

FISHING IN THE PORCUPINE HILLS.

By Lawrence J. Burpee.

Continued from last month.

While we were smoking the commissioner laid a wager with me that I could not catch a gopher. I honestly believe his only object was to have the luxury of seeing somebody else struggling over muddy ground under a broiling sun, while he lay comfortably on a pile of blankets, shaded by a large and disreputable looking umbrella. However that may be, I accepted his challenge, having been much impressed with a venerable western yarn—but new to me—which I had heard the day before, of the estimable Redman who had lived in peace and plenty on the prairie for days—I am inclined, in fact, to think it was for weeks—with no other weapons than a piece of string and a bundle of matches. He caught the gophers with his string, and the prairie grass provided the fuel. Such a man would be quite capable of eating them raw, hair and all, and it would have added to the simplicity of the tale. I felt that what an ignorant Indian could do, with such satisfactory results, I could surely manage, at least once. With a piece of twine, therefore, and a certain amount of enthusiasm, tempered with modesty, I started off gopher hunting. One need not go far, as I have said before, to find gophers on the prairie, and I was soon among them, their shrill tweet! tweet! sounding on every side. Now and then a small inquisitive head would pop up from a neighboring burrow, but there was evidently something suspicious looking about that piece of string, and the way it was carried, for they never stayed up long—indeed, I had only to move to cause the sudden disappearance of a circle of bright eyes. I selected a promising looking burrow, arranged my noose over it in the approved fashion, and waited patiently until his incurable curiosity should bring the small tenant to his door. But I had reckoned without my host, for it appeared he had, like all sensible householders, a back door as well, out of which I presently found him watching me with undisguised amusement. I got up quietly, and ignoring some irrelevant remarks which came on the breeze from the direction of our camp, tried another hole; and would to say that, after about an hour's perseverance, I did catch a gopher—one more unwary than his fellows. I carried him in a fish basket, to the camp on Trout Creek, but he escaped in the morning by gnawing through the cord which was tied around one of his legs. He is now probably the father of a large family somewhere among the Porcupine Hills.

Our tardy driver turned up in about an hour, with a double waggon, and we packed everything on board and started

forward once more. We were very much impressed with the splendid looking cattle that roamed freely over the prairie at the foot of the hills in herds of five and six hundred. They looked like the prize cattle one sees in an eastern cattle show, remarkably sleek, fat and well-proportioned.

It was quite dark when we arrived, tired and very hungry, at our camping ground, on the bank of a beautiful little stream that could be heard bubbling and whispering through a series of tiny rapids down

was bounded by one of the highest of the surrounding hills, to the north, running westward into an intricate network of green valleys which intersected the hills in every direction. The view from the summit was something to be remembered. On every side rose the rounded hills, innocent of trees, or even bushes, but clothed to the summit with the richest coloring of green. Between them wound, in many an intricate turn, the still greener valleys. To the eastward the prairie lay, bounding



View on the Magpie River, Northern Ontario.

to the open prairie. We were not in any humor for sentiment: then, however, as there was a great deal of work to be done. While some of us unpacked the waggon, others gathered dry twigs and branches, and presently had a cheerful fire blazing up. A tripod was erected over this, and the appetizing smell of fried bacon filled the air with its fragrance. The tent was now up, and everything snugly stowed away, and we sat down in a circle to eat our very late dinner, by the fire light. It was close on midnight when we got through, and after a rather sleepy and incoherent chat we turned in for the night.

The sun had but a very short start of us next morning. It had hardly taken leave of the distant edge of the prairie when the first riser opened the tent door and revealed the picturesque spot whose features we had only imagined the night before. The tent was pitched a few yards from the creek, on a narrow strip of plain covered with velvety grass and innumerable flowers. Beyond this the land rose gradually to a wider plain, thirty or forty feet above the level of the creek; and this

the horizon, an immense grassy inland sea. Westward, above the highest of the hills, towered the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies. The scene was one that could be more easily felt than put into language. The Rockies, misty and ethereal in the distance, seemed to be something apart—something belonging to another world, a land of the imagination, where our early dreams of fairyland might be realized. I spent several hours here, dreaming lazily of the picturesque old legends of other days, and of the old-time story tellers, who would have clothed these silent and beautiful hills with magic, and peopled them with fairies and gnomes.

But this was in the afternoon, when the first ardor of fishing had worn off. In the morning, immediately after breakfast, we armed ourselves with rod and basket, and scattered up and down the stream, to try our skill in the piscatorial art, with as much enthusiasm as the immortal Walton. I didn't go far, but waded out to a comfortable looking boulder in mid-stream, and to my intense surprise, for I had never heretofore been a successful fisherman,