

Written for *The Land We Live In.*

A NARROW ESCAPE.

By CAPT. CHAS. A. J. FAIRBANK.

A few years ago I passed the month of October at Moosehead Lake, Maine, in company with my wife, and we made our headquarters at the *Mountain Kinco House*, that well known resort of tourists and sportsmen, while I went on a number of short trips about the country, sometimes alone, at others in company with some of the other guests. On one of these I had almost as close a call as I ever expect to have in this world, and this is the way it happened.

One bright sunny morning, when the lake lay quiet in slumber, its waters as smooth as a plate of glass, my friend Dennen, our jovial landlord proposed that he and I should take a trip to Brassau Lake for a little recreation and shooting. Partridges had been ripe in a legal point of view since the first of September, and were good eating if you could only get them to eat. "An old receipt for cooking trout begins, 'First catch your trout,' and that is quiet as applicable to partridges, therefore, we had determined before the evening shadows darkened the earth, some of those toothsome birds should come to grief.

More by chance than intention my companion on selected a flat bottom boat, a cross between a punt and a wherry of my boyhood days. I could see at a glance that the old tub would be good for nothing in a rough sea; but he remarked, "that it was an easy rowing boat," and as I intended to be the propelling power, of course that was a point in its favor.

About nine o'clock, with guns, ammunition, and a luncheon, we embarked at the boat-house, and taking the oars I struck out for Birch Point, below the mouth of Moose River. After rounding the peninsula on which stands the hotel, I pulled a slower stroke, studying the symmetrical outlines of the Spencer Mountains, that loomed up before me in the east, and thought what a lovely day it would have been to make the ascent of those beautiful peaks. When half-way across the lake, I stopped rowing for a few moments, to enjoy the quiet beauty of the morning. The sun shone brightly, bathing everything in silvery light, and the air was as warm as midsummer, and laden with the perfume of the forest. The lake was one vast mirror, in which the mountains admired their stately heads, and the forests smiled on their counter-parts, dressed in charming, but quiet shades of color, for the more gorgeous tones of the foliage had disappeared, although here and there, on account of the balmy Indian Summer, there were yet left the deep autumnal tints that all admirers of Nature know so well. The sky was one vast blue dome clear as a bell, with not the faintest sign of cloud to be seen, and the combination of sky, water, forest and mountains was simply exquisite.

"Behold, you breathing prospect hide the scene
Throw all her beauty forth, But who can paint
Like Nature? Can imagination boast
Amid its gay creation, hues like hers?
Or can they mix them with that matchless skill,
And lose them in each other?"

As I drank to my fill of the Creator's beauty, my soul drifted into harmony with its surroundings, and a tear rose to either eye, and trembling on the lids rolled down my cheeks, an offering to that mysterious power, which causes one to weep for joy: a singular anomaly.

"What a beautiful morning, Captain!" said my friend, recalling me to the fact that I was not alone.

"Lovely!" I returned, "I never saw a finer one, and I have been enjoying it so intensely, as to bring the tears to my eyes. I wish we had brought the ladies with us."

"The tramp up to Brassau would have been too much for them."

"Yes, I suppose it would," and again I dipped my oars in the limpid water, and sent the Noah's Ark once more in toward our destination.

As we had loitered on the way, it was not till ten o'clock that we landed on Birch Point, and drew our boat up from the water. But then we lost no time, and a moment later were travelling toward Brassau, with both eyes open for partridges.

We had not walked more than half a mile, when we flushed a covey of birds, and four of them fell victims to our inner longings. This was a good beginning, and we both felt elated. Thinking it useless labor to carry the partridges to Brassau and back, we tied them together and hung them to the limb of a tree, where we could secure them handily on our return.

"Do you suppose those birds safe from foxes?" I queried, as we tramped along, remembering the old Couplet which runs

"A hungry fox in passing by
Stole some grapes that hung on high"

"The foxes can't get at those partridges unless they can climb trees," declared Orrin, laughing.

"Some of them are cunning enough to do anything," I returned, as I thought of the many stories of these sagacious brutes, and their tricks, that I had read.

A short time after we came across deer tracks, quite fresh in appearance, and after a hurried consultation, we concluded to follow the trail which led towards the Mountain ridge on our left. We changed the shells in our guns as we went along, for others loaded with buck shot. From the appearance of the tracks we judged there were two of the animals, probably a buck and a doe. We kept up the pursuit for half an hour, hoping each moment to get a glimpse of the game. The trail led up the Mountain side, and it was hard climbing for my companion, but he stuck to it manfully, until we both concluded that we should not get a sight at the deer.

"I call this hot work," whispered my companion as we stopped a moment to get our breath.

"Yes, it's very warm in the woods, but then it's a regular Indian Summer day."

"Too good to last," declared my companion, as he wiped his face. "There will be a change before night."

Changing the shells in our guns again, we started down the mountain, and soon came in sight of the river, then turning west, we resumed our former course, and shortly after came upon another flock of partridges, this time a large one, containing certainly a dozen birds, and we both opened fire at once. We knocked three over before they flew, and dropped a couple more while on the wing, and by that time they were out of sight, although we did not imagine they would fly far.

After picking up those we had killed, and securing them to the limb of a tree near our return path, we went on a still hunt for the others, and were lucky enough to bag two more, each of us getting a bird.

We spent half an hour more in a vain attempt to find the others, but finally gave them up, and became reconciled to our loss for the same reason that the Dutchman did when his wife died, and carrying our last prizes along with us, continued on toward the lake.

Just after noon it began to cloud up, and at one o'clock when we emerged from the forest, and stepped out on the shore of the lake, the sun had disappeared, and we did not see it again for three days.

"You are an awful fellow to travel, Captain," remarked my companion, as we laid down our things preparatory to sampling our grub, "Don't you feel tired?"

"No," I responded, "but you see my dear fellow, I have not so much flesh to carry as you have, and that makes a difference."

"Are you hungry, then?" he continued.

"Am I?" Just trot out the entables and I'll soon answer that question for you, in as practical way as you could desire.

"I am always hungry when in the woods. Your Moosehead air is a perfect tonic for the appetite, and quickly creates

an aching void in a fellow's stomach. I always eat double the amount of food up here that I do at home."

"It is either growing cooler, or else I feel so on account of the sweat bath I have been taking. It was very warm in the woods."

"Walk about then a little while you are cooling off, or you may take cold. I will build a fire; it will look cheerful while we are eating dinner."

"It's too much trouble without an axe."

"I don't mind the trouble, and besides, it savors of camp life a little. I can find plenty of material that will burn, and by the way, what's the matter with cooking one of those partridges?"

"Yes, but we have no frying pan, Captain."

"That don't matter; we can roast it on sticks. I'll have a fire going in a moment, and then we'll see what can be done."

"All right!" replied the landlord, as he began to empty the knapsack of its contents.

It did not take long to skirmish about, and find all the fuel we needed, for there was a lot of drift stuff on the shore near us, and quite a number of wind-falls but a rod or two away in the woods, and inside of ten minutes I had a cheerful fire blazing, while my companion occupied himself in removing the feathers from the bird, whose bones we were to pick. When he had plucked the chicken until it was bald, I took it to the edge of the water, dressed it and cut it into two equal portions, and returned to the fire. I had previously secured two long slender sticks, and sharpened an end of each, and spitting the two halves of the bird with them, we immediately turned our attention to the cooking. In half an hour we had them broiled as well as could be done under the circumstances, and then basting them with butter and salt, which we had fortunately brought with us, were enabled to sit down to a meal that was good enough for an epicure, let alone two hungry sportsmen, who had by that time succeeded in working up an appetite that clamored vigorously for relief.

After our dinner we sat and smoked, discussing the pleasures of out-door life until our cigars were finished, then packing up, we started on the return, not forgetting you may be sure, the partridge we had not eaten. It was about three o'clock when we left Brassau, and the wind which had been rising for some time roared spitefully in the trees overhead, as we hurried our way through the forest.

"I am afraid we shall find it blowing hard on Moosehead," remarked my companion as we strode along, "and the air is fast growing damp, I believe it is going to rain."

"Let it come," I replied, "we are neither sugar nor salt, and rain will not spoil us."

Just as we reached the tree where we had left the first birds shot in the morning, it began to rain, and when we reached the clearing at Birch Point, it was pouring in torrents. The lake, as far as we could see it on either hand was white, and the surf was rolling upon the shingle at the point, in a way that would have been no discredit to Salt Water.

We had heard the roar of the storm and the booming of the surf before clearing the woods, and knew that the lake must be rough, but had not expected to find it so bad as we did. A more complete transformation from the scene in the morning, could scarcely be imagined, and the prospect for crossing to Kineo that night, was far from encouraging.

An Irishman, whose name I do not now recall, and who worked for Mr. Dennen most of the time, at Kineo, had a nondescript Cabin near, and to this we now hastened through the driving tempest, to seek shelter, while we decided what action to take.

The man fortunately was at home, having come over from Kineo at noon, and met us at the door of his shanty and invited us in. We followed him, inside, where there was a good fire in the cook-

ing stove, and we stood near it, for we had begun to feel chilly before reaching the house. I was duly introduced to the proprietor of the ranch, who offered me a seat.

"Shure 'is a tough storm, sir-r-r," said Pat, as I will call him, rolling the r under his tongue, as a veteran chewer would a sweet quid of tobacco, and then as a heavy gust of wind shook the old shanty till it creaked and trembled, added, "Ye'll hardly be thinkin' o' gitlin' ter Kineo ter night?"

"Why not?" I asked, as I took a survey of the general untidiness of the room, and changed my position to avoid a small stream of water that was trickling down from the roof, which in point of fact leaked in a dozen places.

"It's so rough, sir. Ye niver could cross the lake in the boat ye come over in."

"You have hit the nail on the head, this time," I replied, "but, is there no boat here that will live in rough water?"

"I don't think it, sir, an' shure, why can't yees stop with us till mornin'? Yer wilcome ter the bed."

"For two reasons, my man. First, the sea will probably be heavier in the morning than now, and second, I wish to get back to the hotel to-night."

"Do you think it safe to cross, Captain?" queried my friend, as he cast an anxious glance through the small window that overlooked the miniature ocean, whose waves swept higher and fiercer with every moment of passing time.

"Certainly not, Orrin, in that old ark we came over in, but I caught a glimpse of a number of boats as we hurried along, and perhaps there is one among them suitable for the voyage. Give me any decent kind of a boat, and with God's help I'll agree to land you safely on the other shore. Beside, if we stay here to night, our wives will be very much worried, as they will have no means of knowing where we are, and I have no doubt they are looking anxiously for us now."

"I suppose they are, and I should rather go home if we can get there safely, but it is an awful storm, and growing worse all the time. And, pardon me, but I doubt your ability to row across in such a sea."

"Bless your soul, I should not attempt it alone. Pat must go with us. Can you pull a good oar, Pat?"

"Faith, I can, sir."

"Then you are the sardine we want. I'll ship you for the voyage."

"He can row well enough," said Mr. Dennen, "Will you go with us if we start?"

"I suppose so," replied Pat, in a tone that showed he had but little love for the cruise, and then added, "yees better let well enough alone, an' stay where ye are till ter-morrow."

For a moment I hesitated what to do. I cast another glance around the apartment, a faint smile rising to my face as I noticed two pigs roaming at their own sweet will, and saw the hens roosting on top of the foot board of the bed, while every square foot of the place seemed to be filled with twenty different articles, and began to realize that the air was fearfully close, to say the least, thought of the anxiety of my wife, knowing from former similar experiences, that she would not sleep a wink all night, if we did not get back, and then made up my mind to go.

"It is only two miles," I said to my friend, "we will land near the *Three Sisters*, and not try to round the point; let's take a look at the boats," and I started out, my companions following.

Pat had pulled the boat we had come over in, farther up from the water, to prevent it being stove by the sea, and near it were half a dozen other boats of different sizes and models.

Without heeding the rain or wind, I walked around the different crafts, examining them carefully, being well convinced by this time from my observations seaward, that our lives would depend entirely upon the choice of a boat, and the way it was handled. While we were look-