

JANUARY, 1926

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STEPHENS

The Country Gentleman



PAINTED BY WILLIAM MEADE PRINCE

"Ring out the old, ring in the new"

MORE THAN A MILLION A MONTH

The Thrill of Striking Fish



MARKET FISHERMEN OF THE CALIFORNIA FLEET NETTING TUNA AT CAPE SAN LUCAS

WE SIGHTED leaping sailfish for 200 miles and more north of Zihuatanejo, on the west coast of Mexico. Our second morning out we counted nineteen fish, most of them large, and all splendid leapers. One made fifteen jumps, and another tied our record of twenty-one. We were fully eighteen miles offshore while the show was being given.

This was tremendously interesting, for we had established with our own eyes, for at least part of the year, a range of 600 miles for this wonderful game fish. Possibly it travels farther north and south. We had seen a few off the Gulf of Tehuantepec. As we approached the mouth of the Gulf of California the sea became rough, and no fish of any kind showed on the surface. I had no doubt, however, that sailfish ranged as far north as the Gulf.

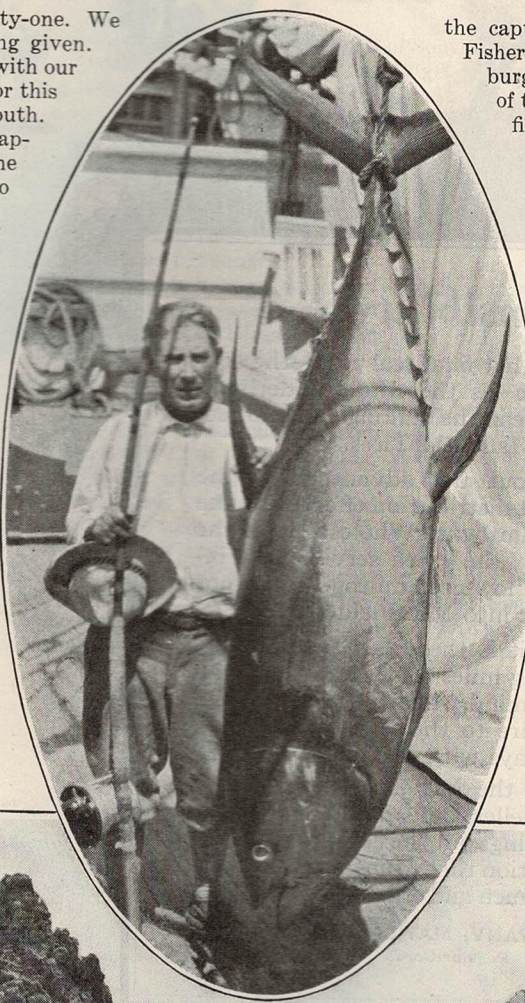
At daybreak on April eighth we sighted the mountains of Lower California, and soon after that the rugged white outline of Cape San Lucas. We ran into the Gulf to San Jose del Cabo, reaching it about noon. There was no bay, only an open roadstead, with a long curving white beach backed by green palms, and above and beyond them the stark glaring desert that stretched to the purple ranges.

We had to shoot the surf in our skiffs to get ashore, a thrilling and sometimes risky business. But it was fun. The solid sandy beach felt strange and wavy under my feet. Natives in picturesque Mexican garb were unloading boxes of tomatoes from pack mules, to be transported by canoes to a small freighter lying out in the roadstead. The little town lay back three miles over a dusty green-bordered road, traveled by trains of pack mules and yelling Mexicans.

San Jose del Cabo had one main street, wide, yellow, deserted, lined on each side by white and brown and pink walled houses of Spanish design. We found ourselves welcome and that the coming of American travelers had been recognized as advantageous. Our inquiries about fish brought vehement replies mostly: "*Mucha pescada.*"

The run down the coast from San Jose del Cabo to San Lucas Bay was a beautiful one, and certainly thrilling. The distance was about sixteen miles, and we saw fish enough to satisfy even us. School after school of tuna passed us, and some were feeding on small bait, and others leaping. We saw sailfish and many whales, and other fish that did not show clearly enough to be recognized. The bay was like a shimmering opal. Far inshore was anchored the fleet of the

By ZANE GREY



market fishermen from San Diego and San Pedro, California. We counted fifteen. There was a yacht among them.

We got our boats overboard and were soon in readiness to fish. Before going out we took a run over to interview the captain of one of the market boats. He said he recognized the Fisherman to be one of the noted Blue Nose schooners from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Tuna were running well, he told us, and some of them were big. The fishermen of the live-bait boats catch their fish with hook and line, using live sardines for bait.

So, altogether, it was quite late when we turned the corner of the Cape. R. C. and Romer went with Bob, Captain Mitchell and Johnny had the small launch, and I went with Sid and Heisler. We had no live bait, and were just on a scouting trip. We had squids, feather jigs, tarporenos and spoons. Just off the beautiful sea-carved monument rocks that form the Cape we were tremendously amazed to see a school of large tuna on the surface.

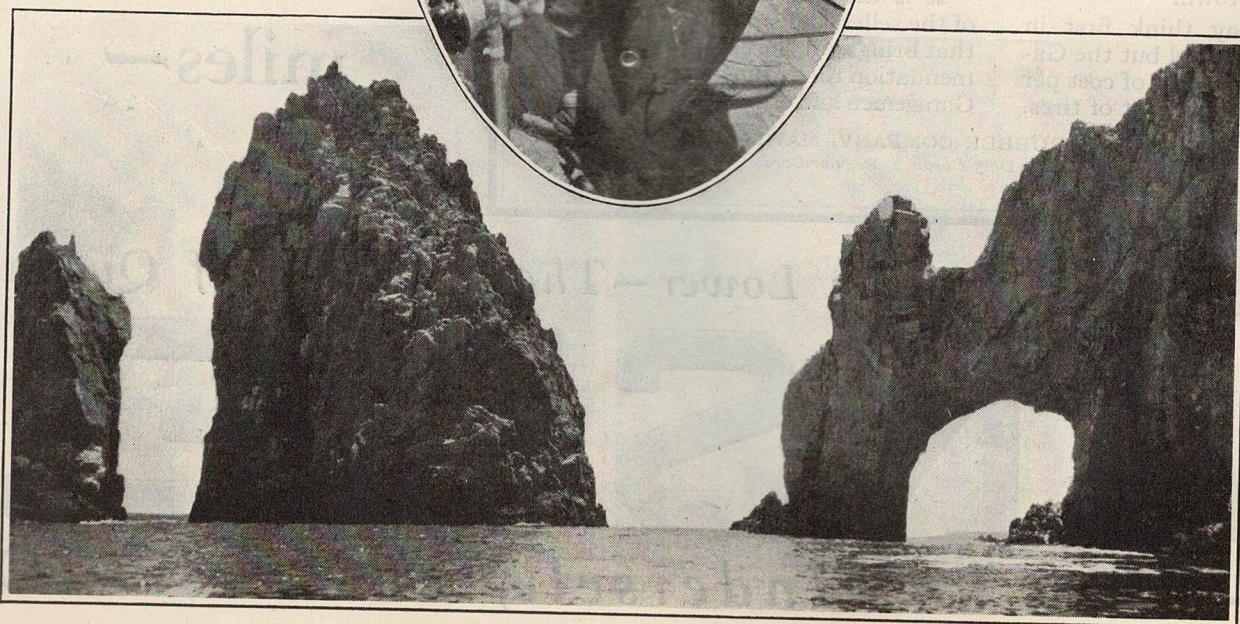
It would be impossible for me to describe in detail what happened the next few hours. But I had an extraordinary experience that was paralleled by my companions. My first strike was such a skyrocket water-throwing plunge that it flabbergasted me. The fish hooked himself, crashed across the surface in white clouds of spray, and, shooting off with tremendous velocity, took 300 yards of line in one rush. He never stopped!

Then it seemed I was hooking, fighting, losing and catching tuna until I was exhausted. During this violent hazy wild period I had occasional accidental glimpses of my comrades in the other boats doing the same thing. It was like a dream. Tuna everywhere! One of the market boats shared our luck and labors. Every time I chanced to glance at this boat I saw two fishermen hauling on hand lines, with a fish on each.

I hooked and lost three very large tuna. Besides these, I lost a number of others, none under a hundred pounds.

Leaders, swivels, tarporenos, broke for me. I had a big tunastrip atarporeno of hooks. My twenty-four thread line was broken twice. But I caught eight tuna, the largest being 218 pounds. Romer caught a tuna of 143 pounds. The others accounted for seven more. R. C. reported some tremendous strikes and lost fish. Captain Mitchell and Johnny had but one. The Captain had his heavy tackle smashed twice. We had been unprepared.

(Continued on Page 135)



CAPE SAN LUCAS AT THE TIP OF LOWER CALIFORNIA

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The Thrill of Striking Fish

(Continued from Page 34)

We scraped acquaintance with several captains of the fishing boats, and made it a point to run over to see them occasionally, after the day's fishing. There were three purse-net boats, half a dozen large live-bait boats, and several small ones, besides the cannery tender, and a large schooner that was used for cold-storage purposes.

Captain Heston, of the schooner, had been following these tuna for eight years. In answer to my queries he made some interesting disclosures.

"I have not noticed any diminution in the number of yellow-fin tuna. There are as many now as when I first started in this business. And that means millions. Some years there are not so many, other years are good. This year they are thick. Tuna spawn on the bottom, and one tuna will have a thousand eggs where a salmon has one. They multiply tremendously. Probably that fact will save the tuna from extinction."

Hooking a Big One

ROMER and Johnny were given instructions to take the small launch and troll along the rocky west shore and the sandy northern shore in search of white sea bass and yellowtail. I took Captain Mitchell with me. We were out on the sea before seven o'clock, ahead of most of the market boats.

Soon after letting out my line I saw a flash of silver and a swirl behind my feather jig. A cracking smash, making a huge patch of white water, was followed by a terrific lunge on my line. It jerked me out of my seat. Despite the grip I had on my rod I almost lost it.

The tuna shot along the surface, between two green furrows, showing a broad back, and as he went he surely gathered headway. That became the most spectacular surface run I ever saw. It was incredibly swift. My reel shrieked as the line shot off. A remarkable feature also was the length of line out of water. Fully 100 yards! Beyond that stretched 200 yards more, whipping the water white as the tuna dragged it in a curve over the surface. He had 400 yards out, and for a considerable number of moments before we began to gain. We chased him some distance before he sounded.

Then I settled down to a grueling contest. The depth at which the tuna worked added much to my difficulties. For two hours I labored hard and persistently before I made any obvious impression on him. But at last I got him to the surface, where the size elicited yells from all of us. He turned head down and dived.

Landing the 318 Pounder

IN A FEW seconds he took off half of my line. That with the drag on! When I had to release the drag I bade him good-by. After a thousand feet he slowed up. But he went on down until he had reached a depth of 1300 feet. When he stopped I endeavored to lift him. Not an inch! Harder I pulled. Presently the dead weight slightly moved and I recovered a fraction of line. I had to lift with all my strength. But that was not very great now, as I had overworked. Excitement and hope revived me, and I strained every muscle.

The time came when I could lift him and gain several feet of line; and of course the farther up I got him the less the tremendous strain. In what seemed an age I lifted him to the surface, a blazing blue and yellow monster. It took both boatmen and Captain Mitchell to haul this tuna into the launch. The magnificent flaming colors, blue, gold, silver, opal, pink, bronze, changed marvelously every second, and were most strikingly beautiful as he quivered and died. This tuna measured nearly seven feet in length and over four in girth. He weighed 318 pounds.

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One afternoon a vast school of blackfish, scattered all over the ocean, came down on us from the west. As far as we could see in every direction the big black snub noses and black hooked fins cleaved the blue water. At first we contented ourselves with chasing them to take pictures. But when it dawned on us that they in turn were chasing tuna, we remembered what wolves of the sea they were, and according to ichthyologists should be exterminated, and we got out the rifles.

Blackfish, or whale killers, are dangerous beasts. They really are not fish, but warm-blooded mammals, and in the experience of men who follow the sea, had been known to attack and sink boats.

I wasted a good deal of ammunition without doing them any harm. It was hard to shoot accurately from a bobbing boat. But at last I hit a huge ugly brute, and instantly wished I had missed him, for he heaved up, showing twenty feet of black bulk, and lunged in our direction. It did not matter whether this was accident or intent. Assuredly he was a fierce monster. He could have stove in our boat with his battering ram of a head or smashed us with his wide flukes.

A Ticklish Situation

I SHOT him twice in quick succession, hearing the impact of both bullets. Then he leaped and went down. What a fearful creature!

We ran over to where he had gone down. The water was colored. I saw the long lean gray-yellow shape of a leopard shark. Suddenly it appeared we were surrounded by blackfish, all from six to ten feet under the surface, but clearly distinguishable. Five of them swam under the boat. They were curious, even threatening. Without word from me the boatman started both engines and we shot away from there.

One morning as we ran out off the Cape we espied a long dark line of leaping fish on the horizon. It was an inspiring sight and we headed full speed toward it.

When we were within two miles I decided the marching white and black wall was an enormous school of porpoises—by far the greatest number I had ever seen together. The school had fully a mile front.

There were thousands of porpoises, of all sizes apparently, and half of them appeared to be in the air when the other half was down. Occasionally a huge black-and-silver porpoise would leap high above the others and fall back, making a high splash. The rhythmic motion and the flash of black, gold, silver, above the white spray made a singularly beautiful sight.

Leaping Porpoises

THE thousands of porpoises seemed actuated by a single idea. As one fish they leaped, faster and farther. Glittering, flying, disappearing, rank and file, whole columns like soldiers coming out together in a graceful parabolic curve, they thrilled the spectator as much as a great herd of caribou in the snow, or a rumbling herd of African buffalo crashing through the high grass.

We gave chase, and for several miles I could not see that we gained perceptibly. Our boats at top speed made about fourteen miles an hour. Gradually the porpoises slowed down and we began to gain.

In a few moments we were surrounded by splashing, puffing, leaping gray bodies. Tiny baby porpoises leaped alongside huge plump ones, presumably their mothers. The roar of splitting water filled my ears. Sometimes a row of twenty would leap right in front of me. I would be looking down upon their glistening backs. The slapping of flat tails mingled with the roar.

They drew away from us, and sheering east, headed into the track of the sun.

We had trolled all morning without sight of any kind of a fish. The sea was

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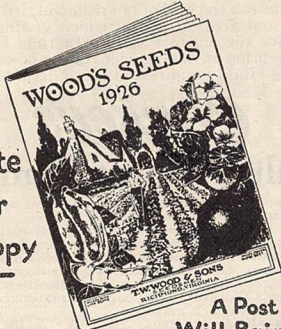
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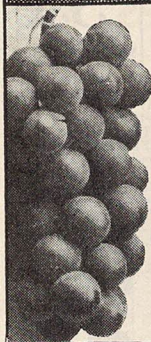
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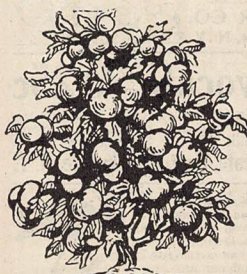
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dark blue, calm and hot under the noon-day sun. I was trying to keep from falling into a doze when Sid roused me:

"They're yellin' for us. Somethin' doin'."

At the same time he opened both throttles. I got up to face forward, with zest and the old curious thrill. R. C.'s boat was perhaps a quarter of a mile from us. Next instant I espied a high sharp black fin not far behind his boat. He yelled and waved for us to come.

"It's a basking shark," shouted Sid.

I thought so too, but when we got within a hundred feet and I had a close view of that enormous fish I changed my mind. Still it had the shape of a shark tail.

"What do you know about this?" yelled R. C. "Some fish! He's bigger than the boat. Doesn't seem to mind us."

A 60-Foot Whale Shark

SID ran my boat closer. I saw white spots on the huge fin. It was not a fin, but the lobe of an enormous tail. I saw a silvery green mass, long and wide, with projections.

The dorsal fin was low and stubby, the pectorals huge, apparently fan shaped, almost resembling the wings of a colossal bat. The fish had a wide flat head, like that of a catfish, and he was close to sixty feet long.

I recognized him as one of the rarest creatures in the sea—the *Rhineodon typicus* or whale shark. I had always wondered if I would ever have the luck to see one.

Doctor Gudger, of the New York Natural History Museum, is the authority on this strange fish, and he had sent me his fascinating booklet, containing all that was scientifically known about it.

In 1829 a Doctor Smith of South Africa harpooned a large shark of unusual appearance, and, assisted by a number of men, finally captured it. The shark was of unknown species. Doctor Smith named it *Rhineodon typicus*.

The first specimen was fifteen feet long and nine in circumference. The skin was sent to the Paris museum.

In 1902 an eighteen-foot *Rhineodon* floated ashore at Ormond, Florida. From that year writers made frequent mention of the *Rhineodon*; and it became evident that the great shark had a wide distribution.

In 1912, Captain Thompson, a local boatman of Miami, Florida, captured a *Rhineodon* thirty-eight feet long. This fish was exhibited as an unknown sea monster, and was finally identified by Doctor Gudger.

I remembered all this in a flash.

"What the devil is it?" called Bob King, leaning over the gunwale.

"*Rhineodon typicus*," I replied, with the satisfaction of being able to classify what none of us had ever seen.

The Fight Begins

"BY GOLLY!" ejaculated Bob. "He shore ought to have a crazy name like that. He's the darndest lookin' fish I ever saw. Let's ketch him!"

This instinct of capture might never have roused in me but for Bob.

We had one enormous gaff, and thought to get that in the shark. So, tying it to a heavy rope, we ran almost upon top of the fish. Lazily, with ponderous slow weave of tail, it moved along, six or eight feet under the surface.

I was standing on deck, beside Heisler, who wielded the heavy gaff. Up to that instant I had not thought of danger. The fish was harmless. But I realized that one blow from its tail could smash and sink us. I was all tight, breathless, staring, and as Heisler threw the gaff I suddenly sat down and held on to the hatch. Still I could see. The gaff sank over the side of the shark. Heisler pulled with all his might. It slipped off.

The fish did not appear to be aware of our ambitious and evil intent. Heisler



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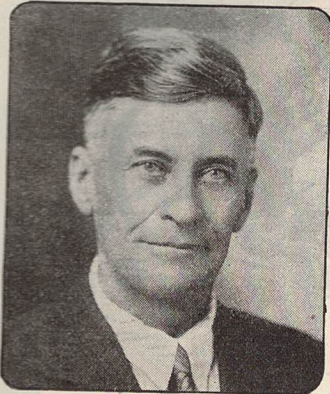


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threw the gaff again. It would not stick. Twice more he failed to get a hold.

"Leave me have that gaff," yelled Bob. "I got six hundred feet of rope." We gave it over to him quite with alacrity.

Bob got out on the bow with the gaff. He had put it on the pole, and evidently did not intend to throw it loose on the rope, as Heisler had done. Bob motioned for R. C. to run the boat to suit him, and they drew up close to that weaving black tail. Bob lunged to gaff that tail. He got hold, but not securely. The fish did not change speed or position. His tail stuck six feet above the water. Bob took more time, waiting till the tail was right under him. Then he gaffed it. I saw the iron go through.

Next instant the tail disappeared in a waterspout. Then followed a thunderous crash that stopped my heart. But it was a sound of churning water. The shark had not hit the boat. The turmoil at the bow subsided. Then I saw Bob paying out rope, and huge bulges and swirls ahead of the boat. R. C. put on full speed and so did Sid. We chased the *Rhineodon typicus*.

The Shark Stays Up

THE fish came up before long and swam on the surface as before. The gaff hook stuck there in the high black tail.

Bob got Chester to hold the rope while he went below. I divined at once that he meant to rig up some kind of an iron.

Presently he appeared with some kind of a spear rigged on a file that had been bound on a gaff pole. He attached a rope to the spear. Then with businesslike promptness he plunged the thing into the fish. He shoved down on it with all his might. The shark made a roaring hole in the sea, almost large enough to swamp the boat. Then he sounded. R. C.'s boat ran to the edge of the maelstrom and stopped. Quickly the water smoothed out, hissing and seething. Both ropes went slipping over the gunwale until several hundred feet were gone. Gradually then the shark slowed until he stopped. With that Bob signaled us to come alongside.

"Go back to the ship an' fetch ropes, barrels, harpoons, guns!" he called. "We'll catch this rhinoceros tappicus."

I tried to persuade Bob that we had no equipment equal to the job.

"Shore we can catch him," he replied, with a keen flash of his blue eyes.

When we returned from the ship they were still fast to the fish. We were thirty-five minutes getting back to R. C.'s boat. The shark was on the surface, tail and dorsal out, and it was towing the boat.

"Jab a couple of irons into this rhinoceros," said Bob, and he instructed Heisler just where and how to hit the shark.

We ran ahead, alongside our quarry, now with dorsal out of the water. We drew close, with the bow at his head. Heisler lunged down with the pole. It was as if he had struck a rock. The iron came back bent. While Heisler hammered it straight the huge fish swam on unconcernedly.

The Battle Grows Warm

SOON Heisler was ready for another try. We had grown somewhat hardened to the presence of the *Rhineodon* and therefore less fearful. Heisler repeated his harpooning performance with all the violence of which he was capable. Crash went the mighty tail. We were deluged with water. Everybody on both boats appeared to be yelling hoarse instructions. I heard the impact of the fish against the boat.

"Hold on!" yelled Heisler. I thought he meant for the boys to stay with him at the rope. But when the boat began to rise out of the water I knew differently. Then with the lifting motion came a tremendous scraping on the bottom of the boat. The shark had swerved under us. The boys fell with Heisler, all hanging to the rope. I came within an inch of going overboard, but managed desperately to cling to a ring bolt until the launch righted.

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Then the threshing, thumping tail appeared above water on our port side. What a narrow escape! The iron pulled out, the rope slackened; and that enabled us to run from in front of Bob, who was swearing lustily. When we got in good position again Bob called for Heisler to come aboard his launch.

Still the *Rhineodon* stayed on the surface. Bob was soon ready, and we followed close beside his boat. The shark was moving faster now, though still high in the water. While Heisler, Chester and Mitchell held the ropes Bob plunged the iron deep back of the dorsal. Roar of beaten water, flooded bobbing boats, blinded fishermen! Pandemonium prevailed for a few seconds until the deluge subsided.

When I extricated myself I was relieved to see that the *Rhineodon* had sounded and was taking line with remarkable swiftness compared with his former movements. Bob had two ropes and Heisler had one. Chester and Mitchell were very busy getting out other ropes.

Down to 1500 Feet

AT ABOUT six hundred feet the shark stopped and swam on at that depth, towing the boat. Presently, at Bob's word, the four men began to haul in on the ropes. It was a slow, laborious task. It took an hour to pull the *Rhineodon* to the surface. How funny to see the big gaff hook waving in that black tail! He towed the boat a couple of miles inshore, and then to the westward. Then he sounded. The men had a harder job to haul him up.

To make a long story short, they fought that fish until nearly sunset, during which time it sounded five times, going deeper every time, the last being over 1200 feet.

When they got him up again Bob yelled to me: "Come aboard this boat with your big rifle." We ran up to them and I went aboard, together with Romer and Johnny. While I watched for a chance to shoot, the boys pitched in to help. But the *Rhineodon* did not come to the surface enough for me to disable it, even with the big .50-caliber.

Sunset came. Our quarry manifestly thought it was his bedtime, for he suddenly sounded. The ropes sped down. Different lengths of rope, tied together, marked how many feet he descended. Six hundred! Twelve hundred! Fifteen! Two of the tubs went overboard to sink. Heisler made a Herculean effort to save his tub, but it could not be done. As the end of the rope left his hands he kicked the tub overboard. Someone else had the white line to which the tub rope was attached.

The Battle Ends

DOWN, slower and slower, but surely and inevitably down the great shark sounded. The boys, with Chester and Mitchell, strove frantically to save a new rope from following the others. In vain! Foot by foot it slipped through their wet grimy gloved hands. Bob had his rope under the cleat on the bow. He too was in desperate straits, but not vanquished.

Here I put aside my rifle and entered the fray. The spirit to conquer that brute was contagious. When the last few feet of new rope lay in sight Chester hurriedly tied the last ball of white line to the end. Bob was panting and swearing. "More rope! . . . We'll lick him yet. Somebody get more rope. I'm losin' heah."

"Just tied on the last piece," replied Chester.

Then followed a short intense struggle to stop the fish, before he had all the rope. Heisler nearly went overboard hanging on to his, but he lost it. That was the last I saw clearly, for my eyes grew red with the effort I was making. We knew indeed we were whipped, at least all of us knew except Bob. For when I gave the order to take a half hitch with the ropes and let the fish pull free of the irons Bob groaned loudly. Then he panted: "Got to—hand it—to old rhinoceros. I've more—respect for him—than I started with."



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