

Simpson of Grand Rapids

Or the Disadvantage of Too Much Law Among Fishermen

By A. E. MacFARLANE

Illustration by Arthur Heming

EXCEPTING the Major, who, having a macintosh, fished on with most contemptible greed, the pouring New Ontario rain had driven us all out of the Rapids and under the wide, leafy thatch of the big basswood. Gunn's tip had been broken by his last three-pounder; and old Matt, who, in addition to being the proprietor of The Forks, was our guide, philosopher, and master-fisherman, was fixing in a spare one for him. The venerable Giles, the Methodist Episcopal bishop, had been chivvied home by the first shower, and we were shamelessly maligning him behind his back. For the night before, when from supper till ten there had been one unbroken series of fish stories, the old man had suddenly called upon us to join him in an hour of prayer—and, if it isn't blasphemy to say so, we had all been feeling distinctly sore about it ever since.

Matt was apologetic, for he had taken in the bishop without proper testimonials, and so felt responsible. "You see, boys, I ain't sayin' anything agin' the religious part of it. For I'm by nature a kind of a religious chap myself; if there was a church anywhere near here I'd be goin' to it mornin' and evenin'. And, as it is, if I go fishin' on Sunday, I'm always ready to own that it's a judgment onto me when I don't catch anything. But the bishop ought to 'a' knowed that you fellers wouldn't feel comfortable at havin' the Lord's attention called to them yarns of yours, and he should 'a' held off that prayer till some more nateral time for it. It was just the same thing that got that feller Simpson onto my nerves, two years ago. You was up here, then, wasn't you, Mr. Gunn? No? Then it must have been the Major.

"You see, this here Simpson had no business here at all. He come up from Grand Rapids, and he come chuck full of socialism ideas he'd been pasturin' on when he wasn't book-keepin' down there. Now, a real fishin' sport never wants to think, or talk, or do anything but fish when once he finds out the sort of river I've got at the Forks. But Simpson, whatever brought him up I don't know—but I reckon he'd heard of the place from one of his employers' friends—he was about as far from bein' a real fishin' sport as any one I ever want to meet in this world. The evenin' he arrived, when old Judge Fitzpatrick, of New York, happened to remark that he was goin' to get up at four next mornin' and tramp the five miles to Trout Creek for a little flyin' at sunrise, Simpson couldn't give him the horse laugh enough; he let the judge see that he'd put him down for a fool the first minute. But for all that he kept the whole crowd of us till after midnight, blat, blat, blatin' about how ideal the gover'ment of the future was goin' to be!

"NOW, I'm not sayin' anything agin' socialism—not agin' the real thing, as I reckon the big men put it—and I'm not sayin' anything agin' a good argument, which all hard-thinkin' men naturally delight in. But under those heads Simpson and his mouth didn't come. His brand of socialism was his own; and, as for his arguments, I've no doubt that any one of that crowd of New York bankers and lawyers I had up here then could have jumped in and demolished them all in five minutes; though you couldn't 'a' closed Simpson's face in five years. But they just watched him talk; argue with him they wouldn't. For his theories were either the same old thing we've been hearin' all our lives, or else they were the ideas of a twelve-year-old. The second mornin' he was rubbin' it into me for puttin' in sixteen hours a day gettin' off that timothy I have on Thompson's Island; he'd 'a' let it lay and rot, I reckon. He said that six hours was a right day's work, and 'when a man was his own master he ought to inaugurate it for himself'; if he didn't, in the future the 'supreme law' would do it for him. I reckon most men think of law as a thing you can't get too little of, but his whole idea

of what was to come was law, everlastin' law, 'supreme law'! In his golden future, while every man of the 'general commonwealth' was goin' to be strictly out for himself, there was goin' to be a 'paramount authority' over all that no man would ever think of resistin'. 'And all land that would grow anything at all was goin' to be cultivated.'

"You'd have thought that about one day's fishin' up here would have taken that fool notion out of him. There was the river flowin' the same as it had since time begun, the rocks that'll be here for all eternity, and the bush—hundreds of miles of it—lookin' as if no foot had trod it yet. You'd have thought they would have showed him about how capable man is to be makin' world-alterin' laws. You'd have thought that he'd begin to feel that man ain't much more than a figger painted in a picture, with mighty little more to do in changin' that picture than he had to do with puttin' the paint on. But those things that come to all men who go to the woods and water in the right spirit had surely never come to this gabbin' little sawed-off! With him the whole scheme of nature and the social system could be altered as easy as alterin' the fashion of wearin' the hair—and Simpson had left all bald-headed men quite out of consideration, too.

"He finally ended up by all but attackin' fishin'—up at the Forks after bass himself, as he was! He said that 'fishin' was a survival of the childhood of the race'—(Judge Fitzpatrick said that he'd been so long at it that he guessed it was a second childhood for him!) 'and in future, while men would still be eatin' fish, certain men would be set aside who'd do the catchin' for the whole community!'

"Now, I'll venture to say that there wasn't a lawyer or a banker of that crowd who had any partic'lar strong feelin' that he was still in his childish period. In fact, I reckon most of them were pretty much of the mind that good game fishin' is one of the few things really worth while that life keeps for the full-grown man. But Simpson kept on harpin' on the 'childish' business just the same. And if you managed to get the talk away from fishin' and onto another tack, he'd get you there, too. At breakfast, when the crowd would be readin' their mornin' mail—and that's a time when silence is especially golden; at dinner, when they'd want to put in the hour comparin' notes on the forenoon's sport; and in the evenin', when the last men would come in through the dusk, and we'd

all sit 'round the door smokin' and meditatin', at peace with nature and all the world—then Simpson would open up. And stop him? You couldn't! We got past tryin'!

"Have you ever slept in a tent through an all-night rain, when your canvas had got rubbed in a dozen different places, and drop, drop, drop, it'd come through—no gettin' away from it, however you might twist yourself? Well, that was Simpson, as near as I can express him, short of a yard of rip-roarin' cuss talk!

"A DOZEN times I was on the point of just takin' him by the scruff of the neck and sayin': 'Now you git—you pinhead of misery; you plaguin' human mosquito you, you git! I don't want your money. I on'y want you to take that everlastin' ding-dangin' mouth of yours out of here!'

"But, somehow, I never can seem to get away from the feelin' that when a feller comes up to the Forks he's my guest. To be sure you pay me so much a week—but, my Lord, there's somethin' more in life than you can give or git for silver and bills! And so I kept on holdin' myself in. He had on'y ten days anyway, and most of the crowd was there for three weeks. Well, nothin' happened till that final afternoon.

"You see, I'd done with him as I do with you: I'd promised him one day of my time to himself. I'd been livin' on in hopes that he'd forgotten it; but the night before his very last day he told me he wanted me with him next mornin'. 'He wanted to get the biggest haul he could to take back with him.'

"Hello! Hello!"

For two or three minutes, through the misty curtain of rain, we had been watching the Major playing what seemed to be a small 'lunge, and in his last excited lurch his boots had lost their grip on his ankle-deep hummock of rock, dropping him into the Rapids up to his arm-pits. Whatever it was he'd hooked took the five seconds of slack line to get off, and the lone fisherman waded heavily in to us, sputtering good-natured profanity. "But it was my last minnow, anyway," he added.

We told him we were mighty glad to hear it, while Matt lent a friendly hand to get the steaming sportsman out of his dripping mackintosh. "I was just tellin' the boys about that Simpson feller," he said.

"Oh, were you so? And are you ready yet to tell what it was you did to him, to shut him up so tight that last night and morning?"

"Yes, I am. I'm goin' to tell about that right now. I felt kind of mean then about the way I played it on him. But the more I've thought of it since, the more I've felt that it was just exactly what he was sufferin' for.

"You see, as I'd no mind to row him up and down the Channel in the sun all that day, I decided to bring him across the river, and down here to the Rapids. Of course, I knowed that he'd 'a' good deal rather get a lot of wrist-thick 'lunge, or some big yellow bass soft as suckers, than a mess of the firm little three-pounder 'small-mouths' from the rough water. But whether he might be willin' or not, I was goin' to see to it that he got the better fish—and, on the side, that he wasn't goin' to take any more work out of me than I could help to do it, neither!

"BEFORE we'd been out together for ten minutes he got my dander up by lettin' me catch his crawfish for him alone. While he was still snorin', I'd got him a stockin'-foot full of frogs; for, for all I didn't like the man, I wanted to give him all the choice of bait I could. But I took it for granted he'd do as the rest of ye do about the crawfish. Not him! He set on a rock under the shade of the bank, and talked improvin', while I was breakin' my back turnin' over half the stones on the Shoal. And it was late enough when we got down to the Rapids.

"When he did begin to fish, too, he found that



"Nah-h!" he snarled out, like a kid asked for half his stick of candy.