

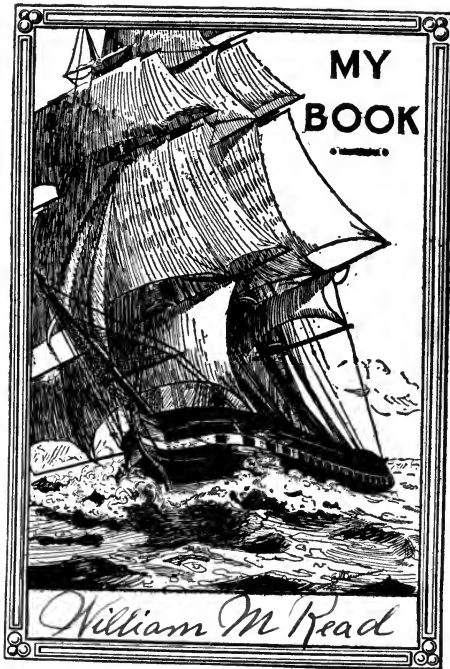
THE BOOK OF  
THE TARPON  
BY A. W. DIMOCK



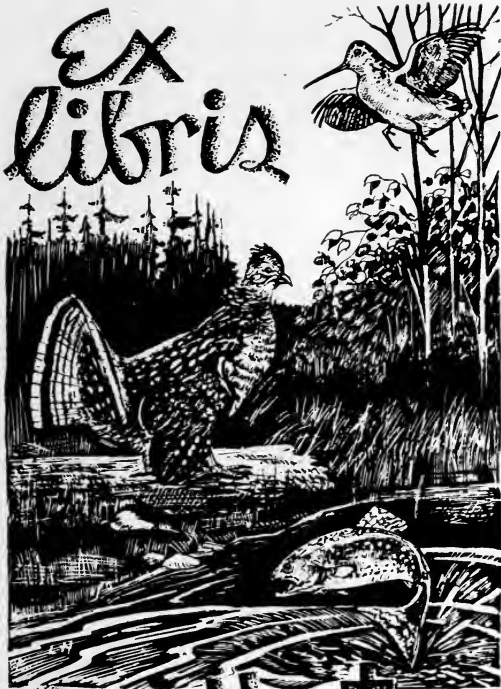
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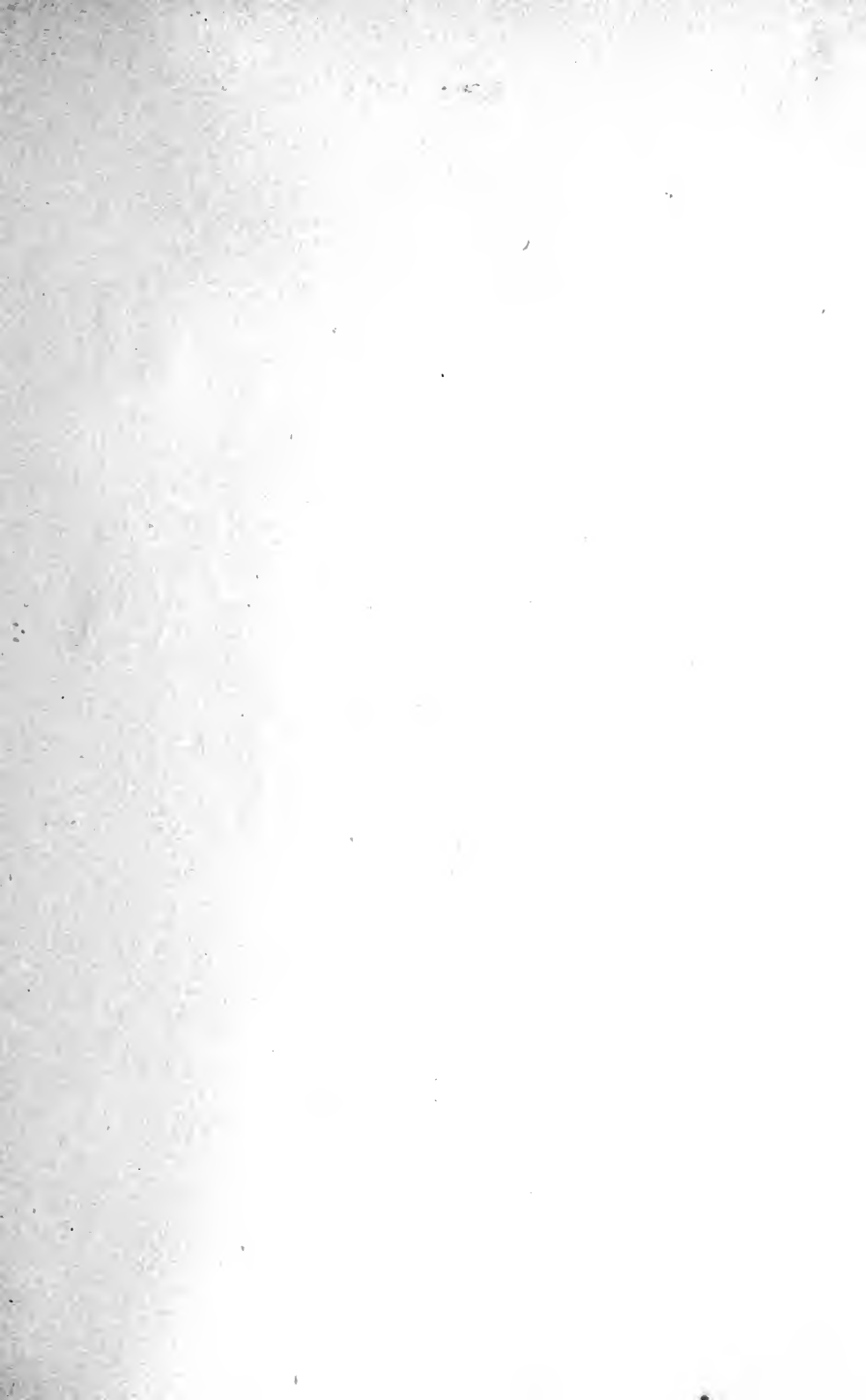
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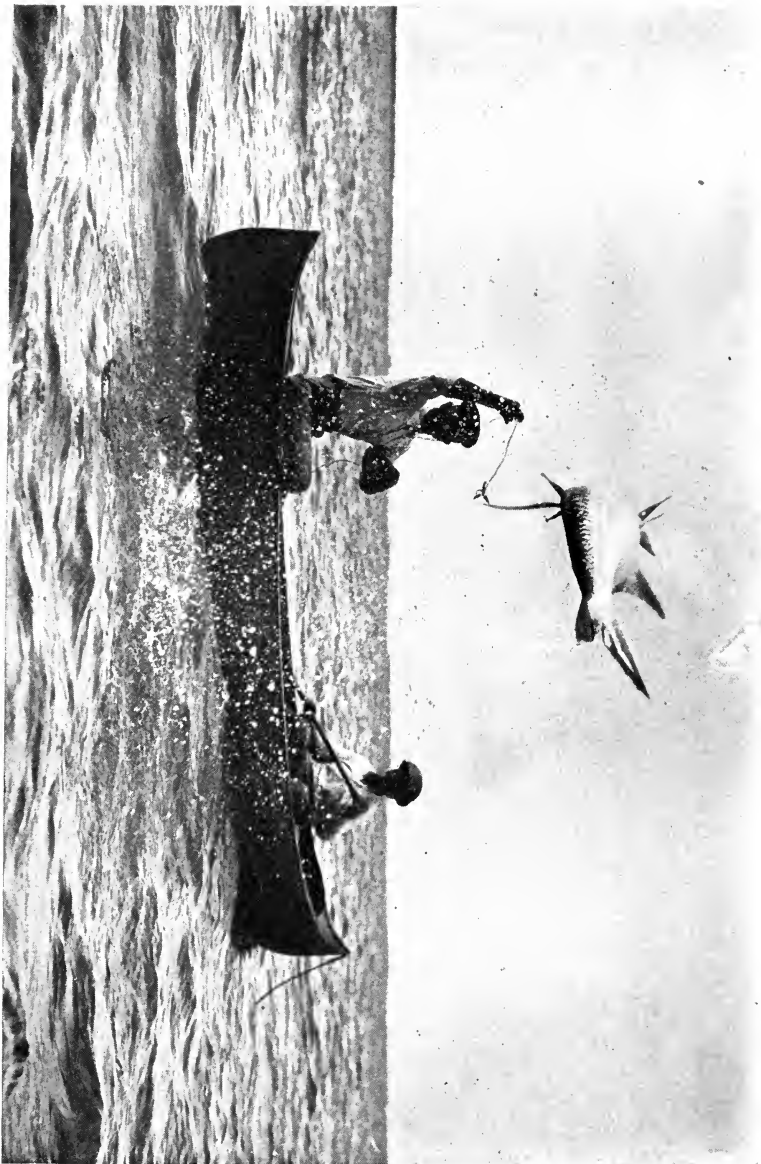


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THE NEXT TARPON SPENT MOST OF ITS TIME IN THE AIR DOING ACROBATIC STUNTS.



# THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

BY  
A. W. DIMOCK

*ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY JULIAN DIMOCK*



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OUTING PUBLISHING COMPANY  
MCMXV

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**THE FIRST TARPON**



# The Book of the Tarpon

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST TARPON

**A** GORGEOUS vision burst from the water behind us and shot ten feet into the air. "What on earth is that, Tat?"

I was trolling for channel-bass, but was catching cavally and ravailla, or jack-fish and snook, as Tat persisted in calling them. I knew the whole breed of jumping fish, with their slick, greasy leaps and an occasional wiggle while in the air, but the best of them was as Satyr to Hyperion compared with the iridescent creature at the end of my line. That twisting, gyrating body, garmented in glistening silver and enveloped in a cloud of sparkling diamonds, was

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

unlike any denizen of earth. The brilliant rays of the semi-tropical sun made a prism of every drop in the shower that surrounded the creature. At first I thought the wonderful being was a mermaid, and as I noted her fierce display of activity and strength, I pitied the merman who came home late, without a better excuse than a meeting of the lodge. Then I suspected it was a wicked genie, freed from the seal of King Solomon which had imprisoned it for thousands of years.

I was brought back to earth by Tat's reply: "Mus' be a tarpum!"

"What's that?" I asked.

"That's what's got your hook!"

Talking in a circle is profitless and I turned to my buzzing reel, shouting as I saw the diminishing line: "Pull like smoke, Tat! Line's 'most gone."

Then I put on the drag, but it had no effect. I held my rod vertically, and pressed my thumb hard on the reel.

Once more the creature shot high in air, while my thumb got red hot.

This was in February, 1882, three years be-



## THE FIRST TARPON

fore the recognition of the tarpon as a game fish. I believe the tarpon then on my line was entitled to the credit of being the first of his species captured with rod and reel. That he failed to receive recognition and that I missed the glory of his capture is due to my unskilful handling of the gaff after the contest was over. The combat began at the mouth of the Homosassa River, in Florida, where its current sweeps past Shell Island into the Gulf of Mexico.

Two hundred yards is little enough for a tarpon line, and I had less than as many feet, but I played the fish as hard as the line would bear, and Tat pulled like a little fiend, whenever I yelled that the line was almost gone. Again and again the tarpon sprang far above the surface, sending my heart into my mouth as some of the leaps lightened the strain on the rod until I feared the creature was free. Back and forth he led us, out on the shallow waters of the sandy flats outside the pass and then around the turns in the deep channel of the river between its mouth and turbulent Hell Gate. The contest ended where it had begun—beside Shell

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Island. The tired tarpon had ceased to leap and the slow, rhythmic motion of his tail barely kept him afloat, while with an audibly beating heart I gently pulled the skiff beside him.

I handed my rod to Tat and, taking the gaff from him, struck the tarpon in the throat with it. The fish gave a lurch, and as I threw my weight back on the gaff, it straightened out and I went over backward into the Homosassa River. I scrambled into the skiff only to find a rod broken, a line parted, and the record of the first tarpon taken on rod and reel lost forever. I scolded Tat, blamed myself, and anathematized the gaff. But a gaff which is good for a fifty-pound salmon is only a toy to a tarpon of fair size.

For many days, from dawn to dark, I trolled from the Homosassa Spring, where the beautiful river rises, to Shell Island at its mouth, but all in vain, for not another tarpon rose to my lure.

In the years that followed, strange stories were told by fishermen of wonderful creatures that seized their bait and, leaping above the surface of the water, hurled it a hundred feet into



WONDERFUL CREATURES THAT SEIZED THEIR  
BAIT AND HURLED IT A HUNDRED  
FEET INTO THE AIR.

GARMENTED IN GLISTENING SILVER AND ENVELOPED IN A CLOUD OF SPARKLING DIAMONDS.



## THE FIRST TARPON

the air. Fishing with a rod in Florida was a sport of the winter months, and it is not until March that tarpon begin to frequent the waters of the coast. To the tourist the strike of a tarpon was a rare event, and fishing for the creatures became exciting and popular long before one had been landed on rod and reel. It was a new game, and the methods and machinery of ordinary fishing were inadequate for this bucking bronco of the sea.

The tarpon was accustomed to taking his food on the fly, and was suspicious of dead bait. Even after he had taken it into his mouth, the touch of a hook, or the motion of a line threw him into a paroxysm of fear and the bait was cast violently from him. There was slight hold for a hook in his bony mouth, and his hard jaws soon frayed the fisherman's line, while too often a chain or wire frightened the fish before he had swallowed the bait. No reel had been made which could hold the line required to follow a fish whose first dash carried him a rifle shot away. The rod had not been built that was capable of putting the strain on the line required to tire a fish that weighed as much as the

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

fisherman, and was strong enough to tow him in his skiff for miles.

Slowly tackle was fitted to the fish. Special lines were constructed, two hundred yards in length, which would support a weight of thirty pounds, and big reels built that would hold the lines and stand the strain of their use. Many fishermen wound two hundred yards of fine line on their reels before putting on the heavier one with which the fish was to be fought. If, then, the tarpon got away with the fighting line he could be followed through the lighter one for another two hundred yards. Snells were constructed of braided flax, soft and strong, of so many threads that before they could all be ground apart between the jaws of the quarry, either fish or fisherman would be dead. The early rods were simply eight-foot lengths of tough bamboo, and for real business they are about as serviceable as the thirty-dollar rod of to-day.

The first bait used was the half of a mullet, through the skin of which the tarpon hook was ingeniously sewed in a way that completely concealed it. The earliest fishing grounds were the

## *THE FIRST TARPON*

streams and bays of the west coast of Florida from Charlotte Harbor south. The fisherman's skiff was anchored fifty or more feet from some deep hole in river or bay into which his bait was cast. A dozen yards of the line was reeled off and coiled loosely on the thwart beside the fisherman, while the rod was laid across the skiff. The experienced fisherman then examined his basket to see that pipe and tobacco were conveniently placed, that his favorite book was at hand and the other volume that closed with a cork was not too far away.

It was the vacation time of the fisherman, and would last till the coming of the tarpon, which might be in an hour, a day, a week, or never. I have known fishermen to come four thousand miles for successive seasons to catch a tarpon, without getting a single strike. While the fisherman read or dozed, his boatman from time to time threw fragments of mullet into the water near the hole where the bait was lying. When it happened that the line began to move and the coil on the thwart to diminish there was excitement in the skiff. The boatman quietly took in the anchor and with oars in hand was ready to

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

give way in an instant. The fisherman gently lifted his rod and, as he watched the outgoing line, poured a dipper of water over the reel to reduce the heat from the friction which would follow the waking of the tarpon.

There was a lesson in every motion of the line for the man who could read it. A jerky action, with a run of a few inches at a time, probably meant that catfish were stealing the bait; a slow, steady outgoing of the line was likely to be caused by a sting-ray; a more rapid rush indicated that a shark had found the bait and, after the manner of his species, was seeking seclusion before swallowing it, while a short, slow run, followed in a minute or two by another and another gave hope of a Silver King to the fisherman. Yet whatever the symptoms, as the diagnosis could not be certain, the treatment was the same. When about forty feet of line had run out, the fisherman, holding rod and reel firmly, struck with force enough to bury the barbed hook deep in the body of the fish. Often there followed a hard pull, steadily continued, which no drag on the line could modify. A few minutes of this, a boat dragged back and forth



## THE FIRST TARPON

by a deep-swimming denizen of the dark waters, and the freed line would come back with the flaxen snood cleanly cut by the serrated teeth of the big shark.

Sometimes when the fisherman struck there shot into the air, a hundred feet from the skiff, six feet of the most beautiful creature that lived, clad in glistening silver mail. The swift twists of the body of the creature could scarcely be followed by the eye, while the convulsive play of the gills was no more visible than are the vibrations of the wings of the humming-bird as it poises over the flower from which it feeds. During the first long dash of the tarpon the buzzing reel blistered the fisherman's thumbs within their protecting stalls, while the boatman labored with the oars and the line ran alarmingly low. When the fish slackened its pace and the oarsman gained, there was joy in the fisherman's heart. He forgot his burned thumbs as he reeled in the line, and as the slack gathered faster than he could take it, he shouted to the rower to stop and to back water quickly. Then, as a fresh spurt of the fish snatched the reel handle from his hand, sharply rapping his

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

knuckles while the freed reel overran the line, he yelled to his boatman to pull for his life. With trembling fingers he picked at the turns in the line which clogged his reel, knowing that the hopes of the day, and perhaps of the season, rested in the next few seconds.

If the tarpon was quiet for a minute or two, or the oarsman rowed as fast as the fish swam, the sportsman had another chance in the game he had fairly lost. Perhaps in an hour, or two, or three, an exhausted fisherman looked on a tired tarpon, slowly sculling beside his skiff and inviting the stroke of the great gaff.

Wood's Hole in Surveyor's Creek was the Mecca of tarpon fishermen in the early days of the sport. It was best reached by way of Estero Bay, through Corkscrew Creek, and was evidenced by letters of gold on a costly base. It was recognized by tarpon as a refuge and three out of four of tarpon that I struck far down the stream selected Wood's Hole for their surrender.

For a few years interest in the new sport increased slowly. The habits and habitats of the tarpon were not understood, and most of the

## *THE FIRST TARPON*

fishing was done before the fish were due on the coast. It is doubtful if the tourist-fisherman averaged a tarpon a month, and thirty, or even twenty-six, days in an anchored skiff was a big price to pay for the chance of a joy ride of an hour.

Once on the Miramichi, after a day of salmon fishing, I tried to talk of the wonderful new sport, but as I compared my day in the long canoe, among the quick waters of the beautiful river, with long hours of waiting on motionless waters, I was abashed. When I was fishing for bluefish off Montauk, in the yacht of a friend, I spoke of the new sport.

"Is it better than this?" he asked, as he hauled in a big bluefish, while a bit of a squall tore his cap from his head and the lee rail dipped beneath the foaming water. And again I was silent.

The king of fish had been discovered, but the method of his capture was clumsy. The fish was all right, but the hunter all wrong. A new weapon or a new method was wanted and chance led me to both.



**HUNTING WITH A HARPOON**



## CHAPTER II

### HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

**T**HE little skiff lay motionless on the smooth surface of the river as I stood balanced on its bow, holding ready in my hand the light shaft of a tiny harpoon. I was peering beneath the bank, under overhanging mangroves, for the tarpon that I knew was there. I looked long and far, but vainly. With a half turn of my head I glanced back at the rigid form of my boatman, standing in the stern of the craft, motionless as a bronze statue save that a slight motion of his sculling hand held the skiff stationary in respect to the shore, while his eyes looked deep into the water beside me. It was flood tide on a calm day and the limpid water of greenish tinge, fresh from the Gulf, showed every rootlet and tiny shell on bank and bottom. I couldn't have missed the smallest

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

fish, yet I studied the depths again, from fifty feet ahead of me down to my very feet.

I was about to speak impatiently to my captain when there burst upon my sight, directly beneath the bow of the skiff and within two feet of its bottom, the huge form of a six-foot tarpon. I scarcely breathed as I slowly, so slowly, turned the point of my harpoon downward. The creature seemed to be floating in the air beneath me, with its every line distinct and almost within reach of my hand. I could make out the protruding jaw, the flexible armor plate that guarded the mouth, the round eye, and the silver cheek. Beneath my hand was the big bayonet fin, the like of which I had often followed for miles as it cleaved the surface of the shallow waters of the west coast. I could trace each four-inch plate that bulwarked the side of the tarpon and could have struck with my iron any one of the purple scales which followed its spine. Yet near as I was to the quarry I was helpless, for with the light pole in my hand I could not drive the barb of the little harpoon through the double armor of the great fish into the flesh beyond.



## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

I stood motionless for minutes, expecting every instant the wild dash of a frightened fish and hoping for a flying shot when it came. As I waited, the bank beside me as well as the tarpon seemed to glide slowly forward until the bayonet fin was eight feet from my hand and the harpoon which I threw with all my strength struck beside it and, slipping between the scales, was firmly lodged in the flesh of the fish.

After a single leap the tarpon started up the river like an express train, and had made a hundred yards before I had the line in my hands with the skiff under full headway. Then came a joyous, one-sided game. When the fish slackened its gait I took in line and brought the skiff nearer. From time to time the tarpon leaped high into the air and started off on a new tack. He carried us from one side to the other of the beautiful Rodger's River; in the shade of broad tamarind trees and beside towering Royal palms; along vine-covered oak-bearing banks and past a rotting plantation house, near the solitary grave of its former owner. The river was wide, free from snags, and the fish had no

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

chance of escape. I had only to handle the line carefully, paying it out to meet the quick rushes of the quarry and keeping a steady strain upon it at other times, and within an hour the tarpon would surely be in the skiff. Then came the "cut-off," which I had forgotten, but which the tarpon remembered and entered.

This was a deep, crooked creek, scarcely ten feet wide, which led to Broad River, only half a mile distant. Yet the creek twisted and turned, flowing a mile and a half to cover a scant half mile. Snags rose from the bottom and roots thrust out from the banks. Trees on opposite banks united their branches above, shrouding the stream with a cavelike gloom. Fat spiders had bridged it and sat in their festooned dens at just the height of my face. I was slapped in the eye by one and my face covered with its web as I entered the creek, holding to the line that led to the tarpon. I held the line taut and kept as near as possible to the fish, while the boatman jammed his oar into bank, trees, and snags in his attempts to follow the twists in the creek. Sometimes the skiff stranded on a half-submerged log, or caught in

## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

a low-hanging branch. Then I paid out line and called to the boatman to hurry, while he worked like mad to free the craft.

Often the fish was two turns in the creek ahead of us, with the line running against snags and through the branches of trees. Each instant there was danger of fouling the line, and once, when the fish was swimming through a tangle of brush, a nickel would have bought that tarpon. But the creature was considerate, and waited under an overhanging bank until we had cleared up the tangle. This was our last trouble for the creek soon widened, straightened, and opened into Broad River just below the bay of that name. The tarpon was as tired as we, and after a short run in the bay and two or three jumps that hardly lifted it above the surface, rolled over on its side and was taken into the skiff.

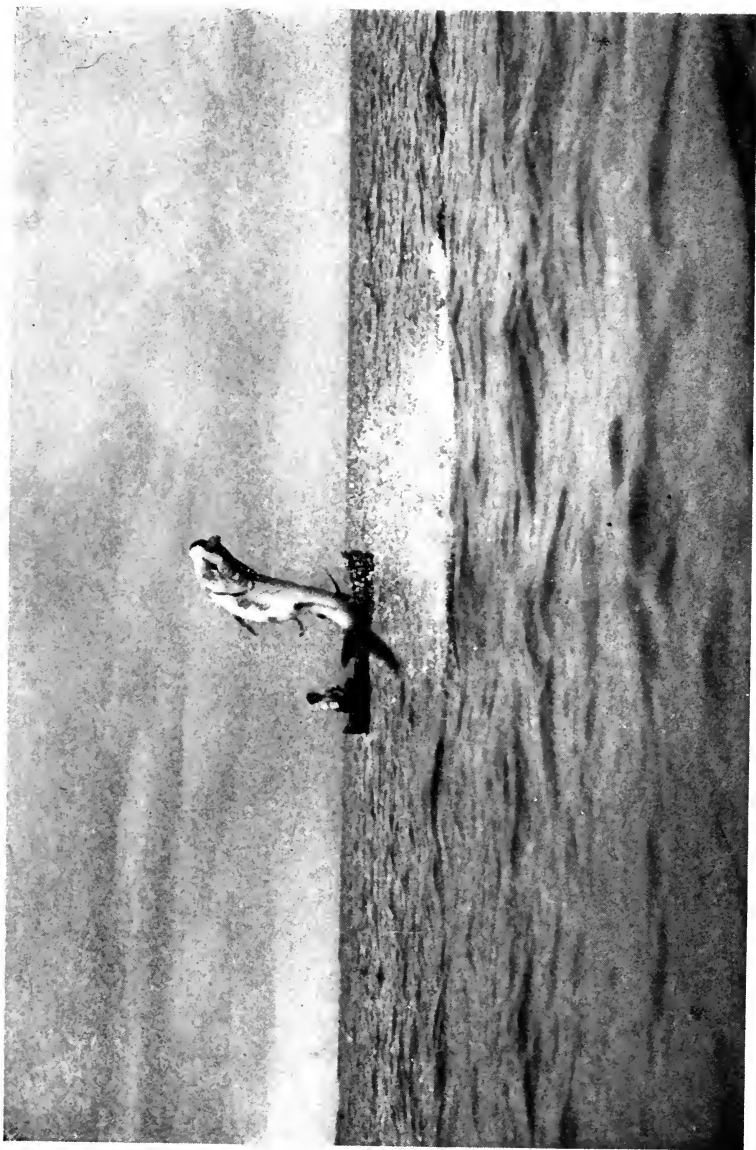
If you talk to a fisherman of high degree, of hunting tarpon with a harpoon, he will scoff at you and accuse you of being unsportsmanlike, both you and your methods. He may compare you with the poacher who spears his salmon by the light of a jack, or with the market hunter

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

who cares nothing how he gets his game, so that he gets it. He will explain to you that the delicacy and skill displayed in the capture of his game and the odds against which he contends constitute the test of true sportsmanship. His test is all right, but he doesn't apply it. To him tarpon fishing is a specialized sport, and he has paid his outfitter roundly for the conventional tools. To think now for himself would be futile as exploring the fourth dimension, or butting against syndicated government and standardized graft.

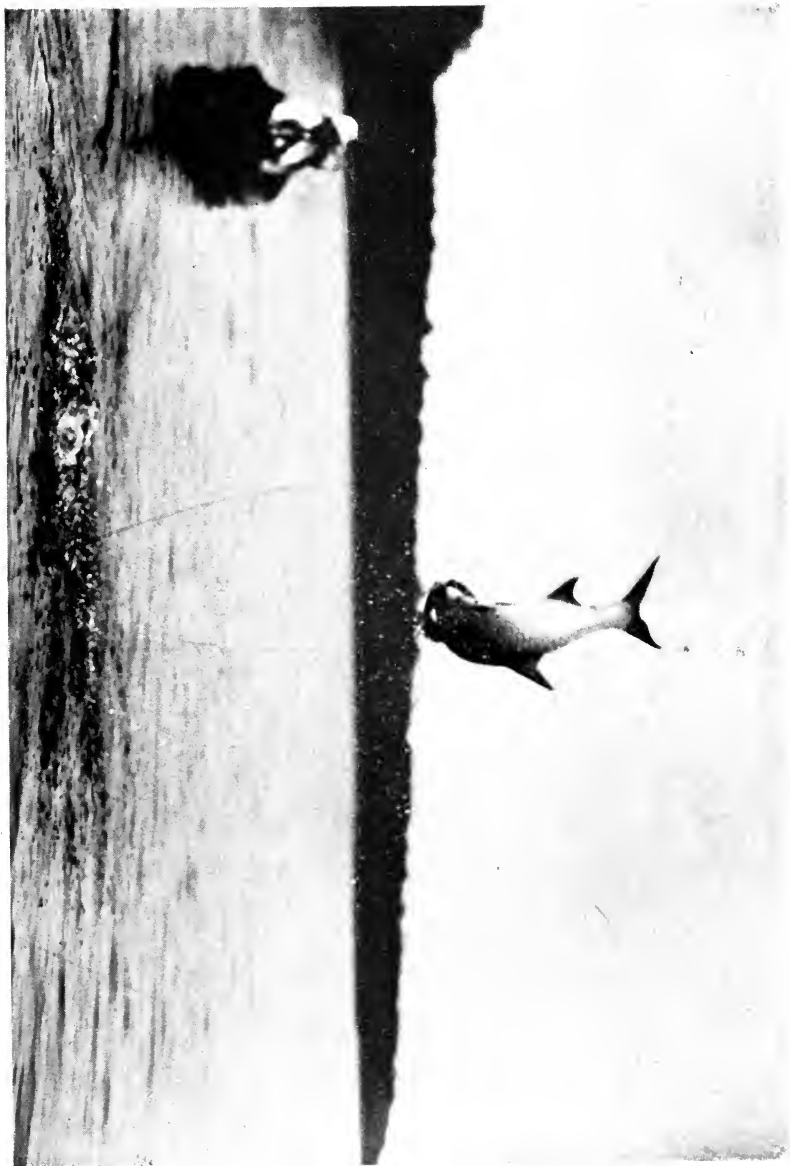
There is much sport in conventional tarpon fishing, but it is the joy of the outdoors, the pleasure of scenery and surroundings, and the picturesque fight against fate which the tarpon puts up. The sportsman, in his cushioned revolving chair, does nothing that a properly constructed wooden man couldn't do as well, and any good mechanic could devise a combination of cogs and springs that would beat him out of sight.

But the machine that hunts with a harpoon must be a machine that thinks. The hunter who successfully stalks a deer through the forest, or



THEN IN FURIOUS MOOD THREW HIS SUPPLE BODY, CONTORTED WITH PASSION,  
ABOVE THE WATER.

SIX FEET OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CREATURE THAT LIVES, CLAD IN GLISTENING SILVER MAIL.



## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

drops him in the open with his rifle at two hundred yards, seldom sits by a runway, while hounds run the quarry to him. The sportsman who can cut down the flushed partridge with his first barrel scorns to snare the creature. The difference of skill required between stalking and hounding a deer is great; between snap-shooting and snaring a partridge it is greater; but between successfully hunting a tarpon with a harpoon and catching it with rod and reel it is greatest.

The harpoon which I prefer is only five inches long, including the socket in which the pole is thrust. It is a plain, pointed shaft, of quarter-inch steel, with a single barb, an inch from the point. The harpoon pole is twelve feet long and one inch in diameter. A soft cotton line a hundred yards long and an eighth of an inch in diameter completes the outfit. One end of the line is fastened to a small, shallow tub in which it is loosely dropped, not coiled, while the other end is made fast to the harpoon. In tarpon hunting the tub is placed in the bow of the skiff, or canoe, in which the sportsman stands. Every inch gained in height is a distinct advantage, and

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

it is best for the hunter to place his left foot on the extreme bow of the skiff, resting the right upon the forward seat. With a light canoe one should stand on the bottom unless he happens to be an acrobat of parts.

With your harpoon ready for action, in your right hand, you sway to the motion of your craft as instinctively as you would balance a bicycle. With a silent, skilful boatman behind you there is no sound of paddle or sculling oar as the shores of the waters you explore glide past you. Within a score of years I thus spent a thousand hours, or perhaps twice that, exploring the waters of the west coast of Florida, from Cedar Keys to Cape Sable and from them to Miami. I followed rivers to their sources in the Everglades and the Big Cypress; drifted with the currents and was paddled or sculled about the ten times ten thousand keys of the Ten Thousand Islands, while my boatman's pole, paddle, or oar sounded the shallows and depths of the network of bays and lakes that extend from the Big Cypress Swamp on the north to the extreme end of the peninsula and even the keys beyond it. Every minute was full of in-



## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

terest, while no hour was without its excitement. Every sense was appealed to and gratified by the surroundings.

Often on the rivers fragrance filled the air from blossoms of magnolia, wild orange, lemon, and lime, or flowers of jessamine and leaves of myrtle and sweet bay. No longer are trees white with the snowy heron, but the brilliant plumage of the red bird and the song of the mocking bird are yet in evidence, while the majestic man-o'-war hawk often floats above one and, rarely, may be seen the most graceful bird that flies, the fork-tailed kite. Often a water-turkey excites your derision by tumbling clumsily from a tree into the water beside your canoe and invites your harpoon by swimming swiftly away beneath the surface of the water. If you yield to temptation and harpoon the bird the chances are about four out of five that you can discover a possible cause of its crazy freaks in the shape of a little worm in its brain, just beneath the top of its skull.

So many are the diversions in following the waterways that I have sometimes found it hard to keep on my job, and have been mortified by

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

the dash of an unseen tarpon from beneath the bow of my canoe.

Birds have been made shy and wild animals timid by the destroying tourist, but there is always life in the water and a continuous panorama moves before the eyes of the hunter as they search the depths before the canoe. In the crystal water from the great springs, in the clear streams from the Everglades and the inflowing tides when the Gulf is quiet, objects many feet beneath the surface are clearly defined. Fish, little and big, brilliant in color and strange of form, slow-moving and swift-darting, hold fast the attention of the sportsman. In the dark streams that flow from the Big Cypress or through mangrove swamps, and the turbid tidal waters when the Gulf has been stirred by a storm, little can be seen beneath the surface and the eye wanders afield, studying the spattering patch where a school of Spanish mackerel are dining, the sprightly play of a family of porpoises in the distance, the swaying fins of a predatory shark, or glimpsing the up-bobbing head of otter and turtle or the disappearing eye of the wary 'gator.



"BOCA GRANDE'S NO PLACE FOR A CANOE." OBJECTED THE CAPTAIN ANXIOUSLY.



YOU HAVE PULLED YOUR FRAGILE CANOE BE-  
SIDE A CREATURE THAT CAN KNOCK IT  
ENDWISE WITH A FLIP OF ITS TAIL.



YOU SOON LEARN TO PAY OUT THE LINE WITH-  
OUT LETTING IT SLIP.

## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

In the shallow water of Florida Bay, when the day is calm, the hunter with a harpoon may float seemingly in air above a garden of shells and sea-feathers, flowers of coral and sponges of strange shapes. Sometimes there glides beneath the craft a creature spotted like a leopard and beautiful as a butterfly, from one to eight feet across the back. It is called a whip-ray and the tail from which it takes its name is many feet long, smooth as ivory and slim as a coach whip. Attached to the base of the tail are half a dozen serrated daggers a blow from which might not kill you, but would probably make you wish you were dead. You could hardly miss the creature with your harpoon, and if you did strike and the barb of your little harpoon held in its tough hide, you would have a joyous ride till your line parted. But you must hold your hand and not waste your time when you are hunting tarpon.

Those ugly things, there are plenty of them, with the wicked eyes and cruel mouths, are sharks. If you strike one of them you will lose your harpoon, for the brute will roll upon your line for a couple of turns and bite it in two.

See those three big fins in tandem order sail-

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

ing majestically in the shoal water above that flat? They are worth looking into, just for curiosity. They belong to a fifteen-foot sawfish, and are just disappearing in the channel. We may find the creature, for it was heading this way. There it comes, gliding under the skiff! See the big weapon, four feet long, four inches wide, with fifty-two teeth, backed by near a thousand pounds of energy! Better not strike it, for it might strike back, and then where would be you and your canoe? Your craft would crumple like paper beneath the slash of that sword.

But there is what we are looking for, the bayonet fin of a tarpon! It is moving slowly through the water as the great fish seeks his prey. Your canoeman makes a circuit to get in the rear of the fish and cautiously approaches it. His paddling would do credit to an Indian, as foot by foot he nears the quarry. The tarpon is swimming high, showing the big dorsal fin and a foot of the back above water. The canoe is within thirty feet of the creature whose whole big body is of shining silver. The canoe scarcely gains an inch, you may never again have such a

## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

chance and how could you miss so brilliant and big a mark?

Perhaps your knees tremble a little and your heart thumps a good deal. Mine always do, and that is why I like to hunt tarpon with a harpoon. I don't get half as excited over an interview with a member of the deer family or even a black bear. Of course, grizzlies are another thing, because grizzlies are—different.

Better go slow with that tarpon. It looks large, but the really vulnerable part for your harpoon isn't much bigger than the back of an unabridged dictionary, and you couldn't hit that with a harpoon at thirty feet once in ten times. Try it on the grass at a stick of wood, and you will be convinced. I never met but three men who, with reasonable certainty, under the conditions named, could strike a tarpon at thirty feet, and of these three two are dead.

Your tarpon is nearer now, twenty-five, twenty-four, twenty-three feet. Yes! I know just how hard it is to wait, but stand your ground! When you do throw, hold your right hand well back toward the butt end of the pole, aim a little high, and as the pole leaves your hand give the

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

end a slight upward toss to produce a pitching effect. The fish is turning a bit to the left. This gives you a better target, unless it goes too far, when your iron will not penetrate the scales. Now it is a scant twenty feet. *Throw!* There is a crash in the water as the tarpon leaps before dashing away, and as you see the line streaming over the bow of the canoe you rejoice mightily and taking it in hand too earnestly acquire instantly a bunch of blisters that you will not be able to forget for days.

You soon learn to pay out the line without letting it slip, gripping it alternately with both hands as you get the canoe under way. The canoeman, having picked up the harpoon pole, helps with his paddle until the craft has taken up the gait of the fish. Thereafter you have the creature under control, paying line out when a sudden spurt puts too great a strain upon it and pulling the canoe up to the tarpon when you want more excitement. Careful, now! You are getting reckless and have pulled your fragile canoe beside a creature that can knock it endwise with a flip of its tail. Your boatman is sitting on the bottom of the canoe, trying to balance it



## HUNTING WITH A HARPOON

against your eccentric motions, and expecting to be wrecked any instant.

There! How do you like that? Another foot and the tarpon would have landed in the canoe. It happened to me not long ago. I pulled the canoe too near the fish when it shot ten feet in the air and, turning, came down head first on the side of the craft. There was a good deal of a mix-up, and we were so busy swimming ashore with canoe, paddles, and other things that were floating around that I forgot about the tarpon until I got hold of the line tub and found that the fish had pulled out the harpoon and escaped.

Look out! The tarpon touched the canoe that time. Better give it more line unless you want to swim. See that jump? Eight feet clear of the water, and I have seen them do twice that. It will be half an hour before you can draw your canoe beside the tarpon with safety. Then, as he lies exhausted beside you, a touch of your penknife blade will cut the bit of skin that holds the barb of your weapon and a moment later, with a flirt of his tail, your captive will start for home.

If you are not satisfied with the sport you

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

have had, you can hook your thumb in the tarpon's mouth, drag him over the side of the canoe, and you will get all you want. But it is better to be satisfied with what you have done—unless you care for a bath. You have had your sport for the day, your cruising boat may be miles away, but you are never too tired to stand in the bow of the canoe while your boatman paddles you home. You continue to study the water, perhaps throwing your harpoon occasionally at channel bass or smaller fish for practice and the pan. You count the day's work as done, yet it's dollars to doughnuts that if you catch the gleam of a tarpon's scale you will begin the day over again.

Hunting tarpon with a harpoon is several games rolled into one, and is the only sport I have known that never palled upon me for a moment. When I cease to enjoy it, it will be because it can no longer be said of me:

“His eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated.”

**RIDING THE BREAKERS**





A SIX-FOOT TARPON WAS AHEAD OF ME AND HIS CAVERNOUS MOUTH ENGLUFED MY MACKEREL.



THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF A MIX UP AND WE WERE BUSY SWIMMING ASHORE WITH THE CANOE, PADDLES AND OTHER THINGS.



THERE IS A CRASH IN THE WATER AS THE TARPON LEAPS BEFORE DASHING AWAY.

## CHAPTER III

### RIDING THE BREAKERS

**B**OCA GRANDE'S no place for a canoe!" objected the captain anxiously, as we paddled away, leaving him on the *Irene*, our cruising craft, which was safely anchored within the Big Pass.

The wind was strong from the west and breakers were thundering along the outer beach, but the incoming tide was strong, and through the deep channel of the mile-wide pass the smooth waves rolled without breaking. Here and there through the pass appeared patches of spattering water, marking places where shoals of minnows had been driven to the surface by bigger fish. Quickly gathering flocks of pelicans and gulls attacked the doomed little fish from above, sharks plowed the water beneath, and tarpon leaped among them, while swift and

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

true as the flight of an arrow, schools of fierce cavally were headed for the fray.

We paddled for the scene of biggest disturbance, which was near the middle of the channel. As we advanced the big waves, which had looked so smooth from a distance, became rolling hills down the sides of which we slid to the bottoms of deep valleys. From each of these we were smoothly lifted, up, up to the crest of a higher wave. Before we could reach them the last of the school of minnows we were chasing had been eaten and already the predatory birds and fish were busy with another bunch of their victims farther up Charlotte Harbor and an eighth of a mile distant. The wind was with us and the slackening tide still favorable, so a few minutes brought us to the battle-ground.

Leaving control of the canoe to the Camera-man, who sat in the stern, I took in my paddle and, picking up the tarpon rod, cast the bait into the midst of the fray. As it touched the water it was seized by a big cavally, known to the Florida fisherman as jack-fish. The fish was about a twelve-pounder, of much strength and activity, and it quickly ran out a hundred feet



## RIDING THE BREAKERS

of my line. I was kneeling in a cranky canoe with less than five inches of freeboard among waves that tossed it like a bubble. Several times I reeled the fish close to the canoe, but each time the toss of a wave kept me from landing it. When at last I had succeeded in taking it aboard, unhooking and casting it out, half an hour had been lost and the nearest flock of birds that were fishing was a quarter of a mile up the bay.

The fish had scattered when we reached the school and I made many casts in vain. A small jack-fish bit off most of the strip of mullet which I was using as bait and as I was reeling in the line a Spanish mackerel seized what was left, including the hook. One doesn't play a baby fish on a tarpon rod, and swinging the mackerel to the side of the canoe I put out my hand to take it aboard.

But a six-foot tarpon was ahead of me, and his cavernous mouth engulfed my mackerel, while his shining, silvery scales grazed the side of the canoe as his great bulk shot six feet in the air. In the surprise of the moment I lost control of my reel and when I regained it and put

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

on the brake the fish responded by shooting out of the water fully two hundred feet away. The drag of the canoe was nothing to the tarpon which took the inside course down the bay for Captiva Pass. He passed Mondongo and was opposite Joseppi when he changed his mind and turned back toward the Big Pass.

I could do nothing to check the fish, for whenever I took in line I brought the canoe nearer the tarpon and started him off afresh. Gaily he traveled, with occasional frisky leaps in the air, for he was outward bound and rejoiced in the trouble preparing for us. When he reached Boca Grande Pass the fish started to cross it, heading straight for the lighthouse on its northern side.

The waves had doubled in size since we struck the tarpon, for the tide had turned and the piled up waters of Charlotte Harbor from Pine Island to Punta Gorda and from Gasparilla to Captiva were scurrying back to the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Big Pass. Our course was in the trough of the sea, and I had to reduce the strain on the line that the canoe might quarter the crested billows. Higher rose the waves as



"THERE IS A SHARK AT THE END OF THIS LINE!"



HE WAS OUTWARD BOUND AND REJOICED IN THE  
TROUBLE PREPARING FOR US.



DRAG HIM OVER THE SIDE OF THE CANOE AND  
YOU WILL GET ALL THE FUN YOU WANT.

## *RIDING THE BREAKERS*

the tide flowed more swiftly and our progress became less while the line ran low on the reel. I was glad when it reached the end and parted, for the canoe had ceased to be manageable by a single paddle. Two hundred yards to the west of us the incoming rollers met the outrushing flow from the pass in shallow water, and a line of roaring breakers tossed foam and spray high in the air. Laying down my rod, I picked up the paddle and soon we were riding the big waves easily as we paddled briskly away from the line of breakers. Yet the roar of the surf grew louder as we progressed, filling my ears, when a great wave burst beside us, sprinkling spray and foam over the canoe.

I turned at a shout from the Camera-man and looked upon the main line of breakers, less than fifty yards distant. The current of the pass had beaten our best efforts. It was useless to fight it and our only hope lay in carrying the canoe through the breakers. We had scarcely time to turn our craft before a breaking wave was upon us. Solid water struck the canoe and lifted its bow to an angle of forty-five degrees, while a dash of foam blinded my eyes for a moment.

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

My weight rested on the thwart behind me as I knelt, or I should have fallen backward. Up, up, I rose, until, toppling on the crest of the wave, I looked across a deep valley to another wall which was rushing toward me. Then came a plunge into the chasm beyond me, with a toss at the end which reminded me of the boys' game "cracking the whip" and of occasions when I had been the cracker. The waves were too short to be taken squarely, but we soon found the angle that suited our craft and rose and fell as we crossed them, with little jar.

The strong current that caused the big breakers helped us quickly through them and we found ourselves rising and falling on the incoming rollers with a motion like the gentle rocking of a cradle. The waves about us had ceased to break and we paddled north well out of the sweep of the main current from the pass. Between us and the shore were long lines of breakers sweeping slowly to Gasparilla Island and sending spray and spume far up the beach. The Camera-man bailed out the few gallons of water we had taken aboard and we paddled a mile up the coast in search of an easy landing place, but

## RIDING THE BREAKERS

everywhere seven lines of breakers formed between us and the beach. We passed three without trouble, but backed the canoe before the fourth which sent up columns of water and foam that shut out the view of the island we were approaching.

As the broken wave rolled on and the following one lifted us to its crest we caught sight of our captain standing with a group on the beach and waving his arms to motion us back. We paddled outside of the breakers again and were hailed by a passing sponger and asked if we wanted help. When I thanked the skipper and told him we needed none, he asked: "What are you doing out here in that cockle shell?"

"Looking for a job to pilot a sponger," I replied.

The skipper laughed as he said: "Your friends on the beach think you need one yourself. They are signaling as if they were crazy."

I assured him they were and, dipping my paddle in the water, thanked him again for his courtesy while he threw over his wheel and with a genial "Ta, ta!" continued his course down the coast.

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

"It's up to us to do something," said the Camera-man. "Shall we run the breakers and get a ducking when we land, or paddle up to Gasparilla and try the pass?"

"We told the sponger we were pilots and pilots don't beach their boats, if they can help it, so let's take it easy up the coast."

Before we had made many strokes we were stopped by a devil-fish which, rising to the surface with its broad wings extended, presented a living barrier to our passage, more than eighteen feet wide. The wide-open mouth before the bow of the canoe was big enough for us to have paddled through, but we made no movement in that direction. The great wings rose and fell slowly, tossing water in the air with their tips, while the flippers beside the monster's mouth rolled and unrolled as they made and unmade the curved horns which gave the creature its name.

We watched the devil-fish and the devil-fish watched us. We sat quietly, afraid that if we frightened him he might smash us and our craft with a blow of one of those powerful wings. What the devil-fish feared would happen if he





SENDING HOOK AND BAIT FLYING TWENTY FEET INTO THE AIR.



HUNTING TARPON WITH A HARPOON IS SEVERAL  
GAMES ROLLED INTO ONE.



THE REALLY VULNERABLE PART FOR YOUR HAR-  
POON ISN'T MUCH BIGGER THAN THE BACK  
OF AN UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY.

## RIDING THE BREAKERS

frightened us we shall never know. The great body sank slowly until it was several feet beneath the surface when a mighty stroke of the wings of the creature sent against us a column of water that nearly capsized our canoe.

As we paddled up the coast we passed pelicans rising and falling on the surface of the slow-moving rollers that swept under them. Often a long bill was thrust deep into the water and the next instant pointed at the zenith, holding a struggling fish athwart-ship. With a deft toss the quarry was sent up in the air and descending head first landed in the fisher's pouch. Tarpon leaped fearlessly around us, knowing, perhaps, that one of their number had possessed himself of our only tarpon line.

At Gasparilla Pass the tide was still running out and the big waves broke across it, but the channel was shallow and narrow, the current not strong, and the breakers half the height of the waves of Boca Grande. The passage of the pass was delightful enough to mark with red letters a season's vacation. We held the canoe on the front of a wave through successive breakings, when it tossed us about and covered us with

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

foam, until it hurled the craft through the narrow pass and within the shelter of its banks.

Standing on the point of the beach south of the pass, where the incoming waves swept above his knees, was our captain, while behind him, just out of the wash of the water, stood the lighthouse keeper and another. Our welcome as we landed was warm and true, but the first to speak was the keeper of the light:

“Your captain wanted to go for you in the skiff when he saw you drifting into the breakers, but I stopped him. Told him he’d only help drown you, that nothin’ less than a life boat could live in that smother. You oughter heard him yell when you went over that first big breaker like a bubble. ‘They’re goin’ to pull through,’ said he, ’nd I yelled a little myself.”

“What made you motion us back when we had started for the beach?” I asked.

“That was more of Cap.’s foolishness. He said there was a schooner comin’ down the coast that ’ud pick you up, but I told him that you wouldn’t be picked up.”

“So he did,” interrupted the captain. “He said that any boat that could ride those breakers

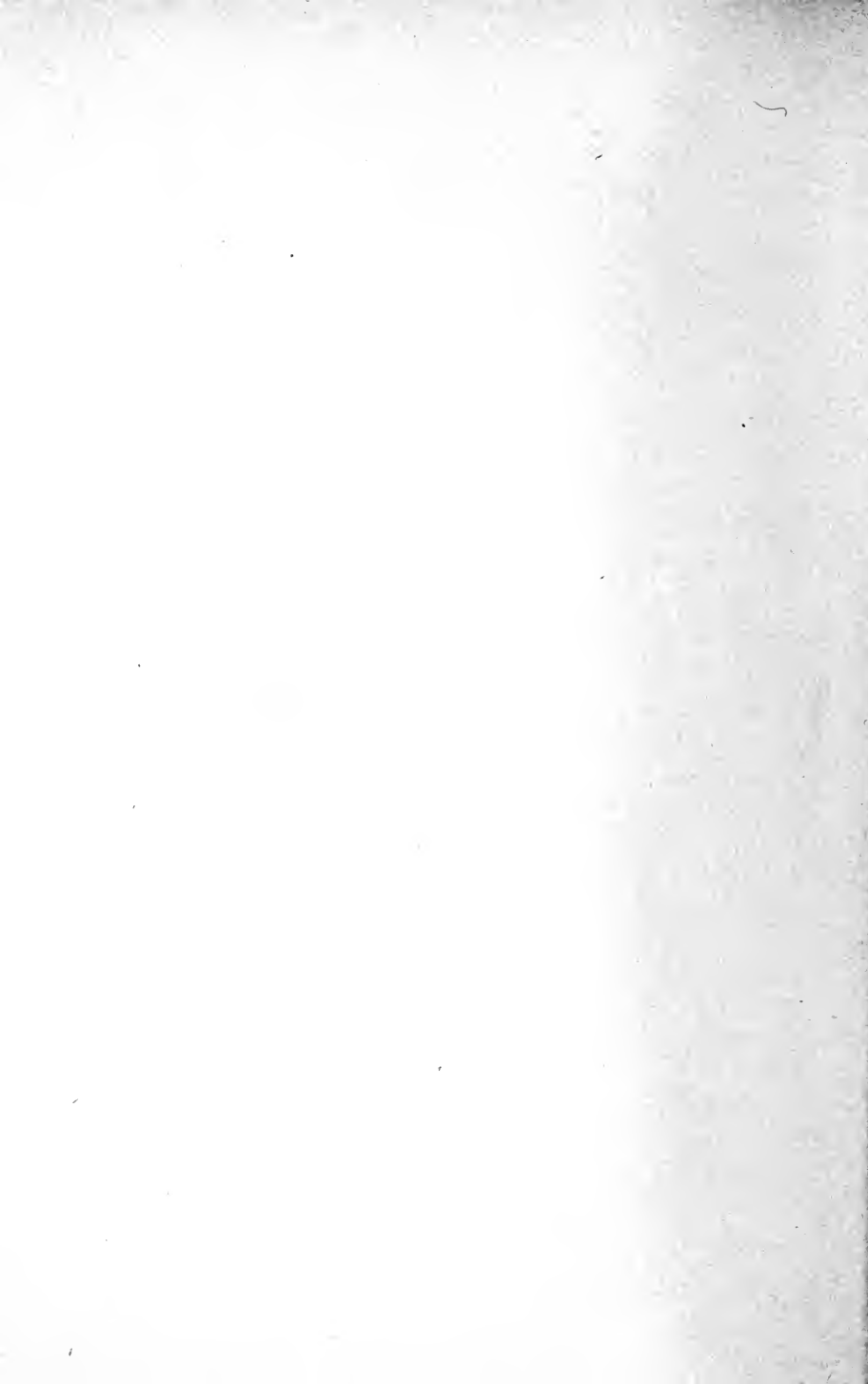
## *RIDING THE BREAKERS*

at Boca Grande could come through this little surf by itself if all its crew was asleep."

We paddled down Charlotte Harbor under the lee of Gasparilla Island in water so smooth that the Camera-man said it made him seasick. When we reached our cruising boat it was near the last of the ebb tide and the black stream from the Peace River flowing out of the Big Pass kept within the emerald walls of the Gulf water as a river between its banks.

A little later the tide turned and the incoming flow from the Gulf brought rolling porpoises, leaping tarpon, and hideous sharks through the now smooth waters of the treacherous pass. The Camera-man proposed that we go in search of the tarpon we had lost, but I quoted to him:

"A sportsman stops when he has had enough," and told him that I had had enough for the day.



**SHARKS AS FISHERMEN**





## CHAPTER IV.

### SHARKS AS FISHERMEN

**I**F you're going to fish in Boca Grande," said the captain, "I want to go with you, or else have a life boat to go after you in. If you fellers get drowned and I don't, everybody on the coast'll blame me."

"Don't worry," I replied, "We'll give you an even chance. We are going to fish for the camera after this. Will you paddle the canoe for me or run the *Green Pea* for the Camera-man?"

"Let Joe run the motor boat. He can do it as well as I, but he isn't used to a canoe."

"You want to be in the fishing, but there won't be any long range business about this. The tarpon and the canoe have got to be together, as nearly as possible, and we are sure to be swamped sometimes."

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

"I know all about that and I like to swim. Shall we run up to Punta Gorda for the *Green Pea*, this morning? Tide'll help us both ways if we get off soon."

The *Green Pea* was a little skiff, short and wide with a broad rudder and a tiny motor with reverse gear. It was built for the Camera-man who sat in the bow with camera and plates while the boy in the stern, controlling motor and rudder, backed and filled and almost turned the craft on its center as he placed it wherever directed.

When we returned from Punta Gorda the captain advised anchoring in a cove south of Boca Grande, saying, "We're goin' to have a nor'wester and may need some trees to tie to. The *Irene* isn't a deep water boat."

"What makes you think we are going to have a nor'wester?"

"Feel it in my bones."

"But that is all nonsense," said I. "It's only a guess of yours and a bad one."

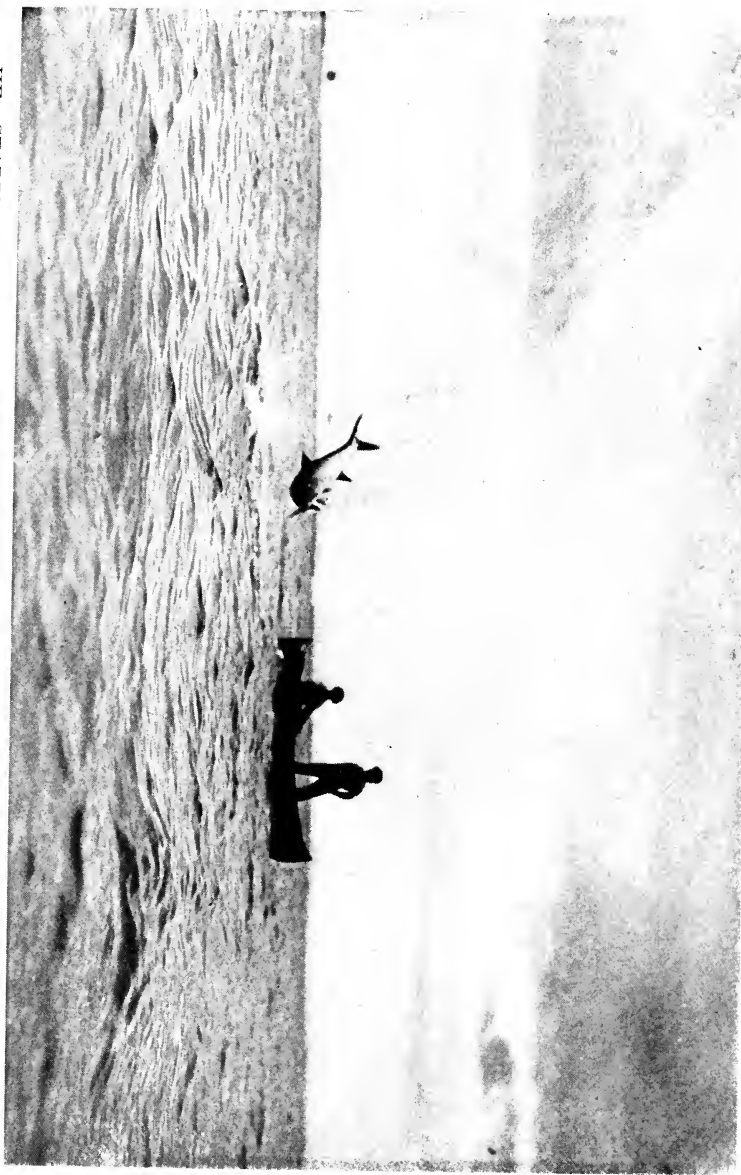
"Bet you a dollar the wind blows a gale from the nor'west all day to-morrow!"

"The only reason I won't bet is because I



DOING ACROBATIC STUNTS THAT MADE ONE DIZZY TO LOOK AT.

HE STARTED AWAY WITH RENEWED VIGOR WHILE I WAS NEARLY EXHAUSTED.



## SHARKS AS FISHERMEN

don't wish to rob you, for to-morrow is going to be fair."

But the captain guessed right and the *Irene* stayed in the cove for two days while we beach-combed and watched the big rollers chase over the beach into the woods beyond. The gale increased and the captain carried a cable ashore and made it fast to a tree.

"I haven't been in a hurricane on this coast. Do you suppose we are going to have one?" I asked him.

"Can't have a hurricane with a high b'rometer, and this isn't the season for 'em. This is a nor'-wester, just as I told you it would be."

"You tie to a tree for this. What do you do in a hurricane?"

"Do nothin'. The wind does it all. You just lie low till it's over, and then if you are alive and your boat hasn't been blown too far back in the woods, you figure on how to get her afloat again."

After the nor'wester had subsided we anchored in the harbor just north of the Big Pass and were welcomed by a band of graceful man-o'-war hawks. Some of them soared two thou-

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

sand feet above us, sweeping in great circles, rising, falling, and curving to right or left, moving their wings no more than does a monoplane. Others of the flock flew low, circling almost within reach of our hands, displaying their tiny legs and tremendous wings and inviting us to throw scraps of food on the water to see how gracefully they could pick them up. They made exhibition of their skill as aviators by swooping in turn on a school of little fish and capturing their quarry without wetting their feet. The little fish, in their turn, displayed qualities of reason, or instinct, by fleeing for protection to the side of the *Irene*.

As the outgoing tide ran low, porpoises, tarpon, sharks, and other predatory fish rolled, leaped, and darted about in the channels on their way to the Gulf from their hunting ground in the harbor. A hundred yards east of us came a tarpon's high leap, five times in every minute, and we put off in motor boat and canoe, which we anchored thirty feet apart near where the tarpon had been rising.

The Camera-man trained his seventeen-pounder on the canoe while I let my bait trail

## SHARKS AS FISHERMEN

aft with the tide. It had scarcely cleared the canoe when it was caught by a six-foot tarpon which shot more than its length clear of the surface of the water. It nearly swamped the canoe as it fell, only to rise again a few seconds later. This time the fish grazed the *Green Pea* and sent several gallons of water over the Camera-man and his weapon, at the same time sending hook and bait flying twenty feet into the air.

Ten minutes later I had another strike, but the tarpon was fifty feet from the canoe when he jumped and fully three hundred by the time the captain had the anchor aboard and the canoe pointed for the fish. I put little strain on the line, though the captain paddled hard, until the motor boat anchor was up and the Camera-man approaching. Then the paddling became fierce. I put a twenty-pound strain on the line and I worked the handle of my reel as if it had been a windlass. Soon we were over the frightened tarpon which leaped beside us three times in such quick succession that there was only one chance for the camera.

I supposed I had tired the tarpon as much as myself, but he started away with renewed vigor

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

while I was nearly exhausted. He leaped time after time at the end of the hundred yards of line I had lost to him. The Camera-man was unhappy over the loss of so much good material and I was chagrined at my failure to hold the fish. The captain warned us that we were being carried towards the breakers and would be among them in two minutes.

"But these are only baby breakers, compared to those we pulled through," said I.

"The canoe is all right," he replied. "It's the *Green Pea* I'm thinking of."

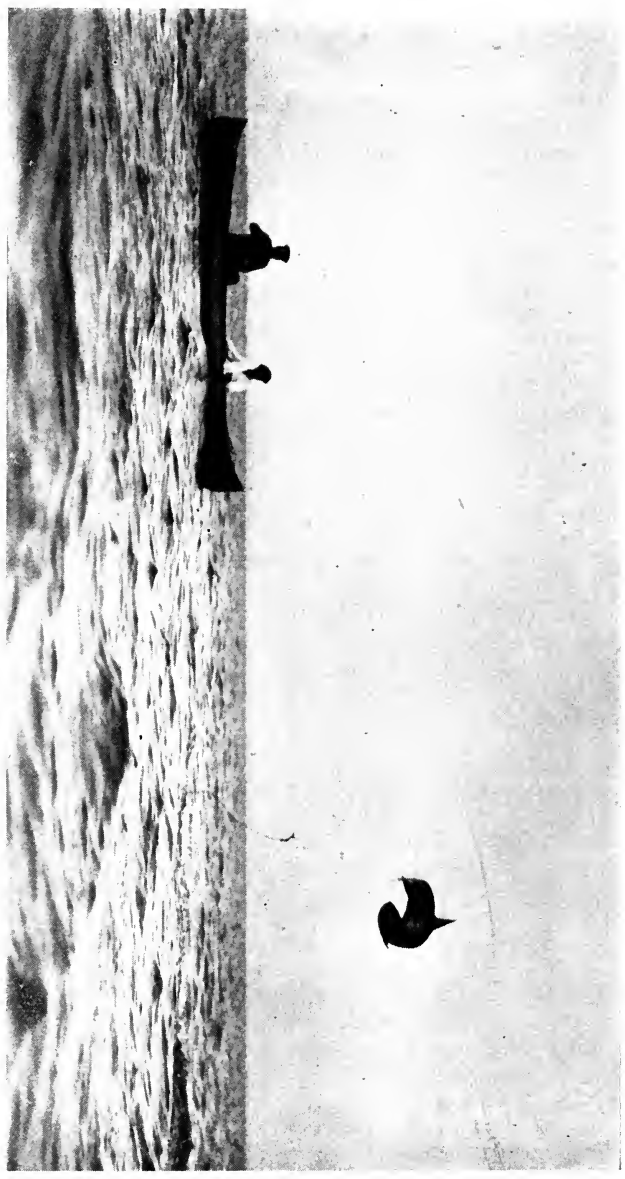
But the *Green Pea* refused to leave us and soon both boats were being tossed about by the rough water where the rollers from the Gulf met the tide from the pass. The canoe rode the waves as gracefully as a swan might have done, but the motor boat pounded badly and couldn't be kept in position for photographing. The tarpon jumped several times without giving the camera a chance while water from every wave splattered over it. Soon the fish became too feeble to jump half its length out of water and as the end was so near the Camera-man started for shore. As the *Green Pea* made slow prog-





THE LAST OF THE SCHOOL OF MINNOWS WE  
WERE CHASING HAD BEEN EATEN.

THE TARPON WAS FIFTY FEET FROM THE CANOE WHEN HE JUMPED.



## SHARKS AS FISHERMEN

ress against the current it was headed for the shoal water outside near the lighthouse beach.

The tarpon made a final spurt, of which I had not thought it capable, but I finally drew the canoe beside it. Taking the shank of the hook in my left hand I was cutting it free from the tarpon's jaw when the open mouth of a monster from beneath the canoe slipped over the body of the fish and, closing, cut it in two. The water that was thrown over me was mixed with blood and as I threw myself backward I nearly fell from the canoe, which took in many gallons of water. In our attempt to balance the cockle shell we careened it so far that the captain went overboard to save the craft from capsizing. A moment later he was swimming beside it, resting one hand on the gunwale, not for support but to steady the canoe.

"Climb aboard quick, Captain, while I balance the canoe!" I shouted, thinking of the great shark that had room enough left in his stomach to accommodate a man.

"Can't do it without swamping you. You paddle for the beach outside the pass. I'll hang on here and swim with you."

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

I paddled as if for life, with the vision of the shark-tarpon tragedy fresh in my mind. I reminded myself that no shark had ever been known to attack a living human being in North American waters, but I could not shut out the sight of those cruel jaws closing through the living body of the big fish. I tried to talk cheerfully to the captain to keep the grisly specter from his mind, but my breath was wasted for he didn't hear me and he remarked to me afterwards:

"I ain't often afraid of sharks, but I was scared blue that time. I kept thinkin' of that tarpon and every time I kicked I could feel the shark behind me. I didn't say anything, 'cause I was afraid of frightenin' you, but you bet I was glad when we got among the breakers in the shallow water."

The beast of a shark chased me around all that night and the captain confessed at breakfast that it had bitten him in two a few times.

We resolved to keep out of the pass when the big waves were breaking across it, even though we had to cut loose from a promising tarpon. Our good resolution was like those made on the

## SHARKS AS FISHERMEN

last day of one year only to be broken on the first of the year that followed.

The next tarpon was a dashing youngster of about four and a half feet in length, but it spent most of its time in the air doing acrobatic stunts that made one dizzy to look at. We were carried back and forth across the pass, then inland to near Mondongo and out to the beginning of the breakers. In half an hour the fish had worn itself out and its leaps above the surface became few and feeble. Soon it only lifted its back out of water and I was drawing the canoe beside it to remove the hook from its mouth, when the tarpon revived and rushing away made successive leaps with nearly its original vigor. As it dashed about I was kept busy with the reel, until it finally settled down to a strong, steady pull toward the breakers. Then the fish turned and headed up the main channel of Charlotte Harbor, sullenly swimming near the bottom. There were a few rushes, but no leaps and the line was carried back and forth without life, though with a strength that seemed resistless. It was long before I suspected what had happened and then I turned to the captain:

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

“Did you ever know a tarpon to change into a shark?”

“Never saw it till yesterday.”

“Well, it has happened again. There is a shark at the end of this line.”

“Must be so,” said the captain. “I thought of that when the fish started up that way after he was played out, but I didn’t see any splash when he was grabbed. Reckon the shark drove him to the bottom and got him there.”

“The story books say that a shark has to get under its prey and then turn over to seize it.”

“Turn over nothin’! That shark didn’t turn over yesterday when it took aboard a tarpon as big as you. Don’t you remember that big leopard shark inside Pavilion Key that bit the tail off a porpoise that was hangin’ in the riggin’? That feller didn’t turn over. He came straight for the porpoise and lifted his head two feet out of water and bit like a man.”

The shark, for it was a shark, became logy at last and yielded to the steady strain of the line, but made occasional forays to show us how easily he could get away. We worked the brute over to the shallow water of the bank just inside



"I WANT TO SIT ALL THE AFTERNOON ON A SOFT  
CUSHION IN A DRY CANOE WITHOUT  
ANY FISHING TACKLE."



FOR AN INSTANT THE GREAT BULK HUNG DIRECTLY OVER ME.



IT TAKES SKILL TO HANDLE CANOE AND TARPON AT THE SAME TIME.



## *SHARKS AS FISHERMEN*

the lighthouse pier. A shark is helpless in shoal water and we soon had ours stranded where we could wade out to him with a club and a strong line. Even a Brahmin couldn't look into the cold, glassy, cruel eyes of a shark without rejoicing at the chance to pound its head into a pulp with a big club. We held an autopsy on the beach and regretted that our rescue of the tarpon we had avenged was too late to be of service to the creature.

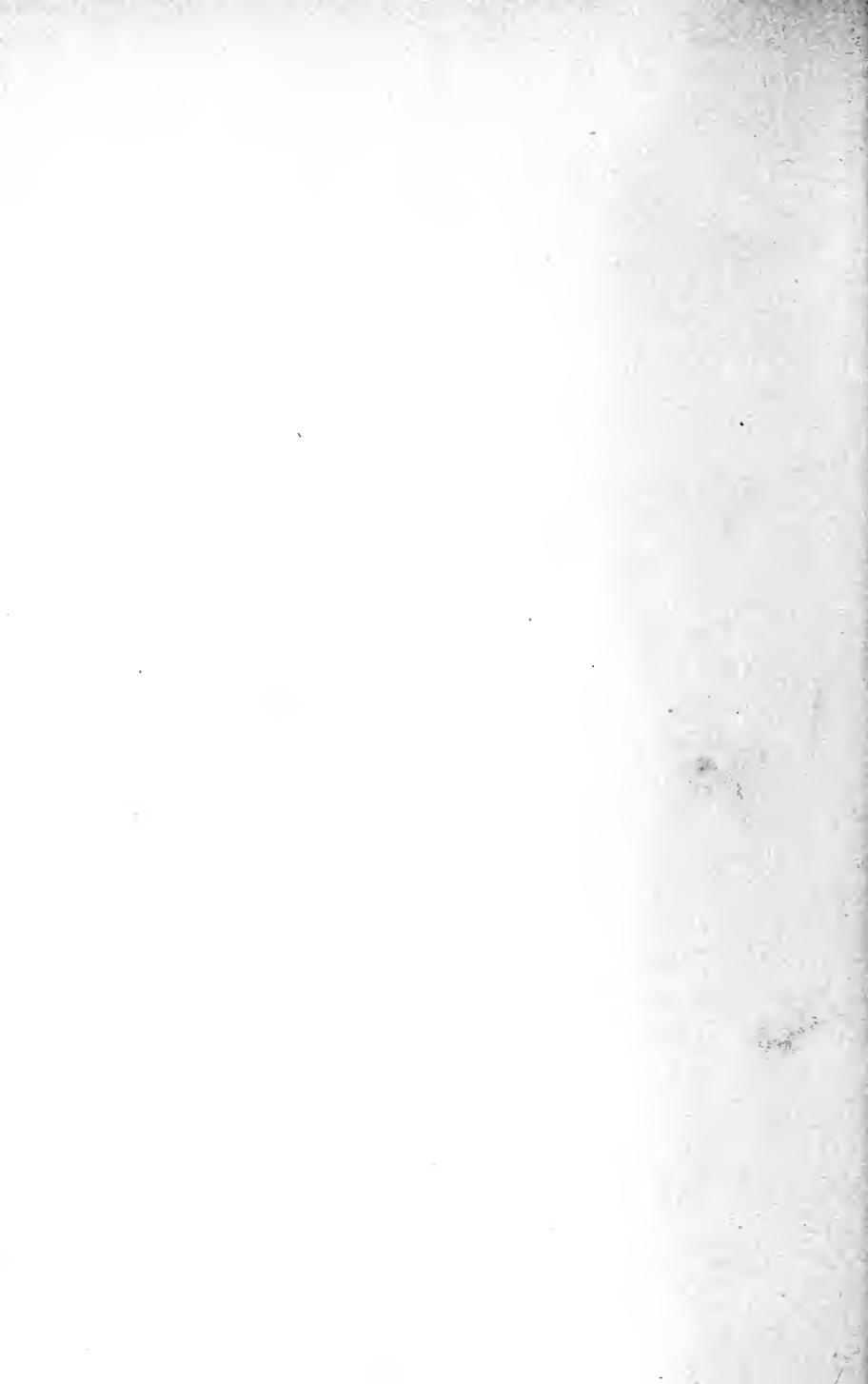
On the last night of our stay at Boca Grande the tarpon community celebrated our coming departure by a spectacular display. The whole harbor was filled with micro-organisms that made the water luminous. Every fish that moved left a trail like a falling star and when a great school was disturbed the effect was that of a lake of fire. All the tarpon in the harbor were at play and each flash of light from a bunch of frightened fish was followed by a column of fire which burst into a rocket-like shower of sparks as a great tarpon shot into the air.

We got in the canoe with a tarpon rod and trailed the bare hook on the surface of the bay. But the rivulet of fire in our wake and the blaz-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

ing pools beneath our paddles swallowed up the little light that streamed from the hook. A handkerchief was torn in two and half of it tied to the hook. Before it trailed a minute a tarpon had it and in half an hour we had the tarpon. In that half hour, before we released the fish, we rode in a chariot of fire. We gridironed the pass with lines of light and sailed beside a score of fountains of fire. Three times we played the game and only stopped when an outgoing tide met an incoming breeze which broke the surface of the water until the whole pass from the lighthouse to the opposite shore was covered with billows of flame.

**THE GIRL'S DAY.**



## CHAPTER V

### THE GIRL'S DAY

**T**HE Girl will arrive at Boca Grande on Friday the thirteenth, prepared to resume command of the *Irene*—and her family.”

“What’s to be done?” said I to the Camera-man, after showing him the foregoing. “We can’t trust the child so near the Big Pass, with that canoe at hand.”

“Better run down to Captiva. That’s a lady-like pass with plenty of fishing. The child couldn’t get into trouble there if she tried.”

That night we anchored just south of Captiva Pass and in the morning took her ladyship from the little mail boat that plies between Fort Myers and Punta Gorda.

“What made you come away from Boca

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Grande after I wrote that I would join you there?" inquired the Girl in her severest manner.

"We thought you would like to go around in the canoe and the Big Pass is too rough for that. We are going to give you a chance to take a tarpon in Captiva Pass this morning."

But the tarpon wouldn't be taken. We took the Girl out in the canoe and anchored it fifty feet from the whirlpool on the south side of the pass. Here the swift tide, striking masses of coral rock in the bottom of a deep pool, comes swirling to the surface like a miniature maelstrom. This pool is a playground for tarpon, which rise to the surface to blow sometimes a dozen in a minute. They are not looking for food and will knock aside the baited hook that floats over them as they rise. We trolled our most seductive lures across the pool, we weighted and sunk them to the depths below without getting a rise.

"How far is it to Boca Grande?" asked the Girl.

"Six miles up the coast, outside, may be a little farther by way of the harbor."

## THE GIRL'S DAY

"The Gulf is smooth as a mill pond. Let's go up that way."

We paddled out of the pass and turned up the coast, keeping a stone's throw outside the slight surf where the smooth waves rolled up the wide beach. The azure sky was cloudless, the sun sent vertical rays from the zenith, from which our broad-brimmed hats shaded us, the slowly undulating, mirror-like surface of the water half-hypnotized as it lifted and lowered us, and the dip of our paddles grew slower until a laugh from the Girl aroused us. She had been humming the Canadian Boat Song, to the measure of which we had listened by the hour in waters two thousand miles away. Our strokes kept time with the murmured music which slowly slackened until, when the laugh of the Girl awakened us, we were barely moving through the water.

As I quickened my stroke a four-pound fish leaping over the bow of the canoe struck the handle of my paddle and fell at my knees.

"What kind of fish is that and what made it jump into the canoe?" exclaimed the Girl.

"It is a pompano, the finest food fish in the

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

world, and it jumped into the canoe because it is time for lunch. They always come aboard exactly at noon. I have often set my watch by them."

While I was speaking, the Camera-man turned the canoe toward the shore and we ran through the light surf till the canoe touched the sand when, stepping overboard, we ran it high up on the beach.

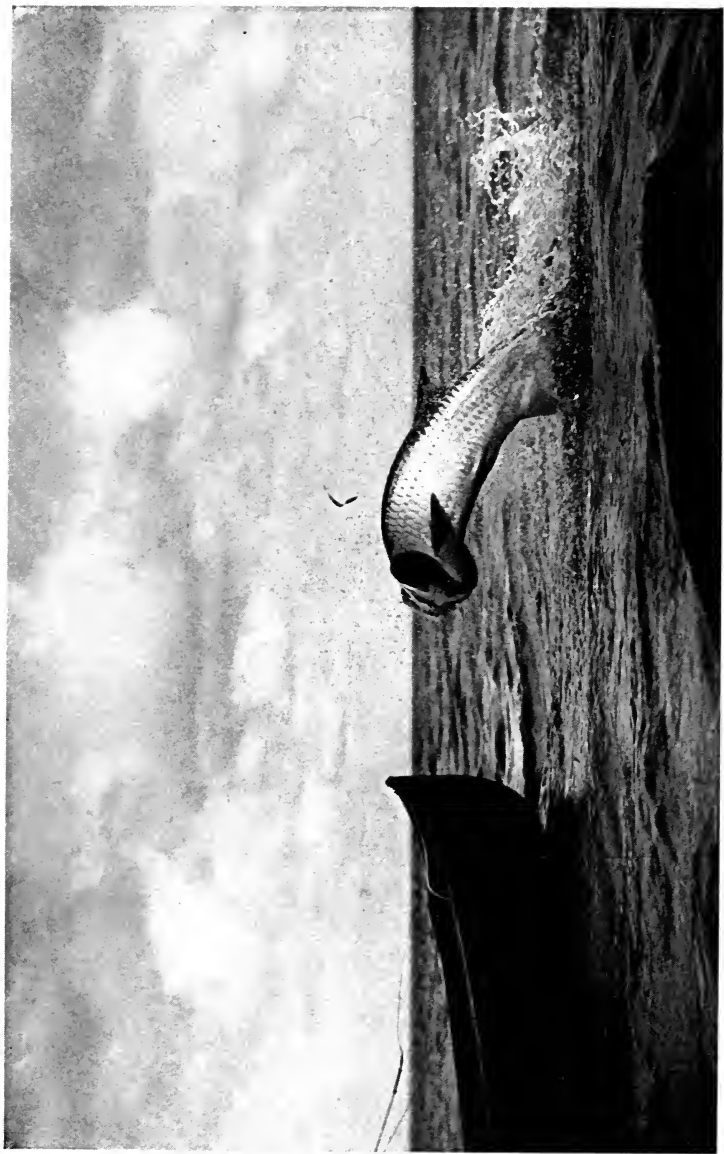
"That was very nicely done," said the Girl, "and if only I had a frying-pan and a fire and a little lard and a few dishes I'd cook that fish, for I am so hungry."

"What did you suppose we came ashore for, child? We are going to eat that pompano down to its very last bone."

"How will you cook it? You haven't a frying-pan or a portable kitchen about you."

"I wouldn't insult a fish of that high character by frying it. It is to be broiled and the process will begin before it is through flapping. Every old camper carries all the kitchen things that are ever needed in the woods and I have them—a filled match box and a little bag of salt. So you can get busy setting the table."





WITHIN AN HOUR, THE TARPON LEAPED OUT OF THE WATER A SCORE OF TIMES.

WE SPENT THE HOUR ON A LITTLE KEY WHICH COVERED BUT THE FRACTION OF AN ACRE.



## THE GIRL'S DAY

"Where is the china closet?"

"In that palmetto scrub. You couldn't ask for better plates than palmetto fans and I'll make you some chop-sticks or forks, whichever you prefer. If you eat fish with a knife, which is the local custom, I can recommend some of those thin, sharp shells."

After the pompano had been eaten, to its ultimate bone, the Camera-man launched the canoe and the Girl was offered her choice of wading through the surf, or being carried. Her choice was the wise one and we resumed our course up the coast.

The waters of the Gulf are alive in summer, filled with finny tribes that eat and are eaten. A school of Spanish mackerel followed their prey so near the canoe that we were spattered with water from their leaps. Porpoises rolled slowly at our side, sometimes lifting high their heads, turning bright eyes upon us, and dashing away in pretended alarm. Prudent pompano swam well inshore and, knowing it was past the lunch hour, avoided the canoe. Single pelicans, flying heavily overhead, dropped clumsily, with sprawling wings and legs, into the water near us.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Awkward though they appeared, they seldom missed their prey. When we reached Boca Grande a mighty flood swept us swiftly and smoothly toward Charlotte Harbor, while tarpon leaped high in air and smaller fish sported around us.

"Is this the pass that was too rough for me to come to?" inquired the Girl.

"Same pass, but on its good behavior, which doesn't happen often," said I.

"May I fish in the pass, now that it is good?"

"Yes, if you'll sit still on the bottom of the canoe, whatever happens."

"I won't move, unless a tarpon comes aboard."

"That's more likely to happen than you think."

A sinker had been fastened to the line for the last few casts in Captiva Pass and when the Girl dropped the hook overboard as we drifted it sank swiftly for some ten fathoms.

"Something is hold of the line!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Caught in the rocks I——"

I never finished the sentence, for a great body shot out of the water, grazing the starboard side

## THE GIRL'S DAY

of the canoe as it rose, up, up, ten feet over my head. With a vicious shake of its open jaws it sent bait and hook flying a hundred feet through the air. For an instant the great bulk hung directly over me and I saw that the wreck of the canoe was inevitable. Then turning in the air it plunged downward, striking the water a foot clear of the craft on its port side. "The way of an eagle in the air" is not more wonderful to me than was the side shift of that tarpon as it hung above me. I saw it then, as I have seen it at other times, but the physics of the thing is a mystery to me.

The tarpon had deluged us as it rose beside the canoe and we were kneeling in water as we paddled for the La Costa side of the Big Pass. Not a word was uttered until we neared the shore, when the plaintive voice of the Girl reached me:

"I think I behaved pretty well. I'm sitting in a puddle, but I haven't moved."

"You did behave beautifully and I am proud of you."

"I suppose I won't be allowed to fish any more, just because of this?"

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

“Yes, you will and all the more, ‘because of this,’ for now you know something of the danger.”

I replaced the big tarpon hook with a small spoon and as we paddled down the Charlotte Harbor side of La Costa Island the Girl trolled. Her first capture was a sea trout, so much like our northern weakfish that I don’t know the difference between them. The next to strike was a powerful fish that pulled like a mule and ran out two hundred feet of line before she could check it, and kept her nose to the grindstone for half an hour, leaving her as exhausted as the fish when we lifted it into the canoe. It was a chunky channel bass, known to the cracker as red-fish, of unusual size, for it pulled down the fisherman’s scales to the tune of fifteen pounds.

“I don’t want to fish any more to-day!” said the Girl.

“You’ve got an attack of nerves,” I replied, “and so have I. I prescribe the Bee Man of Lacosta for both of us. He doesn’t know what nerves are and the humming around his hives will put you to sleep.”

Fifteen minutes’ paddling brought us to the



WE RETURNED TO OUR FISHING GROUND AND IN A FEW MINUTES A TARPON HAD MY BAIT.

AS HE HAULED IN HIS BAIT, IT WAS FOLLOWED AND SEIZED BY A TARPON.





## THE GIRL'S DAY

end of a shallow cove where we made fast to a tumble-down dock beside a shack of a cabin. A barefooted hermit, with a beard that his bees might have swarmed in, came out to meet us. He talked only of bees, asking nothing of news from the world outside, as he led us through narrow aisles between rows of hives of bees which he carelessly handled as he passed as another might have gathered grain. He advised us not to handle the insects until they knew us better and in courtesy to our host we acted on his advice. We sat with him beside his shack and he talked of his bees while we ate their honey and honeycomb and drank the metheglyn which has scarcely been known since the time of Shakespeare. An hour passed slowly away and when we said good-bye to the Bee Man of Lacosta our pulses beat quietly and we could think of the Big Pass without a shudder.

"We haven't a bait!" said the captain the next morning, when I told him we were ready for the tarpon. "That old Spaniard promised to be here at daylight with a dozen mullet and he hasn't shown up."

"Take the shot-gun and a dozen cartridges

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

over to the beach there and pick up five or six needle fish. Tarpon like them better than any other bait."

"I won't need a dozen cartridges for that. Them needle fish come right up the beach and I can stun two or three of 'em at a shot."

"I'll be satisfied if you bring back one needle fish for every two cartridges you take with you."

The captain walked the beach and stalked needle fish for nearly an hour, returning with five after exhausting his cartridges. Tarpon are best taken in Captiva Pass on the outgoing tide, but the fly in the fisherman's ointment is the quantity of seaweed that goes with it.

It was the Girl's day with the rod, and a tarpon was waiting for her at the first space in the pass that we found clear enough of weeds for trolling. Back and forth in the pass we were towed by the most beautiful fish in the world. It was the Girl's first tarpon and, considering the amount of contradictory advice she struggled against, the fish was well played. Whenever she found breath to talk she asked:

"Do you think I'll get him? How big is he?"

We assured her that if she kept cool she

## THE GIRL'S DAY

couldn't lose him and our candid estimate placed his length at seven feet and his weight at one hundred and seventy-five pounds. It may be remarked, *en passant*, that this estimate proved to be within fifteen per cent. of the truth which, as such estimates go, was more remarkable than the size of the fish.

Within an hour the tarpon leaped out of the water a score of times, often clearing the surface by eight or ten feet. The Girl exhausted herself in fifteen minutes, but while she rested, the tarpon took upon his own shoulders the job of wearing himself out. He dragged the canoe through the pass and half a mile down the coast and then returning, explored the harbor. The day belonged to the Girl and not to the camera so the canoe was kept fifty yards from the fish which slowly tired itself out without making the bewildering rushes that imperil the tackle of the fisherman. There were occasional mild rushes when the tarpon overcame the brake on the reel and gained a few yards, but the line lost was soon recovered and at last the canoe was floating beside a fish that had ceased to struggle. We paddled to the beach beside the pass and, step-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

ping overboard in the shallow water, I gently drew the tarpon clear of the water on the sloping shore.

“Hurrah!” exclaimed the Girl. “I’ve caught a tarpon! Oh, the beautiful big scales! Can’t I have some?”

“Sure, all you want!”

“Are you going to kill my tarpon?”

“You have killed him already. He was your enemy; you have slain him and now you must eat his heart. Then you will inherit his strength and his courage. See ‘Indian Mythology.’”

“But he’s such a beauty! I don’t want him killed.”

“He must die! He wouldn’t care to live after you had peeled off his scales and even the ethics of the Camp Fire Club permit the sacrifice of a single specimen. Besides we need him for food and that justifies killing anything.”

When we came to carve the creature we found her possessed of a ten pound roe which we afterwards voted fair food. The fiber of the flesh was coarse and less firm than we would have chosen, but we would have counted it good eat-



THE CAPTAIN GOT THE FIRST STRIKE.



"WOW," SAID THE CAMERA MAN AS HIS SHUTTER  
CLICKED WHILE THE FISH WAS HIGH IN  
THE AIR ALMOST OVER THE CANOE,

## THE GIRL'S DAY,

ing had not a pompano-filled larder raised a standard of unnatural excellence. Joe, "the cook and the captain bold" of the little motor boat, salted and dried a few pounds of the tarpon and thereafter on Sunday mornings awakened memories of New England by giving us genuine cod-fish balls.

"I suppose you know it is my birthday," said the Girl just after dinner.

"We knew it, all right," replied the Camera-man, "but we were delicate about mentioning it."

"Of course, it is your day," said I. "You have done pretty well with the first half of it. What shall be done with the afternoon?"

"That tarpon this morning—Bless him for letting herself be caught!—made every bone in my body ache and now I want to sit all the afternoon on a soft cushion in a dry canoe without any fishing tackle and be paddled up to Boca Grande."

It was the Girl's day, as perfect as the previous one, and we paddled up the coast as before, but as we neared the Big Pass black clouds were piling up in the eastern sky. The tide had turned out and we paddled hard, keeping close to the beach, to reach the harbor before the storm

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

struck us. We had reached Charlotte Harbor and were paddling down the La Costa shore when a wall of wind-driven water approached from the southeast. It blotted out the distant shore and the nearer keys. It shut out Joseppi from our sight and pounced upon us with a roar.

I held my face down with my mouth wide open to catch my breath in the deluge of water. For a few minutes we lost our course and were swept toward the pass. Then we headed our craft into the gale, bearing always to the south that we might strike La Costa before wind and tide could sweep us into the pass and on to the Gulf. Before we made the land every wave was white-capped and the blast swept their crests like sleet in our faces, but we struck the beach by the entrance to a cove which formed an almost landlocked harbor. The rain ceased in a few minutes and the blue sky looked as if it had never harbored a cloud, but the wind died slowly and it was an hour before we cared to fight the waves.

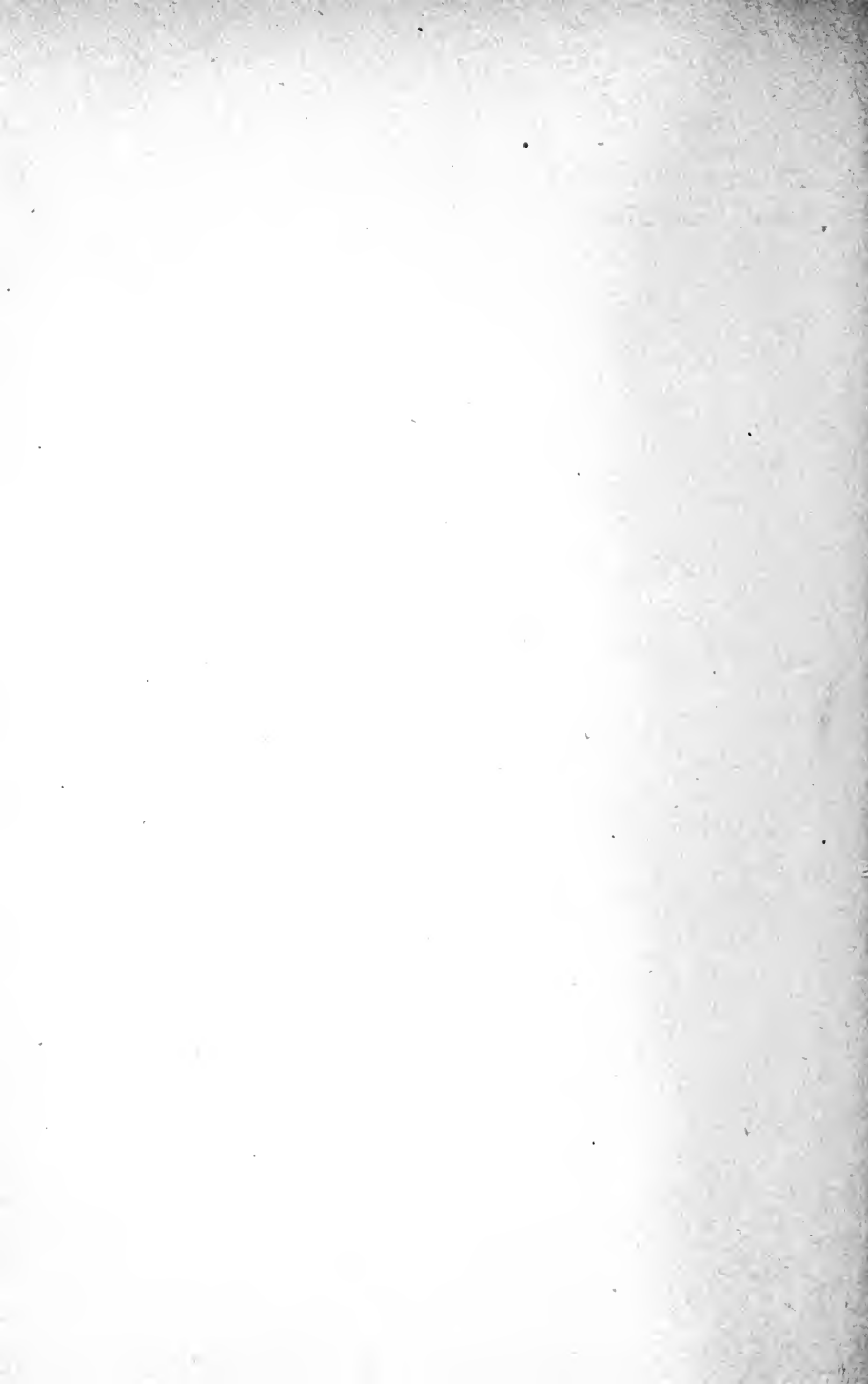
We spent the hour on a little key which covered but the fraction of an acre. It was only a common sand key with a few little trees and a bunch or two of bushes. Yet to us it is a haunted



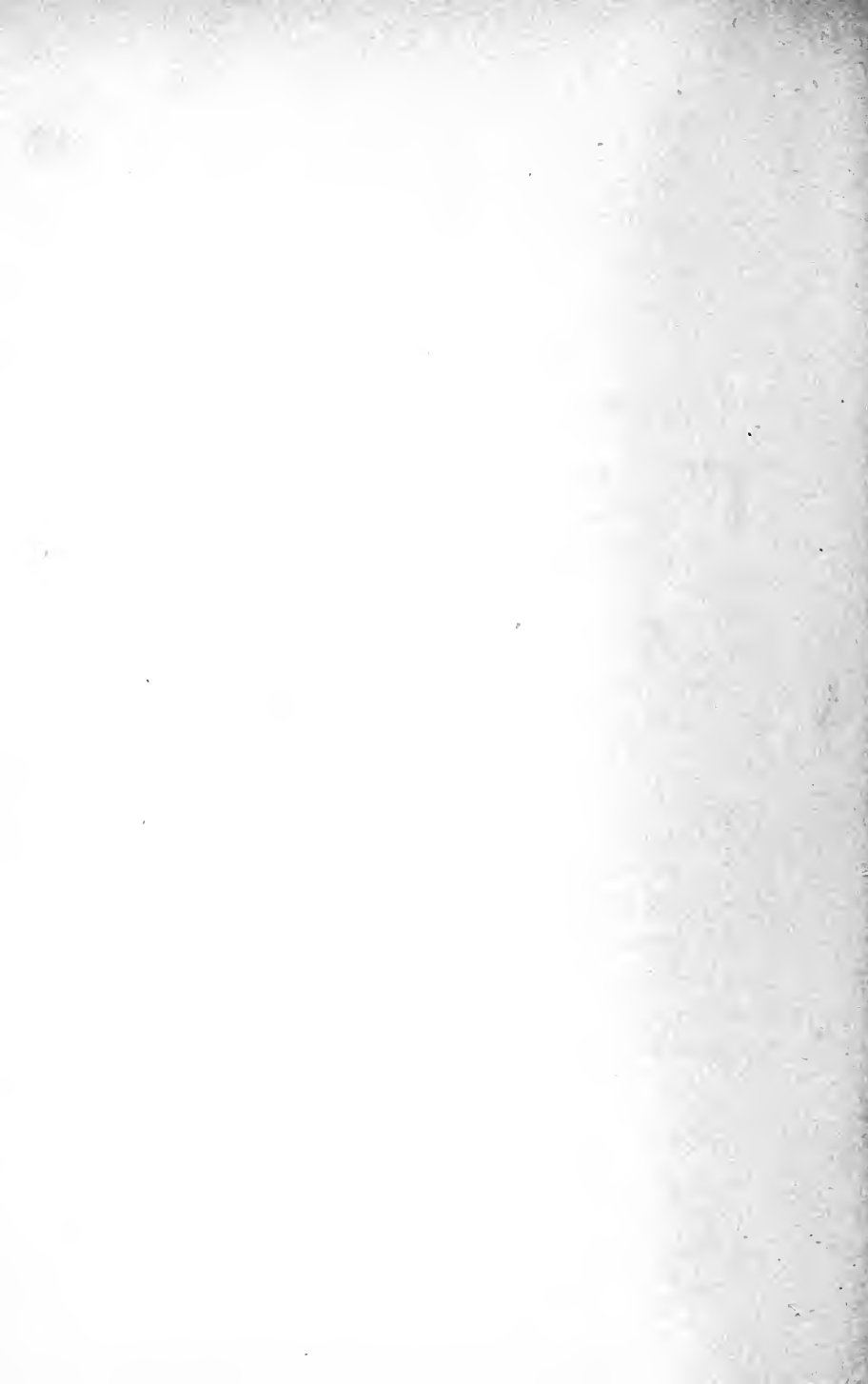
## *THE GIRL'S DAY*

island. The ghosts that inhabit it are a coon and her kittens. As we were resting on the sand a mother coon, followed by two of her young ones, came out from behind a little bush and looked into our faces. We sat motionless as she walked around us, sometimes coming close and then scampering away. She played with her kittens, but shooed them off when they came too near us. I snapped a bit of soaked cracker toward her. She ran away and returned several times, finally taking the piece of cracker in her monkey-like paws and rolling it into a ball. Then going to the water she sopped and rolled it again, after which she fed it to her babies.

I was fumbling in my pocket for another crumb when she saw and fled in a panic, followed by her kittens. They disappeared behind a little bush and I started to look them up, but they had vanished from the face of the earth. There wasn't a place on the little key where a mouse could have hidden from us and we hunted it over and over. The only rational conclusion is that the coon was a ghost and her kittens phantoms, and I have recorded the facts for the consideration of the Psychic Society.



**THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY**



## CHAPTER VI

### THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY.

**T**HIS isn't a 'Girl's Day,' said the Camera-man. "We are out for blood, this morning, and I want every tarpon that is struck held squarely up to the canoe. The more of a mix-up you manage the better it will suit me."

"Then I'll stay home and keep house for you, and see that a good dinner is ready for your return," said the Girl sweetly, adding, "I've had a good deal of your society for two days and shall be glad to rest to-day."

We anchored the canoe beside a channel on the north side of Captiva Pass and both the captain and I put out hand lines. The captain got the first strike and as his tarpon sprang into the air, viciously but vainly shaking its head in efforts to cast out the hook, I hauled in my line and took

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

the anchor aboard. The Camera-man's motor boat, which was anchored near us, was under way as quickly as the canoe, but the lighter craft under the pull of a healthy tarpon and the stroke of an excited paddle beat the clumsy skiff fifty yards in the first hundred. When the motor boat finally overhauled us the first and best three or four leaps had been lost to the Camera-man. .

"Ouch!" yelled the captain, as a rush of the tarpon tore the line through his bare hands, blistering them badly, while from the other boat came the complaining cry:

"Can't you hold that tarpon?"

"I'll hold it!" replied the captain, as he gave the line a turn around his hand and the bow of the canoe parted the water like the prow of a torpedo boat destroyer. Foot by foot he took in the line, never yielding an inch until he reached the wire that stretched between hook and line and the big fish was swimming beside the canoe. The next leap of the maddened creature landed it in the captain's arms through which it slid into the water, scraping the side of the canoe on its way and covering the captain with a coat of thick slime, such as only a tarpon possesses. The



THE NEXT LEAP OF THE MADDENED CREATURE LANDED IT IN THE CAPTAIN'S ARMS.

AS WE NEARED THE BIG PASS, BLACK CLOUDS WERE PILING UP IN THE EASTERN SKY.





## *THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY*

canoe was nearly capsized in the fray and water had come aboard till only an inch of freeboard was left, but there was plenty of time for bailing, for the tarpon had escaped.

"Where's your fish?" asked the Camera-man, as he thrust a plate-holder in place. For reply the captain held up a tarpon hook, straight as the wire from which it had been made. It was a hook of high degree, but had not been properly tempered and by a curious coincidence the next tarpon that rose to my lure broke a similar hook as if it had been glass.

"I hope the next fish will be yours," said the captain. "My hands are so sore that I can hardly hold a paddle."

The next instant he was standing up in the canoe that he might take the line in faster from a tarpon that had struck and was coming straight for us. It must have been a relative of the first fish of the day for with expanded gills and wide-open jaws it sprang straight for the captain's face. How it happened that the fish fell outside and we didn't capsize I couldn't see, for I had to get busy with anchor and paddle for the long fray. I knew the Camera-man had got in his

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

work for his shout of: "Good Boy, do so some more!" had an exultant ring.

"Ouch, but my hands are sore!" cried my companion as he clung to the outgoing line. I tossed him the heavy canvas mittens that I wore when handling a line that had a tarpon at the other end of it, but he refused them, saying: "They're too clumsy for this work."

We were carried outside the pass, down the coast, and brought back to the harbor. Sometimes the tarpon swam quietly his length in advance of the canoe and then after two or three wild leaps dashed away for a score or two of yards. Half an hour after the opening of the combat he struck his colors and, lying panting on his side, permitted the canoe to be drawn up to him, when the captain, putting his hand in the mouth of the fish, took the hook by the bend and tore it out of the flesh.

We returned to our fishing ground and in a few minutes a tarpon had my bait. As it sprang in the air, I called to the captain: "It's my turn now. Pull in your line and get busy with your paddle!"

As he hauled in his bait it was followed and

## *THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY.*

seized by a tarpon which in the haste of his first jump nearly landed in the canoe.

"Wow!" said the Camera-man as his shutter clicked, while the fish was high in air almost over the canoe, but he said something else a few seconds later when two tarpon were in the air together beside the canoe and his refilled plate-holder halfway in the camera. The fish crossed and recrossed each other's paths until the lines were hopelessly twisted. My tarpon was the next to jump and it was my line that parted. Again I took in the anchor and paddled for half an hour, doing my boatman's work while he had the sport for which I had come a thousand miles. He had good luck with his quarry, for with every leap came the click of the shutter.

The tarpon that is working for the camera must be treated with gentleness and judgment. When plateholders are being changed lines must be held as lightly and steadily as if they led to the tender mouth of a nervous trotter. When the Camera-man says "Ready!" a twitch of the line should send the tarpon in the air as surely as the "Pull!" of the trap-shooter is followed by the flight of the clay pigeon.

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

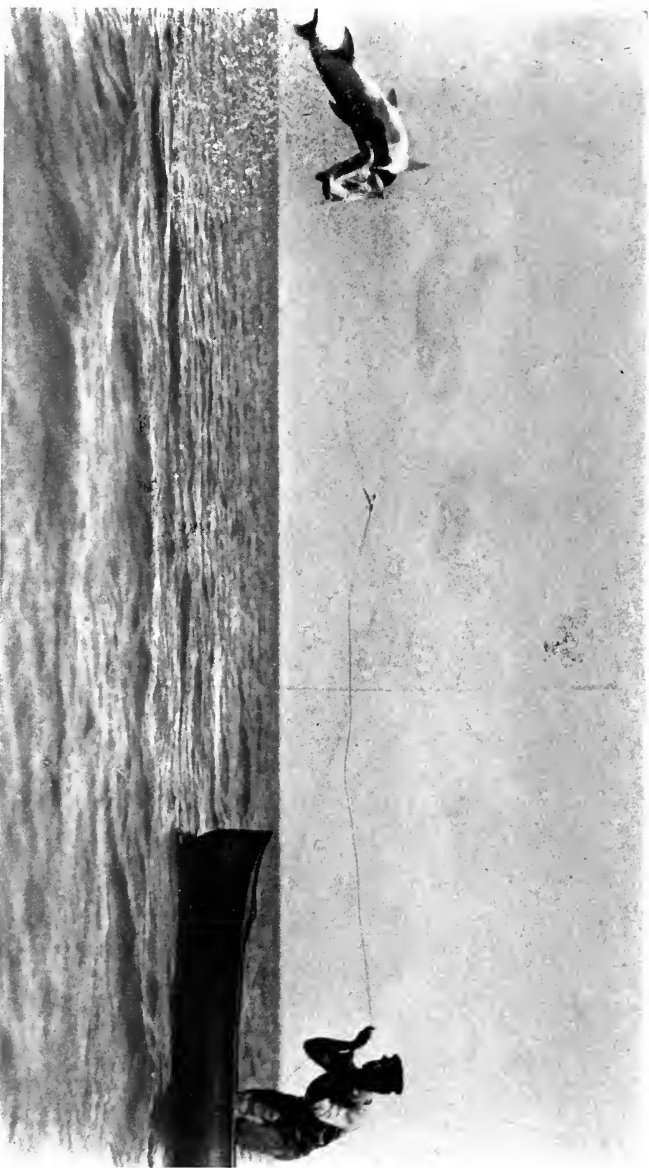
The next tarpon really came to me and I was playing him to the queen's taste when the Camera-man called out: "Plates all used!" and the jig for the morning was up. Returning to our cruising boat, we made a hurried midday meal while the plate-holders were refilled. I would hardly have given a nickel for the guarantee of a dozen tarpon in the afternoon, so sure was I of the crop.

I put out my line as we entered the pass and a minute later the lure was seized, but it wasn't a tarpon that got it. The fish gave several queer, corkscrew leaps, vigorous enough to have been the making of a salmon, though a tarpon would have counted them a disgrace. It was a red mackerel shark, the only one of its species that jumps out of water. The six feet of piano wire between the hook and line of my tackle saved the hook but cost half an hour of time, for it took all of that to conquer the brute, get him ashore, and hammer out his life with a club. The hard jaws of the tarpon will grind apart the line of the fisherman in a few minutes, but the serrated teeth of the shark will cut it as deftly as Atropos snips the thread of human life.



THE FISH CROSSED AND RE-CROSSED UNTIL OUR LINES WERE HOPELESSLY TWISTED.

"OUCH!" EXCLAIMED THE CAPTAIN, AS A RUSH OF THE TARPON TORE THE LINE THROUGH HIS BARE HANDS.



## *THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY.*

Our next captive was a grouper, big and ugly, but with a reputation as a chowder fish that induced us to save him to that end. Spanish mackerel, sea trout, and channel bass came to our bait, but not a tarpon rose to it that afternoon.

When the light was too little for his work the Camera-man changed places with the captain, bringing with him the harpoon he carried in his motor boat. There were a few green and many loggerhead turtles in the pass and I paddled gently while he watched out for them. The green turtles were suspicious and shy and we didn't get a shot at one, but the big loggerheads sometimes took a nap while lying on the surface. We saw one asleep outside of the pass and paddling more and more like an Indian as we approached the creature, I brought the canoe so near that my companion could have jumped on the turtle's back before it awakened. When the reptile made its funny tip-up that precedes a dive a harpoon was fast in its flipper. The turtle started out in the Gulf while I paddled for the shore, but as the creature weighed more than our entire outfit I thought it no shame

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

to signal for the little motor boat. We dragged the turtle up on the beach, well out of reach of the tide and left it safe on its back to await a court-martial in the morning.

It was a drum-head court-martial we held as we solemnly sat around the creature, his big round carapace serving as drum-head. The turtle was convicted of being edible and sentenced to be guillotined. The captain swore that its flesh was as good as beef and added that it was better than green turtle steak. The Court struck out the latter statement as being obviously bughouse. The Girl testified that the creature was a reptile, which no self-respecting person would touch, that she had eaten of the flesh and found it possessed of a wild flavor that was not agreeable. She added that it was wicked to kill so great a creature when so little of its flesh could be utilized. The witness was informed that the Court could broil a turtle steak so that the objectionable flavor could not be detected and that any meat left over would be smoked, dried, and added to the supplies in the larder, which needed replenishing. The testimony of the witness was struck out and she was informed



## *THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY*

that any further remarks on the subject would be construed as contempt of court.

The sentence of the court was carried out and the beach watered with the rich red blood of the turtle while its strongly beating heart was placed where its throbbing could be seen till the sun went down. Thick slices of flesh were carved for broiling, while the remainder was cut into thin strips to be jerked. We made a scaffold of green saplings and beneath it built a fire of black mangrove, the smokiest wood that the country produced.

I was placing a strip of turtle flesh on the scaffolding, when a dark shadow swept over me and, looking upward, I saw, hovering in the air, sustained by its broad wings with serrated ends, the first of a flock of buzzards. The creature settled on a nearby tree and was followed by others of its family, some of which came from beyond the visible horizon. It was then necessary to watch our food as the table manners of our self-invited guests were not to be trusted, so Joe was put in charge while the rest of us picnicked and beach combed.

At the edge of the waves on the beach we

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

gathered pompano shells of delicate texture and more colors than Joseph's coat. We followed the fresh trail of the panama to its lair and shouted in triumph at sight of a *Voluta Junonia*, taking it back when we found the specimen defective. We chased the ghost-like, translucent sandcrab to his hole and collected sea-urchins and sponges. Bits of long-buried wrecks were exhumed and dragged to our fire, where they gave out jets of green flame from the copper salts in the ancient hulk. A young palmetto, or cabbage palm, was sacrificed for its bud and we ate the bread of the Cracker.

We sat late around our camp-fire that night and slept near it in cheese-cloth bars that served well as tents while letting in air and keeping out insects. Behind us was a jungle and before us an open beach up which the foamy water swished, following the breaking of the slow-moving rollers beyond. I was awakened at dawn by a shout from Joe who said a panther was swimming in the pass nearby. I caught sight of the beast as it entered the woods on the farther side and then listened to the story of the excited boy who was awakened by the soft footfall of the



"DID YOU EVER SEE SUCH A JUMP AS THAT FIRST ONE."



A TWITCH OF THE LINE SHOULD SEND THE TARPON IN THE AIR.



LIKE AN ARROW FROM THE BOW SOMETHING SHOT UP FROM THE DEPTHS.

## THE CAMERA-MAN'S DAY

panther which he took for the step of a buzzard. His getting up to replenish the fire frightened the brute which fled to the pass. The tracks led straight from far down the coast, but they wandered about as they approached our camp, as if the big cat were in doubt whether to keep on his journey, or stop and eat us on the way.

The tarpon had returned to Captiva Pass and the Camera-man did a big day's work, emptying his plate-holders twice of hopefully-exposed sensitive plates. When the last plate had been exposed he said:

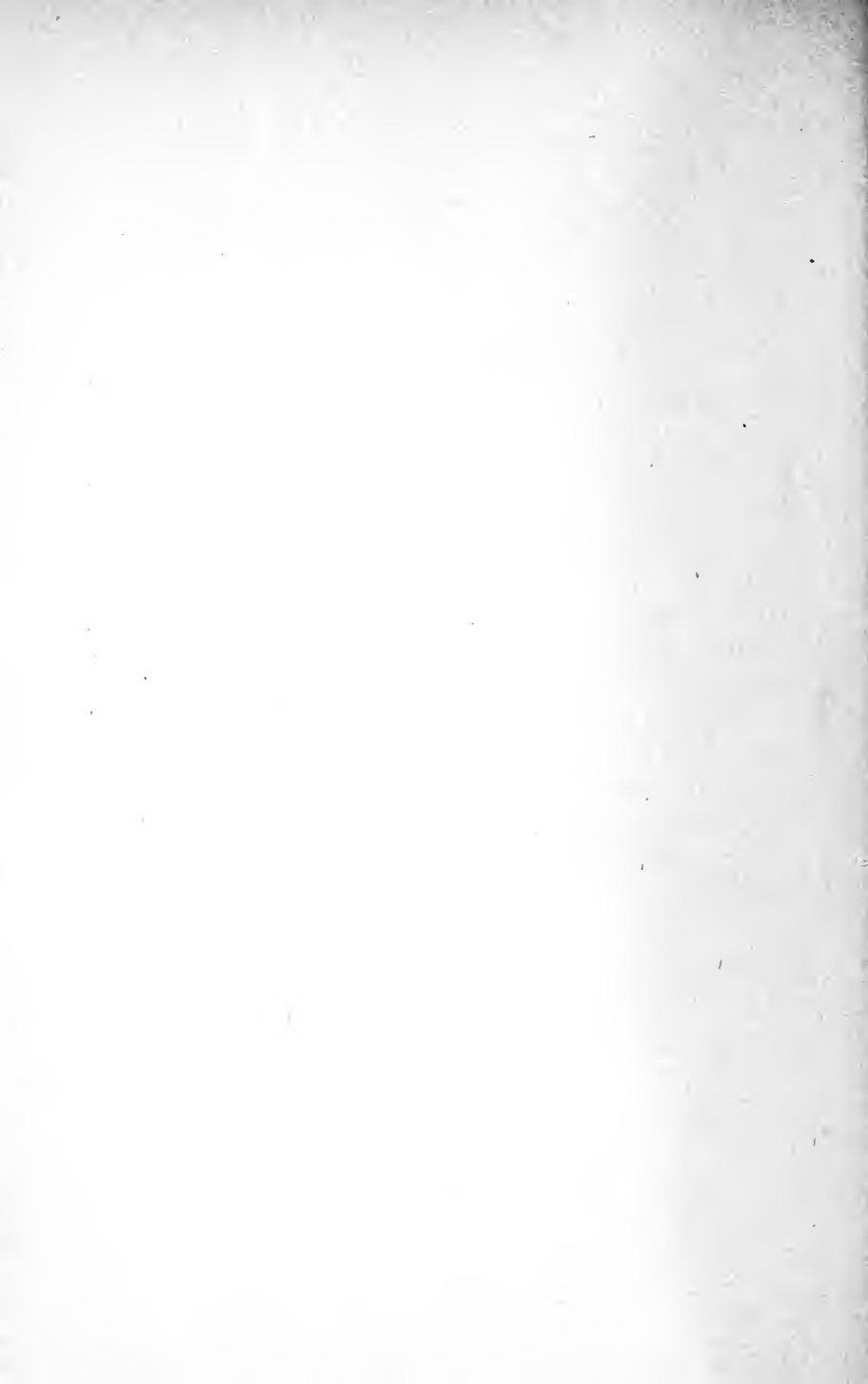
"Hadn't we better move on south? We have photographed the Charlotte Harbor tarpon within an inch of his life. We've got him in over two hundred attitudes, upside down, right side up, and inside out. We have pictured him eating smaller fish and being eaten by bigger ones. We have views of canoe-men taking him aboard their little craft and of his knocking the canoe endways and kicking them overboard. We have nailed him so high in the air that we have got to paint wings on him to keep out of the Ananias Club."

An hour later we were hunting channels in

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

Pine Island Sound on our way to Fort Myers for supplies. Near Punta Rassa a rain-squall struck us and it took two anchors and a lot of chain to keep us from being blown over Sanibel Island. An hour later a breeze from the west took the place of the squall and the morning found us quietly at anchor at Fort Myers.

**THE  
DAY OF THE CAMP-FIRE MAN**





## CHAPTER VII

### THE DAY OF THE CAMP-FIRE MAN

**I** WAS buying supplies at Fort Myers for our trip down the coast, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and familiar tones reached my ear:

“Well, here I am! What are you going to do with me? I am after the three tarpon you promised me.”

It was an old Camp Fire friend who spoke and I had long ago promised him a chance at three tarpon a day if he would join me at Myers for a cruise “In the Good Old Summer Time.”

“I never dreamed of your being within a thousand miles and it’s great luck that I happen to be here now, but I’ll make good. Beginning to-morrow, you shall have your three tarpon a day.”

“But I can’t ‘begin to-morrow.’ I must be on my way to New York then. I could only ar-

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

range for two days here and I lost one of them at Jacksonville."

"You will have to take another day. I will drop everything here, run down to Boca Grande to-day, give you your fill of tarpon from sunrise to sunset, and bring you here to-morrow night."

"Can't possibly wait over a train. I have simply got to go, and must give up my hope of getting a tarpon."

"What made you think you could land here in the morning, find me, bag a tarpon, and be ready to start for home, all in one day? Why didn't you wire me, at least?"

"I did, days ago. Didn't you get my message?"

"Here it comes now," said I, as a boy entered the store with a yellow envelope in his hand. "But you must have a tarpon before you leave. We'll try Niggerhead."

"What's Niggerhead?"

"It's seven miles down the river and we haven't a minute to waste. My outfit is too slow for the time you can spare and I am going to borrow one of a friend, including the man

## *DAY OF THE CAMP-FIRE MAN*

himself. It's an up-to-date, twentieth-century, motor-driven, automatic, tarpon-catcher and if you don't interfere with the machinery it will catch tarpon for you."

"But I want to catch a tarpon myself."

"Oh, you can turn the crank, as you're told. That is all that is expected of a tourist. A machine holds the rod, a motor-man keeps the boat in position, and you get a front seat in a moving picture show. Of course, a good spring on the reel handle would get more fish than you will, but you couldn't go home and talk of that. Now you hunt up my captain and tell him to rustle some fresh mullet for bait, while you get into your fishing clothes in a hurry and meet me here."

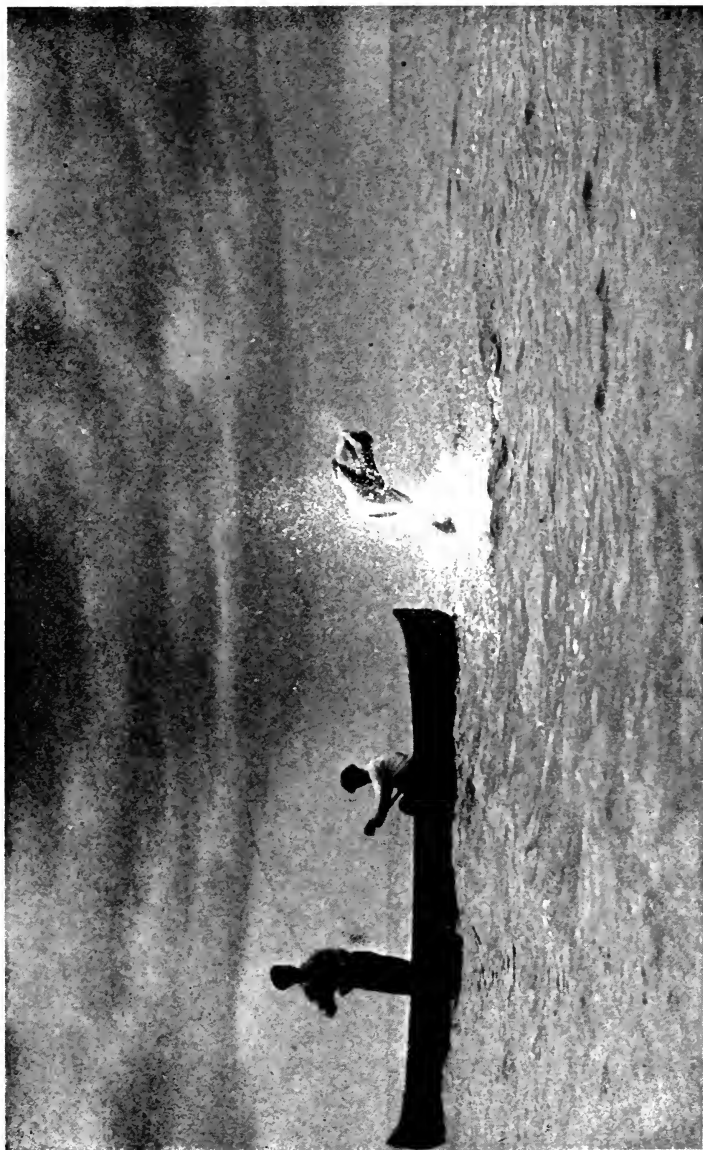
Half an hour later my friend was on his way down the Caloosahatchee, seated in a revolving arm chair in the stern of a small motor boat. The Camera-man and I followed in our slower little craft merely to see the fun. At Niggerhead the motor of the fishing boat was stopped, the boatman put a white strip from the belly of a mullet on the sportsman's hook, fixed the rod in the machine for holding it, and taking the oars the

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

game was on. We had fallen behind on the trip down the river, but arrived in time to see my friend's first strike. I heard him howl as the most gorgeous creature he had ever seen shot many feet in the air and he saw the bending of his rod and heard the loud screech of his reel. He turned the handle frantically. It was all he could do, for the automatic holder took care of the rod, the automatic brake put on a drag nearly to the limit of the strength of the line, and the boatman held the stern of the craft toward the fish through all its turnings and twistings.

Yet there was another thing the sportsman could do. He could yell and yell he did with earnestness every time his quarry came in sight. The tarpon was big and powerful, and for three-quarters of an hour dragged his tormentors up and down and across the river. When it slowly succumbed and was gently pulled beside the boat, the excitement of the sportsman became tragic.

He held his breath while the boatman quietly thrust the great steel gaff beneath the throat of the silver king, and with a single pull sunk the weapon deep and dragged a hundred and fifty



THE NEXT INSTANT HE WAS STANDING UP IN THE CANOE THAT HE MIGHT TAKE  
THE LINE IN FASTER.

"WE HAVE PHOTOGRAPHED THE CHARLOTTE HARBOR TARPON WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE."



## *DAY OF THE CAMP-FIRE MAN*

pounds of tarpon over the gunwale. We had held aloof during the game but now ran beside the victor. By way of a sportsman's accolade I touched his shoulders with a scale plucked from his trophy and thrust it in his hat band to be honorably worn till the sun went down.

"Wasn't it glorious? There never was so beautiful a fish. I wish you could have seen the drops of water sparkle in the sunshine when he shook his head and the way his silvery scales glistened as he turned in the air! Did you ever see such a jump as that first one?"

I assured him that it was very extraordinary and advised him to get busy with another one. Within half an hour two more tarpon struck the bait, both throwing hook and mullet fifty feet in the air on their first jumps. They must have notified their friends that mullet were bad medicine for, though tarpon were jumping around us, not one touched the bait for two hours. Then a fifty-pound baby tarpon was brought to the fishing boat after it had leaped high out of the water nearly a score of times in about as many minutes.

"Where is that gaff?" shouted my friend.

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

"I've borrowed it," I called back. "It's agin ethics to kill any but your first tarpon. Better let it go."

"How can I say I've caught it unless I get it in the boat?"

"Put your thumb in the corner of its mouth and slide it over the gunwale, only don't get your fingers in its gills, if you've any further use for them."

The tarpon was slid into the boat as suggested and promptly put over the opposite side. The fisherman trolled till darkness warned him to go home and he said: "Just once more down and back and I'll give it up."

He was rewarded for his perseverance, for in the last minute the biggest tarpon of the day struck and was safely hooked. The fish was a fighter and in the growing darkness less easy to handle so that more than an hour had passed when the creature yielded. I suggested to my friend that holding the tarpon beside the boat while he measured him would entitle him to claim the capture.

"I'll count this fish caught when he is in the boat," was the reply to my suggestion. With



## *DAY OF THE CAMP-FIRE MAN*

the aid of the boatman the fish was taken in and slid out of the fishing craft.

My friend changed places with the Camera-man for the return to Myers that he might plan for a tarpon trip in the future.

"Never had such fun in my life," was his first remark. "Never saw such fishing and I want some more of it."

"Not with me," I replied, and as he looked a little startled, I added, "Next time, instead of a day of machine fishing, you will take with me the cruise I proposed and learn that you haven't yet an idea of what the sport really is."

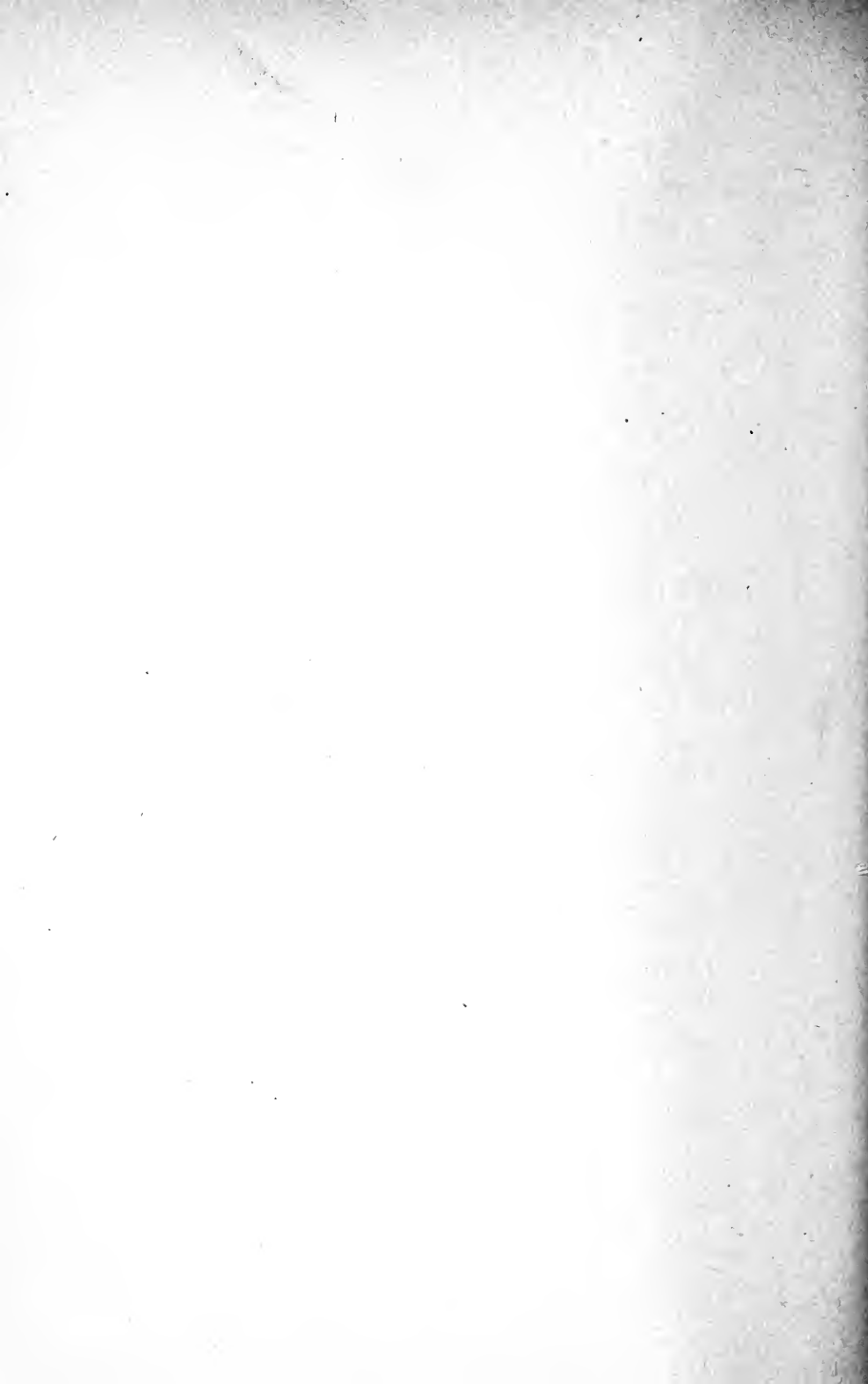
"I am sure going to accept that good offer of yours. If you can keep up the gait of to-day it would be immoral to let the chance go by."

I saw my friend off for the north that night, and as he stood on the platform while his train steamed out of the station, I called to him:

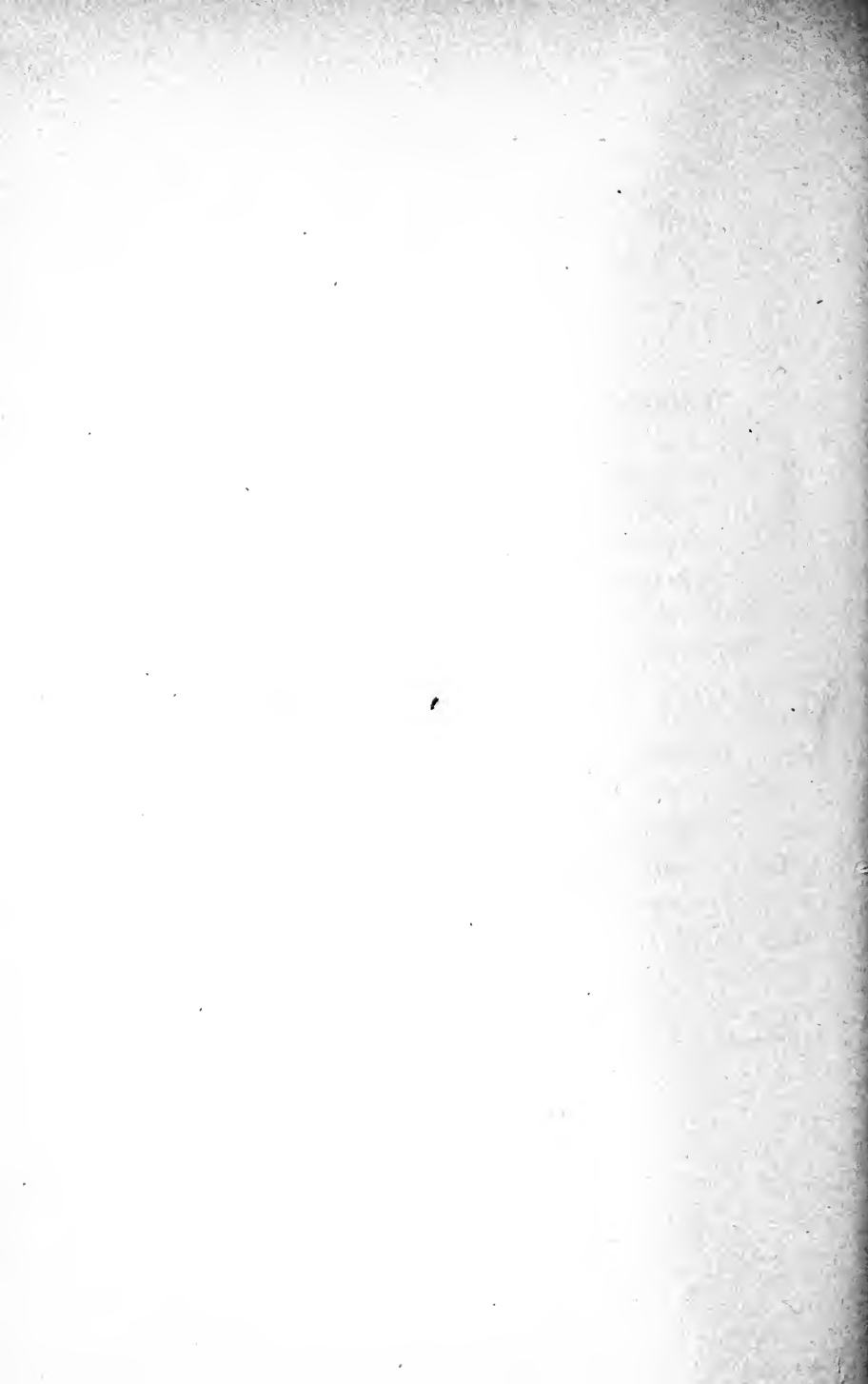
"Will you come when you're sent for?"

"Sure!" was his response, and he was carried away whistling:

"Tell Mother I'll Be There!"



**FISHING IN A FLOWER BED**



## CHAPTER VIII

### FISHING IN A FLOWER BED

**I**T'S my turn to-day," said the Girl the next morning over her breakfast coffee, "and I want to pick posies. Mrs. Langdon told me yesterday that a few miles above Myers the Caloosahatchee is one big flower bed."

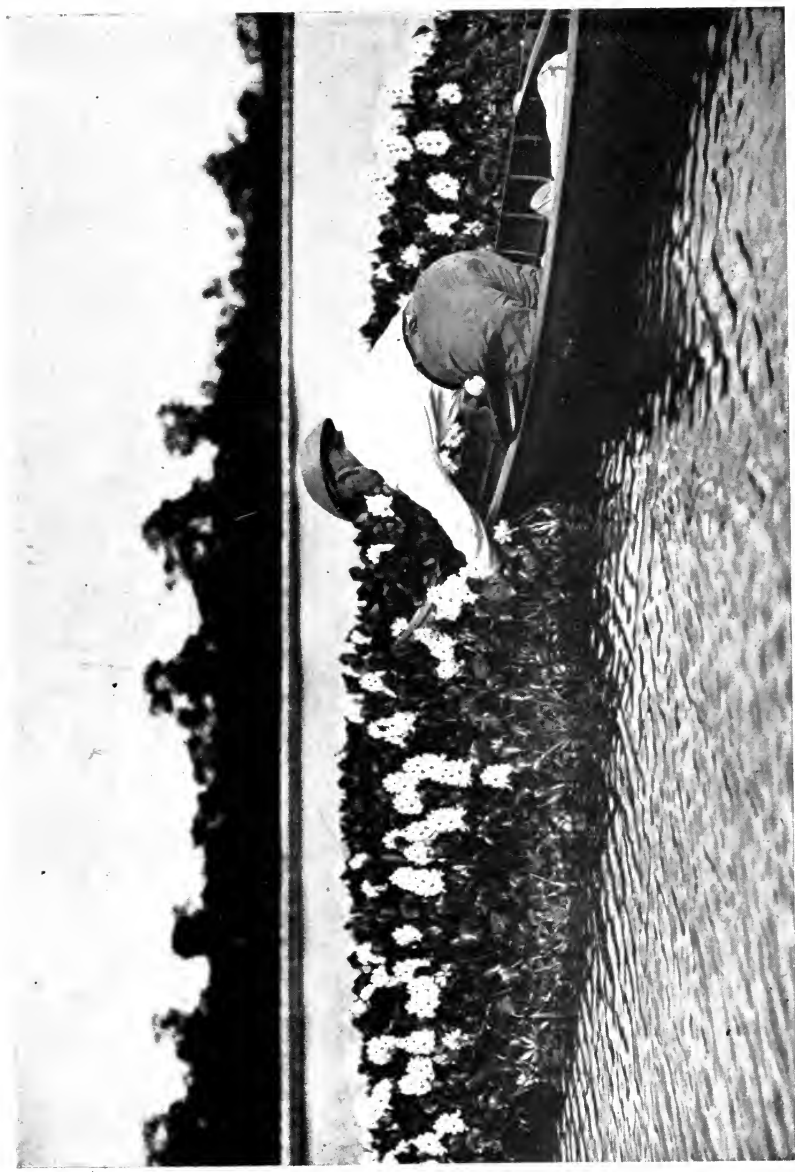
"There are plenty of tarpon there, too," said I, "so I guess we can spare a day, only you will have to go in the *Green Pea*. We can't take the *Irene* in that jungle of water hyacinths."

When we reached the masses of beautiful flowers, for the destruction of which fortunes are offered, we found them threaded by lanes of open water through which canoe and motor boat found easy passage. As we stopped for a few minutes to drink in the beauty of our fairy-like surroundings, the great head of a thousand-pound manatee was lifted above the surface of the water al-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

most within reach of my hand. I hardly breathed while the animal filled its lungs, with its little eye fixed on me. Instead of dashing away with a snort of fear and in a swirl of water that might have swamped our craft, the creature sank quietly beneath the surface and swam slowly up the river, followed by his mate and a tiny manatee calf. I had never before seen so fearless a sea-cow and I seriously wondered if we were old acquaintances, for I had studied the species for years and turned many a specimen loose after playing with it in the water till it seemed tame.

There seemed little chance to play a tarpon, even if one could be induced to strike, but I put out a troll to see what would happen. In a few minutes I felt a tug on the line, followed by the always beautiful leap of a tarpon thirty yards behind the canoe. The next jump was a long, low one, up through a solid bed of water hyacinths and down among the same a score of feet away. The scene that followed was worth the high price of a tarpon line and that is just what it cost. Each water hyacinth is in substance a beautiful bubble from which tiny roots stream in long tentacles. The floating flowers held up the



WE STOPPED FOR A FEW MINUTES TO DRINK IN THE BEAUTY OF OUR FAIRYLIKE SURROUNDINGS.



THE SCENE THAT FOLLOWED WAS WORTH THE  
HIGH PRICE OF A TARPON LINE.



OVER THE BOW OF THE CANOE WITHIN REACH  
OF MY HAND.



## FISHING IN A FLOWER BED

line, and as the fish swerved in its course many square yards of this flowery carpet were rolled up in a mass held together by entangled fibers of roots.

I threw the brake off my reel, for soon the tangled flowers would put on all the drag the line would bear. It was impossible and would have been useless to follow the fish. Already the canoe was in the tiny, octopus-like clutches of the flowery pest, held like Gulliver by a thousand Lilliputian threads. We watched the swaying masses that told of the tarpon's course and were vigilant lest we miss a sight of the coruscating creature as it burst through the flowers. The play lasted longer than we could reasonably have hoped, but the end came at last with the parting of the line. There was silence for a moment and then I asked:

"Shall we try it again? I have another line."

And the Girl replied: "I'd rather keep the memory of what I have seen. Another act couldn't be as beautiful!"

While we had been busy with the tarpon a breeze from the south had sprung up, pressing the mass of flowers against the northern bank.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

The open lead by which we had entered had closed. The only clear water was on the southern bank from which a hundred acres of flowery tangle were being forced by the wind. The motor boat was useless, for the first turn of the shaft would hopelessly clog the propeller. The *Green Pea* must follow in the path made by the canoe. Battling with the hyacinths was like fighting phantoms; there was nothing tangible to hit. A stroke of the paddle sent the canoe forward a foot. When the paddle was taken from the water the canoe settled back twelve inches. I knelt as far forward as possible and, leaning over the bow of the craft, tore apart the masses of fiber and bulb while the captain paddled vigorously. We reached the open lead and escaped down the river just before a change of wind sent the flowers back to the southern shore.

We were tired enough when we reached the *Irene*, but Joe had seen us in time to have ready for us a hot steak and some cold bottles of—*milk*. He told us with pride of his own busy day and after we had eaten, his work was inspected and approved. The fresh supplies had been neatly stored away, the water tanks filled,

## FISHING IN A FLOWER BED

and, best of all, the ice box packed to the limit. The wanderer in warm climates learns to do without ice and soon begins to boast that he cares nothing for it, but the sight of its smoking coolness pricks the bubble of his pretensions and he admits that it is like nectar to a mortal or caviar to the particular.

"Joe has got everything fixed," said the captain. "We can leave here any minute. We will be at Marco Pass by daylight if you say so."

"I don't like keeping you on the job all night."

"I don't mind that. I like to sail at night. You're sure of a steady breeze and no squalls to bother."

"All right, Captain, go ahead. You take us down the river and from Sanibel Light to Marco Pass the Camera-man and I will take care of the wheel."

We sat on the little deck watching the stars, the shadowy outlines of the river banks, and the trees silhouetted against the sky, while the captain with a pilot's instinct threaded the channel, avoiding every sand bar and turning from each oyster reef until Punta Rassa was passed and

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Sanibel Light on our starboard beam. As he turned the wheel over to me, the captain said:

“Tide’ll be all right for the swash channel at Marco in the mornin’. Better call me before you try to make it.”

“Sure thing, Captain. Good night.”

“Good night.”

I knew every rod of the course and had sailed it a score of times, as I had often trodden every foot of the beach we were passing, but I lacked the sailor quality of mind and corrected my course every two minutes by the compass, while taking an occasional backward glance to make sure that the lighthouse hadn’t been moved. Under similar circumstances the captain would have blocked the wheel with a stick and walked about with his pipe, returning to his post when his favorite star got out of the limits he had assigned to it.

The cradle-like motion of the craft sent the Girl and the Camera-man to sleep and I kept the first watch alone. Solemn as well as solitary it seemed to me. The slow, rhythmic swash, as the *Irene’s* bow dipped in the hollows between the waves, and the far-off roar as they swept the

## *FISHING IN A FLOWER BED*

distant beach carried my memory back to the first of the many, many times I had listened to the same sounds from off the same coast. I thought of the companions of a generation ago for whom flowers of asphodel had since been planted, and I looked down upon the sleepers beside me who were babies then. Only Nature was unchanged. I fancied I could make out the "Piney Woods" that heralded Carlos Pass, entrance to Estero Bay, where often in later years I had camped and cruised, fished, hunted, and gathered shells with my family. I felt that I owned the place. A roll of the wheel and in a few minutes I would enter my own gateway.

Then I recalled the Koreshan Unity, whose home is now in the beautiful bay—that band of Innocents in the toils of a swindler who poses as a prophet, to whom has been revealed the scientific fact that the surface of the earth is concave and forms the interior surface of a great hollow sphere. Everything here is bughouse and I turn away.

Now come the Hickory passes, Big and Little, while Sanibel Light sinks beneath the horizon. Every foot of the coast here and the

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

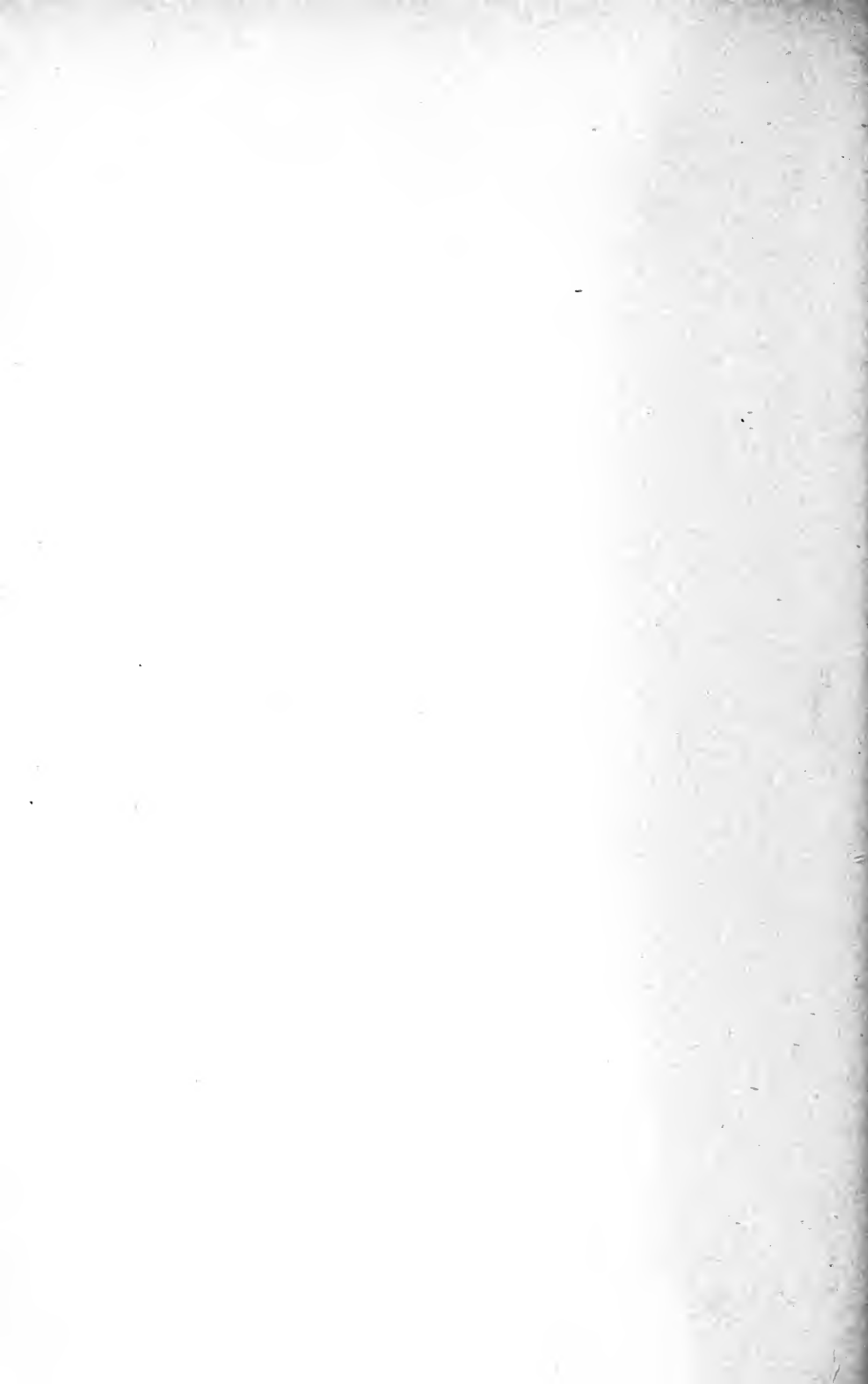
least of the passes are charted in my mind and eyes are not needed to see them. There is Wiggins Pass, and Clam Pass which can scarcely be seen by day, and now the glow worm light of Naples can be seen—the little seaport without a port—just off our port bow, where it should be. We pass near the head of the long slim pier that thrusts itself out into the Gulf, a convenience in calm weather, but a peril when the wind blows.

The light from the mouth of Big Marco Pass beacons and beckons us, but the main channel entrance is away below us while the swash channel lies right in our course. The *Irene* is headed straight for it and the boat knows it so well she would go through by herself without touching. Why, I have waded it at low tide and swum it when the water was high a hundred times. I know every shoal and current, every snag on its border, every tree on the bank, and even the shells on the beach. There is no sense in waking up the captain and I won't do it.

"Well, you made the pass all right," called a voice from the companion way.

"Yes—yes, Captain, and I was just going to call you, as I promised."

**CHECKMATING A TARPON**







THE TARPON WAS SLID INTO THE BOAT AS SUGGESTED.

WE TAKE POSSESSION OF THE ISLAND AND WANDERING FORTH WITH BIG BASKETS,  
RETURN LADEN.



## CHAPTER IX

### CHECKMATING A TARPON

**M**ARCO is the name of a post-office, but the place is called Collier's. Ask any child on the West Coast of Florida about Marco and he will shake his head, but mention Collier and the infant will brighten up and say "Dat's Tap'n Bill!"

Island, bay, hotel, houses, boat-building plant, and even the atmosphere are, and always have been, Collier's. When Ponce de Leon was cavorting about the peninsula, pestering the inhabitants with his inquiries about a spring, he stopped at Collier's. Everybody who goes down the coast stops there. The only way to avoid a long detour around the Cape Romano Shoals is to go through Collier's Bay to Coon Key, and one cannot pass through Collier's Bay without calling at the store.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Summer is the time to visit Collier. When the little mailboat lands me with my family at the dock, Captain Bill meets me with:

“Well, how are you? The hotel isn’t open, you know.”

“Glad of it. That’s why I am here. Where’s that baggage truck?”

Then I wheel our baggage to the hotel; we select the choice rooms, and spread our belongings all over the place as if we owned the whole business. When the dinner bell rings we sit down with the family and occasional tramps like ourselves who stop in on their way down the coast. Instead of the colorless crowd of tourists who occupy the tables when the hotel is open, we meet itinerant preachers and teachers, lighthouse keepers and land seekers, scientists and Seminoles. Best behaved of the lot are the Indians, for they sit quietly, saying nothing, while their eyes take in everything, and they touch neither knife, fork, nor spoon till they have seen how others handle them.

We take possession of the island and wandering forth with big baskets return laden with a score of varieties of fruits from avocado pears,

## CHECKMATING A TARPON

bananas, and cocoanuts down through the alphabet to sapadilloes and tamarinds. As evening approaches we sit on the sheltered piazza that overlooks the bay and, if the tide favors, watch the porpoises at play and, more rarely, witness the dizzy leaps of a dozen or a score of tarpon each minute.

We were to leave the *Girl* at Collier's, for it was a work-a-day trip with us and the chase of the tarpon was likely to take us where the cruising boat couldn't go. We thought to stay with her a week and take half a dozen tarpon a day from the bays about us which we had known so well and so long. The plan was a failure for we were caught in the social whirl. We had a few friends within motor boat radius and picnic, bathing, shell gathering, and other excursions absorbed our time until at the end of three days, without a single fish to our credit, we folded our anchor and silently stole away.

From Collier's Bay to Coon Key the channel twists and turns among sand flats and oyster reefs, between wooded banks and around tiny keys without blaze or buoy, stake or sign to point the path. After years of observation and prac-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

tice I can take a boat over the course, if the day is clear, without running on a bank more than once in three trips.

Yet a boy to the manner born has piloted me through the maze on a night so dark that I could scarcely see his face as I sat beside him. He chatted with me throughout the trip with his hand resting carelessly on the wheel which he idly swung to and fro without apparent thought or purpose. His every act was so casual that I had just figured out that we were hopelessly lost somewhere in the Ten Thousand Islands when he leaned past me to shut off the gasoline from the motor. A minute later the boat rubbed gently against some object that I couldn't see.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"At your own dock," was the amazing reply.

My captain carried us over the same course in the same mysterious manner and I was only sure we had passed Coon Key through the broader sweep of the wind and the gentle rise and fall of the boat on the slight swell from the Gulf. Going down the coast I got my bearings and felt rather than saw its familiar features. I was conscious of the nearness of Horse and



THE REST OF THAT AFTERNOON THE CAPTAIN PLAYED THE FISH A BIT LESS SAVAGELY.



THE SPORT OF FISHING IS IN INVERSE RATIO TO  
THE SIZE OF THE TACKLE.



SELDOM AN INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES BE-  
TWEEN THE LANDING OF ONE TARPON  
AND THE STRIKE OF HIS SUCCESSOR.



## CHECKMATING 'A TARPON

Panther Keys and off Gomez Point I had a mental picture of the old man for whom it was named as I last saw him at his home. He was then well along in his second century and year by year his recollection of the first Napoleon, under whom he served, became clearer and the details of their intimacy more distinct.

Sand-fly Pass, leading to Chokoloskee Bay, was our goal for the night and nothing but a nose was needed to find it even in cimmerician darkness. Its mouth was guarded by a pelican key from which a rookery of the birds sent forth lines of stench as a Fresnel lens radiates light.

In the morning we entered Chokoloskee Bay and crossing it anchored within the mouth of Allen's River, near the Storter store.

For nearly two miles Allen's River is a considerable stream. Beyond that distance it divides and spreads over flats until it is only navigable to a light draft skiff. Near the mouth of the river we caught and released a few tarpon of good size, but when a mile up the stream I struck a ten-pound fish, I returned to the *Irene* and rigged up an eight-ounce fly-rod. The fish rose best to a tiny strip of mullet, cast and skittered

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

along the surface, or trolled. They preferred light flies to those of more brilliant coloring. Yet their tastes changed as often as the colors of a chameleon, and they turned up their noses today at the lure that best pleased them yesterday.

The light fly-rod is too flexible to fasten the hook in the hard mouth of the tarpon with any approach to certainty. In the beginning the fly-fisherman will fail, nine times out of ten, to fasten the hook in the mouth of the striking tarpon. Then he will learn to thrust the butt of his rod away from the fish when it seizes the bait, and clutching the line or reel bring a strong, straight pull to bear on the hook in the mouth of the fish.

My first fish on the fly-rod in Allen's River weighed about four pounds, but it took longer to land than its predecessor of twenty times that weight. It led me into a narrow creek where an out-thrusting branch from the bank forced me to step out of the canoe into water waist deep. I followed the fish up the shallowing stream, walking on the bank when the bushes permitted and wading in the channel when trees came to the water's edge.

## CHECKMATING A TARPON

When the tarpon had had fun enough with me in shallow water it led me back to the deeper river. I nearly capsized the canoe as I got aboard while playing the fish, which cavorted up and down and across the stream, leaping several feet in the air every minute or two for a quarter of an hour before yielding.

In two days I had a score of strikes and landed half that number of tarpon after an average contest of an hour with each. The largest one was four feet long and weighed therefore about thirty-two pounds, but it was an exceptionally active fish and wore itself out in half an hour by a series of frantic leaps, one of which took it over the bow of the canoe within reach of my hand.

During the two days' fishing there was seldom an interval of ten minutes between the landing of one tarpon and the strike of its successor. On the third day the tarpon were as abundant as ever and jumped all around the canoe, but not a strike could I get. If Solomon had ever fished for tarpon he would have added the way of a tarpon in the water to that of an eagle in the air, a

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

serpent on a rock, and the other things that were beyond his comprehension.

We sailed to the south end of Chokoloskee Bay, where Turner's River connects it with the network of waterways through which tidal water flows in all directions around the big and little keys of the Ten Thousand Islands which extend from Capes Romano to Sable. Channels, navigable to tarpon of the greatest draft, connect Turner's River with the Gulf of Mexico, while from scores of tiny streams and shallow water-courses it collects the output of many tarpon nurseries.

I began business on Turner's River with an eight-ounce fly-rod and soon was fast to a ten-pound tarpon which thirty minutes later was captured and freed half a mile up the stream. Scarcely had a fresh lure been thrown out when there was a tug on my line and, as I believe, the largest tarpon that was ever caught on a fly-rod shot a dozen feet in the air. Three times in quick succession it leaped violently, shaking its head to dislodge the hook.

Down the river the tarpon dashed till only a few feet of line was left on my little reel. The



THE CAPTAIN PULLED FIERCELY AND THE CREATURE SEEMED TO LEAP AT ME WITH WIDE OPEN JAWS.



A HUNDRED TIMES THE END OF OUR  
HOPES SEEMED NEAR.



MINNOWS HAD BEEN DRIVEN TO THE SURFACE  
BY BIGGER FISH.

## CHECKMATING A TARPON

slight strain I could put on the line wouldn't have feazed a fish one-tenth the size of the one to which I was fast. I needed more yards than I had feet of line to offer a chance of tiring this creature whose length exceeded mine by a foot. One more stroke of that propeller tail and my goose would be cooked.

I yelled to the captain to paddle for his life, regardless of the fact that he was already putting in licks that endangered it. Soon he was gaining faster than I could take in line and I shouted to him to slow up, changing the next instant to a cry to go ahead. When the trouble was over I asked the captain if I had screamed at him very often.

"'Most all the time, but I didn't mind. I knew you was excited and didn't rightly know what you said," was his reply.

The line never again ran so low as in that first dash of the tarpon. Yet a hundred times the end of our hopes seemed near, but always the fish swam slower, or the captain paddled faster. The wild leaps of the creature were startling but welcome for they tired the tarpon without carrying away line. We had followed the fish up, down,

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

and across the river and after an hour's struggle were well out in the bay, yet at all times we had kept within at least two hundred feet of our quarry.

Always we feared the tarpon's getting too far away. Sometimes the danger was of its coming too near and more than once it sprang at us with wide open jaws, falling short of the canoe by inches only, and once it sprang fairly against the captain, nearly capsizing the craft.

The sport of fishing is in inverse ratio to the size of the tackle compared with the activity, strength, and weight of the fish. Linus Yale, as skilful with trout as he was ingenious with locks, used to hitch his horse to a tree by a mountain brook near his New England home and forget for the day the anxieties of the inventor and the burdens of the manufacturer. All trouble was left behind as he constructed a line from hairs in his horse's tail, attached a hook of his own forging, tinier than was ever made before, with an almost microscopic fly, and with a reed-like rod, made on the ground, captured the wariest trout in the brook. When with this flimsy tackle he landed a trout of large size he rejoiced more



## CHECKMATING A TARPON

than when picking the Hobbs lock gave him world-wide fame.

As I followed my big fish the game increased in interest. It was more like chess than fishing. Strength availed little, for the utmost strain I could put on the line through the light rod was no restraint on the powerful tarpon. The creature must be made to tire itself out and do the chief work in its own capture and at the same time be kept within the narrow limits that the shortness of my line established.

When the reel was nearly empty the line was held lightly, while the captain paddled strongly. As we neared the quarry a quick twitch of the line usually sent the tarpon high in the air and off on another dash. As the reel buzzed the captain invited apoplexy by his efforts, while I encouraged him to increase them.

At times the fish seemed to be onto our game and refused to jump when called on. It even became immune to the splash of the paddle and made an ingenious move that threatened checkmate. The tarpon was beside us and the line short when it dove beneath the canoe and swam swiftly away on the other side. There is only

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

one move to meet that attack and it usually ends in a broken rod and a lost fish. I dropped the rod flat on the water, thrusting it beneath the surface elbow deep, while my finger kept a light pressure on the line. Happily the tip swung to the tarpon without breaking and the fish was played from a rod under water until the captain had turned the canoe around.

The strain of a single pound on a fly-rod is more exhausting to the fisherman than ten or even twenty times that pull on a tarpon rod and I was glad when the Camera-man said he had used his last plate and offered to change places with me. Usually when plates were out we got rid of the fish as soon as we could, but this was an unusual fish, destined to hold long the record for an eight-ounce rod capture, if once we could slide it over the side of the little canoe. The craft might be swamped the next minute, but the record would be safe.

The tarpon noticed the new hand at the bel-lows and went over his repertoire brilliantly. He traveled a mile up the river in search of a place to hide from the human gadfly that worried him and sulked under a bank for some minutes be-

## CHECKMATING A TARPON

fore allowing himself to be coaxed out. He pranced down the stream to the bay, with occasional leaps by the way, and the captain struggled mightily every foot of the course to keep within the limits of the line. In the bay a new terror possessed him and he dashed about as if crazy.

He saw his fate in the thing that he couldn't shake off, as the creature of the forest knows when the wolf is on his track, and he exhausted himself in his panic. Then he rolled over and lay quietly on his back with gasping gills in apparent surrender while the canoe was paddled beside him.

"I'm afraid we'll capsize if I take it aboard," said the captain.

"Get it in the canoe first and capsize afterward all you want, only don't move till I measure it," replied the Camera-man.

After the tarpon had been found to measure six feet six inches, the captain got a grip on the corner of its mouth and lifting its head over the side of the canoe was about to slide it inside when a powerful stroke of the fish's tail sent the head outboard and the captain was given his

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

choice between swamping the canoe or releasing the fish. He let the tarpon go, for which I abused him at the time, but forgave him later when I saw that the hook was still fast in the creature's mouth. It was many minutes before the captain got another chance at the fish, but when he had renewed his hold and was ready to haul it aboard he sang out to me:

"I'll hang to him this time if he lands me in—Halifax, so look out for the pieces of your canoe!"

But the tarpon slid into the canoe without a flutter and slipping under the thwarts lay flat in the bottom. The trouble came later when, the rod having been laid aside, Camera-man and Captain worked together to get the slippery thing out from under the thwarts and overboard. They would probably have swamped the canoe anyhow, but the tarpon made the thing sure and secured his revenge by a flap of his tail that landed him in the bay with his tormentors. It was a fitting end to the adventure—for, after the final scrimmage, canoe and canoe men sadly needed the scrubbing they got in the nearby shallow water to which they swam.

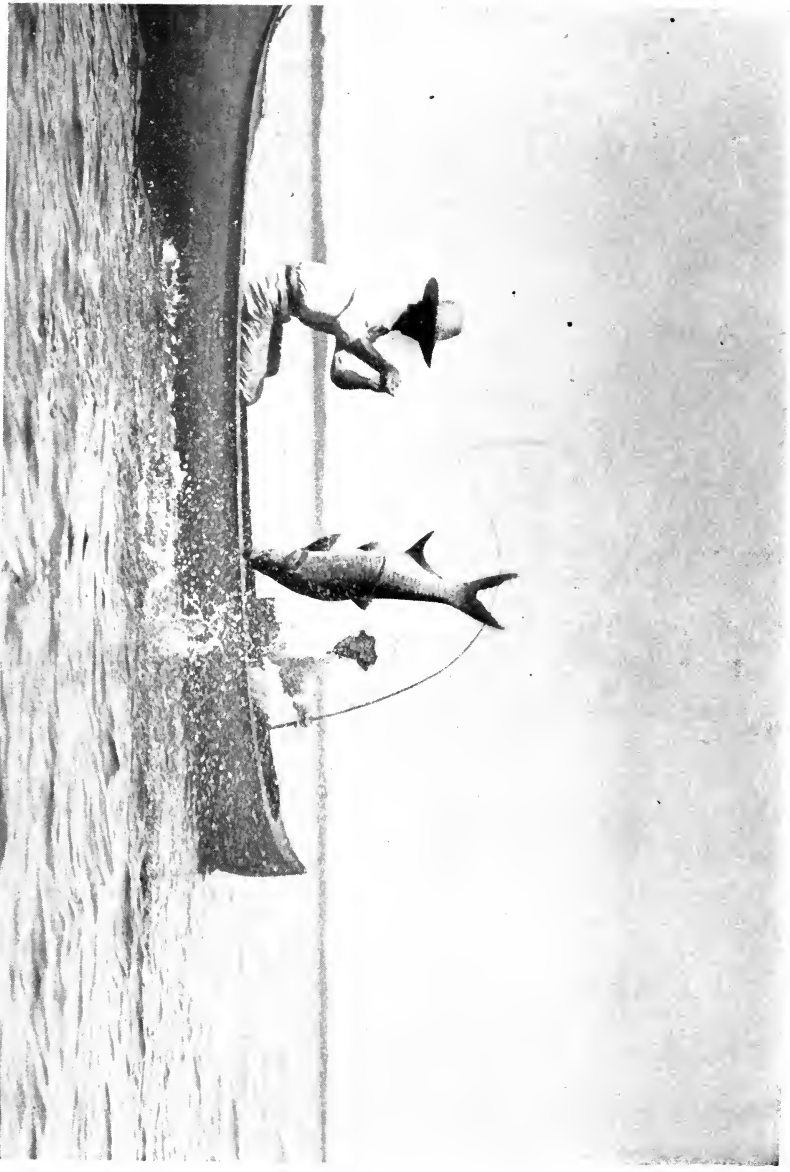
**THE TARPON SWAMPS US**





I BEGAN BUSINESS ON TURNER'S RIVER WITH AN EIGHT-OUNCE FLY ROD.

IN THE BAY A NEW TERROR POSSESSED HIM AND HE DASHED ABOUT AS IF CRAZY.





## CHAPTER X

### THE TARPON SWAMPS US

WE hit the top of the tarpon season at Turner's River and for three days the fish stood in line, waiting their turn like metropolitans seeking good seats at the opera or holding their places in the bread line. No sooner had we turned loose an exhausted tarpon than a fresh one presented itself for the vacant chair. Twenty tarpon a day was our score, of fish that ran from ten to thirty pounds each. Most of them were taken on the fly-rod, for which they were too large, as their weight was light for a heavy rod in such *blasé* hands as ours were becoming.

Much of the action of a fly-rod is wasted with a fish of the tarpon type weighing over five pounds and much time lost from the camera standpoint since it is hard to hold the fish near

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

the canoe. A stiff, single-action tournament style of fly-rod fits the agile baby tarpon down to the ground, while a withy, double-action article couldn't follow for a minute the fish's changes of mind.

"These fish are too little for the big rod, too big for the little rod and we have nothing between," I observed to the Camera-man just after landing on a tarpon rod a ten-pound fish in as many minutes.

"Let's go down the coast," was the reply. "There are big fish in the big rivers and babies in the creeks at the head of Harney."

I agreed to this as I threw out a freshly baited hook and trolled for another ten-pounder. But it was a tarpon of ten stone or more that struck before twenty feet of line had run out and as the creature shot up toward the sky I shouted: "There's a seven-footer for you, the biggest tarp of the trip!"

It may have been the biggest, but I shall never know for sure. I threw myself back on the rod with a force that would have slung a little fish to the horizon and my guaranteed rod snapped like glass. I hung on to the broken rod and

## *THE TARPON SWAMPS US*

the tarpon played me for a few minutes after which he sailed away with half of my line as a trophy.

Before running down the coast we went back to the Storter store in search of a substitute for the broken rod. The captain said he could make a better rod than the old one out of anything, from a wagon tongue to a flag pole. We bought a heavy hickory hoe handle, which looked unbreakable, and furnished it with extra fittings which I had on hand. As we sailed down the coast I mended the broken rod and we entered on the new campaign with three heavy tarpon rods in commission.

We were cruising in the land of the crustacean. There were reefs of oysters along the coast. Oyster bars guarded the mouths of the rivers and great bunches of the bivalves clung like fruit to the branches of the trees. Beneath us was one vast clam bed and dropping our anchor we drove poles in the mud down which we climbed and to which we clung with one hand while digging clams out of the mud with the other. We gathered a hundred or more, as many as the most sanguine of us believed we could eat.

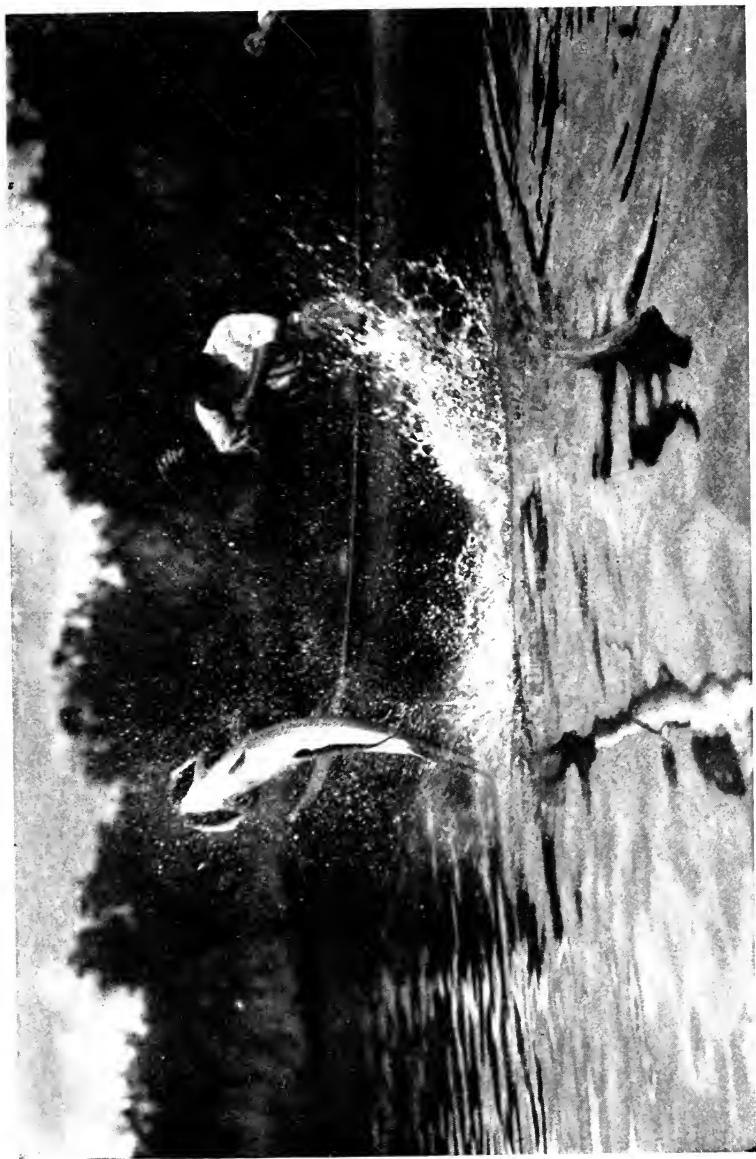
## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

They ranged in size from that of the little neck of New York to giant quahaugs of which single specimens weighed over five pounds.

Our anchorage that night was beside the little pelican key that separates the mouths of Broad and Rodger's rivers and we roasted clams on the beach beside the latter. It was the toss of a copper which stream we should fish in the morning. Their sources and mouths were the same in each case and a creek united their middles like the band of the Siamese twins. We chose Rodger's River because of its beauty, the great royal palms that adorned it, and the tragic legends connected with its abandoned plantation, rotting house, and overgrown graves.

Big herons rose sluggishly from flooded banks before us and with hoarse cries flew up the river, dangling their preposterous legs. Fly-up-the-creeks flitted silently away, while lunatic snake birds, made crazy by worms in their brains, watched us from branches that overhung the stream and when we were almost beneath them dropped into the water as awkwardly as if they had been shot.

We admired beautiful trees, great vines, fra-



TWENTY TARPON A DAY WAS OUR SCORE.

THESE FISH ARE TOO LITTLE FOR THE BIG ROD AND TOO BIG FOR THE LITTLE ROD.



## THE TARPON SWAMPS US

grant flowers, and blossoming orchids as the tarpon bait was trolled from the trailing canoe, and from the mouth of the river to the cut-off no tarpon disturbed our meditations. Hurrying sharks showed huge fins above the surface, slowly-rolling porpoises turned keen eyes upon us as they passed, otters lifted their little round heads, and a great manatee, frightened by a sudden glimpse of our outfit, left a long wake of swirls like those of an outgoing liner.

Crossing to Broad River by the crooked cut-off, we traveled a mile and a half to gain a third of that distance. Projecting roots held us back, overhanging branches brushed us harshly while with bare faces we swept away scores of great spider habitations, suspended from bridges which their occupants had engineered across the stream. Yet I had little cause of complaint, since the only spiders that ran down my neck were the few that escaped the Camera-man whose position in the bow of the leading craft gave him the first chance at the arachnids, or vice versa.

As there wasn't a tarpon in Rodger's River, we looked upon trolling down its companion stream as a mere formality, yet no sooner had I

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

put out my line after turning down Broad River than the bait was seized by a splendid specimen of the silver king. The Camera-man missed the early leaps, for he had been slow in getting out his artillery, but after it had been brought into action he was kept busy. We were carried up into Broad River Bay, where the channels were so overhung with manatee grass that at every turn my line was loaded almost to the breaking point.

When the motor boat, maneuvering for position, got out of the middle of the channel, the propeller twisted a wad of the grass about the shaft and the motor stopped. Then Joe leaned over the stern of the boat, with head and arms under water as he tore at the clinging mass, while the Camera-man relieved his mind by energetic exhortation.

The tarpon led us through Broad River Bay to a series of deep channels which we had long known as the home of the manatee, several specimens of which we had captured there. The surrender of our quarry came after we had entered the broad, shallow, island-dotted bay that stretches from the heads of Broad, Rodgers, and Lossmans Rivers across to the narrow strip of



## *THE TARPON SWAMPS US*

swamp prairie and forest that separates it from the Everglades.

After releasing the tarpon I fished no more till we were back in Broad River, when, again, on putting out my line, the bait was seized by a tarpon whose length we estimated at five feet since we never had a chance to measure it. The fish attended strictly to business and after a few brilliant, preliminary jumps made straight for the cut-off, where, after turning a few corners and tying the line around some snags, it leaped joyously high in air, free of all bonds and in full possession of a valuable tarpon hook and a goodly section of costly line.

We traveled a mile down the river before throwing out another lure and found ourselves in a tarpon town meeting. There were scores of them, leaping and cavorting, dashing hither and yon, and behaving as if at a big banquet, but it was a Barmecide feast, for not a food fish could be seen.

"Hang to 'em, if you can," called out the Camera-man as I baited my hook; "I've had bad luck with the fish so far to-day."

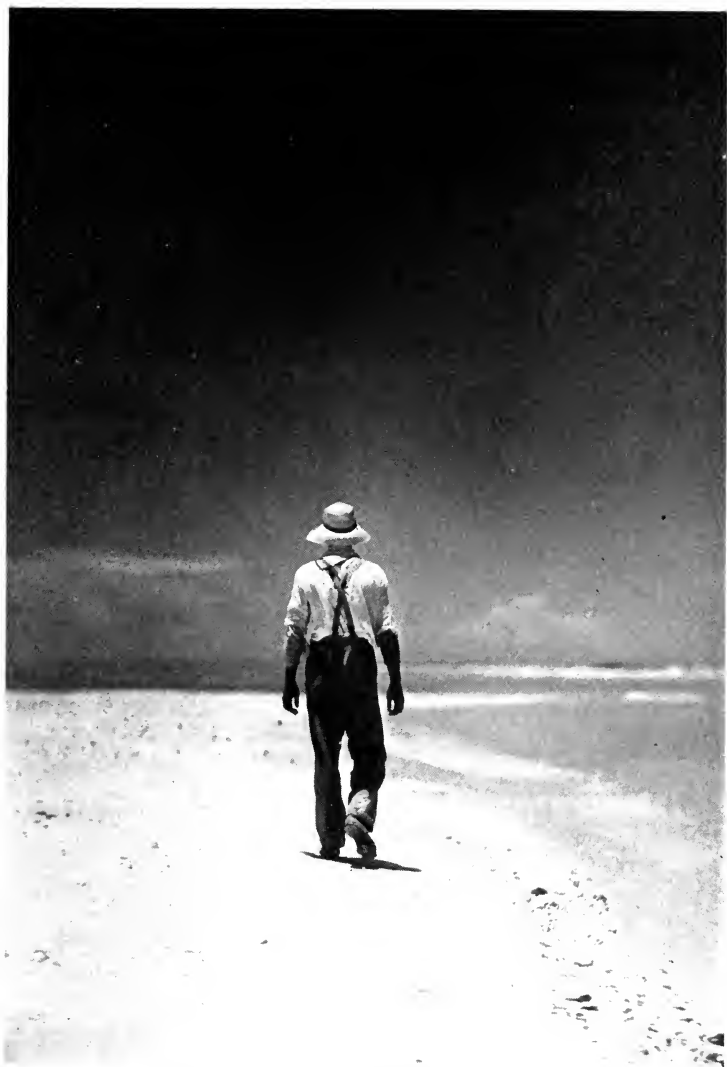
"The next tarpon stays with me, or I go with

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

him," was my reply and the next minute one of the family was over my head, fiercely shaking his wide-open jaws to get rid of the hook. But the hook was fast and I hung to the line through the tarpon's first run, though the canoe was nearly capsized before the captain could head it for the flying fish. The thwarted creature, after three wild leaps, headed straight for the canoe and, diving under it, brought the strain of his weight on the tip of the rod which broke in two parts. I clung to the butt and, as the fish was of medium size, soon brought it to the captain's hand, despite the broken tip.

We had now no rod nearer than the *Irene*, which was five miles distant, but the fish were in biting humor and the opportunity was not to be lost. There was a hand line in the motor boat and I handed it to the captain, for my muscles were aching and I thought to rest them with the paddle. The broken rod was left with the Camera-man for both the hand line and the captain were strong, mix-ups with big tarpon certain, and a swim in the river the probable outcome.

While the captain fished, my work with the



"I PRESCRIBED THE BEE MAN OF LACOSTA FOR  
US BOTH."

RODGERS RIVER WAS NOW FULL OF THEM.



## *THE TARPON SWAMPS US*

paddle was light and consisted in keeping the canoe head-on to the fish. The tarpon had the same chance of escaping the canoe that a horse in harness has of running away from the whiffle-tree. Yet as when a horse bolts from the road there is danger to the outfit, so when a tarpon to which the canoe was hitched dashed off to one side or turned back, there was little between those in the craft and disaster.

One tarpon turned back so quickly, after towing us steadily for a quarter of a mile or so, that I couldn't change the course of the canoe till the fish had torn a dozen yards of line from the captain's hands and was that far behind us. The captain pulled fiercely and the creature turned again and seemed to leap at me with wide-open jaws. Its weight fell on my arm and the side of the canoe which would have capsized but for some quick balancing by my companion. The rest of that afternoon the captain played the fish a bit less savagely, for which I was not especially sorry.

I had no dread of being swamped by a tarpon. It had happened before and would happen again, probably that very day, but I wanted it over

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

and expecting it every minute for hours got on my nerves.

It was late when the crisis came and we were near the mouth of the river, for each fish we struck had carried us down the stream with the ebbing tide. It was a tarpon of the largest size that turned away from an approaching hammer-head shark and, swimming beside the canoe, shot high in the air directly above it. I held my paddle without moving, waiting, waiting, for the canoe to sink under me as it had done before. The captain rose to his feet as the tarpon turned in the air and by a seeming act of volition threw himself clear of the craft.

"Glad I didn't wait for the spill," said the Camera-man as he turned the plate-holder in his camera, "but I don't see how he missed you. What's become of the fish? Can't you get him to do it again?"

The tarpon had escaped. He had given the line a turn about the canoe and of course it had broken.

The *Irene* was in sight off the mouth of the river as I tied a new hook on the broken line and told the captain I would troll till we reached the

## THE TARPON SWAMPS US

boat. But a tarpon lay in wait for me among the oyster reefs and, after he was fast, started back up the river. He was a hard fighter and so erratic in his dashes as he tacked up the stream that every few minutes I had to give him line to keep from capsizing. Though a brilliant performer, he objected to having his picture taken and would only leap after he had succeeded in stealing some thirty yards of line.

"Can't you get that fish nearer the canoe?" shouted the Camera-man. "How can I photograph you when you're a mile apart?"

"I'll take him inside the canoe, if you want," I replied, though I had no notion of doing it.

I hauled on the line till the fish was twice his length from me and was trying to hold him there when the creature dived till the line ran straight down. Then it loosened and like an arrow from a bow something shot up from the depths, dashing gallons of water in my face as it passed. I couldn't look up, but I wondered what would happen. Just as I concluded that this tarpon, like the last, had cleared the canoe in his fall, the craft gave a twist, a roll, and plunged me shoulder first, beneath the surface!

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

It was some seconds before I was straightened out for a swim, with my head on top and a chance to look around. The canoe was floating upside down, the captain was swimming for the drifting paddles, and the Camera-man sat in the motor boat looking as if he were glad to see me again. The tarpon had disappeared and I recalled with regret that I had neglected to make the trolling line fast to the canoe.

It was a few yards' swim to an oyster reef where the captain and I re-embarked and were soon paddling for the *Irene*. It isn't worth while to change the few garments one wears when fishing for tarpon just because one has been overboard, so we sat on the deck as we were and ate clams on the half-shell while Joe made clam stew for a second course and gave us our choice of stewed smoked turtle or clams for the next one. The Camera-man would neither eat nor talk till he had packed away his precious plates.

"Don't often get a chance like that," he remarked as he came out of the darkroom.

"Did you wait for the smash, or do as you did before?" I inquired.

"I waited till the smash was sure, a little too



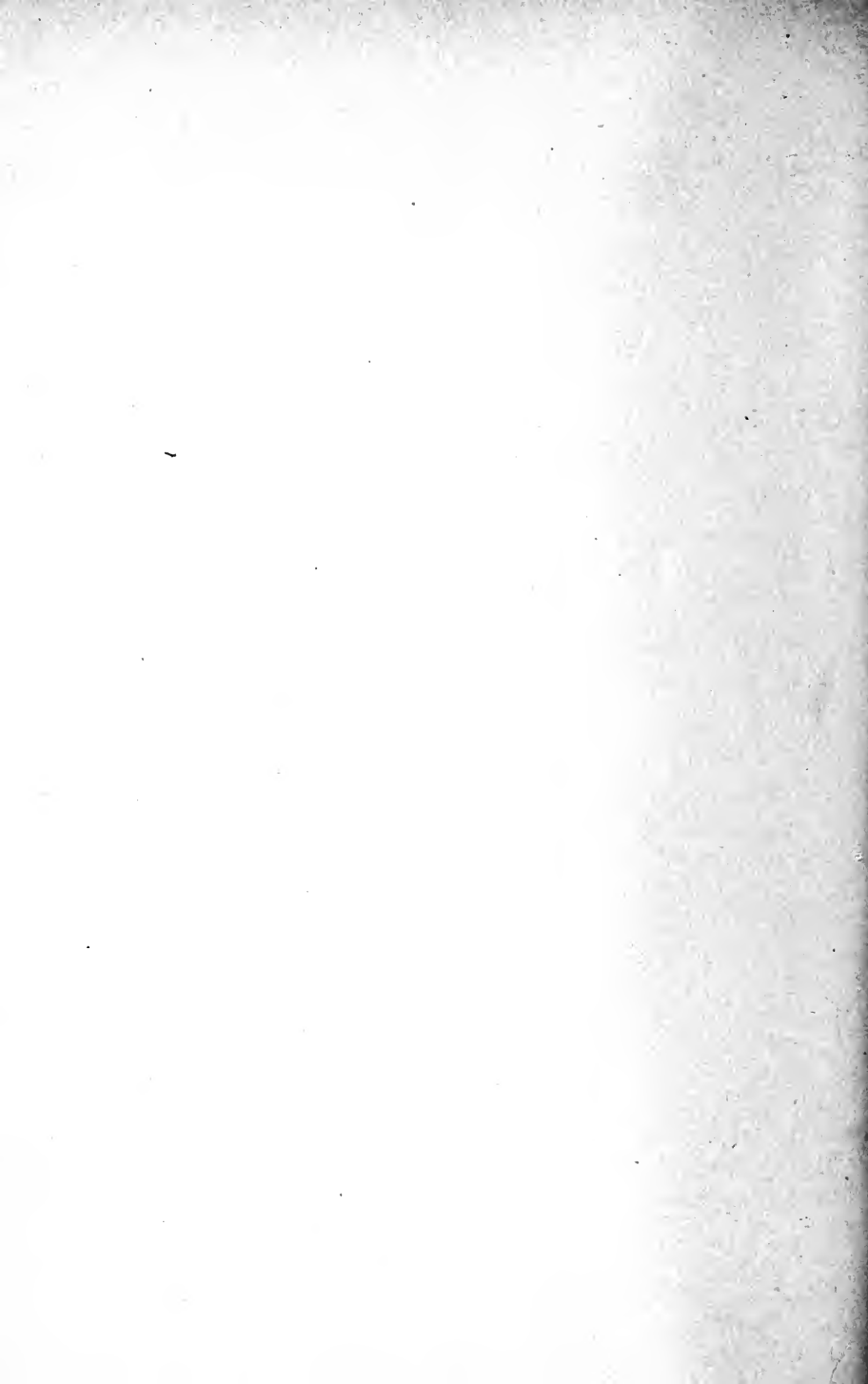
## *THE TARPON SWAMPS US*

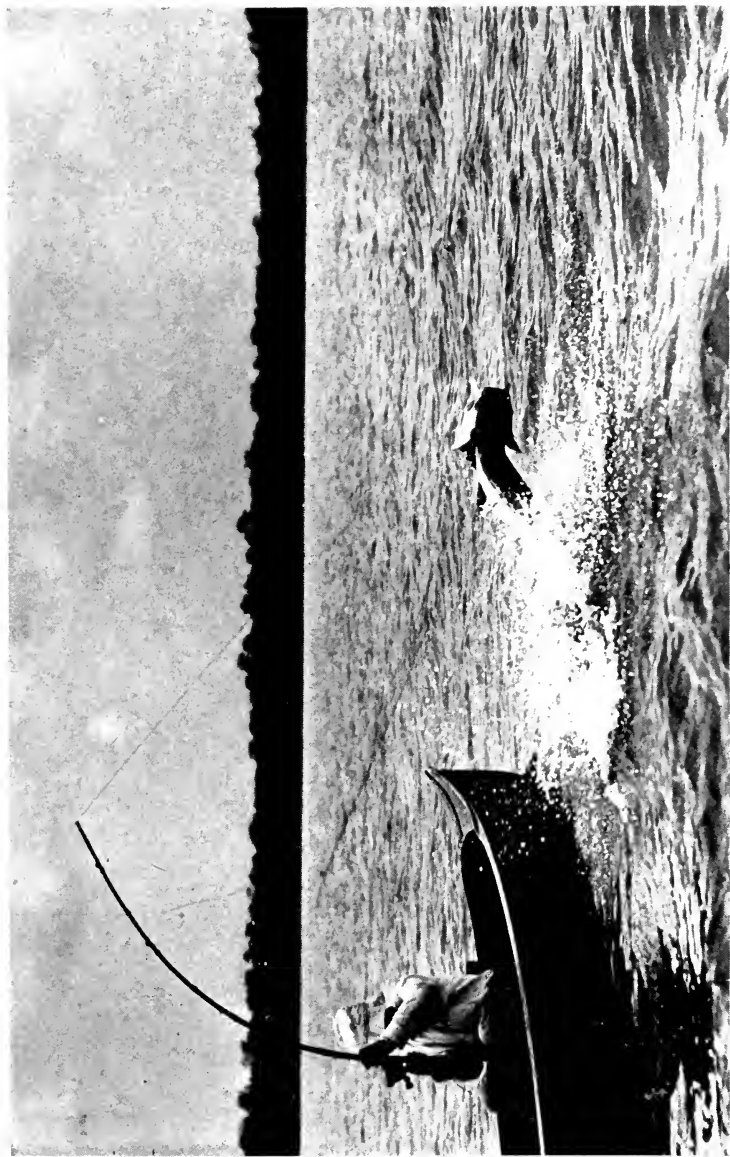
sure for my nerves. I've got all I need of that sort of thing—if the plates turn out all right, and I don't see why they shouldn't. I'll be satisfied to have the rest of the tarpon played reasonably even if I don't get as many negatives."

That night we ran our cruising boat up Broad River to where the tarpon had been thickest and anchored it in readiness for the next day's campaign.



**THE CAPTAIN WINS A WAGER**





ON PUTTING OUT MY LINE THE BAIT WAS SEIZED BY A TARPON.

THE WILD LEAPS OF THE CREATURE WERE STARTLING BUT WELCOME.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE CAPTAIN WINS A WAGER

**T**HE Camera-man was collecting his machinery, while the captain and I were struggling with the problem of patching up a badly smashed rod, when a shout from on deck brought us tumbling up from the cabin. There stood Joe with the butt of our broken hoe-handle rod in his hand clutching at the buzzing reel from which a brand new tarpon line was streaming down the river as if it were fast to a motor boat. Something caused the reel to jam and we were out rod, line, and reel in an instant. The rod wasn't worth fixing, the tarpon had the most of the line, and the reel was beyond repair by anyone but the maker. Joe, who was very penitent, explained that while he was waiting for us he had dipped the baited hook in the water just for fun and a tarpon grabbed it.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

We were down to our last tarpon rod, for when the Camera-man saw the bulge we had made in splicing the smashed rod, he declared that it looked like a stuffed club and was ugly enough to bust his lens if he tried it on it, which he wouldn't.

"Then we've got to play the fish lightly and you won't get any more spectacular shows like yesterday's," said I.

"I am happy to say I don't need any more. Just plain, everyday tarpon fishing is good enough for me now."

"I'm glad o' that," said the captain. "I like to go in swimmin', but I don't want it to come too sudden."

In fighting a tarpon there is less work in a pitched battle which is likely to end in from fifteen to thirty minutes than in a slow siege which may last from one to three hours. I fought my first tarpon of the day hard enough to keep the canoe within a few lengths of him but not near enough to make him wild with fright. He made some beautiful leaps and carried the canoe to the mouth of Broad River, piloted us skilfully through the labyrinth of oyster reefs leading to



## *THE CAPTAIN WINS A WAGER*

Rodger's River, and carried us a mile up the latter before surrendering. I had tried to play the fish lightly, but the strain had been constant for two hours, leaving me with the toothache in both arms.

"You must be tired paddling," said I to the captain. "Just take the rod and rest for an hour or so while I paddle the canoe."

The captain grinned as he took the rod, for he had made scarcely more than a dozen strokes with his paddle in an hour. The tarpon had towed the canoe and an occasional slight turn of the paddle kept us in the creature's wake.

Rodger's River, where not a tarpon could be found the previous day, was now full of them and the captain struck a splendid specimen before he had trolled two minutes. After two or three jumps, the tarpon made as straight a course up the stream as the winding river would permit and traveled as steadily as if he had been broken to harness. Sometimes he stopped to rest until the captain pulled up on him when he gave a playful jump and started on up the river.

"Member the tarpon we lost in the cut-off yesterday?" inquired the captain.

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

“Sure. What of it?”

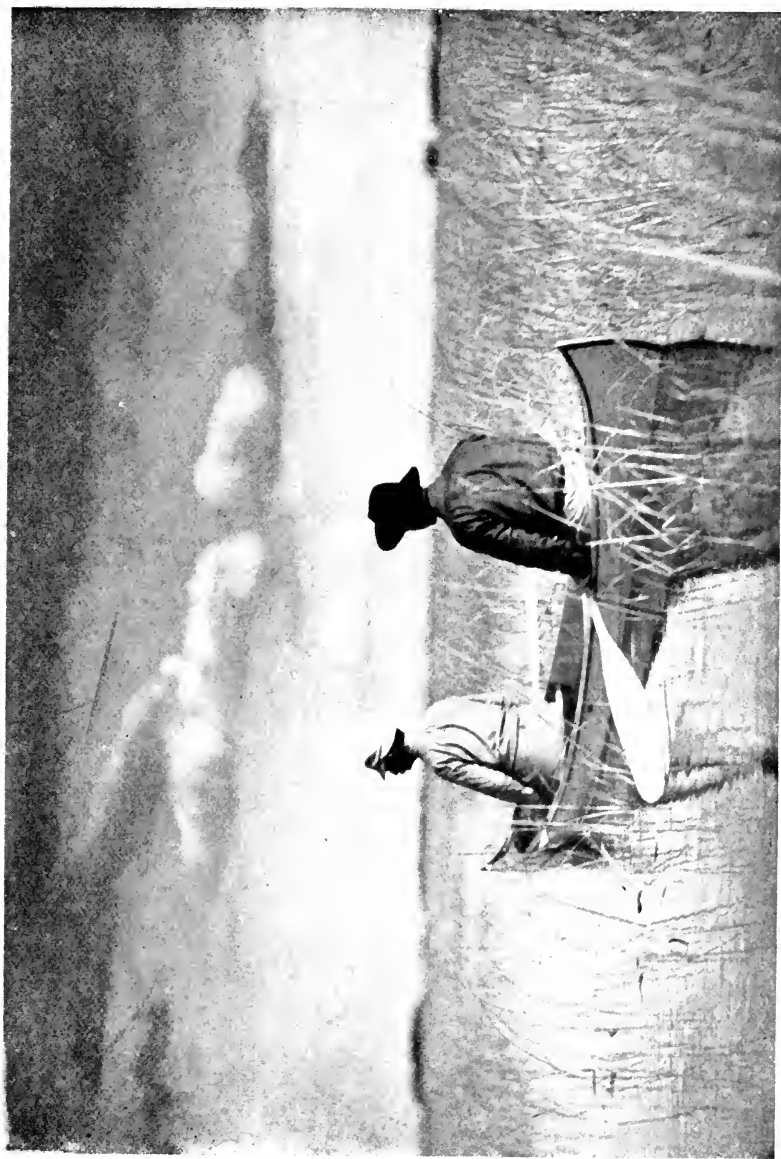
“This one’s bound for the same place and I’ll bet you a dollar we lose him there.”

“But we’re not within two miles of the cut-off.”

“Don’t make any difference. This fish is bound for it.”

For about an hour the captain worked hard to make good his prediction. Whenever the tarpon turned off to one side or even looked backward he was fought and worried till his head was again pointed up the stream. Then the canoe dropped back, the line was kept steady and everything made pleasant for the fish. As we approached the point where the cut-off opens to the east, while the river bends to the north, there was excitement in both our craft for the Camera-man and Joe had heard the discussion and taken opposite sides of the question. There was nothing in the course of the tarpon to indicate which turn he would take and there was nothing the captain could do to influence the decision. The case was in the hands of the jury and the tail of the tarpon would bring in the verdict.

On swam the fish, more and more slowly until



PADDLED OUR LIGHT CANOE AS IF IN A DREAM OVER SUNNY WATERS.



AT LAST I HAD A STRIKE—AND A TARPON SPED  
DOWN THE STREAM.



THE CRAFT GAVE A TWIST AND A ROLL AND  
PLUNGED ME BENEATH THE SURFACE.

## *THE CAPTAIN WINS A WAGER*

it seemed about to stop, but without swerving a hair toward either the cut-off or the bend in the river. The point was reached where the tarpon must choose his channel or climb the bank. Then the captain's excitement must have sent its message through the line to the tarpon which leaped six feet in the air and, twisting to the right as it fell, dashed at full speed into the crooked channel of the cut-off.

"Didn't I tell you so?" shouted the captain triumphantly.

"Keep cool and play fair. You haven't won yet, for we haven't lost the fish. Don't let the line get snagged and I'll sneak the canoe around every turn between here and Broad River."

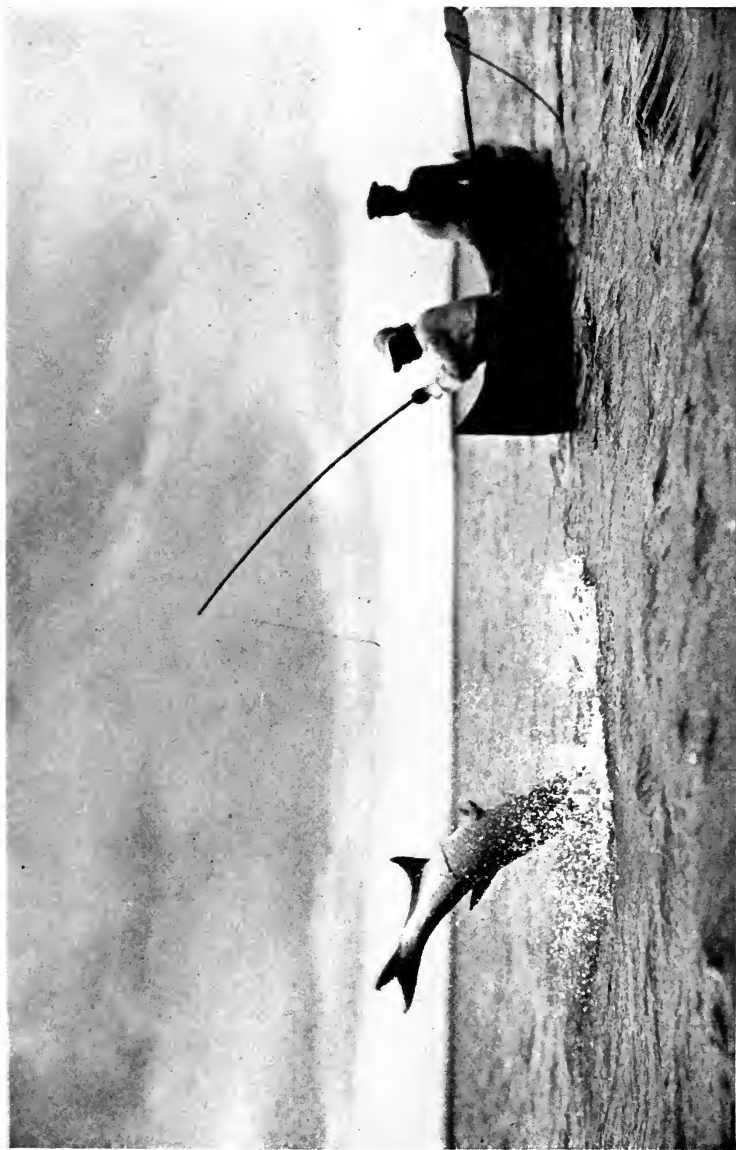
But the contract was too big for me and though I paddled without mishap for two hundred yards I had many narrow escapes. Then came a series of sharp turns which I couldn't make quickly, but were play to the tarpon, and soon the line was dragging over snags on one bank and through branches on the opposite one. We disentangled the snarl, but there was no tarpon at the end of it and the captain had won his bet!



**QUIET CRUISING**







I HAULED ON THE LINE TILL THE FISH WAS TWICE HIS LENGTH FROM ME AND WAS TRYING TO HOLD HIM THERE.



MORE THAN ONCE IT SPRANG AT US WITH WIDE  
OPEN JAWS.



WORE ITSELF OUT IN HALF AN HOUR BY A  
SERIES OF FRANTIC LEAPS.

## CHAPTER XII

### QUIET CRUISING

**W**E paddled through the cut-off to Broad River, observing on the way that many of the spider engineers had rebuilt the suspension bridges which we had destroyed the day before. The captain and I alternately fished and paddled until, when the last fish was turned loose in the afternoon, we had a record of five more tarpon to the good, and the Camera-man had used his last plate.

At supper the Camera-man said: "I don't want to get shy of plates and they are going fast. I must save a lot for the tarpon fly-fishing."

"Then, Captain, it's up to you to get us to the head of Harney River, P. D. Q." said I.

"I can take you through to Tussock Bay tonight. Beyond that I want daylight in places."

I knew every foot of the course, every channel

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

and bar, key and oyster reef, otter slide and alligator bed. I had a personal acquaintance with the feathered inhabitants and could have called many of the animals by their first names, but lacking the sailor instinct I should have bumped every point of land between the mouth of Broad River and Tussock Key where we anchored, if I had tried to make the run in the dark. We left Tussock at daylight the next morning with sails furled and our auxiliary power in play. Our course lay through narrow channels, over shallow watercourses choked by eel and manatee grass, past open meadows and blind leads that beckoned us into little bayous that led nowhere. A small, unpromising stream opened into a river three hundred feet wide which narrowed for two miles till its banks closed in on us.

At the last moment an opening in the bushes on our right disclosed a brook less than twenty yards wide through which Everglade water came tumbling in a torrent. Our motor could have overcome its swiftness but the sudden turns were too much for the rudder and we had to stand in the bow with poles to help the *Irene* around the corners and keep it off the banks. It was like

## QUIET CRUISING

cruising through a flooded forest and the branches of trees swept everything movable from deck and cabin, but a short half-mile brought us to a river known then only to the refugees of the swamps and a few, a very few, hunters and trappers. It was a beautiful stream, from three to four hundred feet wide, but the path of the navigable channel was narrow and tortuous, winding its way through masses of manatee grass and fields of lily pads. Sometimes it so nearly closed that the boat's propeller gathered long streamers of grass and twisted them about the shaft until the motor stopped and all hands, by turns, went overboard to cut the fibers away.

Through six hours of work and slow progress there was no minute without a new pleasure. Beside us, as we entered the river, was a deep pool which must have been a Tarpon Orphan Asylum from the number of baby tarpon it contained. By twos and threes at a time they leaped above the surface, turning and twisting in some joyous sport of their own. Upthrust through every square yard of the floating grass was the little round head with bright eyes that told of an edible turtle beneath it. We tried to collect one

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

for supper with a shotgun, but they must have dodged at the flash or our aim was amazingly bad, for we got none. I reminded Joe that our last hunter-boy used to dive overboard when he saw a turtle and come back with the reptile under his arm, but Joe only asked me to show him how the deed was done. Finally the captain took the Camera-man out in the canoe, while Joe and I were cutting grass from the shaft, and when they returned two harpooned turtle accompanied them.

At almost every turn we saw an alligator floating on the surface of the water and watched him sink slowly until only his eyes could be seen for the moment before they dropped out of sight. We passed an otter slide just as its playful owner coasted down the bank into the river, and once a mother coon from the shore pointed us out to her offspring and shook her wise old head as she maligned us. Outlaws and Indians knew the river too well, and among the feathered dwellers in the water and forest about it not a snowy heron could be seen. The last mother bird had been sacrificed to fashion and the last infant starved in its nest.

## QUIET CRUISING

Often a kingfisher started up the river before us, with the same joyous screech I had heard from Hudson Bay to Cape Sable, while the king-bird I knew in the North was the bee-martin of the Southern river and the same truculent assailant of enemies much bigger than itself. The Kentucky cardinal was only a red-bird in Florida, but it was as friendly and songful as under its olden name. Herons, big, little, and Louisianas, dragged their long legs in the air as they flew from us. Flocks of white, curved-bill ibis flew swiftly over our heads, while a fork-tailed hawk, most graceful of created things, floated in curves about the topmost branches of the trees, gathering its insect prey without alighting.

Little flocks of ducks and coots rose skittering from the water as they fled before us. Bunches of water turkeys sat on branches that overhung the water and as we approached dropped beneath its surface as clumsily as a pelican alights upon it. Then followed the quick, darting motions of the slim head and neck that have given this bird the descriptive names of Darter and Snake Bird. Man-o'-war hawks floated a thousand or two feet

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

above us with wings as motionless as those of a monoplane, and without propellers in their tails.

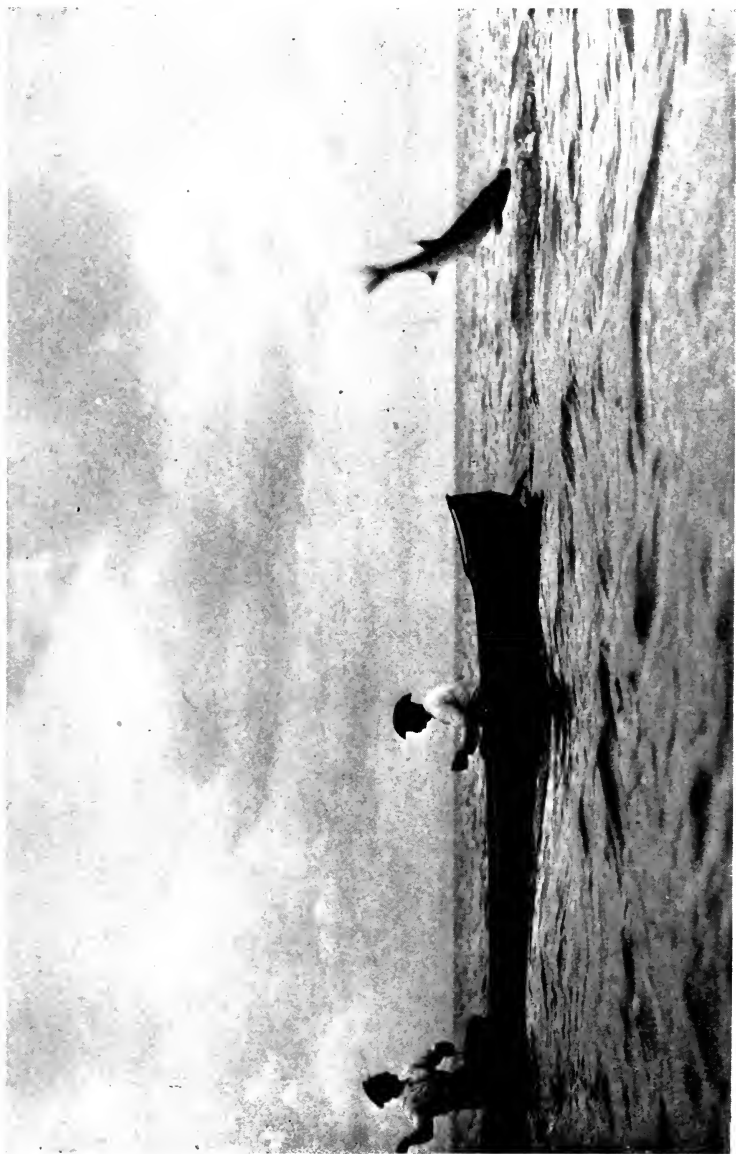
Fragrant myrtle and sweet bay flourished on the banks, while from the shallow water sprang big, twisted trunks of trees whose little branches bore fat custard apples, luscious to the taste but for its turpentine flavor. Near its head the river was fed by grassy-bordered, lily-choked channels of pure water. The river ended three miles from the crooked creek by which we entered it and the *Irene* followed a narrow stream scarcely more than her width, while branches brushed her sides until her nose ran into the bank and her bow was thrust over the border of the Everglades.

We saw before us a great flooded meadow, through the grass of which we waded in water that was half-knee deep. There were acres of white pond lilies with all the beauty, but lacking the fragrance of their sisters of the north. It was dotted with tiny keys bearing tall palms, fragrant and fruit bearing trees, and winding throughout its expanse were clear streams of limpid water flowing over the coral foundation of the Everglades.



**ON THE BORDER OF THE GLADES**





HE SAW HIS FATE IN THE THING THAT HE COULDN'T SHAKE OFF.



WHILE THE CAPTAIN FISHED, MY WORK CONSISTED IN KEEPING THE CANOE HEAD ON TO THE FISH.



AT TIMES THE FISH REFUSED TO JUMP WHEN CALLED ON.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ON THE BORDER OF THE GLADES

**P**ONCE DE LEON failed to find the Fountain of Youth, but if he had explored Harney River where it meets the Everglades he would have discovered the cave of Somnus. Its Lethean waters give oblivion and for two days after drinking of them we forgot our purpose in coming to the river. Tarpon were not spoken of and rods were not rigged. The Camera-man and I paddled our light canoe as if in a dream over sunny waters, through flowering meadows, and around tiny keys with which the Glades are dotted.

We moved so silently that birds sat quietly on their floating nests as we passed within a canoe length of them, while long-legged herons stepped aside with dignity, scorning to take refuge in flight. Deer, crossing between keys, turned won-

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

dering eyes upon us and seeing that we had forgotten our guns pursued their unhurried way. Alligators fled from their mounds in the flooded meadows and we pushed hard on the paddles till we touched the tail of the frightened, fleeing saurian with the bow of the canoe.

We paddled so far and so thoughtlessly, changing our course so frequently as we chased the creatures of the wild, or followed wandering leads of clear water, watching fish and turtles in its depths, that when we thought to return there was nothing to point out the path. We had neither watch nor compass and as the sun was near the zenith we had the whole horizon to choose from. The afternoon was well advanced when the trees on the western border of the Everglades showed up and the landscape was unfamiliar when we reached it. We fancied we were too far south, which was a mistake, and paddled to the north for an hour before changing our minds.

It is not always easy to follow the borders of the Everglades by day, and darkness so confused us that we would have spent the night in the canoe had we not been guided, first by the report

## THE BORDER OF THE GLADES

of a rifle and then by the rays from a lantern shining through the trees where the *Irene* lay at anchor.

On our second day at the head of the river we followed labyrinthic streams that turned and twisted through narrow channels, darkened by overhanging branches or broadened into open lagoons, carpeted and choked by great lily pads. Coming to a heavy growth of this kind, through which we could force the canoe only a few inches at a stroke, I thought to wade and drag the canoe. Thrusting my paddle downward to explore the bottom, I could find none, though to blade and handle I added the full length of my arm. But a commotion was created beneath the canoe and the big leaves about us dipped under the surface, while rising bubbles and water that boiled around our craft told of a monster disporting among the roots of the lilies. Soon the line of disturbance led from us in a broad pathway of swirling leaves and agitated water that stretched out until a turn in the lagoon shut it from our sight.

We thought to revisit a long-abandoned Indian camp, with the site of which we were fam-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

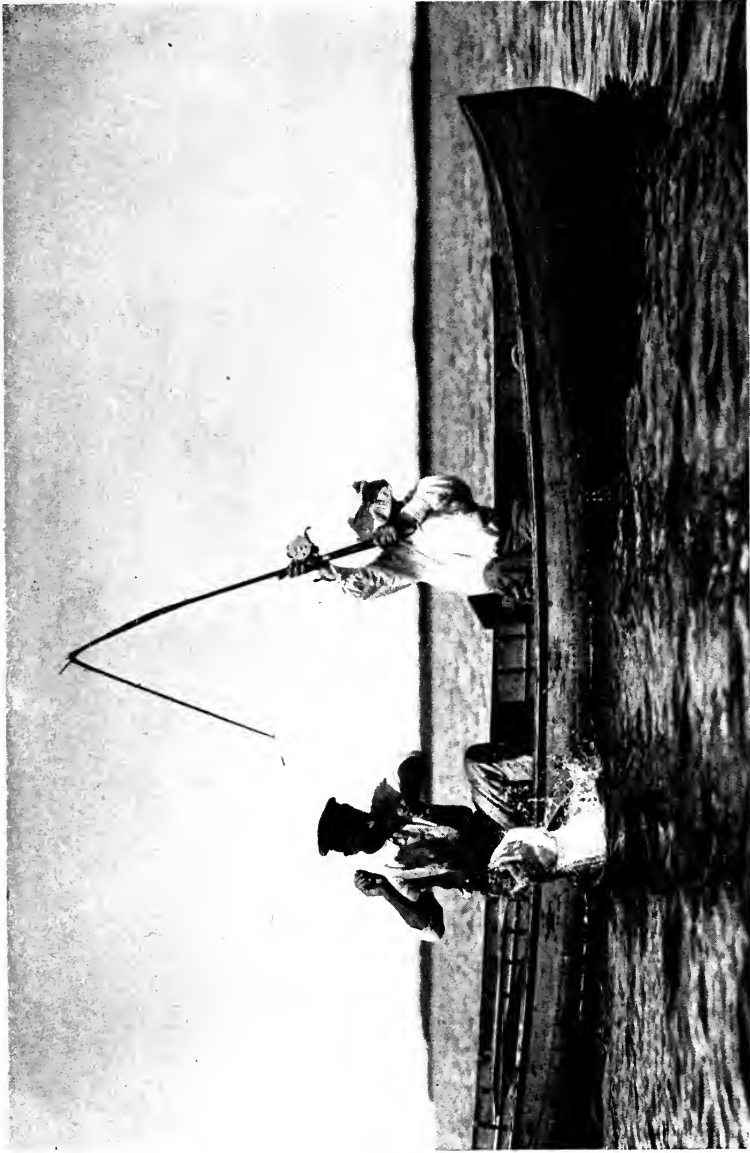
iliar. We passed the point from which we should have seen the lime and lemon trees that surrounded the old camp, but everything familiar had disappeared. Before us was a jungle surrounded by a tall canebrake without an opening big enough to give passage to a wildcat.

“Somebody has stolen our camp!” said I to the Camera-man. “It used to be here, but it’s gone.”

“It used to be here and it is here now,” was the reply. “Things grow fast in this country and that jungle has sprung up since we camped among the lime trees three years ago. Let’s tackle the canebrake and see what is behind it now.”

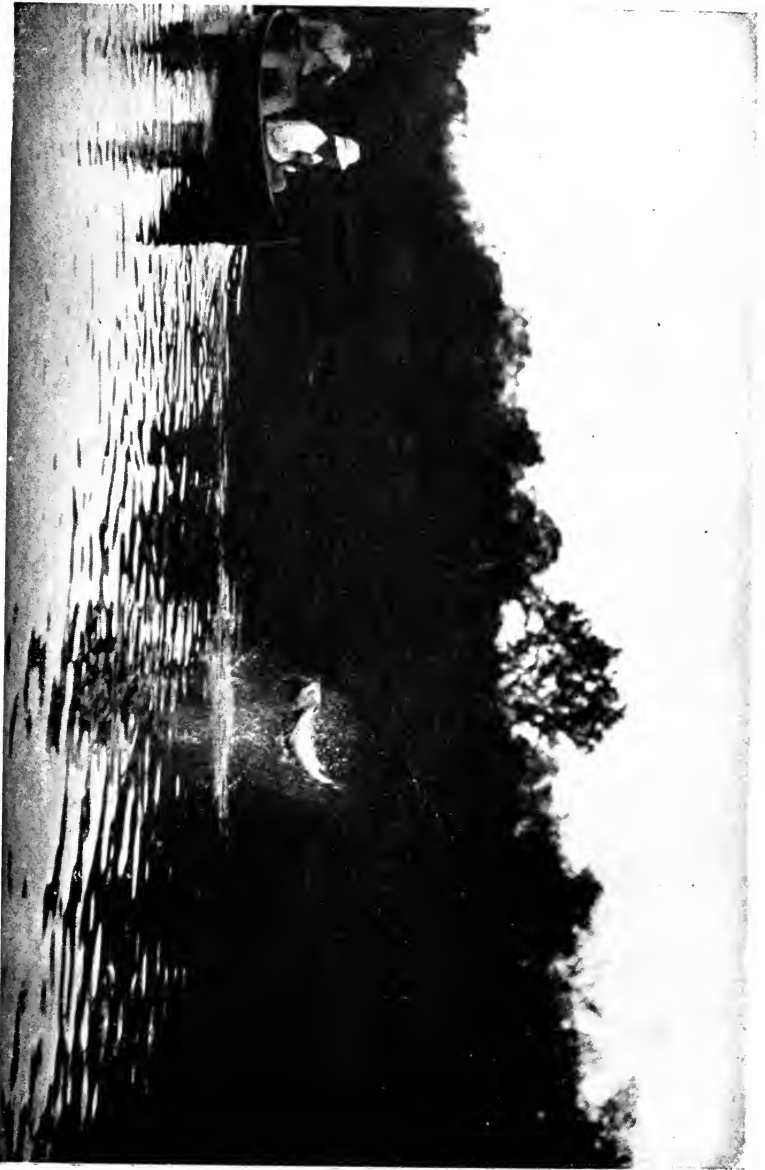
We hacked at the canes and jammed them aside, making a path through which we dragged the canoe until we reached a bank that we knew. A few more yards through a tangle of tall weeds over land that was high and dry brought us to the little group of citrus trees beside which were the charred sticks radiating from the point where in Indian fashion, three years before, we had built our camp-fire. From these sticks we built a new fire and over its coals broiled an Indian





BROUGHT THE STRAIN OF HIS WEIGHT ON THE TIP OF THE ROD WHICH BROKE IN TWO PARTS.

WE HIT THE TOP OF THE TARPON SEASON AT RODGERS'S RIVER.



## *THE BORDER OF THE GLADES*

hen, or limpkin, which I had shot with this lunch in view.

Limes and lemons filled the trees and covered the ground in bushels. Of the former we packed a goodly store in the canoe. In transporting these I utilized the hint a Florida girl had given me by carrying half a bushel of cocoa-plums in her shirt waist.

We dreamed through the afternoon, paddle in hand, finding objects of interest at every stroke. Tiny tree frogs, protectively colored, chirped within reach of my paddle and it was minutes before I could see them, while graceful forked-tailed kites, swooping down from their lofty height, gathered the little creatures in, without pausing in their flight. The great rookeries of the river had been destroyed, but we found scattered nests of herons, curlews, water turkeys, and other birds, and seldom did a mother-bird flee from our cautious approach. Just before us a crow darted down upon an unguarded nest and carried away a little egg, impaled upon its beak. But the avenger was on the trail of the nest robber and a swift-flying bee bird, the kingbird of the north, attacked it in the air. The crow fled

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

to the woods and we missed the finish of the fight, but we felt fairly assured that the plucky little bee bird got the marauder's scalp.

With the passing of the egret, the bird hunters, white and Indian, had lost interest in the river, while the ordinary tourist had never seen its upper waters. A few years' rest from pursuit had half tamed the wild creatures about us. The birds were almost friendly, the alligators less shy, and even a wise old otter, forgetful of the cash value of his fur, gazed at us from the bank unapprehensively.

This *dolce far niente* life could not last and when, on our third morning at the head of the river, the captain asked if we were through tarpon fishing, I told him to get out the little motor boat while I put my eight ounce fly-rod together. There were tarpon in the streams that flowed near us in the Everglades, but the water was so clear that the fish saw the game and refused to rise to our lure. We tried the shallow little streams and the deeper pools about us, but though the creatures we sought were plentiful we couldn't scare up a bite.

"Why not go down to the crooked creek?"

## *THE BORDER OF THE GLADES*

asked the captain. "The pool there is chock-full of 'em."

"I want some babies for real fly-rod work and they are a bit too big for that, but we'll try them."

We went down the river to the pool which was teeming with tarpon and I was sure my first cast would end in a strike. But I cast fly and bait, again and again, without winning the attention of a fish. I dragged the line across the pool as they played until they knocked it aside with their heads. We wasted an hour before giving up, and then paddled down a shallow branch of the river that led away from the crooked creek. At last I had a strike, and a tarpon about four feet long, after two wild leaps, sped down the stream while my reel buzzed in its highest key and the line ran low on the reel.

The captain paddled his best in spite of the way I yelled at him and the considerate fish turned back and zigzagged, giving me a chance to gather in line. As we kept on down the stream it grew shallower and narrower, my reel was nearly full, and I felt sure of the game when the tarpon dashed into an overgrown creek where

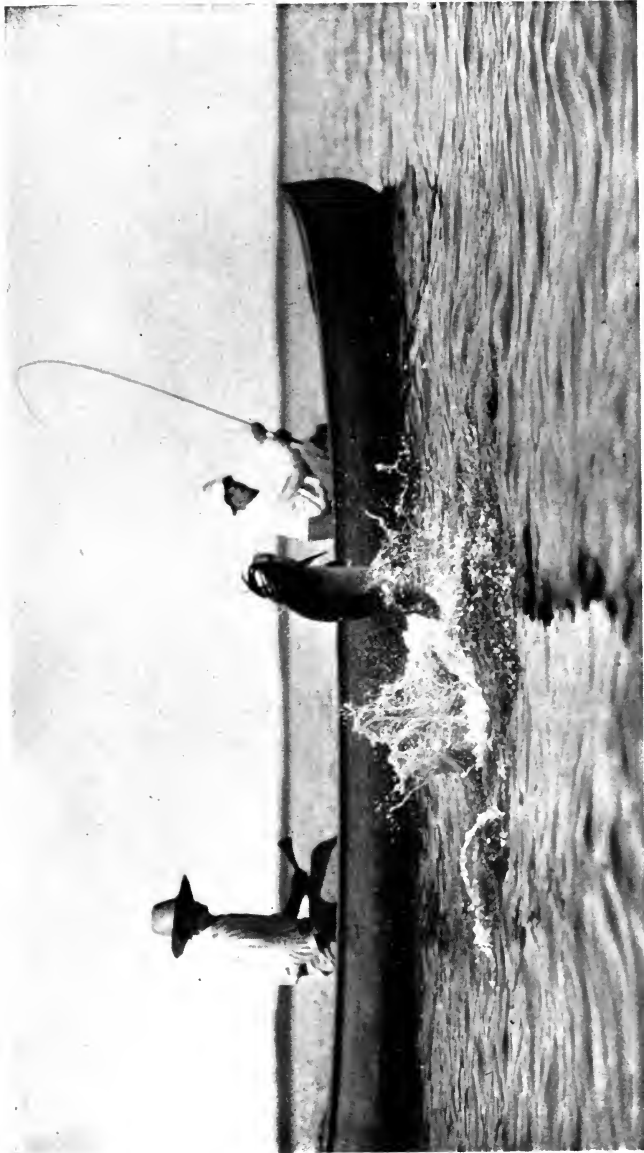
## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

I held my head down to avoid the bushes and kept the tip of my rod straight ahead near the surface of the water.

"That tarpon's a goner," said the captain. "He'll smash your rod when he turns."

But the fish didn't turn and within a hundred yards the little gully opened into a river twice as broad as the one we had left. We followed our quarry up the stream, which spread over shallow banks and wandered among the trees, until the tarpon turned back. Again it entered the little creek, turning so sharply that the captain had trouble in following it quickly enough to keep the line out of the bushes. With the rod held horizontally it was impossible to keep a steady strain on the line, and a series of little jerks so irritated the tarpon that twice it leaped high among the overhanging branches. Once would probably have been enough, but twice made the result certain and the tarpon struck the water a free fish. Though the round was against us its termination was so pretty that I called to the Camera-man:

"Wasn't that jump a beaut? Hope you got it."



THERE WERE FEW MINUTES OF THAT DAY WHEN MY LITTLE ROD WAS NOT IN ACTION.

MADE MY REEL BUZZ AS IT DARTED HITHER AND YON.





## THE BORDER OF THE GLADES

“‘Got it!’ How could I get anything through two of you? You ought to have gone overboard or climbed a tree, anything to get out of the way. You kept me from getting a picture of a tarpon climbing a tree. I’ll never get such a chance again.”

Soon after re-entering the river I saw a small fish jump near the mouth of a creek on the opposite side of the stream. I soon found that it was a regular nursery of hungry tarpon. An infant rose to every cast and although for a time my luck was bad, I finally hooked the ideal fish for a fly-rod. A perfect tarpon, about eighteen inches long and weighing less than two pounds, made my reel buzz as it darted hither and yon, leaping half a dozen feet in the air several times in a minute. It was the first fish of the kind I had fought in the fashion I liked best, with only the spring of the rod and wrist action. Tiny as the tarpon was, it carried out a hundred feet of line and I almost regretted my resolve not to move or be moved from my station at the mouth of the creek. When at the end of a long struggle I gave the little creature the freedom it had so well earned, my wrists were as tired as after the

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

capture of one of his kind of fifty times his avoirdupois.

The next tarpon that struck gave no choice about the manner of playing him, for after a few preliminary leaps and an angry shake of his head he started up the creek like a steamboat and the captain had to get busy to keep within the limits of my line. It was a bigger creek than the one where we lost our first fish and I usually had room for my rod, but sometimes an overhanging branch had to be dodged and there were short turns in the stream that troubled me. Once the fish sulked under the bank for a minute and then came straight for the canoe, but the splash of a paddle turned the creature back on its course after a protesting leap that nearly carried it over an out-thrusting branch. It was our second narrow escape, for if the tarpon had passed us it would soon have been free, since we hadn't room in that part of the creek to turn our canoe.

To manage the canoe from the bow and the tarpon from the stern, in that crooked little creek, would have invited trouble.

It was a playful tarpon that led us and we had oodles of fun in the half mile course of the creek,

## *THE BORDER OF THE GLADES*

but the fly in the ointment was the language of the Camera-man who followed in the little motor boat. He couldn't pass the canoe and he couldn't photograph through us; he could see the fun, but he couldn't picture it. The creek opened at last into a little bay and I called back to the Camera-man:

"Your time has come. There's plenty of room ahead."

But it was the tarpon's time that had come, for the fish swam under some roots that projected from the bank of the creek where it joined the bay and my goose was cooked. I passed my rod to the captain and, taking the line in hand, thrust my arm shoulder deep beneath the surface of the water in an effort to free the line. I might have succeeded but for the treachery of the little canoe which rolled me out and buried me well under the surface of the water. It was a source of gratification to me that the captain went overboard at the same time and I met his recriminations as we poured the water out of the canoe by upbraiding him for capsizing the craft.

The following day we exploited our tarpon creek during all the hours when the camera could

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

work and recorded the capture of nearly a score of tarpon on an eight-ounce rod. The fish varied in weight from two to twenty pounds each and it was one of those rare days when they bit at anything. It might well have happened that twenty-four hours later not a rise could have been coaxed out of one of them. But there were few minutes of that day when my little rod was not in action with a tarpon at the end of it.

Several tarpon escaped by leaping among the branches of overhanging trees and tangling the line till it broke. Twice tarpon jumped over the canoe and one little one fell squarely within it. The Camera-man's luck was hard. He could never choose his position to advantage and the shots he got were in shadows so deep that it was cruelty to lenses to try them. At the close of the fishing he announced that another day of photographing jumping tarpon in the dark would ruin his disposition for keeps, so we brought the *Irene* down to the crooked creek ready for an early start the next morning.

**A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO**



## CHAPTER XIV

### A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

**D**'YE want to take some risk, runnin' the creek, this morning?"

"Guess we've got to, haven't we, Captain?" I replied.

"Nope, we can get out lines and snub her all the way down. It'll pretty near use up the day, though."

"The other way is to let her go flying, engine and current, both full speed?"

"Sure!"

"Can you make the turns?"

"Some of 'em, not all. Every man must take a pole and fend off lively. The bushes will scratch us up a lot and we'll likely carry away something. It will be fun, though, and I'd like to try it if you don't mind."

As I didn't mind, we cleared the deck of every-

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

thing movable, even carrying the little canoe into the cabin, and hauled the bow of the baby motor boat under the counter of the *Irene*. The Camera-man started the motor and then taking a pole went forward, for the captain told him there would be no hurry about stopping the engine since the order wouldn't be given till the peril was past and we were hard and fast on a bank. For a hundred yards the course was straight, then came a sharp turn to the left, followed by one yet sharper to the right.

I stood beside the captain as our speed increased with every turn of the wheel, and as we neared the first bend in the stream I was glad that his was the guiding hand. He stood like a graven image while the bushes on the right bank swept the side of the cabin, until at the first turn I thought the bowsprit would be buried in the woods. But the wheel rolled to port, and rudder and current swept us clear of the bank. While the boat was still swinging, the wheel flew to starboard and I held my breath as the *Irene* slowly swung to the right away from the bank toward which she was surging. One instant the motor boat in tow swung against the right bank





AS I BELIEVE, THE LARGEST TARPON THAT WAS EVER CAUGHT ON AN EIGHT-OUNCE FLY  
ROD SHOT A DOZEN FEET IN THE AIR.



ROLLED ME WELL OUT AND BURIED ME BENEATH  
THE SURFACE OF THE WATER.

## A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

of the creek and a second later the bowsprit swept the bushes on the left bank.

"Rather close call," said I.

"Oh, no, that was easy, but there's a goose neck turn below where I'm afraid we'll have trouble."

It was all trouble, it seemed to me, for the captain kept the wheel spinning back and forth like a teetotum, while the Camera-man and Joe jabbed their poles into the banks and the branches of trees swept deck and cabin. Once there was a crack as the bowsprit mowed down some bushes, but it was only a dry branch that broke. A projecting root caught the bow of the *Green Pea*, but the snag was rotten and broke. At the goose neck turn we ran into the bank, but it was a glancing blow and quick work with the poles freed the bow of the boat before the current could swing its stern across the creek.

A moment later we entered the broader stream and as we turned down the river I looked through the companion way at the clock and thought it had stopped. The passage of the creek had contained incidents enough to make a full day. When I recalled the panorama of the stream as its banks swept past, its perils and pleasures, and

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

its excitements of apprehension and relief, it seemed to me that hours must have passed since the engine was started and the bow of the *Irene* pointed down the crooked creek. But the emotionless clock with its unhurried beat declared that the trip had been made in less than four minutes.

Tarpon were jumping in the river and we went out in the canoe to make their acquaintance, but found them too coy for our purpose. I cast and trolled for an hour before getting a strike and then the quarry was a ravaille. The fish was game and leaped out of the water in a way that would have been highly creditable to a salmon, though it would have disgraced a decrepit tarpon. When I finally struck a tarpon it was too heavy to be played advantageously with a fly-rod and the Camera-man complained that he couldn't get the canoe and the tarpon on the same plate if we kept them a mile apart. For the rest of the day we used the heavy rod, but the few fish we struck fled to narrow channels and gave acrobatic performances where the motor boat could not be maneuvered.

We arranged to anchor for the night beside

## A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

the picturesque Tussock Key, but as we approached it the presence of a camp-fire and the absence of campers suggested that it was occupied by outlaws and that the latch string had been pulled in at sight of us.

"It's a good night for a run down the coast," suggested the captain.

"Then we'll anchor off Flamingo before we sleep."

When our mud hook went down in the night we were lying off the southernmost point of the mainland of Florida, in the shallow water of Barnes's Sound. On one side of us was the key where my friend Guy Bradley, game warden, was shot down and his body left to drift in sight of his home. South of us lay Man-o'-war Bush, still frequented by flocks of the frigate pelican, or man-o'-war hawk. The country about us was once the home of a world of birds, but only fragments of the great flocks remained.

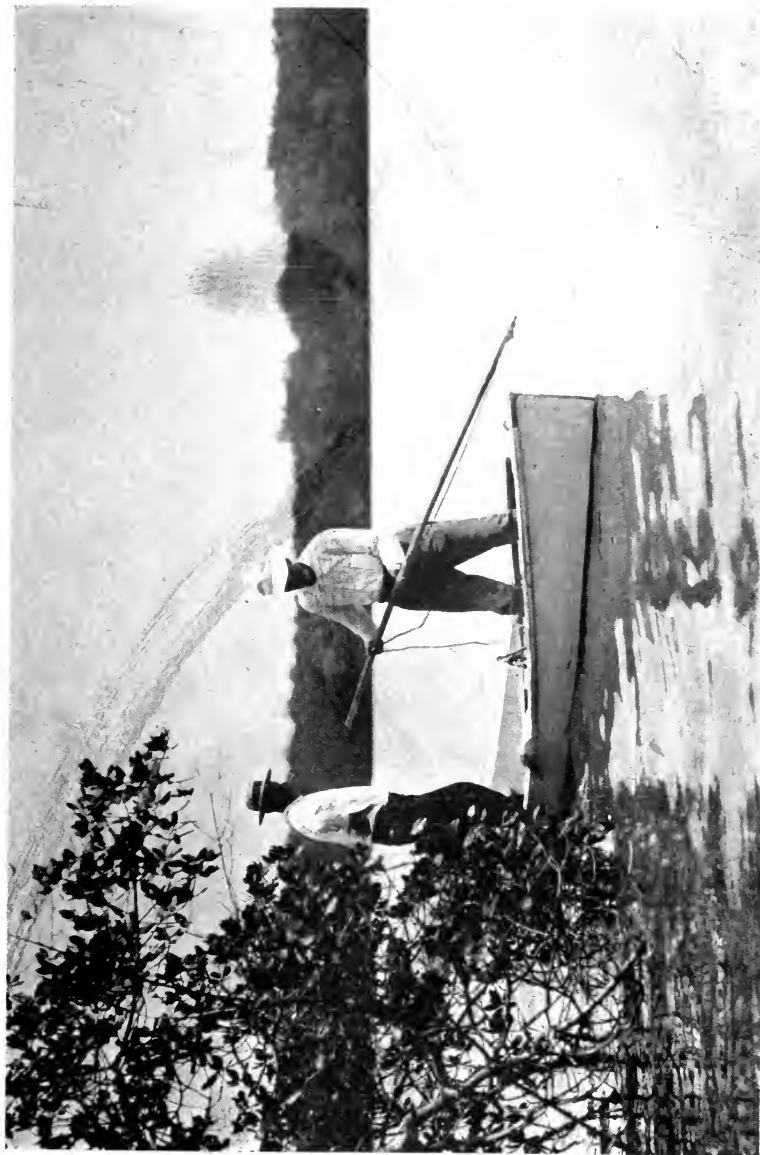
On a bank to the east of us I had once seen a hundred flamingoes standing in soldierly line, while red bands stretched across the sky marked the flight of other flocks of the same beautiful creatures. Near us was a creek leading through

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

devious, difficult channels to a little lake hidden among the jungle-like trees of a mangrove swamp where I had seen a key with its trees hidden by the white plumage of the thousands of snowy heron that were nesting upon it. I learned the next year that my boatman had returned to the rookery and from the birds that he killed gathered plumes which he sold for \$1,100.

A narrow strip of coast, a few miles to the east, contained the little remnant, if any there were, of the Florida crocodile, while a single family of manatees of my acquaintance lived, unless recently killed, in nearby waters. But neither natives nor tourists could kill off the fish and the waters were alive with them, oodles of them. From Joe Kemp's Key, where we were anchored, channels wound about the keys and threaded the shallow banks where multitudes of mullet and lesser fish feasted and were feasted upon. For as the tide rose the channels were filled with sharks and sawfish, dolphins, tarpon, and other predatory creatures until the small fish that slipped into deep waters was lost.

As the flat-bodied sawfish drew the least water



THE TRUE WEAPON FOR THE SHOAL WATER IS THE HARPOON FOR WHICH THERE WAS  
FOOD ON EVERY SIDE OF US.



IT LOOKED AND PULLED LIKE THE BIGGEST  
KIND OF A FISH.



ALWAYS WE FEARED THE TARPON'S GETTING  
TOO FAR AWAY.



## A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

for a craft of its tonnage, it was the first to slip over the bank and glide slowly, with its three big fins in line above the surface, among the schools of little fish. Sometimes, with saw waving from side to side, it darted into a group which scattered quickly, yet left some of its members with bodies slashed half in two.

Tarpon spread over the flats till a score of their bayonet fins could be seen at once as they coursed their prey. Dolphins often fished in families of three and the Camera-man followed them by the hour with leveled weapon, hoping to be within range at the critical instant when Papa Dolphin sent a shower of mullet into the air that Baby Dolphin might catch one as it fell.

The true weapon for the shoal water of Barnes's Sound is the harpoon for which there was food on every side of us, but the bite of a shark, leap of a dolphin, or stroke of a sawfish might at any moment destroy the canoe which was so essential a part of our outfit. We devoted a day to pure pleasure and, leaving camera, rod, and harpoon on the *Irene*, paddled through the channels and over the flats that spread out before us. We followed a family of

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

dolphins a mile up a channel that petered out and sent them skittering over shallow banks in water that only half floated them on their way to another channel.

The day was calm, the often muddy waters crystal clear and more than once as we rested quietly on its surface the huge form of a fifteen-foot sawfish glided slowly beneath us, waving its broad, many-toothed weapon, one stroke of which would have destroyed our craft and qualified us for a hospital at least. Sharks which could have eaten us alive fled at the approach of the canoe, while the tarpon we met seemed to understand that our evil designs against them had been suspended. Our wanderings extended to Man-o'-War Bush and other keys where a few birds, young and old, greeted or scolded us, while on one we found a small colony of the fast-disappearing roseate spoonbill. We explored Cuthbert Creek, disturbing the alligators that slept on its banks and finding a nest of the smallest tarpon I had ever seen. One that jumped into the canoe measured a trifle over eighteen inches and must have weighed less than two pounds.

## A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

“Why not go over to Bear Lake if you want little tarpon?” asked the captain that evening when we told him of our capture. “It’s only three or four miles across the prairie and it sure is the place where young tarpon are made.”

“I know those tarpon,” I replied, “and I don’t believe you could get a rise out of them in a thousand years, but we’ll give them another chance.”

It was a hot, hard tramp to the lake and we arrived there, the Camera-man, the captain, and I, wild with thirst but without a drop to drink. The water of the lake was presumably fresh, but it was thicker than gruel with mud. I had a pocket filter that refused to filter, though I sucked at it till I was black in the face. The lake was a dark cauldron of mud stirred constantly by a few alligators and great numbers of tarpon, of which many were continually leaping above the surface. For half an hour I cast and trolled with flies and bait along the margin of the pond without getting a rise. Then I gave it up and helped the captain and Camera-man by contributing clothing and labor to the calking of a wreck of a skiff originally built of pieces of dry goods boxes. The Camera-man looked ruefully,

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

at the result and said as he stepped cautiously aboard: "I don't mind being drowned in clean water, but I hate being smothered in mud."

Then he pulled off his cap and bailed with it, while the captain and I paddled with sticks. I left my rod on the bank, fearing that the attempt to catch fish from that crazy craft would result in the fish getting us. Moccasins guarded the borders of the pond and one key that we passed was worthy the name of Golgotha, for in a single season two hunters had piled upon it the skulls of a thousand alligators together with their bodies, and the whitened bones yet remained in heaps. In shallow coves we found numbers of ill-odored gar and on the margin of the pond the tracks of a deer which caused us to wonder if the creature had come there to eat the water. As we approached a thicket near the end of the pond a big, black creature sprang out of it with a loud "wouf!" and shambled swiftly away through a tangle where a man would have found it difficult to crawl.

"That must be the bear the lake's named for," said the captain. "I shot at him last time I was here. I wish I'd had my rifle with me to-day."

## A ZIGZAG TRIP AND A ZOO

"I'm glad you didn't have it," I replied, "for if you had fired a gun in this tottlish box that bear would have been fishing us out of the mud for his supper by this time."

"We must get ashore quick!" broke in the Camera-man. "There's a big leak and I can't keep the water down."

After we were safely ashore we found that the leak was in the bow of the box where I had been sitting and came from a rotten board that I must have loosened when the bear made me jump.

On our return to the *Irene* we found that Joe had had a busy afternoon. About noon a hammerhead shark of the largest size had called upon him and been treated to a mullet on a big shark hook at the end of a half inch line. The fish swung the *Irene* about for a time until Joe had attached one end of the line to the windlass and cast it loose from the cleat that had held it.

Then the boy's fun began. With three or four turns of the line on the windlass he could hold the great brute with his left hand, giving him rope if his struggles threatened to break line or hook. His right hand rested on the lever of the windlass and he wound the creature in as oppor-

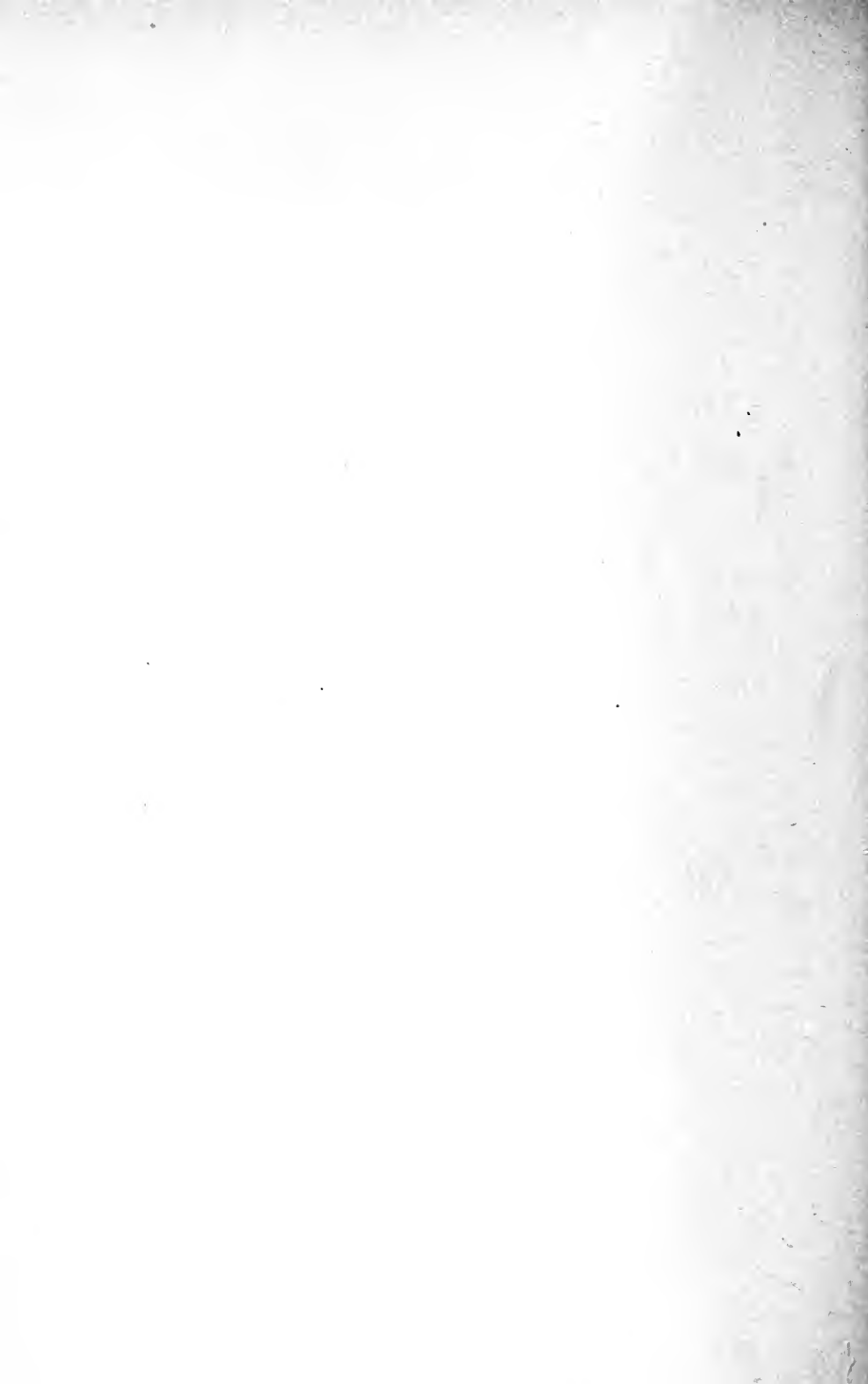
## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

tunity offered. The hammerhead is the most powerful shark of its size and as Joe's captive was fourteen and one half feet long, the boy was as tired as his adversary when at last the broad nose of this strangely formed fish swung clear of the surface. Then Joe looped a strong line around the three-foot nose and hooked it to the throat halliards of the boat. When we reached the *Irene* the head of the hammerhead had been hoisted to the bulwarks and Joe was hammering it vigorously with an axe.

"A pretty full day, Captain," said I as I recalled our zigzagging of the morning, the deer and the dolphin, the bear, the tarpon, the birds, the sawfish, and shark.

"A whole zoo," commented the Camera-man.

**THE HAPPIEST DAY OF ALL**





## CHAPTER XV

### THE HAPPIEST DAY OF ALL

**T**HE pleasure of fishing is not in proportion to the score. When Charles Dudley Warner spoke of a happy day on the trout stream at my home he was asked: "What luck did you have?"

"I saw the loveliest trout scenery in the world."

"But how many trout did you catch?"

"I made some beautiful casts!"

The day of which I write was perhaps the happiest of the fishing trip, yet not a hook was baited, a harpoon rigged, nor a fish caught. We left the Cape Sable country at dawn with a favoring current of air that hardly sufficed to fill the sails and left the surface of the water almost unruffled. We drifted under mainsail alone over the shallow Florida Banks and I sat on the bow with a clear view to the horizon, unbroken save

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

by scattering keys with their tropical foliage. Here and there the surface of the water was dotted with groups of pelicans and lesser birds, and often broken by the leaps of whip rays and tarpon and the rolling of dolphins. The water was so clear that as I looked down we seemed to be floating in air above a beautiful garden of rare products. There were flowering coral in forms infinitely varied, sea feathers, sponges of many sorts that seemed to live and breathe as I gazed at them and above and among them, darting hither and thither, were tiny fishes of many shapes and colors.

Once a great whip ray glided almost beneath me and I looked down upon a broad, flat back, fully eight feet in diameter, covered with white rings on a black ground, as uniform and bright as a fresh linoleum pattern. Startled by a motion of my hand as the creature rose to the surface, it fluttered away, looking like a giant butterfly with its great wings waving half in and half out of the water.

Wireless messages of good will must have radiated from our slow-moving craft to the creatures of the wild. For minutes at a time dolphins

## THE HAPPIEST DAY OF ALL

swam within a harpoon's throw of my hand while pelicans in our path waited till the *Irene* was within its length of them before starting on their heavy flight. Birds, both land and water, showed strange fearlessness. A passing red-bird lit upon the masthead and sang joyfully to us, while a stray chuck-will's-widow, bird of the night, dropped within reach of my hand and rested on the deck in the shadow of the furled jib. Man-o'-war hawks swooped under our counter to collect the scraps thrown overboard by Joe and one even touched with its bill a fish that was held out to it. Several tern that were fishing near us lit on the cabin to rest and ate of the food pushed toward them, while one in payment for his dinner sat on my outstretched finger and posed for the Camera-man.

The little breeze died out, but I couldn't destroy the delicious peace of the day by the noisy churning of the propeller and for an hour we drifted. The time might have been better employed, for when black clouds piled up in the southwest and a heavy squall tore up the water as it bore down on us, it was too late to find the shelter we needed. Every sail was furled and

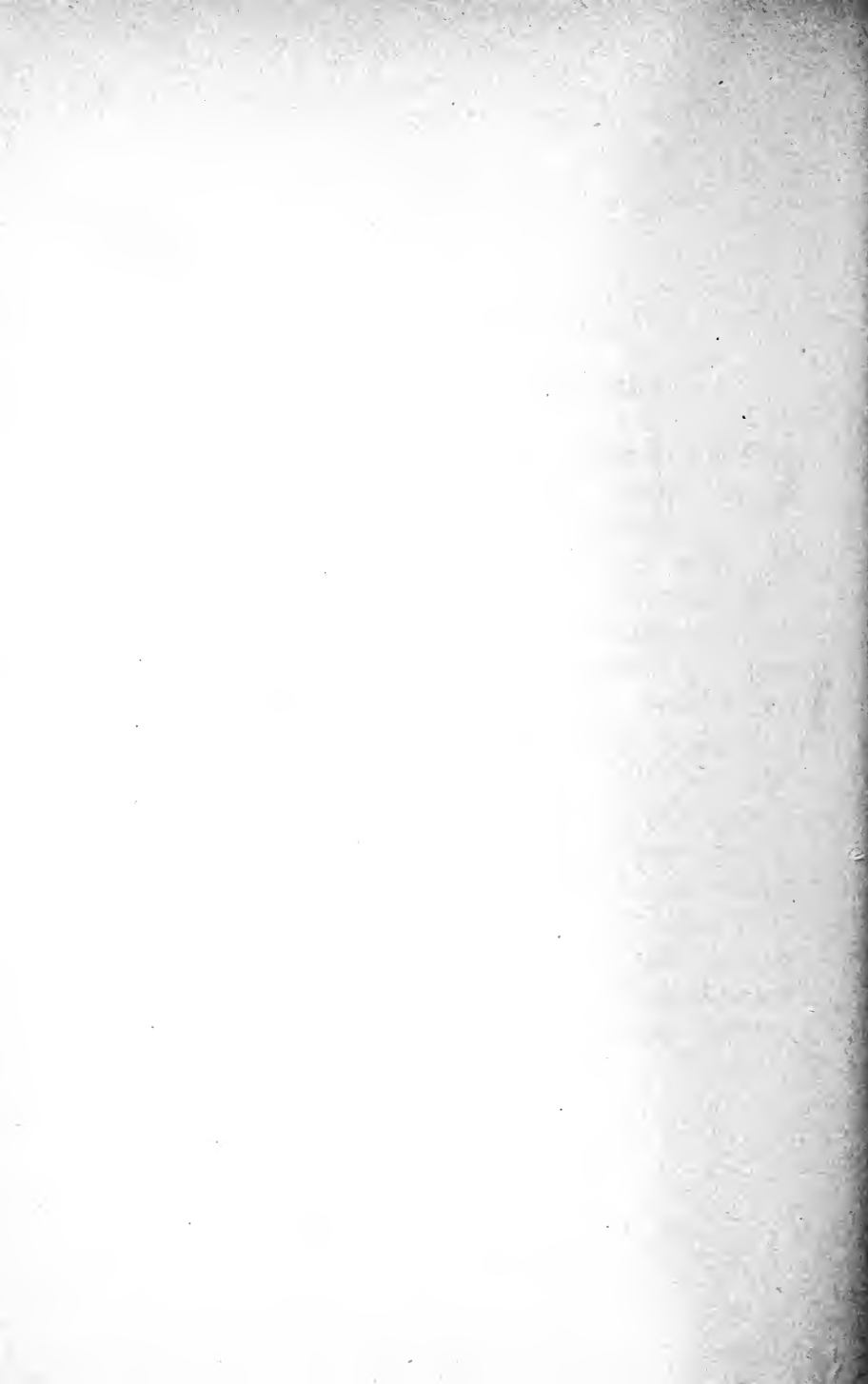
## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

we were churning away for the nearest key when the shrieking wind struck us and took command. Against it the motor couldn't even make steerage way and the best it could do was to keep the big anchor from dragging.

The scene had been changed as by a magician's wand. The deep water and wide sweep for the wind which make for big waves was wanting, but every billow was crested with foam and the flying drops under pressure of the blast stung our faces like sleet. When the fury of the squall had so abated that the motor could pull us up to the anchor we hoisted it and started for the shelter of the keys. As darkness came on we anchored close under the lee of Bamboo Key, which enjoys the unusual and not altogether merited distinction of having never harbored a mosquito.

We cruised in vain for tarpon among the outer keys until we reached Bahia Honda. Between that and No Name Key the channel was alive with the creatures we sought. They appeared to be at play, for few small fish were in sight, yet two or three of the largest sized tarpon could be seen in the air at once.

**TARPON TRAGEDIES**



## CHAPTER XVI

### TARPON TRAGEDIES

**C**AN'T catch those fellers," said the captain. "They're like the tarpon in the pool at Captiva Pass. They ain't fishin'. They're at some game of their own."

We attacked the enemy in our usual formation, the captain and I in advance with the canoe, while the Camera-man and Joe followed in the *Green Pea*. Up and down the channel I was paddled, trailing a beautiful bait, artistically cut from the belly of a mullet. Tarpon jumped all around us, so fearless of our presence that I looked for one to land in the canoe, but not one seemed to see the bait.

"I told you so," said the captain. "When tarpon are thataway they won't bite and it's no use tryin' to make 'em."

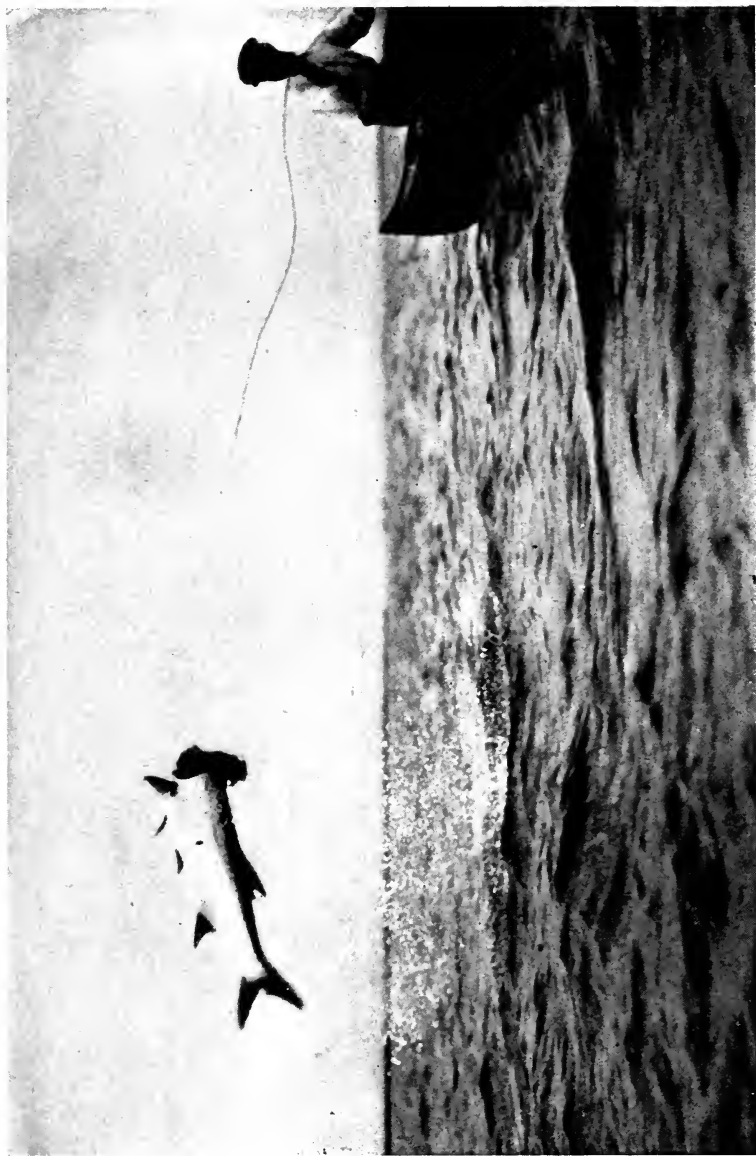
That speech of the captain was what the tar-

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

pon had been waiting for and just as he finished it there was a jerk on my line and the biggest tarpon I had ever seen shot high in the air. I can safely call it any size I please, since I had never a chance to measure it. It looked and pulled like the biggest kind of a fish, but it jumped as often as a little one. Straight out for the Florida Straits it swam, never swerving from its course, but tearing line from the reel in spite of all the strain I could put on it with the captain paddling his best. Suddenly the fish changed its method and after two leaps in quick succession swam for the canoe, swift and straight as an arrow.

The effort to keep a strain on the line was hopeless, yet I reeled in as fast as I could, but when the tarpon made a long, low leap, striking the water a canoe length from us, I was at least fifty feet of line to the bad. I wound on desperately, though I knew if the jump were repeated the canoe would be split fore and aft, while a number of things might happen to me. Instead of knocking me endwise as I feared, the tarpon swerved aside and when the line tautened it led behind the canoe and ran under the bow of the





JUMPED WILDLY, AND DASHED TO THE RIGHT, TO THE LEFT, AND ON AGAIN.



THE CAPTAIN GOT HIS FIRST STRIKE.

## TARPON TRAGEDIES

motor boat. I yelled to Joe to back out of the way, but it was quite needless for he had already reversed the engine and in another second the danger of cutting the line with the propeller was past. For a minute the tarpon kept a straight course, then after two wild leaps came back for the canoe. Again it passed us, once more outward bound, but soon jumped wildly and dashed to the right, the left, and on again.

"What's the matter with your tarpon?" asked the captain.

"Hydrophobia, I reckon; seems to hate to stay in the water."

"He's bughouse, all right, but the sharks must be after him."

The tarpon jumped again, the water boiled around him and the strain on the line ceased. As I wound it in there came to the surface and was dragged along, the head and about a foot of the body of the great tarpon which had been bitten in two by some bigger fish as easily as great power shears snip armor plate. I wound in the ghastly remnant for a nearer view and to recover my hook, but when it was almost within reach of my hand there floated up from beneath it a huge

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

dark body with a cavern of a mouth which closed over what was left of the tarpon. Again the line ran out, but this time with a firm pull as if fastened to a slow freight train. When the shark found that he was hooked he turned, rolled, and twisted about till he had the line in his mouth. But it was the steel wire end of the line and after biting it a few times the puzzled shark gave it up and swam quietly away to meditate.

“Sorry we lost the tarpon, but we’ve got a big shark to show for it,” said the captain.

“Looks the other way round to me. We might as well try to tow a house and he won’t be worried into tiring himself out.”

“Coax him into shoal water and pound his head, same as we did at Boca Grande.”

But he wouldn’t be coaxed and when I tried to reel him in, I merely pulled the light canoe over him. Then he came to the surface, lifting his big dorsal fin high above it and turning his huge body until the cavernous mouth with its rows of introverted serrated teeth was in position to engulf us as it had the tarpon.

“Let up on that line!” shouted the captain as

## TARPON TRAGEDIES

he backed water with his paddle. "That devil could swallow us whole."

I turned loose the line before replying.

"You have often said, Captain, that sharks wouldn't tackle a man and that you would run the biggest of 'em out of the country with a stick!"

"When I said that I was in shoal water. It's the canoe I'm afraid of. They'd eat that up for the fun of it."

"I don't want to lose the canoe, so I'll keep twenty yards away from this brute."

The shark towed us back and forth for an hour, sometimes going far out from the key and at others running close to the shore. Once I landed on the beach and putting on the line all the strain it would bear tried to turn or tire the shark. I only succeeded in driving it off shore at so rapid a gait that I had to hustle to get back in the canoe, before my reel was emptied. Another hour dragged on, when the Camera-man, who had been patiently following us, sang out:

"What are we fishing for, tarpon or sharks?"

"Tarpon, from this minute!" I replied, and reeling in line till I was as near the monster as

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

I cared to be, I cut it and set fish and fisherman free.

“I have been thinking of that for an hour,” exclaimed the captain as he turned the canoe toward shore.

When we got back to the channel between the keys the tarpon had ceased to jump and I feared they had gone, but before I had trolled a minute the bait had been taken by a tarpon that made a picturesque fight, but a brief one, for soon the sharks were on its track. There came long, straight runs, followed by two or three wild jumps and a dash to one side. Then I lessened the strain on the line and gave the tarpon its head till the danger from the shark was past. Untrammelled and fresh, the tarpon could play all around the sharks and by watching for danger signs I helped it escape its foes while the Camera-man got the pictures he sought. When the fish grew weaker I pulled the canoe quickly beside it to remove the hook and free the creature from danger. I was all too late, for when within reach of my hand the tarpon rose half out of water, its body already encircled by those rows of cruel teeth that never give up their prey. The



THE GORGEOUS CREATURE APPEARED WITHIN A HALO OF RAINBOW MAKING DROPS.



ONE TARPON CAME TO MEET US JUST OFF THE  
HOTEL.



IN PAYMENT FOR HIS DINNER HE POSED ON  
MY OUTSTRETCHED FINGERS.



## TARPON TRAGEDIES

jaws closed with a crunch as the great fish swirled, dashing into my face water and blood.

"Got a shark on your line, look out!" shouted the captain and I saw that a second shark had swallowed the head of our quarry. I put no pressure on the brake of the reel, but turning the tip of the rod to the captain said:

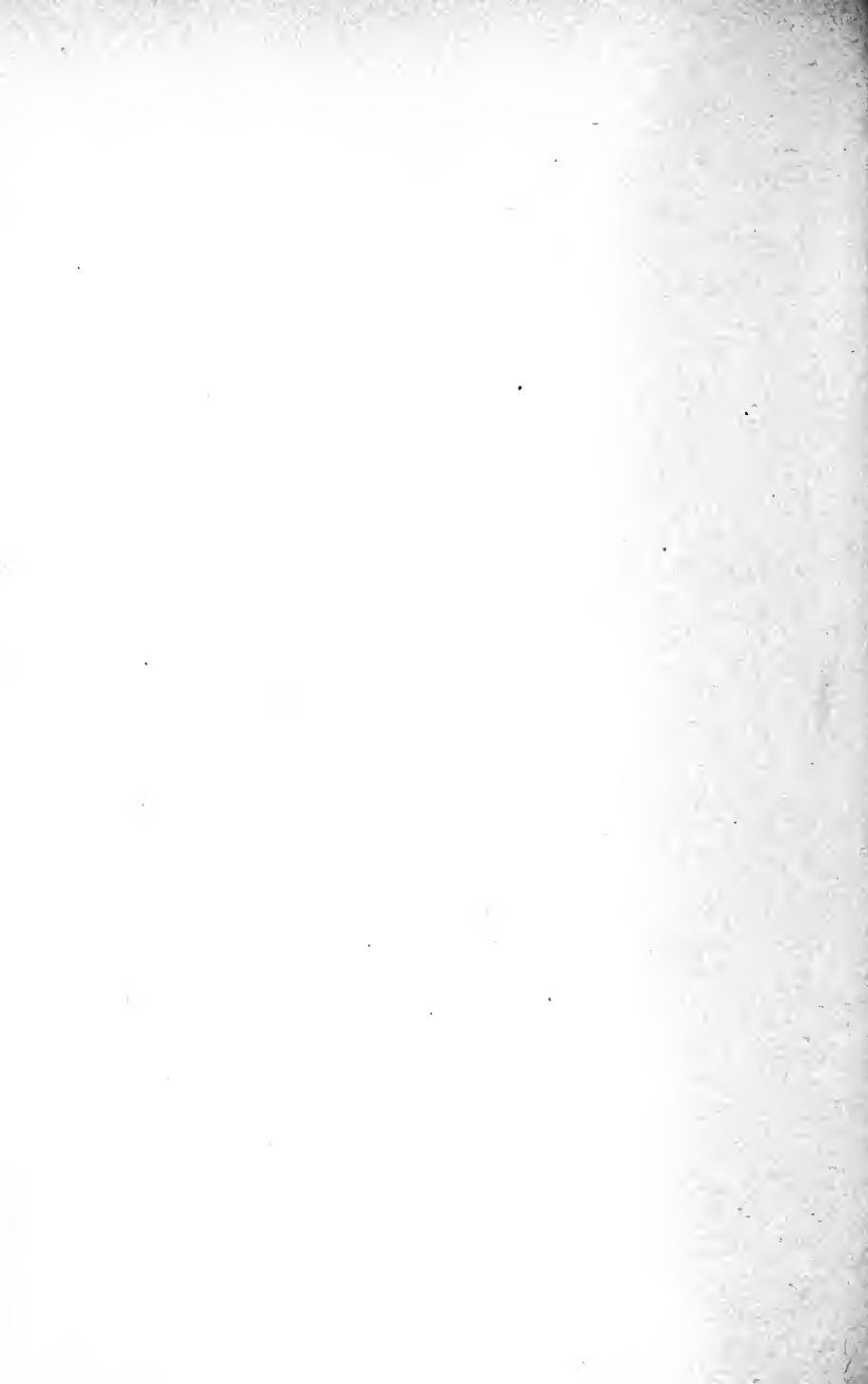
"Cut that line, quick as you can. I've had all the shark I want for to-day."

We paddled beside the motor boat and talked of the tragedy—for at the moment it seemed no less. As we conversed the blood of the slaughtered tarpon flowed on with the tide, making an ever-broadening, hot-scented trail up which streamed the savage sea-dogs. On every side they were dashing about, and I could feel that they were sniffing the tainted water, savage at being baffled of their prey. As they surged about our craft the Camera-man inquired of me:

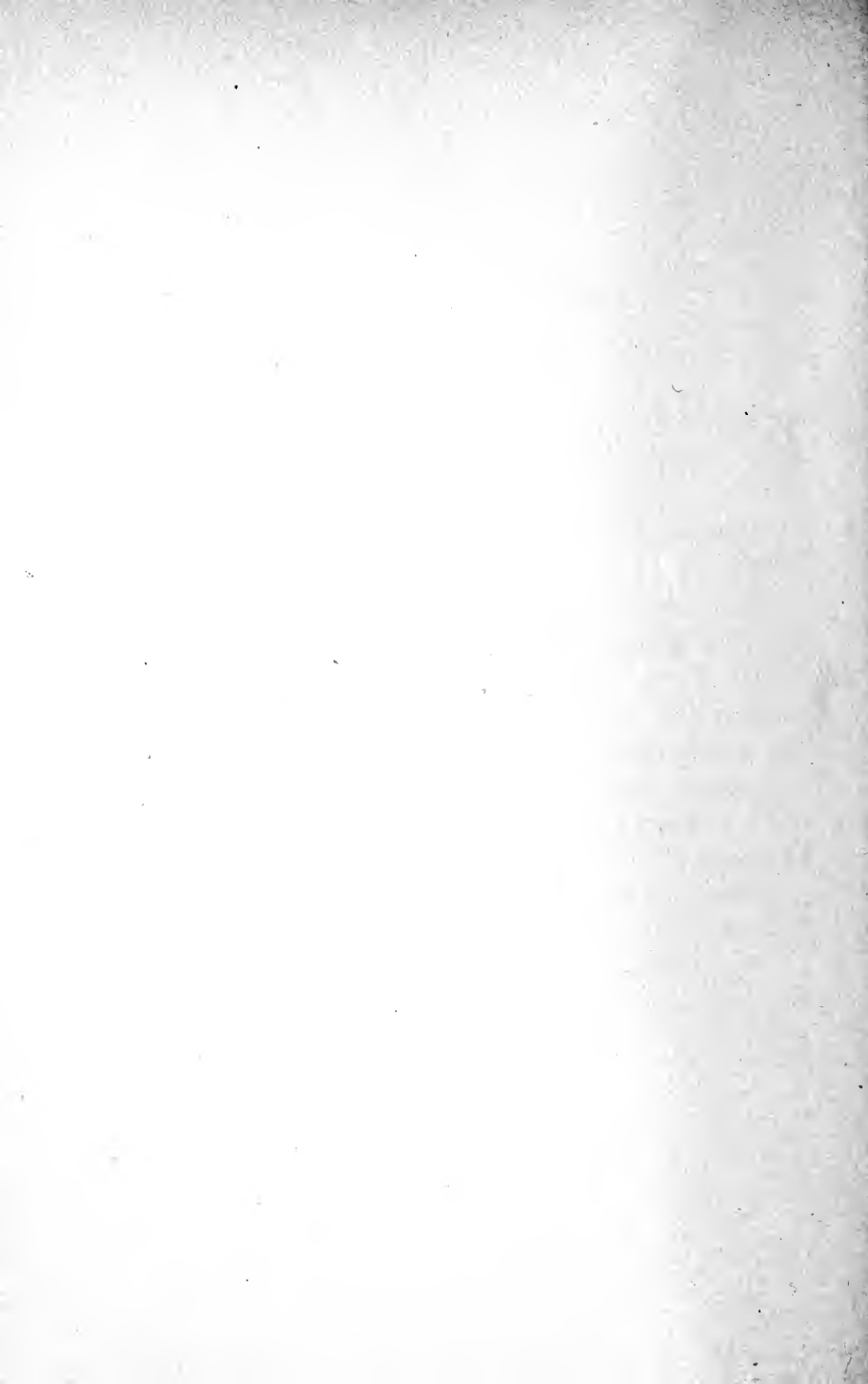
"Do you cling to your faith that sharks in American waters won't bite folks?"

"You know faith has been defined as 'belief in things that ain't so!'"

"I reckon that's your kind," said he, and I didn't feel like denying it.



**THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST.**



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST

**F**ETCH on your tarpon, I'm ready for them," said the Camera-man as he came up the companionway.

"I thought you'd used your last plate," I replied.

"So I have, and my camera is packed for home. That's why I want to see a tarpon. Up to now I've been scared to see them, afraid the camera wouldn't work, or that I'd miss a shot or fire at the wrong time."

"I am afraid your last chance has gone. It's a night run up the coast and a train from Myers to-morrow for us."

"There's more tarpon a cable length ahead of us than I ever saw in a bunch," said the captain.

"How do you know?" I asked. "I've been watching the water and haven't seen a jump. You surely can't see the fish under water?"

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

"That's jest what I did, when I clumb the mast."

The Camera-man and I went forward and stood on the cabin, studying the clear water before us. We were on the shallow banks south of Cape Sable, slowly moving northward before a gentle breeze that scarcely caused a ripple in the water.

We came upon the tarpon, a great school of them, all large and headed northwest. They were swimming in a regular formation that extended hundreds of feet and covered many acres. There were probably thousands of tarpon in the bunch. Those in our path sheered aside to avoid us, but none seemed alarmed.

"The rods are still in commission, and I'll paddle you if you would like to try them," said I to the Camera-man.

"I don't believe there is the least chance, but I'd like to be reminded how a rod feels," was the reply and we were soon in the canoe among the tarpon.

I paddled slowly and I paddled fast. In the clear water on the light banks every scale of a tarpon could be seen and the bait almost

## *THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST*

maneuvered into its mouth. It was wasted effort. The fish swerved aside from the bait and a little more so from the canoe. We passed through the column of tarpon without getting a strike, but I continued to paddle and the bait was still trolled. The captain had been instructed to luff up and wait for us when he got two or three miles ahead. But it was we who were two or three miles ahead, between Sandy Key and North-West Cape.

“Better put up your rod and take a paddle,” I suggested. “We’ll paddle up the coast to Harney River or even to Pavilion Key. It will make us think of old times.”

The answer came in the scream of the reel and I turned in time to see the leap of a tarpon which we had failed to see despite the clearness of the water. Again the tarpon leaped, many, many feet in the air, while with wide open mouth, gills blurred to the sight, twisting body, and wildly shaking head the gorgeous creature appeared within a halo of rainbow-making drops. Once more it leaped, but quietly, scarcely more than breaking the surface of the water as it slipped through it. The diamond sparkle of flying drops

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

was lacking, but the sun shone squarely on those silvery scales which reflected its dazzling rays back to our enchanted eyes.

“Did you ever see so radiant a picture?” asked the Camera-man, forgetting his duty to his rod.

“Never!” I replied, “and you won’t again if you don’t take in the slack of your line.”

As the line tautened the fish jumped and darting away kept me busy with the paddle while my companion was fully occupied with his reel. When the pace slackened I continued:

“I’ve been so busy with the rod that I haven’t had a chance to enjoy the show. I’m getting my innings now, though.”

“So am I. I never before understood what an incubus the camera was. I was so busy looking for pictures for others that I couldn’t see any for myself.”

“But don’t you wish you had a negative of that splendid leap in the full blaze of the sun with these perfect surroundings?”

“I already have a better picture of it all than any camera could make. My picture was taken in colors and the angle of my lens was 360 degrees.”





IF THERE IS BETTER TARPON FISHING IN THE WORLD THAN CAN BE HAD AT BOCA GRANDE,  
I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF IT.



ONCE MORE IT LEAPED BUT QUIETLY.

## THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST

After leading us nearly to the cape, the tarpon turned sharply to the west where storm-clouds were beginning to roll up from the horizon. They grew blacker as we advanced, sending forth shafts of lightning and spreading upward until their deep shadows fell on the water and their inky blackness threatened to obscure the sun. The faint sound of a horn came from the *Irene* and I knew that the captain was anxious, but we were having the sport of a lifetime and it seemed worth all the risk. Besides the canoe was safer in a storm than the big boat.

"You haven't many minutes left!" I called to the Camera-man. "You'll have to chuck the rod before the squall that's coming gets here. One paddle won't be any use then."

"That's all right, but I'll hang on till it comes," was the reply and he reeled in line so rapidly that the canoe was soon within twenty feet of the tarpon. The squall struck the water half a mile away, whitening the surface as it swept toward us. The shadows grew deeper as the black cloud mass touched the edge of the sun and our margin of safety was reduced to seconds. A last turn of the reel brought the tarpon within

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

ten feet of the canoe and the frightened creature shot high into the air, parting the line in its leap. There was danger of its swamping the canoe for it grazed the bow as it fell, but we had no room in our minds for a thought of danger in the presence of the picture without parallel.

The most beautiful creature on earth, a veritable Fish God, panoplied with glistening mail of frosted silver, bordered with royal purple, and vibrant with life, was before us. The brilliant rays of the unclouded sun fell full upon it while just behind the onrushing shadow of a great cloud swept toward us. The background of the picture was a sky of inky blackness from which the forked lightnings were playing. Below, a wind-driven wall of rain with accompanying white caps was just at hand.

For one long, unforgettable moment the fish poised in mid air, then—the picture faded, the rod was dropped in the canoe, and the paddle seized. Darkness came with the flood of rain and the blow of the storm and we closed our eyes to the one and leaned forward against the thrust of the other. The wind raged against us, striving to drive our craft out of the water, but always

## THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST

the sharp bow of the canoe met and parted it till it swept past, unharmed. Kneeling, with paddles dipped, we held the craft true to the wind as the needle to the pole. As the waves rolled higher the canoe rose gently to them, while their foam-flecked crests, torn loose by the wind, were dashed in our faces.

"Isn't it glorious?" came to me from the bow, through the hissing of the rain and the roar of the storm, but the howling wind swept my answer away.

Suddenly, almost as it began, the rain ceased, but the gale continued and the waves rose rapidly. As the stern of the canoe settled in the hollows between them, the bow was lifted above their crests, and the wind seizing it struggled to toss the craft end over end. Once in the trough of the sea the curling crest of the next wave would have poured over the side or the wind rolled the canoe over like a log. There was joy in holding our course, so quartering to each oncoming roller that every danger was avoided and our craft rode smoothly the high-mounting billows. When the chance came to look around I saw the *Irene* a quarter of a mile to leeward.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

She was reefed down to the last points, with just enough jib for steerage way and was plugging along, graceful as a Chinese junk. Half an hour later as we boarded her she was banging about in a heavy sea, without breeze enough to keep her main boom from threatening to knock off our heads.

"Glad to see you back!" was the captain's welcome to us. "I was scared one time."

"So was I, but I thought you knew the *Irene* well enough to pull through without our help so we staid and had our fun out." The captain's only reply was to turn his back on me.

Waves in the shallow waters of the Gulf, though often short and ugly, subside quickly, especially when the storm has been local and an hour later we were gliding up the Florida coast with the sun as bright, the sky as blue as before the squall, and nothing in Nature but the slow heave of the Gulf to remind us of all that had happened.

"Excitement is over for the day, I reckon," said I to the captain as he stood at the wheel of the *Irene*.

"Mebbe it's jest beginnin'. See them clouds



THE HEAD OF HARNEY RIVER IS A NURSERY FOR TARPON.



DON'T TRY TO CAPTURE THE BIGGEST FISH WITH  
THE SMALLEST ROD EXCEPTING  
PERHAPS JUST ONCE.



DARTING AWAY KEPT ME BUSY WITH THE  
PADDLE.



## THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST

on the port bow? They're mixin' up trouble. Look, see! Know what them tails is droppin' out of the sky for?"

"Looks like waterspouts?"

"Sure! Right off Shark River Bight, too! That's where they make 'em. I've seen four there to onct."

"They won't trouble us. This wind will carry them away."

"Wind nothin'! They make their own wind. See 'em now! Two dead and t'other pumping water from th' Gulf, a barrel a second. Comin' this way, fast, too!"

The waterspout was growing with amazing rapidity. The massed black clouds formed a huge, inverted cone with its apex resting on another cone of water which rose swirling from the Gulf. The gigantic hour-glass came swaying toward us. It grew stouter in the middle, blacker above, and more turbulent below. More impressive than the picture itself was the thought of the tremendous invisible power that before our eyes was hoisting water to the clouds by the hundred tons.

"You don't seem in much hurry to get out of

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

the way," said I to the captain, as the roar of great waters came to my ear.

"Wanted you to git a good look at it. Besides we couldn't run away with this wind and there won't be any in a minute."

Even as he spoke the south wind ceased and a gust from the north caught the sails aback and set the boom banging over our heads. Puff after puff struck us from one direction after another until we seemed to be the battleground for the four winds of heaven.

"Start up the engine, please!" said the captain to the Camera-man, and, "let go the halliards!" he shouted to Joe, while he trimmed in the main sheet till the boom swung amidships. As he was helping Joe lash the mainsail to the boom the propeller began to churn the water and he called to me:

"Head her for shore! Hold her straight for the point north o' Shark River!"

When the captain got back to the wheel the waterspout was dangerously near with its umbrella-like top almost overhanging us.

"Wouldn't it have been better to run out into the Gulf?" I asked.

## THE TARPON AND THE TEMPEST

"She'd have follered us," he replied, "I've had one chase me half way round the compass."

"It's coming straight enough for us now!"

"She'll bust when she strikes shoal water. That'll be in a minute, now—I hope," he added anxiously.

I hoped so, too, and already the end was in sight. The swirling column of water thickened with mud torn from the bottom and I saw, or thought I saw, an area of marked depression outside of the base of the waterspout. The top became more unsteady and the bottom more turbulent, while its forward motion ceased and our boat began to widen the distance between us and the monster.

"There she goes!" shouted the captain, pointing out a palmetto log as it slid down the inclined plane of water and plunged into the base of the towering mass. At first the log was lost in the column of water, but as it reached the narrow part of the hour-glass formation it was thrown crosswise of the column and the waterspout broke in two.

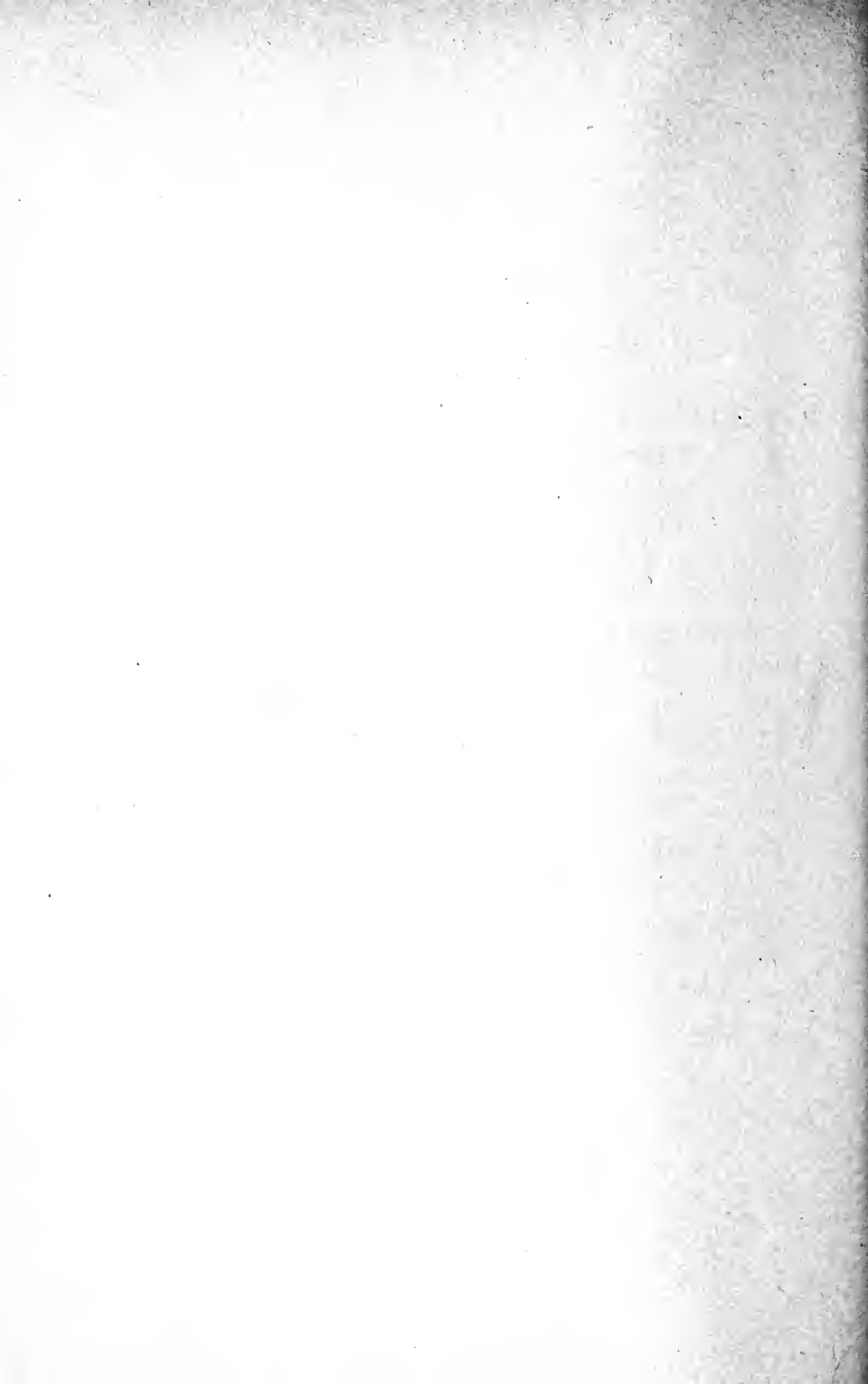
Great masses of water, crashing from the clouds, tore the surface of the Gulf and the *Irene*

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

was tossed about like a cork. The first human sound that followed the roar of the falling water was the wail of the Camera-man:

“Why didn’t I save *one* plate?”

**WHERE AND HOW**



## CHAPTER XVIII

### WHERE AND HOW

**I**F there is better tarpon fishing in the world than can be had at Boca Grande, on the west coast of Florida, I have never heard of it. On the north side of this mile-wide, ten-fathom pass, which connects Charlotte Harbor with the Gulf of Mexico, is a railroad station, within three hundred yards of which I have found as good all around big tarpon fishing as I have ever known. Here the dark outflow of Peace Creek and the Myakka River cuts through the clear water of the Gulf, leaving banks that are sharply defined. Often the fishing in Boca Grande itself is more exciting, but conditions of wind and tide frequently make the pass perilous to small craft. There is room in the big pass for a hundred or a thousand fishing craft and no amount of fishing seems to frighten the fish.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Seven miles down the coast is Captiva Pass where in rough weather the fishing is better than in Boca Grande, but a few boats in a few days will drive the last tarpon away.

Between these two passes is Joseffa Island where tarpon fishermen most do congregate. Boats, boatmen, and bait are provided for guests and fishing is made automatic. Sometimes the boatmen are haughty, and I have heard guests complain of the little liberty allowed them by tyrannical guides, but it has usually seemed to me that they were only getting what was coming to them. The possessor of a launch can live at Punta Gorda, twelve miles from Boca Grande, and make daily trips to either of the passes. The owner of a yacht or houseboat can find good harbors near any of the passes, while to the camper the whole range of the beautiful, breezy beach lies open.

Oldest of all the tarpon resorts is Shultz's at Punta Rassa. The old hotel, far-famed for age and ugliness, was burned a few years ago and a modern structure has taken its place. Shultz is still there, however, and his hotel contains a replica of "Murderer's Row" where the great tar-



## WHERE AND HOW

pon fishermen of the past generation have been housed. From Punta Rassa fishermen go out daily to Matlacha Pass, between Pine Island and the mainland, up to Caloosahatchee River, or to any one of several points in Pine Island Sound. Ten miles from Punta Rassa, down the bight below Sanibel, Carlos Pass leads in to Estero Bay, Surveyor's Creek, and other tarpon grounds.

Easiest to reach of all tarpon centers is Fort Myers on the Caloosahatchee River. Hotel accommodation, boats, boatmen, and tackle can always be found there, and in five consecutive days fishing nearby I captured thirty-five big tarpon.

Forty miles south of Punta Rassa is Marco, which has changed little since I began visiting it a quarter of a century ago. The boat service between Punta Rassa and Marco is irregular, but difficult as it is to get there, it is yet harder to get away, as I found when having contemplated a visit of a week or two, I stayed as many years. The fisherman should take his own tackle to Marco, but boats and boatmen can always be found there for trips of a day or a month.

From Marco to Everglade, on Chokoloskee

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

Bay, is twenty-five miles. This is the last place on the west coast at which the fisherman can be comfortably housed. If the Storters like your looks you will find yourself in pleasant quarters. The house is at the mouth of Allen's River, where a few tarpon can always be found, while Turner's River, five miles down the bay, is their natural home. In three days on the latter I took thirty-two on an eight-ounce fly-rod, the largest of which measured six and one-half feet in length and weighed about one hundred and forty pounds.

South of Chokoloskee Bay the fisherman must have a cruising boat or be prepared to camp out. In the first twelve miles are three rivers, Barnes, Hueston, and Chatham, all favorite watering resorts for tarpon. Ten miles farther bring the fisherman to Lossman's River, where also tarpon may be found, and another ten miles will land him at the mouths of Rodger's and Broad Rivers, either of which is likely to be filled with the fish. Two miles south he will find the mouth of Harney River with its twelve miles of devious channels and bays, the only natural stream on the West Coast through which a craft of moderate size can

## WHERE AND HOW.

reach the Everglades. The head of Harney River is a nursery for tarpon, with miles of tiny streams through which baby tarpon can be followed where there is scant room to turn a canoe, in water darkened by overhanging branches that meet above them.

A branch of Harney River leads to the labyrinthic channels and several mouths of Shark River, where a few tarpon may be found at all seasons of the year. But its crooked channels are guarded by snags and oyster bars, and its under-cut banks by a maze of projecting mangrove roots, all destructive of the tackle and temper of the tarpon fisherman.

Thirty miles from Harney River, down the coast and around the three Capes Sable, is Flamingo, home of the late Guy Bradley. Near here, at Joe Kemp's Key, is good anchorage and fair camping ground, while before it spread out the shallow waters and beautiful keys of Florida Bay. Here, too, tarpon abound, but their pursuit with the rod is apt to be disappointing as in the clear, shallow water the fish can see the fisherman's game too easily.

It will hardly pay the sportsman to go south

## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

of Cape Sable, for although there are tarpon along the outer keys, there are too many sharks on the outlook, and it is not pleasant to have to dispute for possession of one's quarry with a tiger of the sea.

March, April, and a part of May are the conventional fishing months, when the hotels are filled and prices of everything from board to boatmen are at their highest, but the time to catch tarpon is in June, July, and August. There is good fishing in May, but then heat and mosquitoes are at their worst. With June come cooling showers and breezes, fewer insects, often almost none, and a climate that contrasts deliciously with that of the heated term in New York.

I append a table of the results of a photographic tarpon trip, extending from Boca Grande to Harney River during July and August of a recent year. The total of 334 tarpon captured would have been largely increased had I not stopped fishing whenever the Camera-man's plates were exhausted. The tarpon varied from one and one-half pounds to a hundred times that weight and in length from eighteen inches to six

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and one-half feet. All were taken from a light Peterboro canoe and sixty-three of them on an eight-ounce fly-rod. Most of the rest were captured with heavy tarpon rods, though a few were taken on hand lines. The fly-rod work was all my own, but I often exchanged the heavy rod and the hand line for my boatman's paddle. The work was about equally strenuous, but the change of occupation was a relief.

### Summary of Catch

15 days	Boca Grande	84	tarpon
14	" Captiva Pass	66	"
5	" Caloosahatchee River	35	"
3	" Marco	14	"
5	" Harney River (fly-rod)	25	"
2	" Broad River	13	"
3	" Hueston River	30	"
3	" Turner's River (32 fly-rod)	56	"
2	" Allen's River (6 fly-rod)	11	"
<hr/>		<hr/>	
52 days		334	tarpon

For a *de luxe* tarpon trip, the fisherman should begin by taking a hundred dollar bill to a sports-

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man's supply shop in New York and asking for a tarpon outfit. Then if he sticks to his text and doesn't let the dealer saddle him with anything irrelevant, from an alforjas to a yacht stove, he will get back enough change to tip his waiter at lunch. His outfit will be complete from his forty-odd dollar jewelled reel and four-dollar lines down to the thermos bottle that is to keep his milk cool while he fishes.

Some of the tackle which we used on our photographic trip was first class, but after we had broken two rods and spoiled a reel, we did good work with a twenty-five cent bamboo pole, a four-dollar reel, hooks at seventy-five cents a hundred, and No. 13 piano wire which I bought at seventy cents a pound in New York after paying a dealer at the rate of seven dollars a pound for the same thing. Our hand line fishing was done with soft cotton line about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter. It was found necessary to supplement this with canvas gloves or mittens.

Aside from photographic paraphernalia, the cost to two people of a trip like this can be as little as they choose to make it, if they are willing to do the ordinary work of the easiest kind of

## WHERE AND HOW

camping. There is substantially nothing in the navigation involved that the Camera-man and I have not accomplished in a light canoe. We have camped for weeks at and beyond the more distant points named, with no better protection than a cheese cloth mosquito bar with a waterproofed canvas top. The entire value of the clothing I wore, from linen cap to canvas shoes, was less than five dollars. The cost of the simple cooking outfit, bought at a country store as we started, wouldn't have paid for a dinner in the city. The necessary expense of supplies for such a trip is really negligible. Matches, salt, pepper, twenty pounds of corn meal, a piece of fat pork for greasing the griddle, and a gallon of Florida syrup will set one back about a dollar and provide the groceries required for a trip of weeks.

A hatchet, a few cents worth of hooks and line, a pair of grains, and the cheapest kind of a single-barrel shotgun or rifle with cartridges should be carried. Rust would eat one barrel of your costly fowling piece while you were cleaning and oiling the other. The few implements named are keys to a well-filled larder from which fish of many varieties can always be taken. One can

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

select the channel bass with his big spots, or the sea trout with his little ones, or may choose at will the white flesh of Spanish mackerel or sheepshead, or the rich, red meat of the cavally. As the fisherman becomes skilled with the grains he will eat of pompano, placed on the coals before it has ceased to flop, and will realize that he has reached the height of epicureanism. Broiled duck, Indian hen, and other birds that may legitimately be used as food are always available.

Reefs of oysters abound in tarpon waters and the very trees are laden with the bivalves, small but sweet, while a bed of great clams stretches for a hundred miles before the mouths of the tarpon rivers. Palmetto cabbage, bread of the Cracker, grows on nearly every wooded bank, while fruits and vegetables flourish, from avocado pears, custard apples, and bananas, down to tamarinds, wild oranges, and yams. Many of these grow wild while others can be obtained cheaply from little Cracker farms.

In the cruising of many years in Florida, I have not known what it was to lack food. Limeade and tea from the leaves of the sweet bay have often taken the place of coffee and a





HE FITS THE LIGHT FLY ROD AS NO TROUT EVER DREAMED OF DOING.



SHAKING HIS GREAT OPEN MOUTH SO NEAR MY  
FACE THAT I PUT UP MY HAND  
TO BRUSH HIM AWAY.

## WHERE AND HOW

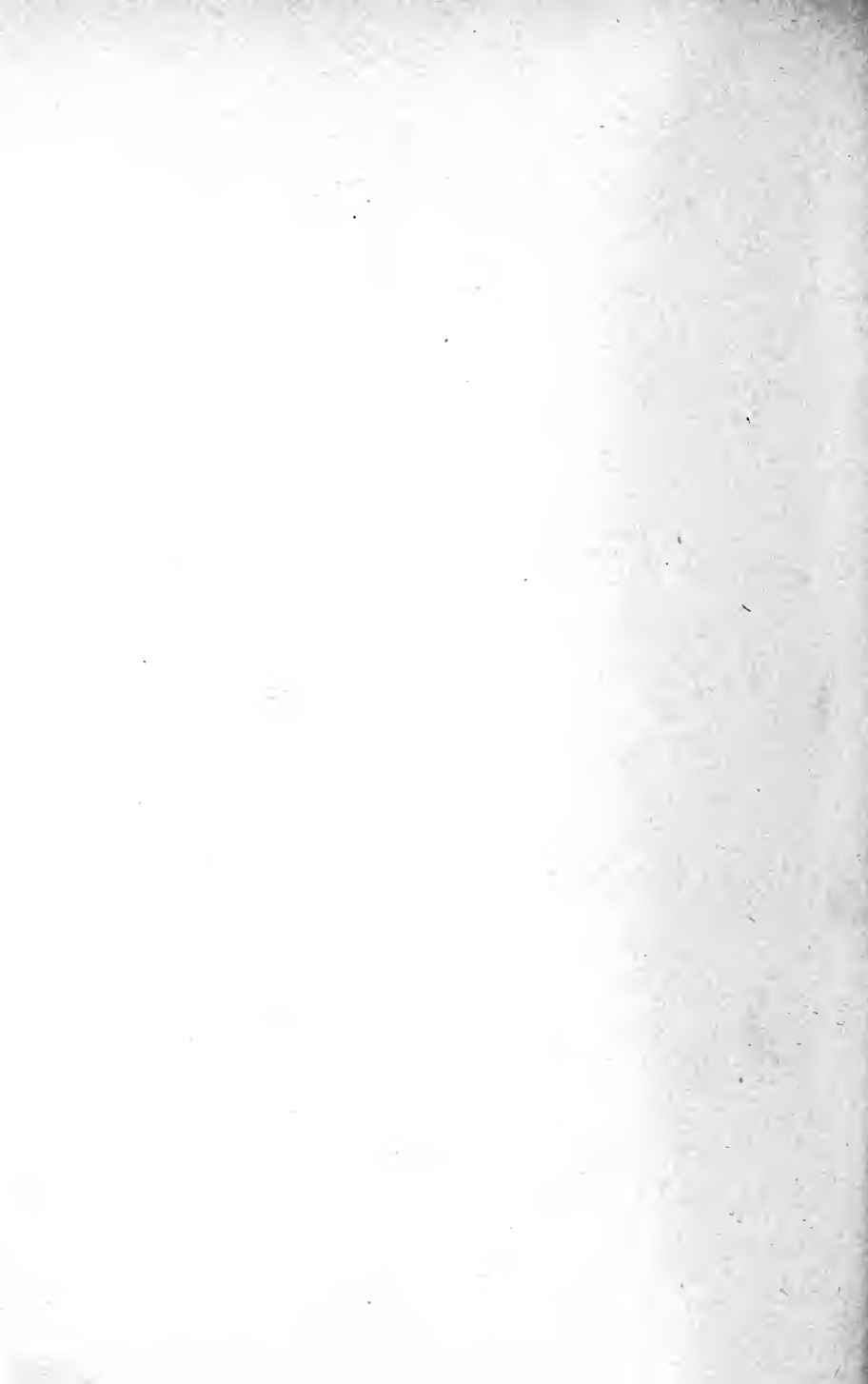
few joints of sugar cane made an acceptable dessert. My mouth waters to-day at thought of the hoe cakes, Rhode Island cakes, and mush that I have prepared and eaten with Florida syrup made on the banks of the tarpon rivers from the sugar cane that is there of perennial growth. This syrup, unknown to the markets of the North, possesses a flavor of its own, not exceeded, to my taste, by the far-famed product of the maple tree.

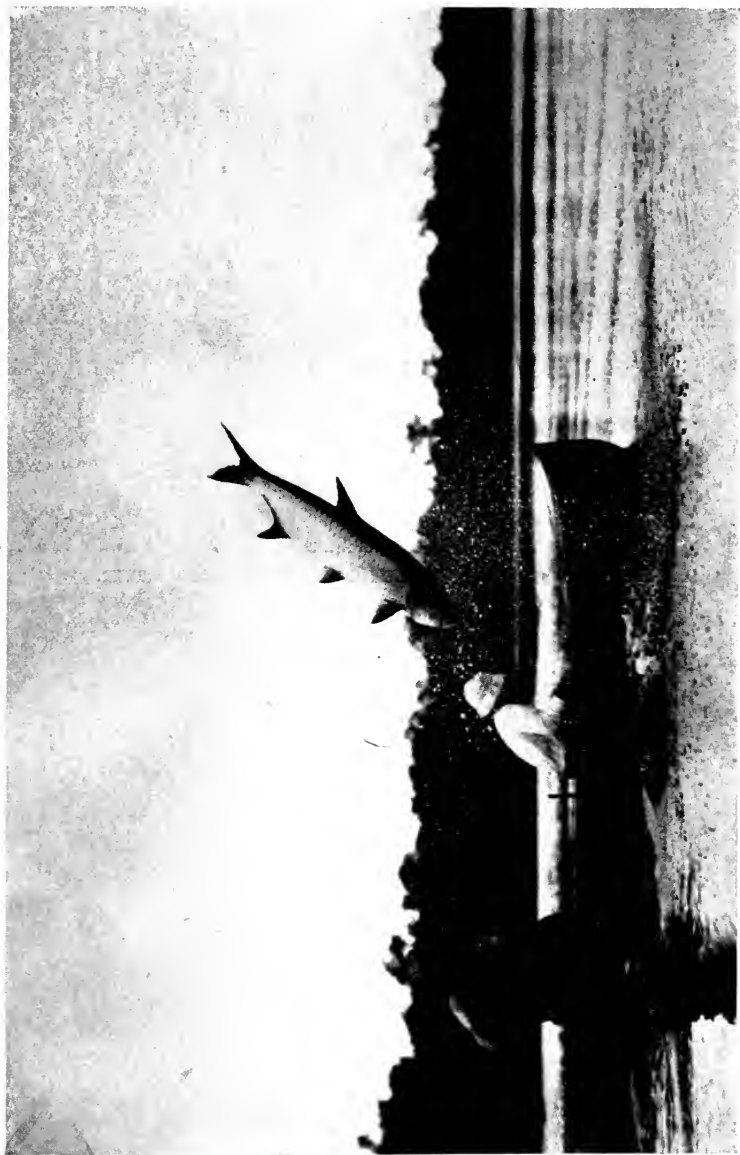
There are rivers in Florida from which a few tarpon can be taken in winter, but the game isn't worth the candle. The would-be tarpon fisherman who will only go south in the winter should drop Florida from his itinerary and go on to Aransas Pass, Corpus Christi, or, better yet, to Tampico. The big Panuco River at the latter place abounds in tarpon during the first two months in the year, when it isn't worth while to fish in Florida. There is no lack of opportunity here to make as good a record as a fisherman should wish, and it is to the credit of the frequenters of this resort that the custom obtains among them of turning loose the uninjured fish after their capture has been effected. Yet, although the abund-

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ance of tarpon in Tampico is all that could be desired, there is no such variety in the sport as is offered by the passes and Gulf, creeks, rivers, and bays of the Florida Peninsula.

**THE FINEST SPORT IN THE WORLD**





NO AVAILABLE SPORT OFFERS GREATER LEGITIMATE EXCITEMENT THAN TARPON FISHING.



THE CAPTAIN LIFTED HIM CLEAR OF THE WATER.



ROUGH WATER AND A BUCKING TARPON MAKE  
HARD RIDING.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE FINEST SPORT IN THE WORLD

I HAVE saved the last chapter for a serious talk. I want to weigh the sport of tarpon fishing against anything else of its kind and to hold the scales as evenly as could the blind goddess herself. I have studied the lives and the writings of worthy fishermen of great repute, from Simon Peter to Izaak Walton and from Izaak Walton to Charles F. Holder, vainly seeking for a type in the fish line that it wouldn't be cruelty to infants to compare with the Silver King.

My mountain home is on a trout stream, famous among artists of the fly for three-score years. Rod in hand, with perennial joy, I have traced its course for a generation. But it is the delight in Nature unspoiled, her rocks and ravines, sparkling waters and shaded dells, or as

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

Charles Dudley Warner expressed it to me, the "lovely trout scenery." I remember many red letter days, but I forget the bags that I made, and when I try to recall the well-filled creel, or the colors of the twenty-inch trout, I find that they made no furrows in my brain.

I have spent happy hours and days on famous salmon streams, but the chief pleasure has come through the charming scenery, the beautiful pools, and the excitement of canoeing through the white water of the rapids. My cherished memory of the Miramichi is of the fishermen instead of the fish, and the nightly symposiums, filled with the genial humor and serious thoughts of Joe Jefferson, have banished my recollection of the days on the stream.

To one who has known the tarpon, the feeble efforts of the salmon to live up to its own reputation are saddening. The smooth, greasy way in which it usually slips out of the water and slides back into it reminds me of the action of the tarpon—it is so different.

Time would be wasted in seeking for comparisons among lesser fish than salmon, and a fish that doesn't jump when played is quite out of

## *THE FINEST SPORT IN THE WORLD*

the tarpon's class. Thus the horse mackerel, despite his being the fad of the California coast, will have to practice aviation before his picture can be placed in a Piscatorial Hall of Fame. As for that other favorite, the jewfish, or black sea bass, it is not only as ugly as sin, but would be distanced in a race with a loggerhead turtle.

The tarpon meets every demand the sport of fishing can make. He fits the light fly-rod as no trout ever dreamed of doing and leaps high out of the water a hundred times for every once that a brook trout clears the surface. When grown to the size of the average man he is no less active, although he will snap a line of thirty threads and break a hickory hoe handle, as you or I would break a reed.

Played gently from a smooth-running reel with six hundred feet of line, the labor of his capture is not beyond the strength of a robust child. Or the great fish can be fought furiously until he leaps wildly, around, over, and into the fisherman's boat. I have never been harmed by a tarpon, but they have landed on my head, caromed on my shoulders, swamped my canoe, and

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

one big slippery form dropped squarely into my arms.

Funny things sometimes happen, as when a big tarpon which I was playing with shortened line rose beside and against the canoe, shaking his great open mouth so near my face that I put up my hand to push him away. An instant later I was struck in the back by the hook which the tarpon succeeded in ejecting as he leaped high on the other side of the canoe, beneath which he had dived. My boatman was taking the hook from the mouth of an exhausted tarpon which he was holding when the fish broke away, dived under the canoe, and rising on the other side threw body and tail against the back and head of his antagonist in a resounding spank that nearly knocked the breath out of his tormentor's body.

The first leap of the tarpon after he feels or suspects a hook is an effort to get rid of it and he often succeeds in sending it with the bait hurtling through the air. Fishing with a heavy sinker on my line in the swift tide at Boca Grande, a tarpon seized the bait and rising in the air, fifty yards from the canoe, sent the leaden weight into my hand as truly as Mathewson him-

## THE FINEST SPORT IN THE WORLD

self could have done. It was on the same day that my needle fish bait, thrown high by a tarpon, was caught in the air by a man-o'-war hawk.

Tarpon fishing "acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." I have fished with a Doctor of Divinity and with Matt. Quay, although not at the same time. Near the same place I sat on the deck of a palatial yacht, its *dilettante* owner smoking and chatting, while his boatman fished for tarpon fifty yards away. When a strike was made the yachtsman was rowed to the fishing skiff and completed the capture of the tarpon. Beside the yacht was another fisherman, a boy in a leaky skiff with ventilated garments, whose entire outfit wouldn't have paid the yachtsman's expenses for fifteen minutes, yet the boy caught more fish and perhaps had more fun.

Tarpon may be found, not only in the places of which I have written, but throughout the broad, shallow waters and deeper channels of the whole Ten Thousand Islands. I have seen them far out in the Everglades, in lagoons in the Big Cypress Swamp and even in a deep little lake, a hundred yards in diameter and ten miles from any other body of water.

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

In fishing for tarpon don't try to capture the biggest fish with the smallest rod, excepting, perhaps just once for the name of the thing. Proportion your tackle to the work to be done. A fly-rod with stiff action fits a baby tarpon down to the ground, but even a five-pounder will tow you for a mile through a creek before you can tire him with the spring of the rod.

I am opposed to elaborate equipments, yet, if you fish with a tarpon rod, you have got to pay three or four dollars for a line that you would dare show a sophisticated tarpon. I hate to advise it, but if you must crowd a lot of vacation into a little time and can spare the twenty, thirty, or forty dollar tax for a powerful reel of fine workmanship, containing the automatic handle brake with stop, you will find it for your soul's welfare. Then, unless your reel seat locks beyond peradventure, lash the reel to the rod all you know how, and in any event tie the rear pillar of your reel to the rod, that a sixty-pound pull on the line may not fall with multiplied leverage upon the weakest part of the reel. Most fishermen don't do this, but all of them will

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wish they had—if they fish for tarpon long enough.

Don't carry a gaff. Don't murder your game. To object to taking a tarpon for mounting or other rational purpose would be fanatical, but wantonly to slay the beautiful, harmless creatures that have so contributed to your pleasure is not only cruel, but it is unfair to your fellow sportsmen. The fish can be measured without harming him and the cube of his length in feet divided by two gives his weight in pounds as nearly as is worth while. You can even take the tarpon in skiff or canoe as proof of your prowess and thus landing a tired tarpon by hand is often as exciting as playing a fresh one.

I have saved the best advice for the last and am really sad that so few will take it. If you have an available friend in the world don't cumber yourself with a guide. Two of you in a canoe make an ideal outfit. You will take turns with paddle and rod, or line, when fishing, and with two paddles in commission there is nowhere on the coast you need hesitate to go.

Outfit at Fort Myers with about the supplies suggested in the last chapter, adding as little

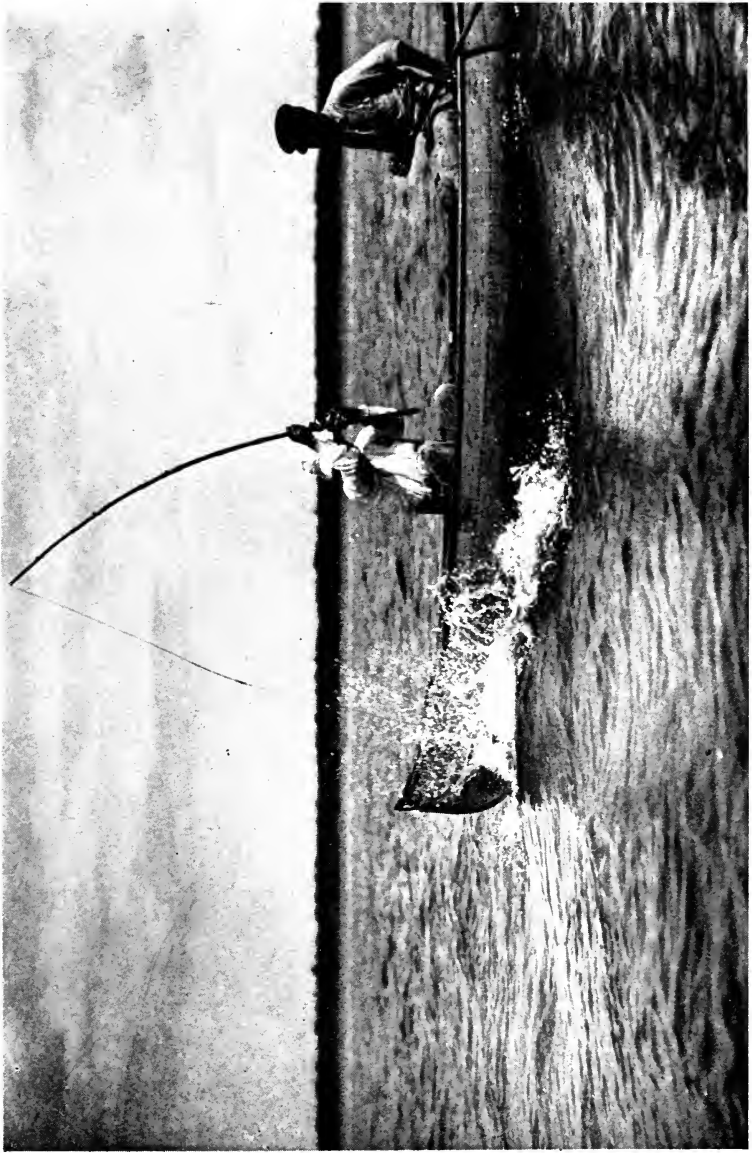
## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

thereto as your personal equation will permit. Start down the river early in the morning, having provided a couple of fresh mullet for tarpon bait. When about six miles down the stream, begin trolling with a hand line. Tarpon should soon make it interesting for you. Watch out for a favoring tide and two hours of paddling will carry you to Punta Rassa. If you strike a head tide, six hours will be needed instead of two. Camp on the shore at Punta Rassa where you will find plenty of fiddlers for bait and a few minutes fishing near any old snag will give you more sheepshead than you can eat. If a fisherman happens to see you he will hand you a couple of pompano. Don't hesitate about taking them. It is the custom of the country.

Rise with the sun and paddle up Sanibel Island for fifteen miles to Captiva Pass. Troll occasionally, when the water is shallow and grassy, until you have picked up a dozen sea trout. You won't eat more than two, but if you came from New England the "sounds" of the remaining ten will make you think of the cod's sounds that mother used to cook.

You will settle down to regular housekeeping





DOVE BENEATH THE CANOE AND SWAM SWIFTLY AWAY ON THE OTHER SIDE.

TWO OF YOU IN A CANOE MAKE AN IDEAL, O'FETT.



## *THE FINEST SPORT IN THE WORLD*

on the outside beach at Captiva and unless your strength of mind is greater than mine you will not be able to leave for a week. Your first work in the morning will be to get some needle fish for bait. They swim along the beach and you will stun them with shot or a bullet and grab them before they recover. It is not the conventional bait, but a tarpon will climb a tree for a needle fish. With a professional guide you would get more fish at first, but you wouldn't have a quarter of the fun. You will waste some time at the whirlpool where the tarpon are always rising but where they never bite. You will lose a little time in learning where it is best to fish, but your muscles will be sore each night from the tarpon you have played each day.

Sometimes a grouper or channel bass will take your tarpon bait, and always there will be more than enough for the larder. You will be glad of the days when high winds make the pass too rough for fishing, for an occasional rest feels good and beach combing and shell gathering is resting. Then you will paddle up Charlotte Harbor, keeping under the lee of Lacosta Island, and stop at Faulkner's bee farm and taste his

## THE BOOK OF THE TARPON

metheglin and honeycomb. You will call at little farms where you will gather figs and limes without charge and buy mangoes, bananas, and tomatoes for little more than a song.

From Captiva you should go to Boca Grande where a few days with its swift tide, rough waters, and big tarpon, in your little canoe may satisfy you. Then half a day's paddling will take you back to Punta Rassa, from which you will watch the weather before starting down the coast in the open Gulf. Yet it is all safe and easy, for you will follow the shore, always keeping near enough to run through the light breakers to the beach whenever a serious squall threatens.

In the inland waters of Marco you will have good fishing and you will want to stop a few days just to sample the fruits of the island. In taking the inside route to Coon Key you will doubtless get lost a few times. I usually do and it is an old playground of mine. If you do get lost it will teach you how harmless an incident it is and save you from many a panic in the future. It may trouble you a little to find Chokoloskee Bay, but the smell of Pelican Key at Sandfly Pass should prove a sure guide. None

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of the other points on the coast mentioned in these chapters are difficult to find excepting the Everglades through Harney River. The first six miles, up Harney River to Tussock Bay, is easy, but after that the course is labyrinthic. The best advice I can give in a few words is to keep as near as possible to an east-north-east course from Tussock Bay for about seven miles when you should strike the Glades. It will take you a few days to exhaust the blind leads, but you will succeed at last and the experience will richly repay you.

This program, which I propose in all seriousness, having tried it in every essential feature, is far less strenuous and far more satisfying than you can possibly imagine. You can modify its features as regards food since you will often be within reach of supplies of bread, vegetables, etc., from farmers.

To the fisherman who wants to catch tarpon without exerting his body or exercising his mind, I suggest that he go to Marco in June, July, or August, taking with him a hundred dollar outfit, a ten dollar outfit, or no outfit at all. He can sit on the piazza and watch tarpon jump until he is

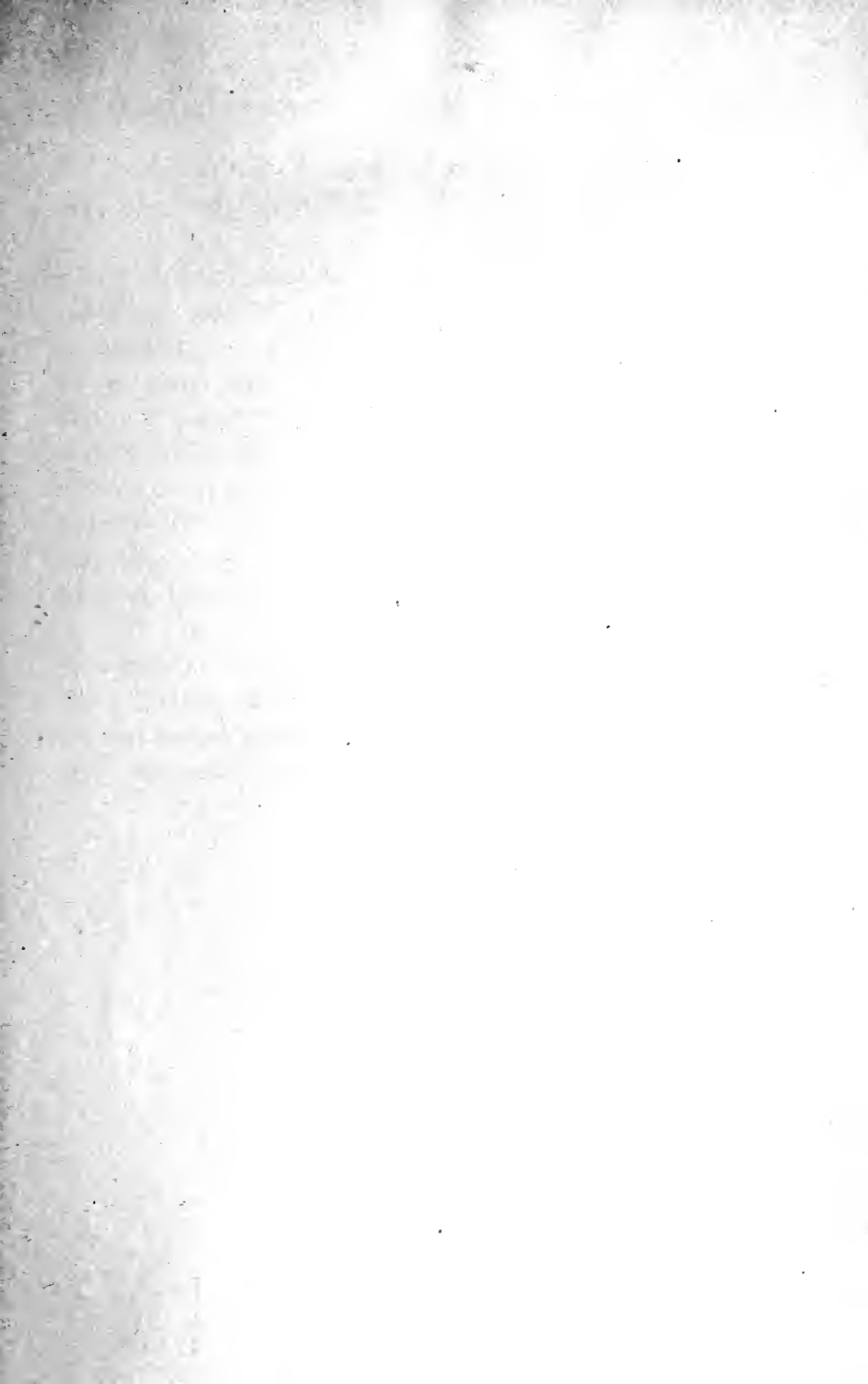
## *THE BOOK OF THE TARPON*

braced up enough to sit on a cushion in a skiff and hold a line. After that the tarpon will provide stimulation.

The moral of it all is that the time to catch tarpon in Florida is when they are there and that is in the summer. This is really more important than the brand of your rod or the number of threads in your line. Incidentally this is the time to visit the West Coast where the tarpon live. Nature is then at her best. The flora of the country is then more flourishing, the fauna more numerous and active, the sky bluer, and the gorgeous effects of clouds and color are beyond compare.

No other sport is carried on amid natural surroundings more healthful and beautiful. No available sport offers greater legitimate excitement than tarpon fishing and no trust can control it.

THE END.



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