

and irregular, to be sure, but they are "8s," and can be improved upon. This is another stage of the practice where much patience and care are required. Much future success depends upon a thorough mastery of this "8," which may be termed the foundation of all the others. It is not learned until the skater can cut it easily and gracefully forward and backward upon both edges, and can follow his first marks so closely that a dozen swings round the two circles leave only a deepened and very slightly broadened mark on the ice. To cut such a finished figure as this is far from an easy task, and few experts have really mastered it. The best man I ever saw at this "8" and allied figures was that wizard of "place-skating," ex-World's Amateur Champion, Louis Rubenstein, of Montreal, and to his mastery of edges and place-skating he owed his ability to defeat the great skaters of the world.

From these hints the learner may realize the importance of the plain "8," and he should make one cast-iron rule to govern his practice at this and all succeeding figures—*i.e.*, never to consider himself master of a movement until he can do it equally well upon either foot. The trouble about the plain "8" is that, while a pretty and graceful movement, it is not *showy*. When most young skaters have reached this stage of the game they want to "show off," and whirl and spin and do other flashy movements. This is all wrong, and it has spoiled many a promising skater; who could not wait to thoroughly master first principles before seeking more dazzling

effects. Eights, with loops, kinks, whirls, etc., in them are merely the plain old eight elaborated, and the showy embellishments are much easier than the original figure. Master the "8"; practice till you can cut it to place, forward and backward, on inside and outside edges; can describe two full circles from one start if you wish, and can do these things with an even, graceful swing free from visible effort, and you are a skater.

But, the novice may ask, "Aren't you going to explain the vines, twists, whirls, and all the *great* feats I have seen performed?"

In reply, I say, I am not. When you have skated to the point where I leave off here, you have yourself performed the *great* feats of skating. You can now follow and understand what were previously baffling, intricate evolutions, as easily as a stenographer reads his notes. One glance now at the work of an expert will teach you more than you would learn from pages of print, and a little intelligent study of the diagrams in your skating-book will enable you to trace out most of the many beautiful movements therein described. You probably will never master *all* of the known figures, many of which are specialties performed only by their inventors; but you may figure prominently in the majority of showy movements, and when you have reached your best form, you will probably, after all, agree with me that plain forward and backward skating, and smooth work on the edges, are as satisfying as any figure, and receive far too little attention from beginners.

HUNTING THE CAIMAN IN MEXICO.

By Edward French.

THE big state of Tabasco, in southern Mexico, is peculiar in formation and feature. It is an enormous area of flat land, composed of the richest alluvium.

During ages of geological chaos vast streams of water brought its foundations down from the Sierra Madre mountains and pushed this new-formed land out into the sea. Covered in suc-

cessive centuries by the rotting vegetable debris of mighty tropical forests, it has to-day a soil of black mold, of from eight to thirty feet in depth. It is cut by numerous sluggish streams of considerable depth, and many little lagoons sleep in its dark forests.

The forests are almost impenetrable, away from the streams, and much labor with the *machete* is necessary to clear a



Painted for Oetave by Hermann Simon.

"THEIR FIERY EYES CAN BE EASILY SEEN." (p. 208.)

path. Animal life is richly represented. The two chief rivers are the unexplored Usumacinta, rising in the unknown mountains of Guatemala, and flowing near the mysterious ruins of Palenque; and the Grijalva, whose course is for many leagues through tunnels and unknown *barancas* of the Sierra Madres. This last is a broad, deep stream, navigable for steamers full eighty miles from its mouth. Its densely wooded banks abound in birds, deer, jaguars, the Mexican tiger and the repulsive caiman. On either bank, stretching back into the gloomy forests, are long, narrow lagoons called *muertos rios*, "dead rivers," in which the caiman, or American crocodile, is king.

One afternoon my canoe was stopped for the night near four or five Indian huts made of wattled canes and mud and called "*Chaculaya*." The hammocks, guns, camera and miscellaneous bundles were carried into one of these *jacals* by my Indian boys. The place was a *posada*, a stopping place for travelers, where one could get the simple necessities of life for a small sum.

The day had been an easy one for my boatmen. We had made only four Spanish leagues since early morning and the men were in the humor for some sport.

I heard them talking in *Maya* with the old Indian landlord. Soon Manuelito came to me and said, "Patron, there are many alligators in the *muerto rio* here and there is great sport killing them."

"Indeed," I answered, "I should like to hunt them very much, but it is too late now, for it will soon be too dark to shoot."

"Not so, Patron," he replied, "they are best killed in the dark. They feed in the night and their fiery eyes can be easily seen." And then, with numerous smiles, active hands and eyes, he told me the details of the killing, which I verified an hour later.

After the short twilight, we started for the *muerto rio*. Our leader and guide was the old Indian inn-keeper, Christiano, who carried in one hand an American bull's-eye lantern, and in the other his *machete* to cut away entangling vines. I followed with my carbine and a good supply of cartridges. Manuel-

ito and José, my two Indian boys, came last. They carried ropes and a "grapnel" on a short pole, much like a large, strong "gaff" used in sea-fishing.

The preparations before starting had been carefully made to insure safety and success. They first hung around their necks little pictures of the Virgin and saints that had been blessed by the priests. To make doubly sure, they added another string bearing Brazilian cat's-eyes. Manuelito said that the blessed relics would keep away the snakes and serpents, while the Brazilian opals were very effective against the *chimanes*, or Indian spirits. The Indians of these hot countries all have the idea that snakes and serpents of all kinds hang down from the trees in the night, ready to strike the nocturnal traveler. The Indian spirits are also believed to lurk in thick trees, to take advantage of the unprotected victim.

A short walk along a narrow path, lined on both sides by palms and giant *ceiba* trees, brought us to the bank of the "dead river." With many cautions from Christiano to be very still and not alarm the "*lagatos*," we carefully arranged ourselves in his roomy canoe. Under instructions from my boys, I tied the dark lantern on the front of my big Mexican hat and knelt down on my blanket in the prow of the canoe. Manuelito knelt behind me, with the big grapnel, and Christiano and José back of him, each with a paddle.

I had been cautioned not to speak, but to direct the course of the craft by motions of my hand. As we glided out into that basin of ink and wedged our way through what seemed a solid mass of blackness, my thoughts involuntarily turned to old experiences. In the woods of northern New Hampshire I had often hunted deer in precisely the same manner. I was fondly recalling many a successful hunt and cheerful camp, when a nudge in the back annihilated space in the fragment of a second and brought me back to southern Mexico.

The vigilant "little Manuel" pointed ahead and over my right shoulder, and as I turned my head and forced a lane of light through the night, I saw a dull, fiery spot, like the coal of a cigar that is slightly obscured by its ashes.

"*El lagato, el lagato,*" whispered he, in my ear. The canoe moved silently and steadily on toward the unsuspecting monster. When we were within ten feet of him I prepared to shoot, but was restrained by the boy until the canoe, almost stopping, was within three feet of the brute.

Then my eager little teacher, in a voice trembling with intensity, said, "*A hora, hora.*" ("Now, now.")

I placed the muzzle of the carbine within twenty inches of the monster's head and directly in front of the red, cruel-looking eye, and pulled the trigger. I felt the canoe shoot back and heard the loud splashing and struggling of the caiman in his death agonies. The canoe turned quickly and came up alongside of the dying monster, and Manuelito, with the grapnel, caught him by the fore-leg, where the skin is soft and unprotected by the armor. A stout rope was thrown around the carcass and it was cautiously drawn nearer. Unless promptly roped it would have sunk. These low forms of animal life die slowly, although shot through the brain. With his *machete*, Christiano slashed through the spine just behind the head. This was to paralyze the powerful tail, which otherwise might have smashed the canoe.

The caiman accomplishes a vast amount of destruction among the beautiful birds and small animals, and for this reason I never felt sorry to see one destroyed.

Our game was dragged into the boat, and a nastier looking and smelling thing I never rode with.

Christiano washed his *machete* noiselessly, then seized his paddle and we headed for the shore. This *machete* he took great pride in keeping bright and clean, and he had given it a name in his native language meaning "the executioner." On making the low shore, with its tangle of giant grass and weeds, I was glad to help unload the musky reptile. The grass was bent over him and knotted so that Christiano could find him the next morning, when he would come and take off the skin from the breast. Salted and dried, he sold the skin for about a dollar to an enterprising American firm, who buy and ship these skins to a New Jersey tannery.

Our victim was not a large one and we were all eager to try for another. It is not a high order of sport, but there was a savage delight in killing the repulsive creatures. The next one was smaller and took his dose composedly, and again we journeyed to the bank and knotted the grass above him. The third one we did not find for quite a little while, and but for the fiery glow of his cruel eyes we should have run into him, for he rose silently and suddenly out of the warm, still water, directly in front of the canoe. Had we struck him we should, most likely, all have been thrown out. We shot backward out of reach, only to approach him again in a more cautious manner. The boy whispered in my ear, as I fingered my rifle, "*Un grande lagato, Patron*" "a big one, master." He proved to be a powerful monster, twelve feet long, with an enormous head and a black, tough skin. He made a long and dangerous fight. When near enough, Manuelito seized his *machete* and struck him with such savage intensity that I asked him why he did so. "Ah! Patron," he said, "is it possible you do not know that he is an old one, a wise old devil, that feeds upon the souls of the dead?" This new fact in natural history was interesting, and after a little judicious questioning Manuelito told me many of the curious superstitions believed in by his people. It is impossible to describe his bright ways, his lifted eyes, shrugging shoulders, restless, gesticulating hands, gleaming teeth and warmth of imagery. In part he said, that some of his dead *sobrinos* (relatives) had not been good Christians and their souls had been in purgatory. These poor souls had escaped some way and wandered back to earth. Vengeance had, however, overtaken them, for one of Manuelito's grandfathers, who was a better man, had seen them one night when the moon had a ragged edge (the only time that spirits are visible to mortals), seized by lagatos and dragged into the murky waters. "Since then," said the boy, "we have all been good Catholics."

I was satisfied with my night's work and did not care for further acquaintance with the repulsive, ill-smelling brutes. We returned to the *posada* of

Christiano, where, after slinging our hammocks and drinking big bowls of hot chocolate, we began our usual fight with the mosquitoes. They are the bane of river travel, in spite of close nets and fumes of cigars, and if it were not that about three o'clock every morning the pests go into hiding until the

next evening, a white man could not endure them.

The next morning, Christiano was very glad to accept the skins of the dead lagatos. He refused remuneration for his hospitality, so I gave his wife some money and resumed my upward voyage on the dreamy Grijalva.

TWO HOURS OVER DECOYS.

By E. A. Shepherd.



UPON the eastern side of the muddy old Missouri River and not far from the city of Council Bluffs, Iowa, is a lake, very shallow, but covering quite an area, that is deserted in the fall and spring, with the exception of a few residents, who eke out a meagre existence by renting boats to the occasional sportsman who happens to wander that way.

I have enjoyed several pleasant days on and about this lake, which glories in the name of "Manawa," and while game is not usually very plentiful, at certain seasons of the year the shooting is at least fair.

During the past season I had two hours of very lively shooting at the lake, the flight being unusually good. It was upon a day following the first freeze of the season, and I put a dozen canvas decoys in my shooting-coat, and taking a liberal supply of shells, and my little Parker hammerless, boarded the electric motor in Omaha, Nebraska, for Council Bluffs, where one can usually get transportation to the lake. The time consumed in making the trip was passed in dreaming the dreams of all sportsmen and wondering how the shooting would be. Reaching the "Bluffs" at about half-past eight o'clock, A. M., I was chagrined to learn that there was no "dummy" running to the lake that day, so I was left to decide between walking thither or returning to Omaha, to try again some other day. It is a faint-hearted sportsman, indeed, who will give up for a trifle like walking a few miles, so I balanced the shells and decoys in my coat pockets, tightened my waders,

lighted my pipe and started down the dummy track.

About two miles out of town there is a narrow slough that often contains a duck or two, which may have been slightly wounded and have stopped there to gain strength before proceeding further. Accordingly, I slipped a couple of shells into the gun as I approached the slough, and had reason to rejoice a moment afterward at having done so, for a pair of red-heads came down the wind almost before I could sink out of sight in the tall grass. I tried a long side shot at them and had the good fortune to drop one, but scored a clean miss with my second barrel. My bird dropped upon the ice, about twenty feet from the shore, and I had some difficulty in securing it, as the ice was so thick that I feared it would cut my waders, while it would not support my weight. By procuring a post and breaking my way through, I was at last able to get the bird, which proved to be a female in fine condition.

I followed the slough for a time with a view of getting another shot, then left it and kept on toward the lake, skirting the corn fields, on the lookout for quail. However, I saw nothing more until I neared the lake, where the ducks appeared to be flying in unusual numbers, owing, no doubt, to the keen, strong, north-west wind, which raised surprising waves on the shallow water. Arriving at the boat-landing, it was not long before I procured a boat, a poor affair, originally intended for two pairs of oars, but now fitted out with one pair near the bow, but it was the best available, as some men had reached the lake earlier in the day and had their choice of the lot.