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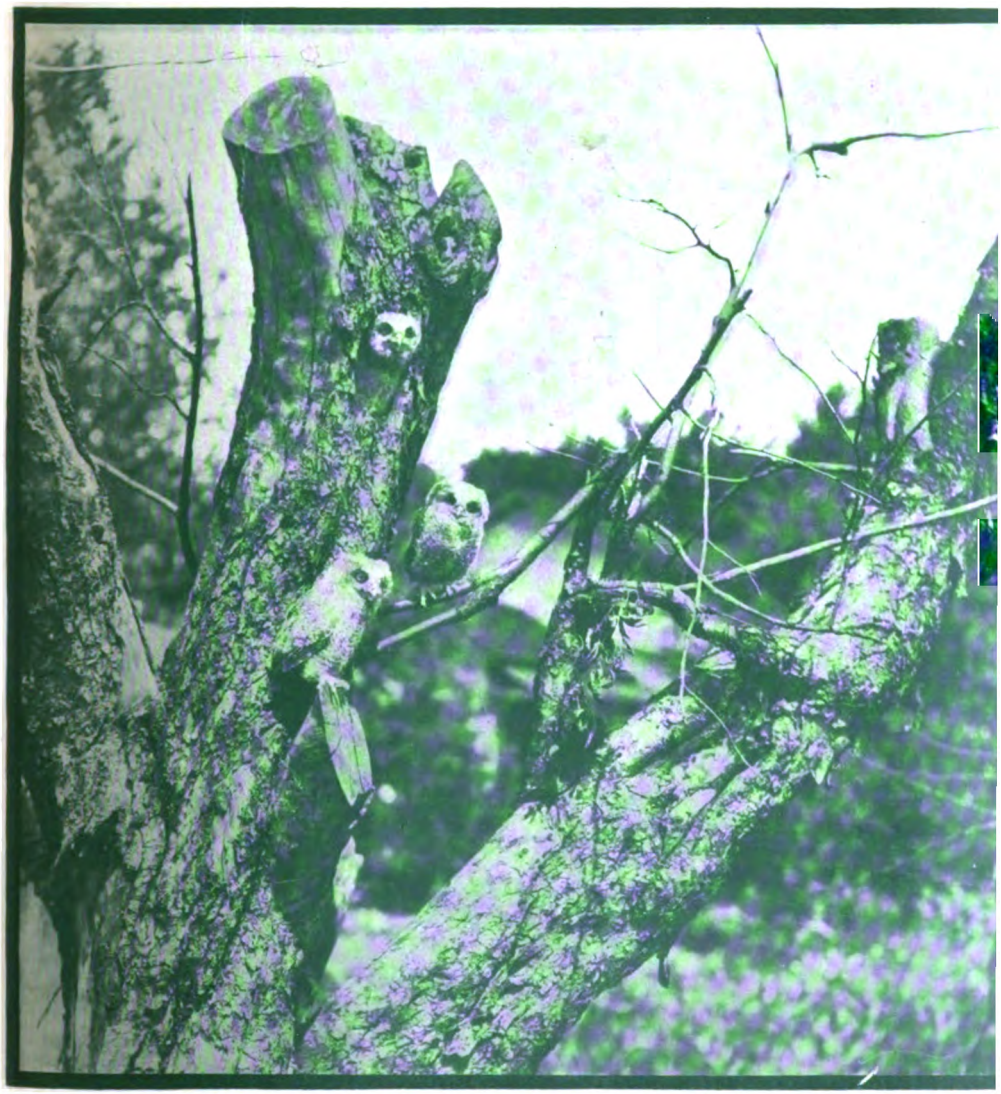

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BIRCHING IN THE BIG WOODS.

G. O. SHIELDS.

IV.

October 19th we left our camp on Lone Pine lake at seven o'clock in the morning, with our houseboat and other belongings on our backs, and carried them another three-quarters of a mile to a small bit of water, which, owing to its shape, we thought would probably feel as well pleased to be called Goose Egg lake as anything, and so we writ it down.

It took us but a few minutes to cross this. Then we again got out and walked to Grouse lake, so called because the good little water spaniel treed a covey of ruffed grouse near the first landing. Three of the birds Clark killed with his revolver. It was getting toward noon, so we put out the spoon victuals and enticed into the canoe two good sized bass, one large mouth and one small mouth, which, later, just fitted our two large mouths, while the dog held an overflow meeting near.

We next discovered two large, handsome lakes, each three miles long by a mile wide, one containing three and the other four beautiful islands, all covered with pine, cedar and hemlock, and offering most tempting camp sites for tired wayfarers such as we. These lakes we recorded on the map as Flora and Anna, in honor of two pretty little sisters—dear friends of mine—in Chicago. These little girls may well feel proud of having two such beautiful waters named after them, and the lakes might well feel proud—if they could feel at all—to bear the names of two such charming little misses as Flora and Anna Tatham.

The portage from Lake Anna to the next one in the chain is perhaps 150 yards. This being also anonymous up to the time of our visit, we named it Lake Armour, as a compliment to Mr. Philip Armour, of Chicago, who went over this route one September, and who, Clark says, is a jolly good fellow. This lake may be known by its having three islands set at the three angles of a triangle. The portage from this to Crab lake is so short that you just fairly get your load settled on your shoulder blades when you have to dump it in the canoe again.

I could rave over the beauty of Crab lake through a whole page. It is five or six miles long, of almost any width to suit purchasers, and nobody knows how deep. It has 20 islands, large and small. It is a pity the lake has not a more appropriate name, yet the one it has fits it pretty well, for it is the shape of an old hard-shell crab and its claws reach out into the big pine woods. Between the claws, where the small barnacles and other parasites would be if this were a sure enough crab, are high, bluffy, narrow, picturesque peninsulas, running far in toward the body of the lake, all covered with groves of evergreen trees.

Crab lake has been fished only by a few adventurous chaps, but the stories they tell of their catches would make Thomas Ochiltree ashamed of himself. This lake seems to be monopolized by the small mouth bass, and of these and water it contains about equal parts.

There was a rough October gale the day we crossed. The clouds were cold and angry looking, and the tree tops seemed to be trying to battle with one another on something like prize ring principles. The waves were a good deal more than waist high, and were covered with suds. I begged Clark not to start across, but he said there was no danger. When we did start I begged him to hug the lee shore, but he headed straight for the opposite shore and appeared to me as though he wanted to say, "Darn a man that h'aint got no nerve."

I sat low in the bottom of the canoe,

and almost wished I had never been born. I tried to pray, but had forgotten the combination. I wondered if our bodies would swell up and float ashore, or if the bass would eat human beef. But the wind roared and blew the cold water on us just the same. Before we had gone a mile out a snowstorm set in, and you couldn't have seen us if you had been in another boat 10 feet away.

Finally, I made up my mind that if I was to be nearly drowned again, I would at least have some fishing, and I cast out the spoon. It slid back behind the canoe 20 or 30 feet and began to spin in the waves when a bass took it, seemingly just for amusement, and after a brief dispute between him and me, he came in. Three others followed suit before we reached the golden Western shore Who ever heard of catching black bass in a snowstorm—a real blizzard? I suppose it has often been done, for they say there's nothing new under the sun, but I never before happened to be there when this particular act was on. There must be lots of fish in a lake when they are so hungry as to go out in a snowstorm to feed. Crab lake is beautiful and will probably make as big a record in time as Gogebic made when it was new.

Between this water and Rice lake, the next in our course, is the divide that separates the black bass and trout waters from the muskalonge waters. The lakes that we had been in up to this point all have outlets that flow into Lake Superior, and there are no muskalonge in them. Those to the South of the line we traveled on, all flow into the Wisconsin river, and nearly all are muskalonge waters. Consequently, as soon as we crossed the narrow ridge, by a carry of less than a quarter of a mile, and launched our craft in Rice lake, I got my number eight Skinner and began to put up my biceps for some big fish.

We had no strikes in Rice lake, and from it we ran Rice creek, a slow, deep, lazy stream, along whose marshy borders grow thousands of acres of wild rice. Out of this we put up 200 or 300 mallards, just plain mallards, with not a widgeon, teal or any other breed of duck among the flocks. They were very tame, and if we had only had a shot gun we could have shot (at) a boat load of them.

Rice creek empties into Big lake, and at the mouth of the creek we got into trouble; that is, we hooked a muskalonge and lost 15 or 20 minutes in getting him into the boat. However, we were in no hurry, so did not complain. Having landed our fish we went ashore, cooked it and ate it. For breakfast we ate the three black bass. We camped on the site of an old Indian village. The Lac de Flambeau Indians come up here in August in large numbers to harvest the wild rice and carry away boat loads of it. They have some novel devices for gathering, hulling and taking care of the grain, such as earthen mortars or tubs, flails, pestles and birch bark buckets. At the close of the harvest they have a rice dance and a great feast, when they dine on rice, fish, ducks and such other delicacies as their larder or the surrounding country affords.

Big lake has the same general characteristics as several of those already referred to. It is three and a half miles long, two and a quarter miles wide, and is adorned with several pretty islands. It has given up a great many muskalonge, as well as bass and pickerel, in the last three years, but still contains plenty of them, and would contain plenty for years to come if all men were true sportsmen. Unfortunately, however, some of them are hogs.

Out of Big lake we ran Windfall creek, a crooked, rapid stream three miles long, badly obstructed by fallen timber, hidden rocks and shoals and overhanging brush. While polling along through one piece of it which looked clean, and which we thought was safe, we ran the birch high up on a sharp pointed rock that stood within three inches of the surface. A

hole was ripped in the boat's bottom large enough to permit a man's hand to pass through, and we had to work hard to reach shore, although it was only 40 feet away. The boat was half full of water when we landed, but fortunately our bedding and eatables were not seriously damaged. We hauled her up, built a fire, warmed the pitch pot, patched the rent with a piece of canvas, and were soon on our way again.

Windfall creek empties into Island lake. Near the mouth of this stream we built a fire, cooked and ate a five pound muskalonge and two grouse that we had picked up *en route*.

Out of Island lake we passed through another channel, a quarter of a mile long, into Spider lake, and through another short thoroughfare we took a look at Manitowish lake, both of which have been so often described in print that I need not talk about them here. We hurried through these and another channel three miles long into Rest lake, but there was no rest there, and we sped across it. The outlet to this is Manitowish river, proper, and we were then on the home stretch. We busied ourselves with the light ashen paddles, and built up a pretty little bunch of foam in front of our prow as the boat shot through the still water. The dam was three miles below and we were trying to reach it before dark. We made it, but had no time to lose, and half an hour after we pulled the latch string of the dam-keeper's shack, we sat down to just such a meal as a logging camp cook always knows how to spread before sportsmen who have been working hard and livng on fish and grouse straight for a week.

We arose the next morning at the usual rising time in logging camps, two o'clock, and long before daylight we were ready to start. We made our way while the early fowl nodded on his perch and while the hoar frost of late autumn rendered the boom logs exceedingly slick. Oft did we slap our hands about our unoffending backs while we did store our duffle in the light canoe. When seated on a roll of bedding, so tightly hemmed in that not a toothpick could have been stuck down betwixt us and the next package, our feet grew cold, and in the gray of the morning, tingled with the coldness thereof, so that we fain would have got out and walked, but alas, the walking was extremely n. g. As the sun arose, threw off the covers and let the warmness out of his virtuous couch, things were remedied and we were comfortable. Likewise the fishes seemed to be comfortable, for they came forth and bit, and we took them in as we paddled our canoe. We had a run of 15 miles from the dam to the railroad, and it was as exciting and enjoyable as any part of the entire voyage except, possibly, the part where we were nearly drowned. I might describe in glowing terms the beauties of the autumn morning; the gentle sighing of the ancient pines in the October breeze; the rushing, roaring, frightful rapids and cataracts of the mighty Manitowish; the picturesque figure of the stalwart guide as he stood up in the canoe, pole in hand, and steered her with all the skill of an Iroquois, through the boiling, foaming torrent safely into the pool below; how his bronzed face took on a look of deep anxiety and his eagle eyes searched through the intricate windings of the stream for possible hidden dangers; and a lot more of such rot, but I do not feel equal to it to-night. We passed through all the bad places safely, and through all the beautiful curves and gently flowing reaches, peacefully, reaching Manitowish station at 11 o'clock, October 20, 1890. Selah.