

The Amateur Sportsman

AND

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PLATTE LAKES AND RIVER.

A Rare Combination of Trout, Maskalonge, Bass and Pickerel Fishing.

BY L. F. BROWN.

One puzzling accompaniment to the anticipation felt by many an angler who is about to get his annual vacation, is deciding where to go. The angling waters are so numerous, the kinds of fishing so many! If he could divide himself up into about fifty men he would fish. Before him are letters from guides, friends and camp keepers in Canada, Newfoundland, Quebec, Wisconsin. They tell of fine catches of pike, pickerel, bass, trout, grayling, ouaniche, salmon. They furnish distances, amounts of railroad fares, rates for board, boats, guides and tents. How happy he could be with any one of a dozen fine angling chances that are available!

He must go far, and can travel far. On Saturday at noon his vacation begins; and he can hie away by rail until Monday morning—all that time is clear gain. Thus his fortnight of leave of absence is stretched to include three Sundays, with a Saturday afternoon and evening added at the start, and a Monday morning at the finish. So he can leave New York Saturday evening and on Monday morning be fishing west of St. Paul or north of Halifax. But where?

Wanted.—Good angling, varied, but all right at hand; a good country house or "hotel" in the middle of the angling region. There must be a lovely trout stream for fly casting, one or more lakes for bass, another for pickerel and maskalonge. Brook and wave, white-caps and cascades, vistas along a stream, far-reaching blue of joyful lakes; and good meals, fine beds, a warm welcome; wilderness, great beauty, and plenty of fresh milk, butter and eggs, with a breakfast to be had before any unearthy hour in the morning he may choose to go fishing.

Exacting requirements! Yet Platte fills them.

For six years I kept a vow never to revisit Platte. It had welcomed me as I first saw its wide waters, by letting me look at a half-breed Indian carrying a maskalonge weighing twenty-two pounds. The sight crazed me; I must hook and land a dozen such fish, or larger ones, during the week I was to remain there. So, blind to the fine bass and pickerel fishing and ignoring even the trout, I rowed on Platte Lake, five miles long and three wide. Patient, expectant and laborious hours as I held one end of a trolling line in my teeth, and a great trolling hook throbbed as it spun in the water two hundred feet behind. After three days of faithful trolling, my sole catch was a 10-pound pickerel. Resulting heart-sickness and loss of belief that happiness dwelt at Platte Lake.

So my Irish host, the only Thompson, pitied me and helped. For two evenings we rowed back and forth over that mile-long "bar," dragging the great hook, and hoping for a strike. Luck came at last. After sundown the second evening the maskalonge were striking. I caught a six pounder—then lost two giants, the last one nearly cutting the line before he said good-bye. I hauled in the hook, cut away a foot of the frayed line next to it, and then in my excitement I threw the hook into the lake and tried to tie my knife on the end of the trolling line. Thompson's face was a study. His eyes

looked his amusement, but he was silent, and even refused the gift of my hat which I took off and offered to him. No doubt he thought it was a dangerous hat—the head it had covered must have rooms to let, to throw away the only trolling hook. And it had. We were obliged to go ashore. I left the next morning. Thompson's silence was too expressive. That incident forms one of his pet stories.

But time is a healer, and Platte was yet beautiful, and held big fish. I wanted to see how Pearl, the Irishman's merry ten-year-old daughter, happy in her single gown and with bare feet and flying hair six years before, would look now as a grown-up miss of sixteen. She and the gray-haired angler had been great friends. Could the young woman be as beautiful as the wild, free child?

Then some one sent me a picture of a maskalonge from Platte, thirty-seven pounds! It was an alluring bait. Yet Newfoundland's peerless salmon stream, Harry's Brook, was a strong counter-magnet. Finally, I received this picture of another fish caught in Platte by Dr. Baker, of Findlay, Ohio. It weighed twenty-six pounds. He gave a dinner to thirty-five of his friends at Findlay, with the big fish as the central dish—baked.

See his smile. Could I not get such a fish, and smile also? I wrote him, asking particulars. Here is an extract from his reply:

"The day I caught the big fish there were between twenty and twenty-five people fishing at Platte Lake—all near the mouth of the Platte River, where it empties into Big Platte. I had fished all day with nothing to bring in save some blue-gills and a few perch. My partner had landed four, weighing about twenty-five pounds, in the forenoon, the largest a eleven-pound pickerel.

"Having had such poor luck, I, of course, was the first to get discouraged and start for home, about 5 P.M. Letting out my trolling-line, with a No. 8 Pfeuger spoon, I had gone perhaps six hundred feet from where the other boats were, when, all at once, I struck something which I took to be one of those logs, up-ended, occasionally seen around the lake; the line cut into my little finger and made it bleed. I told the oarsman that I had struck a log; when just then the fish made a dash out of the water, and the oarsman caught sight of him. I wish you could have seen his eyes. He informed me in no mild language that I "had a whale—the largest fish ever caught here!" I began drawing in the fish, paying him when I thought he was a little too stubborn; and after about ten or fifteen minutes (tearing a landing-net all to pieces), I had him at the edge of the boat. The oarsman reached out and caught him in the eyes with the thumb and second finger. My partner took him by the back of the neck; and they slid him over the boat, where I sat on Mr. Fish until we had him securely tied to the seat with the anchor-rope through his gills. I imagine I can sometimes hear the yell yet that went up from the other boats when we succeeded in landing him—some of them having caught sight of him when he came out of the water."

Royal sport, modestly described! I rose to that fly, and started for Platte.

An all-night ride to Toledo, an early start on the Ann Arbor Railroad from there. Fine free reclining-chair coach, greatly improved roadbed, little dust, beautiful country! Glimpses of handsome lakes, a good dinner at Durand. At Owosso Junction, Blind Charley's cry of "pop-corn!" with its indescribably cheerful tone. At Harrietta we cross the head-waters of the

loveliest trout-stream in all the world—the Slagle River, whose praises I have sung for eight years. Finally, at 5.30 P.M., only ten miles from the railroad terminus at Frankfort, on Lake Michigan, we stop at Beulah Station, meet Thompson's "bus" (a comfortable open wagon with side seats and lumpy hay cushions), and start at a snail's pace around the east end of exquisite Crystal Lake (a magnificent water that affords peerless perch fishing), and go on a long hill where the road is all deep sand, and the horses stop every few hundred feet. It takes two hours to plod the four miles from the station to Platte Lake Hotel. But when the highest hill is reached sand vanishes; we go down hill into refreshing, wild forest, cross two trout rivulets, and arrive at Thompson's hotel for fishermen on the shore of Big Platte Lake.

The hotel has comfortable rooms and beds, and faces the lake over a sea of ancient pine and cedar stumps. The meals and service are excellent. Mr. B. E. Lillie acts as clerk, for Mr. Thompson likes to fish and is unable to keep away from the lake. But his wife and daughters second his very successful efforts to make anglers feel at home. Board (and such board!) is one dollar a day, or six dollars a week. Guides are two dollars a day. Excellent boats, best of all kinds of live and artificial baits, perfect air and water, grand views!

Thompson is always the central figure. How he does love to fish! Tireless, genial, watchful always to see that every want of a guest is satisfied if possible before expressed, full of fish yarns, ready to smoke, drink, fight or eat with a comrade, he is a great favorite, and sure to make everybody there enjoy life. He can look wise as a judge as he takes a bite of his favorite "spearhead" chewing tobacco, and scans the lake to suggest a trial for the fish in some spot so well known to him. He has made many hundreds of anglers happy. May his shadow grow larger!

There are two delights at Platte that are unusual. You may row for days without getting a giant maskalonge, but you remain in a state of eager expectation, for you know that, any moment, you are liable to hook a monster, and no matter how large you may make your hook, nor how heavy your line may be, it is liable to be smashed or broken by those uneducated water-lions, "the really big brute maskalongs," as Thompson calls them. He says he has seen them longer than himself. But I anticipate—wait for the sorrowful denouement.

Now, note the wealth of easily reached angling waters, and what variety of fishing they afford.

From the big boat-house on the shore in front of the hotel, it is a row of thirty minutes, easy trolling as you go, up the lake to the mouth of Platte River, and five rods up that river you come to good trout-fishing, growing more and more excellent for twenty miles. One mile from the mouth, you can row into the "Dead Stream" that comes into Platte River, and reach, in about a mile, the Little Platte Lake, two miles long and a mile wide, and it affords splendid black bass fishing. Little Platte can thus be reached in about ninety minutes from the hotel; or a boat can be left there, and it may be reached by rowing straight across Big Platte to a trail some thirty rods long through the woods to the smaller lake.

There are from two to thirty anglers at the hotel from May 1st to November 1st. Yet Thompson often has to hire men to fish for his table. It is not unusual to see as much as 800 pounds of bass, pickerel and maskalonge dumped from the boats on his dock at night; and every fish will be dressed and put on ice by the anglers, to be boxed and expressed to their homes when they leave. Fish are sometimes worth as much as ten cents a pound right there. So as Thompson never would charge me anything for being oarsman, I sometimes found myself acting as a table fisherman, and landing more fish than I should.

I omit all mention of the beauty, wildness, effects of storm and wonderfully healthful air. If I had hay fever I should go there.

But here is a copy of my special diary, for this is a true story:

June 18.—Slept late; strange to sleep well. Fine air into window, and smell of coffee. Hungry—another new feeling. Unpacked and donned fishing clothes. Must take things easy for several days. Ate too much breakfast, am ashamed—fried bass, steak, ham and eggs, baked potatoes, strawberries. Late start, with Mr. Thompson as oarsman. He tells me not to throw the trolling hook in the lake unless there is plenty of line tied to it! Have worms for bait—awfully bad form. Cane poles also, and lines tied to their tips. Anchored in weeds head of lake, and caught about 100 perch. Glorious water and perfect day. Dressed and skinned the perch as caught, and went back to eat them for dinner, fried. Trolled in afternoon, and landed two four-pound pickerel and two bass. Place very wild, and shores and woods fine. Distances very deceptive. Lake looks a mile across; is nearly three times that distance. Strawberry shortcake and trout (caught in a rivulet near the hotel) for supper. Smoked and told fish yarns with the family. Bed at eleven. Dreamed of fishing and woke early to find party starting early for a try at the Platte River trout.

June 19.—Ate more trout—must fish for them soon. Heavy wind on lake. Thompson rows. Trolled over the long bar. Three pickerel, four bass—lost two somethings that pulled hard. Two sociable loons yelling, diving for fun, and watching us from a safe distance. Thompson furious at losing yet another big fish. Plenty of wave and white caps—ideal cloudy day for trolling. Very few weeds to foul hooks. Loafed in afternoon. Great stories after supper by two fishermen from Ohio about giant fish here, and strong lines and hooks broken. Comfort to think my salmon line will hold anything in lake. Sure to get a big one. Must eat less; woke at two, thirsty. Lake looks dark under stars—no moon. Feeling better.

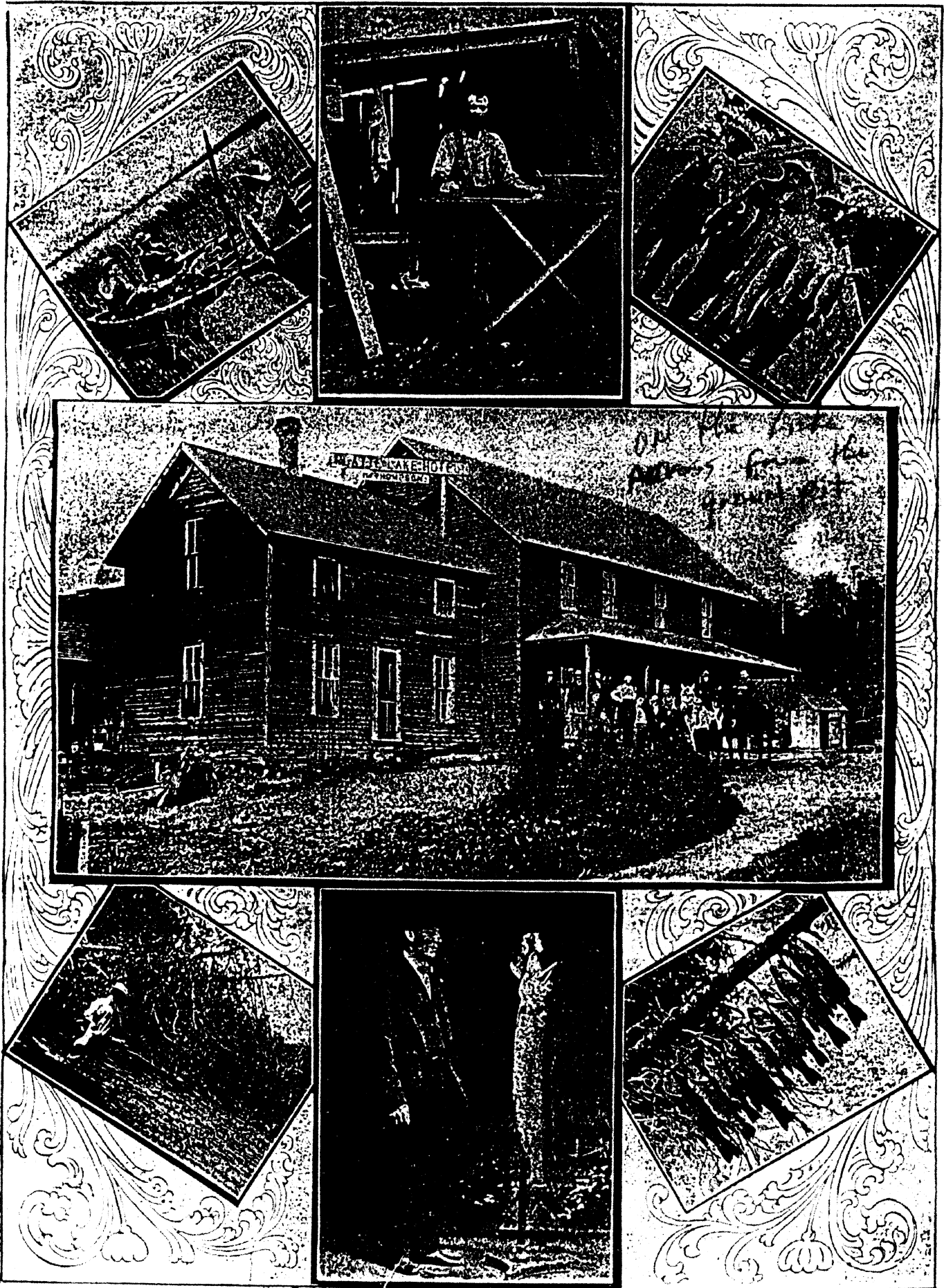
June 20.—Trolled up to Birch Point and over bar—three pickerel, four bass. Thompson still rows. Getting sun-burned. Fine dinner of trout at hotel. Rowed alone up to the Point, and "still-fished" at the scattering lot of rushes well out, known as "Pratchett's Island." Unshaved, and do not comb my hair. Look like a tramp—jolly! Visited with the women folks in their quarters back of the hotel. More stories from Thompson. Plan for a picnic to-morrow at the Point. Other anglers bringing in fine catches, especially beautiful trout from the Platte.

June 21.—No picnic. Pearl's sister sick. More arrivals. So away go T. and myself, just loafing and trolling. Get a few pike and bass. Not a maskalonge yet. Have forgotten business, and sleep all night. Caught about 100 fine rock bass, but T. threw them all back—says they are a coarse fish, not to be in company with the game ones. Great place! Big easy chairs in boats if wanted, with cushions. Have fished with my slippers on—good walking over the dry turf from the hotel to the lake. They certainly do know how to put up lunches in the baskets made specially for just that. Cold chicken, potted ham, cheese and crackers, two kinds of sandwiches, bottled coffee, two or three kinds of cakes, butter and milk if wanted! Cigars. It spoils a fisherman, for the chances are he will be so delighted with his cold luncheon that he will not go ashore, build a fire, fry a bass or some trout in the pan kept under the bow of the boat, and thus add greatly to the enjoyment of the meal.

June 22.—Had the picnic—T. and wife, both girls, and another guide to row second boat. Four pickerel picked up on way to Birch Point, two and a half miles. Deserted cabin on Point—wild place owned by Chicago people. Man's wife died; he left. Fine spring just south of point, close to shore; beautiful rivulet flows from it over sand into lake.

Ate half a pickerel and drank three cups coffee. Had roasted potatoes. Fished after lunch in the cove south of Point. Got a four-pound pickerel and one bass on my hook, with cane pole, and T. landed them for me with the net. Gone all day, rowed back myself—never a strike, and wonder what has become of the maskalonge T. says are here—nobody getting one.

June 23.—Away early up Platte River by way of Platte Lake. Saw many fine trout in the stream. Went up Dead Stream



Noon Luncheon Among the Rushes.

Mr. Thompson, Dressing Trout.

Campers on Little Platte Lake.

into Little Platte, and fished in shallow water, among rushes and lily pads, boat drifting. Caught 15 very fine black bass during forenoon, using all of our 25 minnows. Average weight of bass, 2½ pounds. Good joke on T. He had tried his line to be sure it was strong, as he said any moment a terrible fish might strike. Sure enough, something took his hook and all the line up to the tip of the cane pole! Thompson wondered what it was, and how much it would weigh. Had lunch on a point among spruce trees—very wild. More loons yelling and watching and diving. Trolled across to Dead Stream—no strike. Returned down the river to the lake, and tried the bar. Not a strike after two hours' faithful work. No maskalonge here. Tired; chicken pie for supper. Bed early.

June 24.—Gave T. my best trout-rod and favorite reel. Tried them in Platte River. Splendid trout-fishing reached by boat from house in forty minutes, and trolling all the way besides. Platte fine stream for fly casting—plenty of room for the line and flies. Thirty beauties during forenoon, fishing from boat, T. holding it around banks by the brush on shore while I whip the best places. Great combination—so many kinds of angling here together. T. getting irritated over no maskalonge. He lost another big one, and thought he had a second; but it proved to be a five-pound pickerel caught in the side, making the fish pull very hard through the water. He sends out to Beulah for a No. 1 "Star" maskalonge hook, and it is to be put on my salmon line to-morrow and the bar worked faithfully.

June 25.—Sunburned now—beard an inch long, and hands getting blistered from rowing. Feel splendid—great improvement in health. But we get no maskalonge, not even one strike for two miles on the bar. Row down past Edgewater sawmill, and enter Lower Platte River, the outlet to Big Platte. Go down an exquisitely beautiful stream, clear, gravel bottom, wooded shores, with lots of fish darting past the boat, for a mile and a half, drifting with the current and drinking in the beauty of the vistas. Enter Round Lake, about a half mile across, and troll around it. Famous place for maskalonge, and the very embodiment of the wild. Rowed around it five times, but only took a three-pound pickerel each time. Back into Platte—hard row up the stream. Not a strike going back to the boat-house. This is getting monotonous.

June 26.—Am strong enough now to row all day. Great exercise. Trolled on the bar, holding line in teeth. Got two beautiful bass. Hooked a snag that turned out to be a fish! Had to give him about twenty feet of line. He swam out straight away from the side of the boat, and jumped clear! About 40 inches long! Steady, now! Here is a maskalonge at last. All right, this salmon line will hold him—strain, about fifteen pounds. Fish will weigh about twenty. Swims straight for me, much faster than I can haul in, and then back with a jerk. Then jumps and shakes his head, and is gone! Oh, how very limp and easy the line comes in! No use to swear—spilled milk! One thing sure—a few big ones here, and will strike if you troll long enough. Small consolation in getting a very fine three-pound small-mouth black bass at "Pratchett's Island." Cooked and ate him at Birch Point and had a dish of the wild strawberries there. Big thunder and wind storm—black waves, wraiths of white-caps rather alarming. Let the boat drift before it the 2½ miles right to the boat-house, never dipped an oar, and trolled as I went, getting a four-pound pickerel on the "Star" hook. Angry at losing the fish on the bar. Always the way, the big ones get off and are lost. Small satisfaction; but I notice I am very eager to have another try for a large one.

June 27.—Am making this diary entry on the railroad, at nine at night.

Bitter loss! This morning I trolled up the south shore, and no strike for two and a half miles. Nothing doing. Had my lunch again on the Point. Loafed and watched a thunder storm from the shelter on shore. Caught a lot of rock bass on the very attractive-looking angling shore off the Point. Saw a giant fish—they are here! Am rather tired of fishing for

them, and will try for the trout and bass again. Smoked and read on shore until nearly sundown. Started for the boat-house by way of the curved shore of the Cove, trolling. This time I am on a snag sure. No—a tremendous fish is jerking and taking the line. It cuts my fingers. Boat is being dragged across the cove. Have been pulled twenty rods. Fish very deep in water. Comfort to know the line is stout enough, and the hook is very large—in fact, three of them. How can he jerk so? Boat going lively now; fish goes under the bow. Nearly fell out passing the taut line around the front. At least 300 feet out. Going to be biggest fish ever got here! Pull on line twenty pounds, easy; all I can stand. Oh, for a big reel and stiff rod! Breath comes in gasps; can feel heart throb.

Despair! Line broken!! Oh, unkind fate! The fish is gone, with a hundred feet of line. Never saw him. How could he be so mean? Confound the line! (this to the shores and lake generally). Paid five cents a foot for it, warranted not to break, and it has broken. Rest of it tossed in the lake. It should have held a tarpon or a tuna, and here it falls with what was probably a fifty-pound maskalonge! I am going away at once—never did like the place. Have tried so hard, and it does not give me a big fish. Will never spend my vacation here again. I am on my way back to New York. Never mind, next year I will take a shark hook, a wire rope and a windlass, and go dredging for that fish. I cannot stand it—must have revenge, or I shall feel bitter all my life about it. He is there in Platte yet! No thanks! He can jerk on a line more viciously, meaner, and harder, than any fish I ever hooked—not excepting a 23-pound salmon in a wild, racing current. He made a gallant fight for life, and won. Platte holds him. I hope no sportsman but myself will land him.

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And here in New York, looking back to all that lovely outing of ten days, Platte lies fair in memory. May it continue to bring joy to its anglers, companionship for the whole-souled Irishman who runs that little forest hotel, and happiness to the good family. Next year I am going back to get the big fish.

HUNTING IN THE CHOCTAW COUNTRY.

BY J. W. FARRELL.

Last November the entire gang began to feel the effects of close application to business. When the leaves began to put on their golden colors, as if dressing for the final event of the season, each became affected with a different ailment that needed an identical remedy. Allen was "bilious"; I was "run down"; Libby had the "rheumatism"; Beadle had "a bad taste in his mouth"; King was "tired" and Hargis declared that he "was never so hungry in his life," and all agreed that the proper and only remedy was—a camp hunt of three or four weeks.

All being of one mind as to what the "inner man" desired, we arranged to visit the Kiamichi and Black Fork mountains in the Choctaw country, where game was plenty and the fishing of the finest.

Being all Americans, and of course desirous of exercising the right of suffrage—the privilege and duty of every citizen—we agreed on election day as the day for our start. Libby was commissioned to purchase such supplies as would be necessary and I was authorized to employ a camp guard and cook. My duties were not arduous, as I soon found in the person of Joe Barber the party we needed.

On the evening of election day, all having voted, we pulled out for Thomasville, a lumber camp on the line of the Port Arthur route, about one hundred miles south and west of Fort Smith, Arkansas. We were compelled to lay at Pittsburg until 3 A.M. of the next day, so we went to bed. At three, an hour of rising that at home would have been profanely adjectived, we boarded the flyer and were soon going south at a rapid rate. Being sleepy, we arranged beds in the seats of the smoker and were soon dreaming of "fur, fin and feather." I made my bed on the west side of the car, while the rest of the crowd chose the east.

The country through which the line winds its "devious way, o'er precipice and bog and fen" entitles it to its name, "the Picturesque." It runs through the Ozark Mountains for one