

SPORTING SCENES AND ADVENTURES ON THE
SHORES OF LAKE HURON.

By "Gaspereau."

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THE PASSENGER PIGEON—*ECTOPISTES MIGRATORIUS*.

THE SECOND VISIT.

No. 3.



FEW days after this first visit with the party mentioned, I quietly prepared myself for a second, and determined to go alone. If any one wishes to study a subject of natural history, especially in bird life, or herpetological, let him go alone. You are not then tied to be in at any hour, nor to do your share of work, and a hired hand in such a case is an utter nuisance, to me at least. I went to see, to study,—as far as I could,—the mode of existence of these multitudes, being well aware that a similar opportunity was not likely to occur again during the course of my natural life.

A generous supply of eatables, drinkables, a couple of buffalo robes, some tin ware, an axe, and pot that held about 8 quarts were easily placed under the seat of my roomy buggy, and a strong double tin box with plenty of ammunition. I determined to spend two entire days on the ground, so as especially to note their morning flights, and other habits as I should discover.

It was on a Tuesday morning after my breakfast that I started, taking my hired man to bring home the horse. Except in the roughest spots the road had become dry and passable, and with a strong French Norman pony that I had bought in Montreal, we had no fiascos on the road.

On arrival the same scene was there as had been left. The astonishment of my man was great. He had never seen any thing like this, although born and bred in Canada. He informed me he had once seen an acre covered with pigeons' nests, but here there were miles on miles of them, and millions on millions on their breeding ground.

We first of all attended to the horse, and had a sandwich and cup of strong cold tea. This I strongly recommend to any one on the hunt, in preference to any spirituous liquor, as more invigorating, and it never leaves such depressing feelings behind.

Having selected a dry, convenient spot, on the border of the little brooklet before mentioned, a comfortable bower was soon erected by us, a little open hut in fact, facing the stream, and before it a fire was soon lighted, which sent the smoke curling through the trees, a comfortable bed was made of "savin" or the green twigs and little branches of cedar and balsam fir—there was no spruce here,—the buffalo robes were spread, my thick overcoat was

rolled up as my pillow, and my home, *pro tempore*, was completed. I had nearly forgotten to remark that an elm tree beside "the residence" served admirably for a seat.

Ere John McCoy, my man, left for home, I killed him a good mess of birds, and sent a dozen to my better half. One had only to stand still, load and fire—fire and load, and a retriever I had, saved me many a disagreeable hunt after a winged bird. It was naturally in him, and many a time, like many another sportsman, have I regretted his death, as others have, their favorite dogs. John accompanied me into the bush, and we had reached a ridge covered thickly with hemlock.

The noise of the birds here was tremendous. They were nesting on every branch, and every tree had as many nests as it could contain, for on every limb you could see them, as far as the eye could penetrate among the interstices, and there was fully an acre of hemlocks on this ridge, besides considerable undergrowth.

On one scrubby iron wood, not more than six inches in diameter, I counted seven nests, and a bird on every nest. This range was very thickly populated. I could not bear the idea of shooting the hens on their nests. Nor was there the least necessity, as any amount of cock-birds were procurable. They merely looked at me with a wondering expression in their eyes, nor did one of them leave their nests, although I was only a few feet from them. My man was not fifteen feet from me yet we had to shout loudly to hear what was said.

I looked at my watch. It was three in the afternoon, and I walked a few yards further from my companion. Some small animal ran through the bush ahead of me, and I fired after it, and turned it over. This raised a tremendous roar of wings, and John did not hear me shout as loud as I was able, although not ten feet from me. Dash brought a rabbit to my feet.

I shouted to John to start for home, and think I have an ordinary strong pair of lungs, but John assured me both at the moment, and afterwards, that he could not hear for the roar of the birds' wings, and their notes or calls. The before mentioned iron wood bush was not over thirty yards from where I had fired, yet on passing it the birds were sitting as quietly as if nothing had happened, and merely raised their necks a little as we passed

within a few feet of them. I purposely disturbed several other hens on my way back, to ascertain if they would feign lameness, but they did not, and sought shelter in some adjacent tree, returning in a few minutes as we passed on. I tried this frequently and with the same results. One had only to walk a few yards and stand still, and very quickly the parent bird, whether male or female, returned to take charge of its offspring.

As we reached the open where the horse was tied for his dinner, a large number of flocks sped past containing from a dozen to hundreds, and all of them directing their flight due north, east or west, having evidently some locality they sought to visit, seemingly many miles away. These birds were mainly hens, in fact hens altogether. John went home and I was glad to be left alone. He was not to return till Friday.

To me, there is nothing lonesome in the bush when by my-elf. I had trapped for furs, years before, generally single, and had too much to do, to attend to my traps and prepare pelts to bother with being melancholy. There was always some thing new seen every day, and so it was with this wonderful collection of nesting pigeons, which was decidedly the largest ever seen in Canada of recent years. I was not long in securing a couple of dozen of birds, as they flew past in bunches, from two to five or six falling with each shot. The gun was getting foul, supper must be prepared, and my gun cleaned for to-morrow. Sticks must be put up with forks on them, and small poles laid from one to the other, on which the pigeons were hung in half dozens. You tie the tips of the two long tail feathers securely in a knot, and string three birds through the nostril on each, then tie the quill ends together, and hang them over the pole, three on each side. This is a very convenient plan, easily arranged for either ducks or any game, and it allows plenty of fresh air in which the birds can stiffen and remain fresh a long time, whereas when thrown in a heap, they will be found to sour and get heavy in a very short time, even in November and December. Experience has taught me this. Let the birds cool separately, and cool thoroughly, and they will keep very much longer.

The fire was lighted and soon blazed gloriously, so that lots of red coals remained, then the pot was filled with water, and a half dozen hard tack biscuits broken and thrown in with some pepper added. These were allowed to simmer with sundry slices of fat pork, and the pigeons were next cleaned, as many as needed, and thrown in to boil down. I had some canned meats if I wanted, and sundry bottles, if any particular friend came along.

Of course there was tea, but I must say I had little heed for it, as I preferred water, or a little ale, or if very tired perhaps a mouthful of whiskey and water. A pipe to conclude was a considerable comfort, and to me at least was soothing, or if nothing better helped most agreeably to pass the time.

My various jobs having been finished, and supper enjoyed, I cleaned a dozen more pigeons, an easy job, and tied them in a bag which was hung on a neighboring sapling. Then the gun was cleaned in the brook and laid away for the day and I

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