vigor and energy; and their bodies being so remarkably thin, or compressed, as to be less than an