

trolling for bass soon after daylight that morning, and presently saw a muskrat reconnoitring about the float. In a little while it dived, and uprooting some aquatic herbage, proceeded to drag a load of it under the wharf, having evidently decided to begin building on this highly desirable site.

It worked away vigorously for nearly a quarter of an hour, when it was spied by the big mink at the pine log. Your rodent is no match for a weasel, and it was soon forced to beat a retreat, while the mink returned to his log cabin. In about ten minutes, the muskrat swam caustiously back, found the coast apparently clear, and at once resumed operations. Again the mink returned to the charge, and this time dived under the float and fairly routed the intruder out from its position among the cedar stringers. He then mounted the float, and, standing erect, watched the rat round the bend to see that it really did double the point instead of trying to sneak back under water.

The Cautious Muskrat

It was delightful indeed to note this fearlessness among the wild animals. Jerry Muskrat was obviously far more afraid of Billy Mink than he was of me. This was mainly the golden harvest of sanctuary, for in settled parts the muskrat is cautious, if not timid. Last August as we paddled down through the rapids below White's Lake, in a very narrow reach of the Madawaska, we almost ran into a muskrat. At first we thought it had been taken by surprise and was trying to escape us by diving; but we soon found it was feeding quite unconcernedly. We stopped paddling to watch the little creature foraging right beside our canoe; the water was so shallow that when the rat reached its favorite patch of cauliflower, the little leaf-rosettes of pipewort growing in the bed of the stream, its tail was still

"wiggling" above the surface with all the animation of an undocked terrier pup's, and so close to us that once in a while it would flip against the side of our canoe. Presently under stress of breeze or current we drifted over it just as it rose to the surface; it dived this time and took shelter under a log, one of the strangest of sights! to watch an air-breathing animal submerge and glide, smooth as a fish, into its aquatic lair. Again it came to the surface, just below us, in deeper water where the channel widened out; and this time when we paddled up, it showed us a clear pair of heels and disappeared with a farewell smack of its tail.

The Bad, Bold Mink

The mink, of course, is proverbially bold. One day as we were paddling back to camp with our mail, we noticed a mink standing on a little rock, marooned (as it were) in mid-channel behind our island. Taking a quiet stroke in its direction, we allowed the canoe to drift up to the rock, expecting the mink to beat a hasty retreat and escape by diving. To our surprise, even consternation, the mink deliberately rose up, sniffed the breeze with enquiring nostril, and then, crawling down the stone, plunged into the water and swam straight for us; on reaching the canoe, it actually tried to clamber up the smooth side and get over the gunwale. This didn't seem to us to be playing the game according to Hoyle, and it was some time before the true solution occurred to me. I had been fishing the day before, and the smell of bass was evidently still perceptible to this sharp-nosed fisherman of our native waters.

In fact, though it serves a different end in the two creatures, the sense of smell is no less imperious in the mink than in the deer, and leads to just as unreasonable action. Not long ago, a camper on a tiny island was clean-

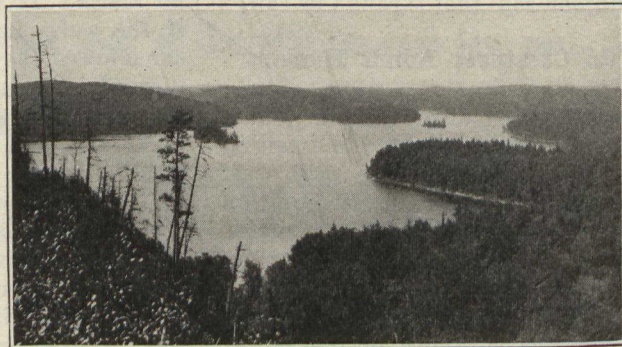
ing fish with a jack knife, when up popped a mink at his elbow; he threw it a grey trout's head, and it made off with its booty; in a few minutes, like *Oliver Twist*, it was back for more; and when he quite properly refused to pander to the glutton, it actually caught hold of the fish he had in his hand, and he was forced to tap this slim gentleman of the road two or three times quite smartly over the nose with the flat of the knife blade before he could persuade it to leave go.

Some Notable Visitors

In our third season of camping we began to keep a sort of Visitors' Book of the most striking personages that entered our camp. Almost the first were a flock of American Mergausers; these birds are often to be seen about Cache Lake, usually hugging the shore and coasting along by point and bay; they seldom take to the wing, but escape by a sort of "scuttering" flight along the surface, wings and feet in full play like the hoppers of a water wheel. They often band together, 2 or 3 broods of them, into a flock of 30 or 40. One day as we were sitting at our camp table, a few yards in from shore and partly screened by a fringe of balsams a regular "raft" of over 30 of these birds, frightened by a passing canoe, came splashing across our bay and settled down behind the big floating log. Back of this barrier they formed into a long line of clucking protest. When the coast was clear, they clambered (still in line) up on the log, heads all turned outwards in the direction of the moving canoe; they looked for all the world like an awkward squad of raw recruits dressing by the left; the log was partly under water and very slippery, so that every now and then, one would fall backwards out of line to flounder in the water. Evidently there was no danger from the landward quarter; they never so much as glanced in our direction.



Luncheon on the Portage.



Beautiful Cache Lake.