



*"Slipped out onto the lake to see whether they had forgotten"*

# Fish That Bite and Get Away

*By Harold W. Pripps*

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

**W**E were seated on the screened porch of the cabin, safe from the buzzing mosquitoes which swarmed the balsam grove. Supper over, the dishes washed and put away, we were enjoying a half hour's smoke before going out for my first chance of the season at musky fishing. My wife and the school ma'am had slipped out onto the lake in the canoe to see whether they had forgotten the trick since the year before. The sounds of their laughter floated over the quiet waters and assured us that they, too, were enjoying this quiet evening hour. We could see before us through the balsams the outlet of the lake, its waters golden with the reflection of the dying day. Suddenly, there came a slap! splash! over to the right through the trees.

"There he is!" exclaimed Ham, our host, as he arose to his feet and peered through the trees at the rapidly widening circles in the waters of the outlet

which marked the spot where a big fish had jumped.

"If you get that fellow on a hook, you'll have your hands full. I've sat here smoking alone, night after night since it was warm enough to be out, and almost every evening, just about this time, or maybe a little later, there comes a whack and a slap-splash that was made by a bigger fish than you or I ever saw, or I'm no guesser."

Knowing Ham's qualifications as a guesser in matters of this kind, I fetched my fishing tackle in a hurry. In a few

minutes we were out on the water. The hum of the mosquitoes round about us, the gurgling of the waters of the outlet as they flowed over the rocky bottom into the Turtle, the singing of the reel and the splash of the bait were the only sounds that disturbed the stillness of that splendid evening. At the very first cast, I received a vicious strike. There was a furious boil at the end of the tightened line, then a sudden slackening and I reeled in my bait.

"Try him again," encouraged Ham, "And don't forget that you've got to be almighty quick with those wooden plugs. One taste of that hardware is all a musky needs to make him spit it out quicker'n lightning."

I cast right over the same spot and again was rewarded by a sharp strike. This time it seemed that I had the fish on good and solid; but as before the line suddenly slackened and I again reeled in the bait. I was peeved, to say the



*Off for a day of fun and fishing*



*"The girls tried their hand at it, too"*

least, as I had a perfect right to be. "Let's have a look at that contraption," said Ham.

I handed the bait over to him. It was the Chippewa Skipper, a floating surface bait, one of my old favorites. It has double instead of the usual treble hooks on the bottom, as on most of the other plugs. I had turned the points of the hook up, a weedless feature, so as not to get snagged on the masses of eel grass which crop out of the rocky bottom and wave their floating streamers down the current of the outlet.

"Better turn 'em point down again," advised the boss, meaning the hooks.

"But, by golly, they ought to have stuck the way they were unless that fish has a mouth that is all bone on the inside."

Again and again I cast around the shores of the outlet, but the big 'un had had two tastes of my lure and no doubt had just about made up his fish-mind that "all is not minnow that glitters." The proper stunt at this point would have been to change lures, I suppose, but night was rapidly coming on and so we slowly moved up the outlet to meet the girls. The shore line was becoming indefinite in the dusk, and I was not surprised when, on my next cast, I landed the bait about two feet beyond the edge

of the reeds which lined the bank. There was a sharp jerk and for a moment it seemed as though the bait were snagged. I was able to draw it through, however, with what seemed like a small bale of weeds. Just then the girls came up.

"What luck? Any fish for breakfast?" they questioned.

"Yah, look at him now," derided Ham. "He's cleaning out the lake—of weeds."

I reached down to clear my bait, when lo and behold, there in the center of that mass of weeds was a fish! I pulled off some of the weeds; then drew the fish, which in the fading light I saw to be a fair sized pike, around to the other side of the boat where the girls were. Feeling itself cleared of the encumbering weeds, the pike gave a couple of convulsive flops.

"Ooooooh! He really has one!"

"Let's get away from here quickly! It might tip the canoe!"

We couldn't decide later who had splashed most, the girls in their hurried exit or the fish in its struggles. I held the pike on a short line and soon drew it up to Ham in the stern. He obligingly batted it on the head with a hardwood billy, which he had whittled for just such occasions as this.

"Huh!" grunted Ham as he lifted the fish out of the water, "No wonder he didn't struggle any more than he did. I thought there was something funny about it, or he would have made a different kind of a fuss even though he was tangled in the weeds. See, he was hooked back of the gill-plate. He must have struck at the bait and missed it when it landed in the weeds and so got hooked in this way. Huh!"

By this time it was too dark to see well enough to play a big fish in case we should hook one in the narrow outlet, which was very probable. This together with the fact that the mosquitoes had licked off our dope and were getting more

vicious every minute made us decide that the cabin was the place for us.

The next morning at the breakfast table plans for the day were made.

"We'll have to have some live bait," said Ham. "These fish are getting too smart to bite on every fool gee-gaw that gets dragged by their noses. Chubs are the thing and chubs we must get."

A hike of a mile or more through the woods took us to a little swamp creek. Here we unfurled our net and proceeded to get wet feet and a dandy mess of chubs. The girls had a great time out of it, too. They waded out to some big boulders and fished with alder poles.



Each joyful shriek meant that I would have to wade out to release a wriggling chub and replace it with a "wiggler" worm. Our big can was soon filled with chubs. Then came the dash through the woods to get the chubs into the live-box before they suffocated.

"By glorious, we got enough bait to last us as long as you stay, even if you stay a month," estimated Ham, as we looked into the well stocked live-box.

Contented with our good fortune, we lounged through the heat of the day, thinking of the big time we would have between sun-down and dark that evening with the one best bait for muskies—live, toothsome chubs.

Well greased with mosquito dope (that is, Ham and I were; the girls wore head-nets and gloves to keep them off) we hurried down to the live-box as soon as we had finished supper to prepare for the fray. A tragic sight met our gaze! A great blue heron flopped away as we neared the water's edge. We knew what that meant. We had left the cover open! One lonely little chub which was small enough to hide under the stones that weighted down the box was all that was left!

"What a shame," consoled the girls. "And to think of the way you poor fellows worked to carry that heavy can through those hot woods."

"That fool bird might just as well have taken this one too," said I.

"He would have, in another minute," vouched Ham. "Come on. This is too much. Let's go back to the cabin and play rummy. What's the use of catching fish anyway? The skeeters half eat a man up; then you have to skin 'em, the fish I mean; and then eat 'em. What's the use, I say?"

"You're right," I agreed, very weakly though, for I had a secret longing to see whether that one lone chub wouldn't tempt the big musky again. But the majority ruled, so we played rummy.

The next morning Ham committed, to say the least, an indiscretion.

"Say, folks," he beamed, at the breakfast table, "I know where there's the dandiest patch of blackberries you ever heard tell of."

"Ooooh! Take us to it!" shouted both girls at once.

"Aw, rats!" said I, trying to throw cold water on the plan, at the same time kicking Ham in the shin under the table, "I thought that this was a fishing trip."

"Sure it is, and you can fish all you want to on the way down. It's right on that old portage trail at the Flambeau.

Good musky waters all the way, you know."

I brightened up at once. This was something like it, for I could take my fly rod along also and try for bass in the rapids after we got to the berry patch. That big musky would have to wait until evening and I would save the little chub for it, I thought.

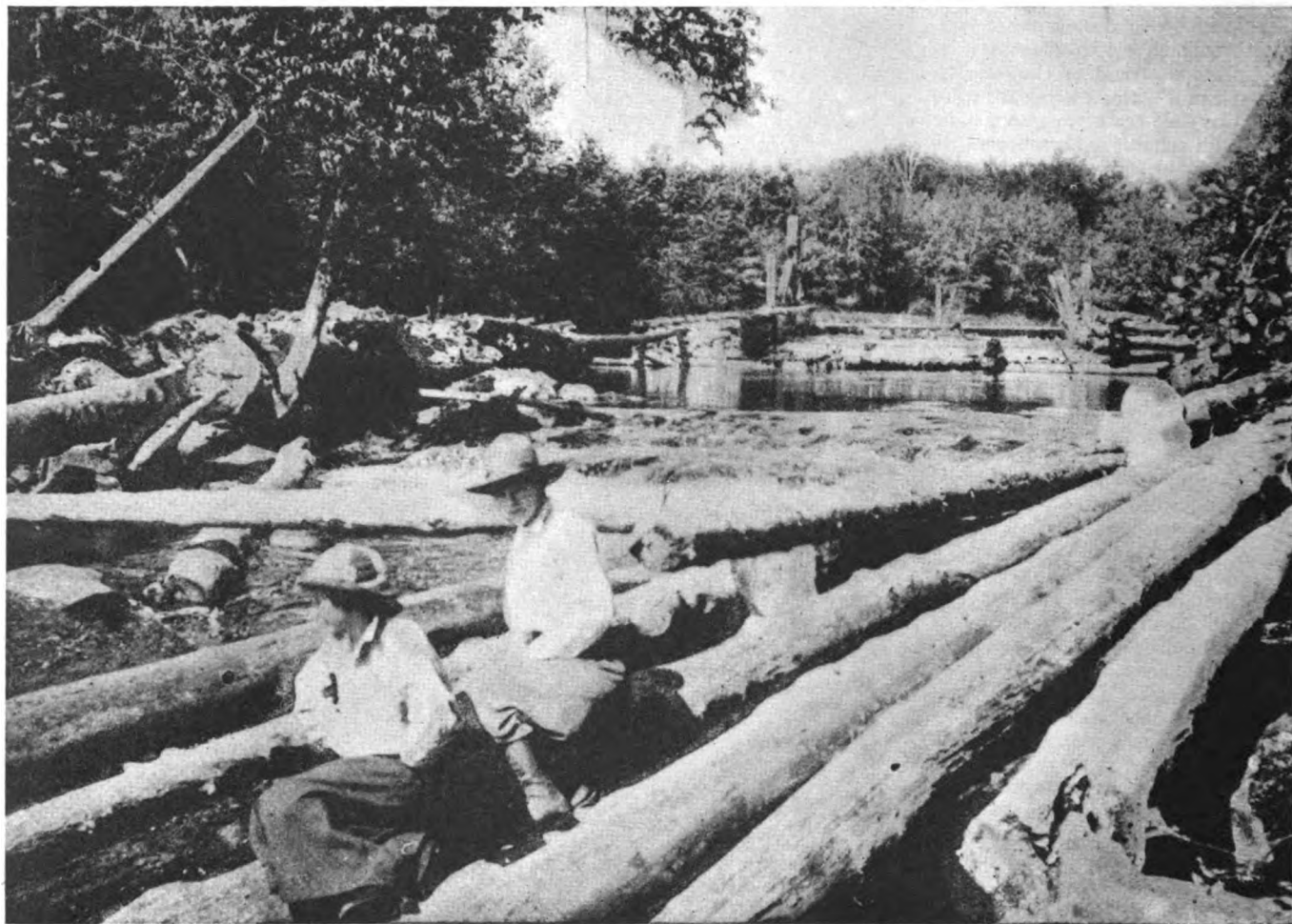
We had an amusing experience on the way down the Turtle. I had caught some frogs for bait and was casting with one of them. We were nearing the first portage, just above the rapids, when a particularly lively musky struck my frog. He was hooked well, and of all the

splashing and whacking of the water you ever saw, this was about the best. As there were four of us in the canoe, it behooved everyone to sit still, yet the girls were frantic with excitement. There was no chance to calm their fears, for I had my hands full with that acrobatic fish. Moreover, Ham was adding to their fears by yelling that this fish would surely upset us. The old villain knew that the water was only three feet deep at this point. After some maneuvering, I drew the fish up to him where he sat on the stern seat, ready with his hardwood billy. Then several things happened simultaneously. The girls, seeing shallow water



*Viewing the picturesque Falls of the Turtle*





*The jam of logs and debris at the Falls of the Turtle*

and shore close at hand, jumped for it just as Ham was going to apply the billy to the fish. The sudden jerks of the canoe, as the girls jumped, made him miss.

Indeed we were hard put ourselves to keep from tipping. The blow barely touched the fish and it shot straight for the soft mud of the landing right at the girls' heels. The frantic splashing of the fish, which raised a spray of mud, and my shout of "Look out, he's coming after you!" lent wings to their feet. They fairly flew over some windfalls on the bank, nor did they stop till they were half way up the hill.

"We will not come down till he stops wiggling," said one of them. Accordingly, Ham did the thing up neatly.

Upon reaching the Flambeau, the three berry enthusiasts immediately disappeared up the portage trail, while I rigged up my fly rod and spent a pleasant morning crawling around on the rocks. I took out two nice small-mouth bass weighing about two and a half pounds each and might have caught more if it hadn't been so late in the morning. The cook's announcement of dinner was a most welcome sound. The luscious blackberries which they served with condensed cream for dessert makes my mouth water now to think about. The girls were highly elated over their berrying and it was only because all of the pails were filled that they consented to return to camp before night. I was very anxious to see

whether I couldn't lure that big musky with our one, lone, little, chub, in case he should feed in the outlet that evening, as usual. So with the coming of sunset we again set out. That chub worked wonderfully well—but not on the game I was after. On one of the first casts made with it, I caught another wall-eyed pike, at the same time losing the chub. I had to resort to my hardware lures for the rest of the evening. It was with quite a feeling of disappointment that I quit after dark without having seen or heard any signs that the big fish was in the outlet.

Each succeeding night we fished in front of the cabin and it was only once or twice that we came back empty-handed. But the big musky which Ham had heard every night up to the day of our arrival didn't come around. At any rate we didn't hear him.

The morning of our departure came and everything was packed soon after daybreak awaiting the arrival of the tote team. I was down at the rocky shore of the outlet for one last look when suddenly, near the opposite shore, a big fish broke water and with a splash that sent a shower of spray into the air, disappeared again.

Ham had heard it, too, and came down. "Ha! My friend feeds here in the morning now. Get your rod."

I hurriedly unpacked my tackle box and chose a large spoon hook. Jointing the rod, I stepped into the waiting canoe

and we were off. A few long casts down stream to straighten out the line and then I made a short one across to the reeds on the opposite shore. Bingo! he hit the spoon and on the instant I struck him hard.

"Head for the lake!" I shouted trying to keep cool.

The musky broke water, shaking its head in a frantic effort to shoot the spoon out of its mouth. Ham gave vent to a shout of joy. "It's the whopper all right!"

Immediately, as the fish leaped, I stuck the tip of the rod under water to draw him down and then raised the point of the rod high again when he was under water so that he would have to work against the curving rod. Again and again he broke water with graceful leaps, frantically shaking his head. I saw that he was indeed the biggest musky I had ever seen. Across and back again he darted, as Ham worked up toward open water. There seemed no diminishing of the strength of his efforts.

Suddenly, he gave a particularly vicious jerk, when in a moment I had allowed the line to slacken ever so little, and snap! off he was, taking the spoon hook and part of the line with him.

I reeled in silently. There was lots to be said but no words at hand to express it with.

"Yep, that's the way she goes sometimes," observed Ham, soberly. "But then, those big fellows don't taste good

*(Continued on page 467)*

the articles required. Otherwise, where the tourist merely places an order carte-blanche, thus: "Two weeks' supplies for four men," on arrival at camp he may find himself the proud possessor of a barrel of flour, a case of eggs, a fifty-pound case of butter, a sack of potatoes, ditto beans, a couple of pickled hogs, half a barrel of sugar, and canned goods enough to stock a small store, together with a bill for a hundred and fifty dollars or so, and a couple of modest guides with bland smiles of expectancy, ready (upon pressure) to care for the remaining three-quarters of the stock at the end of the hunt with no inconvenience to the happy sport. And why should the shrewd office man seek honors in the "dam-phool" class the moment he sets foot in the bush? Why foster the opinion in the minds of the honest (?) natives that "city sports" all belong to that class of birds which have gills and eat without biting?

## "Fish That Bite and Get Away"

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anyhow. They're weedy and tough and everything else," he tried to console me. "Don't you care, hubby," cheered a voice from the bank. "We'll come up and get him next time."

And I'm glad to add that there will be a next time unless something direful turns up. I have the date set even now, and many a time during the past winter I have taken out my tackle box, mused over the end of that broken line, and vowed that the next time I would test my lines oftener.

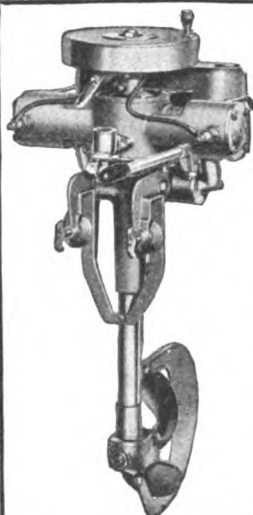
## The Education of Pardner

(Continued from page 409)

green pike was brought up and as as Tommy spied the fish his eyes snapped and he showed the only signs of being excited I noticed in all the time he was with us. "Get him, get him," cried Tommy. "Him got your spoon."

"G'wan, Tommy, what you giving us?" "Yes, me can see um sure."

We got Mr. Pike in finally, and sure enough, firmly fastened in his mouth was the Lowe's Star Bait he had taken in the morning. It was pretty badly battered, but not knocked out. That pike was the maddest, ugliest thing I ever saw in the fish line when we took him in. He must have been fighting mad when the second spoon came along, he certainly couldn't have been hungry for what he already had his mouth full of. Tommy took Pardner over to Bear Island for a visit to the Catholic church and the Hudson Bay Co.'s post. She came back full of information as to how the company traded with the Indians, the kinds of merchandise they kept in stock and the kinds of furs they got in trade. Tommy also took her on a trip over some of the portages and showed her where and how he set his traps and told her, as well as he



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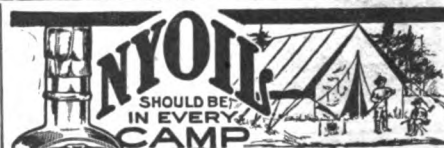
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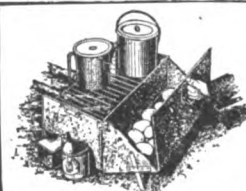
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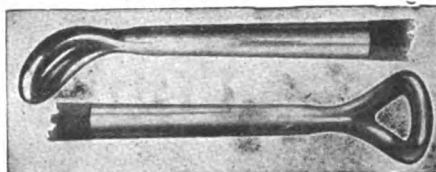
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