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CHRISTMAS NUMBER

FIELD AND STREAM



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"THE STORY OF THE DU PONTS"

First Installment of "The History of American Arms and Ammunition" In this Issue

FIELD AND STREAM



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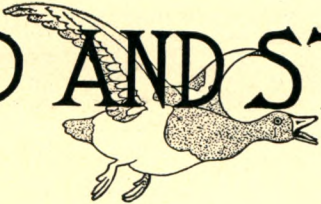
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TWELFTH YEAR

DECEMBER, 1907

NUMBER EIGHT



“BYME-BY-TARPON”

FIGHTING THE KING OF GAME FISH ON ITS CHOSEN FEEDING GROUNDS
WHERE THE PANUCO FLOWS TO THE MEXICAN GULF

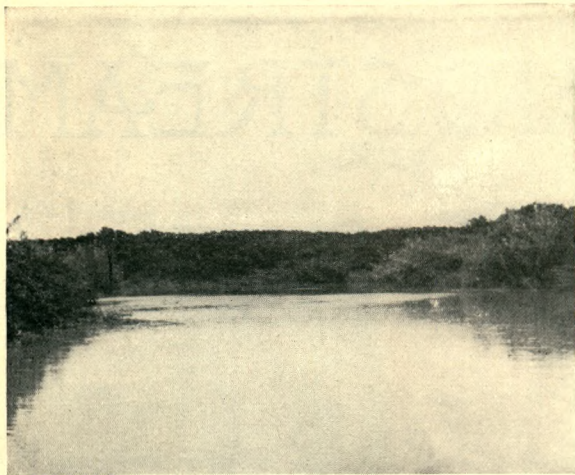
By ZANE GREY

TO capture the fish is not all of fishing. Yet there are circumstances which make this philosophy hard to accept. I have in mind a late incident of angling tribulation which rivals the most poignant instant of my boyhood, when a great trout flopped for one sharp moment on a mossy stone, and then was gone, like a golden flash, into the shady depths of the pool.

Not long ago I followed Attalano, my guide, down the narrow Mexican street of Tampico to the bank of the broad Panuco. Under the rosy dawn the river quivered like a restless opal. The air, sweet with the song of blackbird and

meadowlark, was full of cheer; the sun, rising, shone in splendor on the water, and on the long line of graceful palms lining the opposite bank, and the tropical forest beyond, with its luxuriant foliage festooned by gray moss. Here was a day to warm the heart of any fisherman; here was the beautiful river, celebrated in many a story; here was the famous guide, skilled with oar and gaff, rich in experience. What sport I would have; what treasure of keen sensation would I store; what flavor of life would I taste this day! Hope burns always in the heart of a fisherman.

Attalano was in harmony with the day and the scene. He had a cheering figure,



"A LAGOON, UNRUFFLED BY THE WIND"

lithe and erect, with a springy stride, bespeaking the Montezuma blood said to flow in his Indian veins. Clad in a colored cotton shirt, blue jeans and Spanish girdle, and treading the path with brown feet, never deformed by shoes, he would have stopped an artist. Soon he bent his muscular shoulders to the oars, and the ripples circling from each stroke hardly disturbed the calm Panuco. Down stream glided long Indian canoes, hewn from trees, and laden with oranges and bananas. In the stern of each stood a dark native wielding an enormous paddle with ease. Wild fowl dotted the glassy expanse; white cranes and pink flamingoes graced the reedy bars; red-breasted kingfishers flew over with friendly screech. The salt breeze kissed my cheek; the sun shone with the comfortable warmth northerners welcome in spring; from over the white sand-dunes far below came the faint boom of the ever-restless gulf.

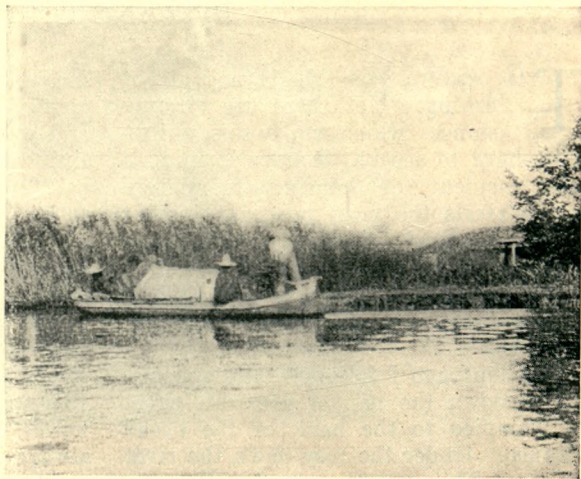
We trolled up the river and down, across from one rush-lined, lily-padded shore to the other, for miles and miles, with never a strike. But I was content, for over me had been cast the dreamy, care-dispelling languor of the south.

When the first long, low swell of the changing tide rolled in, a stronger breeze raised little dimpling waves and chased along the water in dark, quick-moving frowns. All at once the tarpon began to show, to splash, to play, to roll. It was as if they had been awakened by the stir and murmur of the miniature breakers. Broad bars of silver flashed in the sunlight; green backs cleft the little billows; wide tails slapped lazily on the water. Every yard of the river seemed to hold a rolling fish. This sport increased until the long stretch of water, which had been as calm as St. Regis Lake at twilight, resembled the

quick current of a Canadian stream. It was a fascinating, wonderful sight. But it was also peculiarly exasperating, because, when the fish roll in this sportive, lazy way, they will not bite. For an hour I trolled through this whirlpool of flying spray and twisting tarpon, with many a salty drop on my face, hearing all around me the whipping crash of breaking water.

"Bye-bye-tarpon," presently remarked Attalano, favoring me with the first specimen of his English.

The rolling of the tarpon diminished, and finally ceased as noon advanced.



"DOWN STREAM GLIDED LONG INDIAN CANOES"

No more did I cast longing eyes upon those huge bars of silver. They were buried treasure. The breeze quickened as the flowing tide gathered strength, and together they drove the waves higher. Attalano rowed across the river into the outlet of one of the lagoons. This narrow stream was unruffled by wind; its current was sluggish and its muddy waters were clarifying under the influence of the now fast rising tide.

By a sunken log near shore we rested for lunch. I found the shade of the trees on the bank rather pleasant, and became interested in a blue heron, a russet-colored duck and a brown and black snipe, all sitting on the sunken log. Nearby stood a tall crane watching us solemnly, and above in the tree-top a parrot vociferously proclaimed his knowledge of our presence. I was wondering whether he objected to our invasion, at the same time taking a most welcome bite of lunch, when directly in front of me the water flew up, as if propelled by some submarine power. Framed in a shower of spray I saw an immense tarpon, with mouth agape and fins stiff, close in pursuit of frantically leaping little fish.

The fact that Attalano dropped his sandwich attested to the large size and close proximity of the tarpon. He uttered a grunt of satisfaction and pushed out the boat. A school of feeding tarpon closed the mouth of the lagoon. Thousands of mullet had been cut off from their river haunts and were now leaping, flying, darting in wild haste to elude the great white monsters. In the foamy swirls I saw streaks of blood.

"Bye-bye-tarpon!" called Attalano, warningly.

Shrewd guide! I had forgotten that I held a rod. When the realization dawned on me that sooner or later I would feel the strike of one of these silver tigers, a keen, tingling thrill of excitement quivered over me. The primitive man asserted himself; the instinctive lust to conquer and to kill seized me, and I leaned forward, tense and

strained, with suspended breath and swelling throat.

Suddenly the strike came, so tremendous in its energy that it almost pulled me from my seat; so quick, fierce, bewildering, that I could think of nothing but to hold on. Then the water split with a hissing sound to let out a great tarpon, long as a door, seemingly as wide, who shot up and up into the air. He wagged his head and shook it like a struggling



A TYPICAL HACIENDA BESIDE THE PANUCO

wolf. When he fell back with a heavy splash, a rainbow, exquisitely beautiful and delicate, stood out of the spray, glowed, paled, and faded.

Five times he sprang toward the blue sky, and as many he plunged down with a thunderous crash. The reel screamed. The line sang. The rod, which I had thought stiff as a tree, bent like a willow wand. The silver king came up far astern and sheered to the right in a long, wide curve, leaving behind a white wake. Then he sounded, while I watched the line with troubled eyes. But not long did he sulk. He began a series of magnificent tactics new in my experience. He stood on his tail; then on his head; he sailed like a bird; he shook himself so violently as to make a convulsive, shuffling sound; he dove, to come up covered with mud, marring his bright sides; he closed his huge gills with a slap, and, most remarkable of all, he rose in the shape of a crescent, to straighten out with such marvelous power that he

seemed to actually crack like a whip.

After this performance, which left me in a condition of mental aberration, he sounded again, to begin a persistent, dragging pull, which was the most disheartening of all his maneuvers; for he took yard after yard of line until he was far away from me, out in the Panuco. We followed him, and for an hour crossed to and fro, up and down, humoring him, responding to his every caprice, as if he verily were a king. At last, with a strange inconsistency more human than fishlike, he returned to the scene of his fatal error, and here, in the mouth of the smaller stream, he leaped once more. But it was only a ghost of his former efforts, a slow, weary rise, showing he was tired. I could see it in the weakening wag of his head. He no longer made the line whistle.

I began to recover the long line. I pumped and reeled him closer. Reluctantly he came, not yet broken in spirit, though his strength had sped. He rolled at times with a shade of the old vigor, with a pathetic manifestation of the temper that became a hero. I could see the long, slender tip of his dorsal fin, then his broad tail, and finally the gleam of his silver side. Closer he came and slowly circled round the boat, eyeing me with great, accusing eyes. I measured him with a fisherman's glance. What a great fish! Seven feet, I calculated, at the very least.

At this triumphant moment I made a horrible discovery. About six feet from the leader the strands of the line had

frayed, leaving only one thread intact. My blood ran cold, and the clammy sweat broke out on my brow. My empire was not won; my first tarpon was as if he had never been. But true to my fishing instincts, I held on morosely; tenderly I handled him; with brooding care I riveted my eye on the frail place in my line, and gently, ever so gently, I began to lead the silver king shoreward. Every smallest move of his tail meant disaster for me, so when he moved it I let go of the reel. Then I'd have to coax him to swim back.

The boat touched the bank. I stood up, and carefully headed my fish toward the shore, and slid his head and shoulders out on the lily pads. One moment he lay there glowing like mother-of-pearl, a rare fish, fresh from the sea. Then, as Attalano warily reached for the leader, he gave a gasp, a flop that deluged us with muddy water, and a lunge which spelled freedom.

I watched him swim slowly away with my bright leader dragging beside him. Is it not the loss of things which makes life bitter? What we have gained is ours; what is lost is gone, whether fish, or use, or love, or name, or fame.

I tried to put on a cheerful aspect for my guide. But it was too soon. Attalano, wise old fellow, understood my case. A smile, warm and living, flashed across his dark face as he spoke:

"Bye-bye-tarpon."

Which defined his optimism and revived the failing spark within my breast. It was, too, in the nature of a prophecy.

