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The COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

For the AMERICAN FARMER and HIS FAMILY



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ON THE TRAIL OF BIG BUSINESS

Bone fishing - 38.

BONEFISHING—By Zane Grey

II

LONG KEY days pass. Gradually the northeast wind has lost its persistent strength and the weather has grown warmer. It has rained often. Last night there were two hard showers. The rain roared on the roof. I always like to lie snug and comfortable in bed, in the dark, and listen to a storm. Rain on the tent is one of the pleasures of camp life.

Today was hot, almost one of Long Key's white days. The trade-wind clouds hung along the horizon, their level bottom and regular formation making them singularly attractive. I watched a great flock of gulls floating in the shallow tide, all facing the wind. Now and then one would fly up and soar ahead of his fellows, to alight again. I saw a white gull, one of the yellow-billed species, darting down into the water. He was a master fisherman. He went clear under. Also I saw a kingfisher; and his method was to fly out over the water, soar up, then poise with fluttering wings. If he saw his prey he pitched down. If not he flew off a little way, soared up to repeat the performance. Then two beautiful man-of-war birds, the *rabitorcado* of my Alancran adventure, sailed over our boat. They brought back to me memory of the lonely haunting coral reef in the Caribbean.

It is in contemplation of the elements and of creatures of Nature that I have most pleasure. Thus I escape from myself. Only the last few days have I felt well. Slowly I am relaxing and coming to myself. Long Key has soothed and strengthened me before this. It has what I love—a lonely shore, not beaten by contending tides, but lapped by shallow musical waves, and a fringe of coconut palms, wild trees, fruitful trees, all leaning seaward with their long leaves bending and bowing. It has miles of shore line where the sea casts up its used and dead. Yesterday I found a wooden shoe, such as Hollanders wear. It looked old. Perhaps it has floated many years to get here.

WHERE sea meets strand, all over the world, there must necessarily be myriads of things cast up by the tides. But it is only on lonely shores like this that the sight is beautiful or profitable. Nor are all things cast up pleasant to my eyes. Never before in my years of Long Key wandering have I seen a hundredth of the champagne corks or whisky bottles. What execrable things to come upon while dreaming on a lonely coral shore! They only remind one of the let-down of the civilized peoples, of the false craving of man for alcohol, and alas, of the fact that women have become addicted to the bottle! The thought hurts me. I hate to feel myself narrow or little. But

drink and cigarettes for women! Such habits are too close to the license that seems rampant these days.

But fortunately there was little else along the beach to alienate me. Every tide heaps up a black line of seaweed as wandering and meandering as the water line, and it has something of grace and beauty. This seaweed was black, of a peculiar fringelike quality, that soon decomposed and bleached out and blew up on the shore. Always it was the home of the hopping and skipping little sand fleas.

IN PLACES I encountered mounds of short-bladed grass, washed up from the shallow water. This grass is the kind that grows in dark patches on the white sandy floor of the sea, and where the bonefish come nosing along in search of small crustaceans. How many hours have I sat motionless in canoe or boat waiting for a bonefish to find my bait that was lying in such a patch of grass. Broken shells, bits of dead coral, large and small sponges, nuts and seeds and driftwood littered the strand. Since my last visit here a wreck had been washed ashore, a huge mass of iron-studded timbers that once had been trod by the feet of sailors and had fallen prey to the savagery of the sea and must now rot under sun and rain. What of those sailors? They may have gone on their last long voyage. The sea is the most secretive of the elements.

At low tide the wide beach made walking easy. When the tide was at flood it was a tiring task to plod along over drifts of seaweed, roots of trees, under the brush and through the soft layers of sand high up.

Always it was pleasant to rest and gaze seaward, like Crusoe, for a white sail. Only here gazing was nearly always rewarded by the gleam of a mackerel ship, and the smoke of a steamer, hull down over the horizon. There are places made to rest. It was Byron who sang: "There is a rapture on the lonely shore." Indeed there is.

Beyond the palm grove on the point the work of the recent hurricane showed at its worst. Almost all the palms had been



The Big One That Didn't Get Away

beheaded of their graceful tufted crests and only the naked stumps remained. It gave a singular effect of devastation. I was glad to get beyond this zone and into the brush along the edge of the mangroves. Here were masses of driftwood—boxes and barrels, lumber of all kinds, pieces of wreckage, bottles, electric-light bulbs, corks as thick as shells on the beach, and many a strange derelict of ship furniture, all lodged against the roots and trees, making progress of the walker one of difficulty and amaze. These things gave me only passing thoughts. How little am I interested in the doings of men as compared with the myriad evidences of the prowess of Nature! I continued my walk on to where the bright green mangroves met the sea line.

The tide was low. All the bonefish flat at the head of the key was bare in the sunlight, a gray-white patch of decayed coral, uneven of surface and smelling rank and salty. Yet the odor, strong as it was, did not strike me as disagreeable. I took off my shoes and stockings and prepared for one of my hunts for soldier crabs—to me not the least of the many fascinations of bonefishing.

With my knapsack in hand I sallied forth on the marl. Or I should say into the marl, for at my first step I went to my knees in this soft decayed coral. Everywhere were tiny holes and little mounds and queer nests and long furrowlike trails—indicative of the life of the flat when the tide was in. All these sea creatures had crawled into their burrows. Soon the tide came creeping in and with it the crabs began to come out. I did not find any coming out of their holes, but I found some with the white claylike marl sticking in their shells.

SOLDIER crabs are not beautiful like the hermits or so mysterious and fascinating as the ghost or spirit crabs. Yet I never tired of hunting for them. They live in a stolen shell, mostly the snail-shell variety, from one inch to five in length. I have, however, found soldier crabs in various kinds of shells. They crawl out of their holes, and with the incoming tide go into the mangroves. They must feed at these times.

They crawl over the marl, strange creatures indeed, with their legs and feelers

showing from under what seemed an enormous burden. They have pretty good sight and were enabled at times to see me at ten feet distant. Then they would pop into their shells and squat down. Some, however, would try to escape.

How much of this pleasure of hunting crabs depended upon the fact that they were wonderful bait for bonefish? I cannot exactly tell. Probably it was a good deal. On the other hand it was both hard work and great fun. I had to walk fast for the very good reason that if I did not I would sink into the marl. At that, despite my exertions, I went to my knees. And soon I was wet with sweat and hot as fire and panting for breath. When, however, I had penetrated into the mangrove swamp I was able to hold on to branches and step upon roots, which means facilitated my progress.

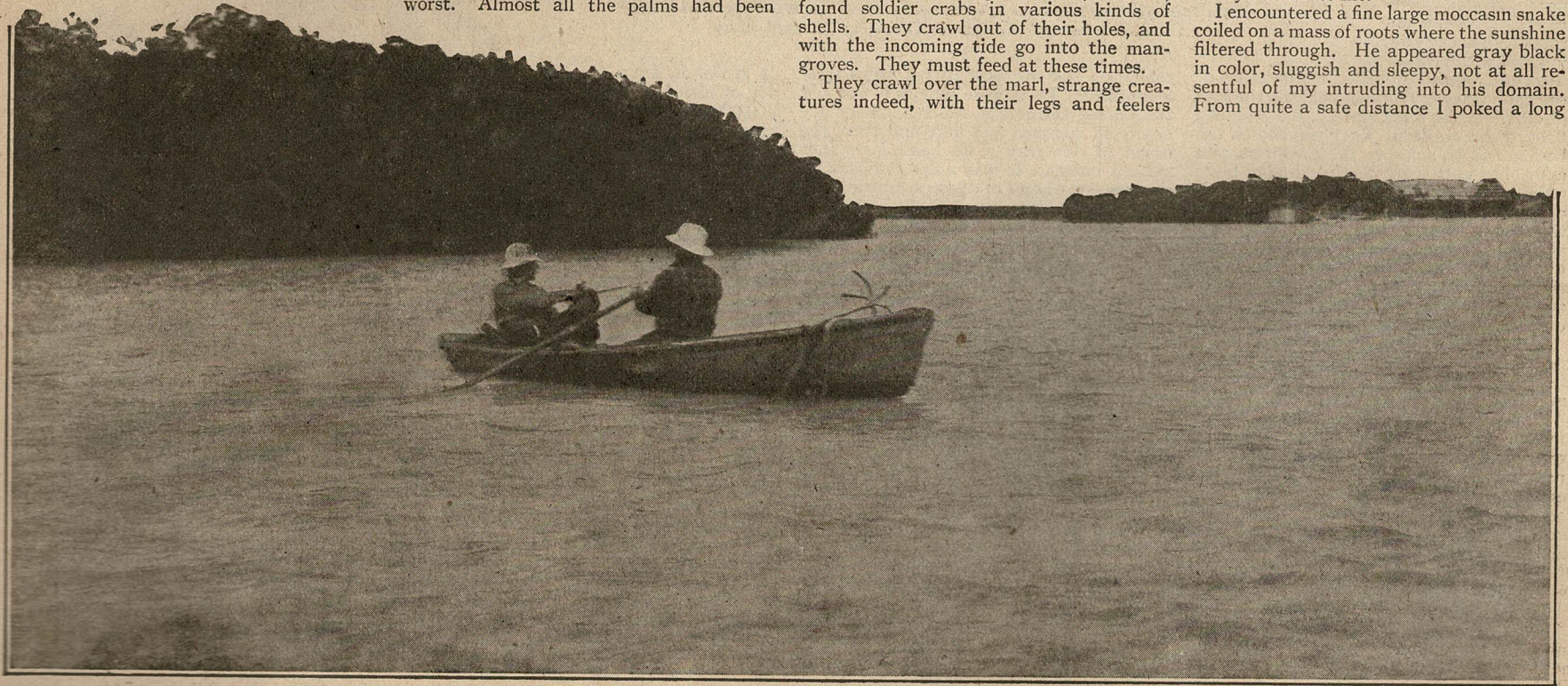
The interior of a mangrove swamp is a place most people would shun. Overhead a green shiny canopy spread thickly, almost hiding the blue sky. The roots of mangroves are an abomination to one who wants to move on. Only rhododendron and manzanita can compare with mangrove. These roots stand high out of the marl and really reach above high-water mark, and they are numerous, tangled, curved, and stiff as iron. To climb over them is a task for a tight-rope performer and a contortionist. To thread a way through them is next to impossible. Yet in my interest to catch soldier crabs I accomplished both.

HERE and there were open spots, all shaded over with foliage, where the water was shallow and warm and the soldiers held some kind of conventions. For here I always captured from three to a dozen. Sometimes I would see one quite a long distance away, say fifty feet across a labyrinthine mass of mangrove roots, and I would laboriously climb and wiggle over to get him. Success always brought a strange little thrill. I know now that I was reverting to boyish pursuits.

Nevertheless, there was a charm outside that of the obsession of a fisherman who will never grow old. Never? At least not in spirit.

The mangrove swamp was a place aloof from the haunts of men. How many men would care to get slimy and wet and hot and mosquito bitten in a swamp, shut in by a web of roots, overshadowed by heavy foliage, sucked down by a claylike medium as treacherous as quicksand, and lastly often in close proximity to the deadly moccasin snake? For me that was part of its charm. For the rest it was a strange, almost silent place. Places wild and lonely always fascinate me.

I encountered a fine large moccasin snake coiled on a mass of roots where the sunshine filtered through. He appeared gray black in color, sluggish and sleepy, not at all resentful of my intruding into his domain. From quite a safe distance I poked a long



There Came a Day When the Wind Softened Until There Was Only a Ripple on the Water. We Fished the Shoal Where the Bonefish Feed

stick at him and so contrived to make him open his mouth. Cottonmouth the natives of the South call the moccasin. I can vouch for the white color of the inside of his mouth. And after I had insulted him I beat as precipitate a retreat as possible until I was quite some distance from him. Then I resumed crabbing, always with eyes keen and roving, with senses alert, with something of a thrilling content.

LONG KEY days are of great variety. I have waited long for those I love best.

For ten days running we had the northeast trade wind, cool and annoyingly persistent, roiling the water and endlessly threshing the palms. Then the wind veered to south, lulled a little, came again strong from the southwest, and shifted to north, colder and harder, at last making again to the northeast. Most of these days were pleasant ones, but nothing comparable to those I wish to describe.

Even trade winds, persistent as they are, cannot endure forever. There came a day when the wind softened until there was only a ripple on the water. All day it blew pleasantly, a summer breeze from off the sea. We fished that day at the upper end of the key. I was out in the open all day, and every time I looked up from my fishing tasks or dreaming intervals I caught a glimpse of the variously colored and vivid streaks of the sea. All shades of green. Hours, it seemed, I watched the white terns feeding near our boat. They were buoyant, swift, airy birds, wild looking, and they uttered queer plaintive cries as they hovered over the water. Then they would pitch headfirst and fly down to plump into the water, and mostly came up with quivering minnows in their strong yellow bills. Pelicans, too, were feeding on that shoal.

Then came one of the beautiful still days, hot on land, pleasant on the water. Only a gentle ripple waved out of the east. We took the canoe and paddled out at low tide, and followed the edge of shallow water. If green water can be perfectly colorless this indeed seemed so. We followed long streaks of white sand ribbed by the tides, and bordered by patches of grass, and coral zone, where the great yellow sponges grew, and little black trees of seaweed, and conch shells and other marine curiosities.

The afternoon passed swiftly. Fishing makes nothing of hours. Time is brief for an angler. That soft sweet scent breathed off the sea. The little waves lapped musically at the canoe. The clouds sailed on, like ships. To the east the shore line curved with its white beach and gold-green palms, meeting the green of the sea. No heat, no glare, no wind!

WE LINGERED at our anchorage until the sun was low down in the west, a yellow shining light giving out a flare of paler intensity. To the south were scattered wide scrolls of clouds, different from the level-bottomed trade-wind clouds. And a growing tendency of the lights to color indicated an unusual sunset.

When we took up anchor and headed down the coast sea and cloud and sky and sun had engaged in a transformation beautiful to the eye. The sun seemed the master of that changing spectacle, and though hidden, dominated all, as if supreme at his hour of departure. Broken graceful clouds covered the west, and behind them the lord of day was sinking, sending exquisite rays on high, bars of light, ethereal, glorious and rimming all the clouds with silver radiance. The bulk of the clouds was softly gray. And with such lights predominating, the

sun sank. Then it seemed that a rarer change ensued. Certain it was, the surface of the sea began to glow. The color of the water seemed amber; the sand and grasses and coral and sponges took on something of the glamour from above; the scroll of clouds to the southeast turned the rose of a sea shell. As moment by moment passed

Hardly a breath of wind rustled the palm leaves. The water was like glass and clear as crystal and amber green in color. A Kentucky cardinal was singing sweetly from the mangroves. Evidently he was on his pilgrimage north and had crossed from Cuba to tarry a day with us on the island. The only other object of life was a little

Meanwhile the fish was going faster. The line smoked off the reel. Wiborn bent over and dipped rod and reel in the water. When he raised it the spray flew from it. There was fully two hundred and fifty yards of line on the reel, and it was almost gone.

"About all over, chief," called Wiborn. "Pull up your anchor," I yelled. "Quick!"

Wiborn had his difficulties holding the nodding rod with one hand and hauling up the anchor with the other. But he accomplished it, just as his last yard of line went off the reel. How the rod sprung! I made a powerful surge with the paddle and the canoe shot forward. Wiborn lost his balance. Suddenly I was transfixed between two emotions—one a fiendish glee in the possibility of his falling overboard, the other a poignant fear he would lose the bonefish.

"**F**ALL on your knees!" I shouted as I again wielded the paddle.

He recovered somewhat, went to his knee on the bow seat, and bracing himself, lifted the rod and began to reel. Lone Angler was left-handed, and he wound a

reel faster than any other fisherman I had ever watched.

"Great!" I called encouragingly. "Get up that slack. Don't fall overboard. You've got some bonefish."

But the fish took care of the slack line. He straightened the line out, pulled the reel handle out of Wiborn's hand and got what little line he had recovered.

"It's up to me. Hold him!" I yelled, and began to paddle fast and furiously. The canoe leaped forward. The sea was calm, and I could handle a paddle. Wiborn held his rod almost straight up. It was bent and nodding. The line was tight and showed for fully two hundred feet, strung like a wire. I remembered that it was one of my specially made number-nine lines, very hard to break.



Part of the Fun of Bonefishing is in Catching the Bait

this effect seemed intensified until there came one in which it was a supreme manifestation of Nature, a transfiguration almost too wonderful for the credulity of man. The sea became a quivering opal, a moving and darkening light spread out from the west; the clouds above the sunset resembled white ships against a background of gold; and that scattered company southward deepened their rose. An enchantment of the open—a sky—a canopied sea—a moment of Nature's painting!

TODAY is one of the white days, when the white sun shines and the white coral strand burns white—too strong for unprotected eyes. It is hot in the open, cool under the palms. The faithful northeast trade is blowing, not hard, but enough to ridge the green sea with ripples of white. And the water shines as if it were melted diamonds. It is a streaked river, flowing past the island, gray and brown and green, all shades of green, tipped by a million waves of white. The sky is deep blue. No clouds mar the level horizon lines. And the palms seem happy. They are whispering. Unquiet palms with the soul of wind in their leaves!

Long Key days passed as if they were all summer afternoons. I wandered along the beach, wrote a little and fished a good deal.

During the latter part of this period I caught the record for Long Key bonefish—ten pounds two ounces—and also I had the further fortune to get several eight pounders. It was an extraordinary season for the number of large fish taken. The Bonefish Brigade put in strenuous and long efforts to break my record, but in vain.

Lone Angler Wiborn had all the experience I predicted and worse. He really broke very little tackle, for he is a marvel of dexterity and judgment. But the big fish got away from him, either on the strike or afterward. Up to this time he had caught two small bonefish, and another weighing five pounds. As good luck would have it, the five pounder was fast and game, and gave Lone Angler his first real experience with this wonderful fish.

"Well, you could never have made me believe he weighed only five pounds," was what Lone Angler said, and that seemed considerable of a tribute for him.

One fine day we were lounging in the canoe, far up the winding shore line, and waiting for the bonefish to come on the shoal. The morning was still and hot.

raccoon, stunted in growth, digging for crabs in the sand. He would stick a paw deep in a crab hole and almost stand on his head trying to reach his quarry.

The tide worked slowly in, bringing a gentle ripple on the surface. From time to time I stood up looking for bonefish, but that morning they were slow in coming. We fished for hours without seeing one or having a strike, and gradually we lost the eternal vigilance needful.

"When you were in Hawaii did you ever see or hear of bonefish?" I asked my companion.

"No, but I never did any shore fishing," he replied.

"Well, bonefish are native on those coral reefs," I told him. "An Englishman named Baker wrote me about bonefish in Hawaii. He sent photos of one he had taken, and it was almost identical with the species here. Weighed about seven pounds. He had seen and hooked much larger ones. And it seems the natives claim their bonefish grow to sixty pounds. Wouldn't it be great to hook one that big?"

"It's easy to believe," replied Lone Angler. "Dolphin grow to seventy pounds and Marlin swordfish to seven hundred. Why not all fishes in proportion?"

"I'd like to try those Hawaiian bonefish," I said thoughtfully, and then, as I was lapsing into my favorite habit of dreaming of far-off sunny shores, Wiborn suddenly exclaimed: "Hey!"

His tone was the opposite of indolent. I turned round in time to see his rod jerk down with an unusually hard bite. Like a flash Lone Angler swept up with it. He hooked something that exploded the shallow water out there. But I could not see the fish for the splash. Then the reel began to screech and the rod to shake. Wiborn got up quickly.

"Here's your bonefish," he said with elation.

"He's a lunker. Say, that's a run," I returned, growing excited.

The fish had headed for offshore and was gathering speed. I sat up on the stern seat, swiftly reeled in my line and laid my rod down. Next I pulled up my anchor and grasped a paddle. A task for two men was ahead of us.



The Author Landed the Record Size Long Key Bonefish

Then began a race that actually beat anything I had ever had in fishing. Fast as I paddled we could not recover line—not a foot of line—for perhaps a quarter of a mile. I grew from thrilled to wild excitement.

(Continued on Page 32)

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BONEFISHING

(Continued from Page 13)

No one had any idea how big these Florida bonefish grew. Manifestly this was one that would make any record look like a minnow. I paddled so hard that twice I nearly capsized the canoe. Exertion and excitement got away with my breath. I began to sweat.

"Good heavens!—Wiborn—what a fish!" I panted. "If you make—a blunder—I'll brain you—with this paddle—Hang on! . . . There, the line is slackening a little. Now wind—get some line back. . . . Wind, you left-handed lone-angling scallawag! This is a—real fish. . . . And we're going—to get him!"

We began to gain on the fish. Wiborn pumped and wound while I paddled. His hat fell overboard. At every stroke, I made his body jerk forward and back. He surely had his troubles staying aboard. We were now in six or eight feet of water, and the waves were large enough to roll the canoe. More and more we gained line, until the reel was half full.

"THAT'S fine," I said exultantly. "Let's lay for his second run. If we hold him through that—but, oh, he must be an awful fish! Here we are half a mile off shore. . . . Wiborn, this is a new bonefish stunt for me. Isn't it great?"

"Immense!" rasped out Lone Angler. "But we'll never get him."

"Yes, we will," I declared. "Let's slow down a little. Not so hard now."

I reduced the power of my frantic strokes and Wiborn reeled less wildly. Our quarry accommodated us with less speed. We gained on him. I sent the canoe over the swells, and now and then we had a slack line. When Lone Angler had all but a hundred feet of that line back on his reel we were fully a mile offshore. The swells began to grow large enough to roll the canoe badly. Our situation was thrilling but precarious. I did not want to upset way out there in the deep water.

"Get down on your knees in the canoe," I yelled. "We've got to be careful."

Wiborn complied, and leaned over the bow seat. He had begun to tire. His face was wet with sweat. His motions of pumping and reeling grew labored.

"We're getting close to him," I warned.

"It's a broadbill swordfish," panted Lone Angler.

"Nix! We hooked him way in on the shoals. He took a crab. It's got to be a bonefish—Oh, be careful!"

Then the fish either heard or saw us, for he made a smash on the surface and darted away on his second run, this time down the coast. What a terrific run! He went like a

bullet. Wiborn again thrust the reel under water.

"Wow!" I yelled in sheer delight, and I fell to paddling madly. This time with wind and tide in my favor I not only kept up with our wild quarry but gained on him. Pretty soon Lone Angler had a safe amount of line back on the reel. Our bonefish began to circle inshore.

"That's what we want," I cried. "If he circles he's ours."

But his circle was wide and long enough to take us half a mile back nearer shore. We got into shallow water where patches of white sand showed in the green. I was now paddling toward the beach, much to my satisfaction. I reckoned, however, without warrant. The bonefish adopted tactics new to me. It was as if he had made up his mind to stand his ground. He made the rod resemble a waving buggy whip. Lone Angler's skill alone saved a break.

We worked up closer to the fish and I began to watch with keen eyes. Twice I saw a dark streak cross the white sand. The length and thickness of it simply made my heart come to my throat.

Suddenly the fish crossed a white patch of sand. I thought I caught a glimpse of a wide bowed head and a forked tail. But I could not be sure. Cautiously I stood up, braced myself, and while maneuvering the canoe to help my comrade I kept sharp lookout. Our bonefish was swimming to and fro, at right angles with us, about a hundred feet out. I noted that he sheered from surface to sand. Again I caught a broad silvery flare in the amber water. Like a burnished shield it blazoned out the size of the fish.

THEN suddenly I saw him. I got a clear flash at him. And I was struck dumb. Huge, silvery, shield shaped, with great bowed head, he certainly was not a bonefish. All in an instant I was sick. What a horrible surprise and disappointment! I was about to tell Wiborn that he had hooked an African pompano, when it occurred to me there was no need to dispel his fond illusion of a monster bonefish. Hard on that thought flashed another—I had vowed to put this marvel of an angler up against a fish that would discount his mighty steelheads. Fortune had played into my hands. He had most assuredly hooked an extraordinary fish.

"Well, stand up now and lick him," I said. "This bonefish was in Noah's ark and he is as big as a hill."

"We got—here—first," panted Lone Angler, and he stood up and went at our quarry with grim determination.

I was bound to confess that the exhibition Lone Angler gave during the ensuing half hour was the finest and most masterly I ever saw. Dilg is a great fisherman, but he could never have held this fish. Neither could I have done so, or anybody else I know. I kept paddling the canoe around and to and fro, but did not cover any distance. What this queer fish really did neither I nor Wiborn could ever remember. But he did everything a fish could do except jump out of the water. He fought deep, and now and then swirled on the surface. Lone Angler kept at him unmercifully, never giving him a second to rest, always keeping a powerful strain on him, until it grew plain that he was growing tired. Lone Angler's exertions were heroic.

EVEN at the last Wiborn could not lead the fish. But it would swim past the canoe, deep down, and I took up the landing net and made ready. I could not get a really good look at it. Awaiting my chance, the moment came when the fish came round the canoe headed my way.

"Now lift—slow and steady—hard!" I called sharply.

Up came the broad flare of amber and silver. I saw a black eye as large as a silver dollar—an enormous width of head—a strange wonderful-looking fish. The wire of the landing net was just large enough to go over his head back to his dorsal fin. Then he stuck. I heaved with all my might. Splashing water everywhere the fish came out and over the gunwale, to flop heavily into the bottom of the canoe.

I stared, first at the fish—huge, like a silver shield, round of head, forked of tail—and then up at my friend.

He was staring, too, incredulously and bewildered.

"What—on—earth?" he panted.

"No—he's what of the sea!" I returned. "I thought he was an African pompano, but he's not. I never saw this kind of fish."

Lone Angler was beyond praise. He stretched out in the canoe, with his shoulders against the back rest and there he lay. His right arm was limp and dead, his left hand paralyzed. He showed me that he could scarcely move his fingers. His shirt was cut all around; his hair was disheveled. And indeed he appeared an object to excite commiseration.

That night at camp we classified the fish as a permit, the first one ever taken at Long Key. This species is sometimes caught on the West Coast in shallow water. The one we got weighed over twenty-one pounds.

(THE END)

MRS. JOE PREENY'S REST



Mrs. Preeny Started Home, Having
Lost Five Pounds

mischief and before night the grandmother was telling her that she was spoiling the children and one of the sisters was mad because the baby had soiled her beau's photograph. At the end of the week poor Mrs. Preeny started home, having lost five pounds, and when she reached home everybody on the place quit work. They expected her to do everything after her week of pleasure and complete rest.

The Preeny womenfolks miss the sister-in-law who caused so much trouble while she was living in the valley. When she moved they were glad to be rid of her, but now they can see that she made the neighborhood lively by blessing out somebody every few days.

Wife likes for husband to buy her something to wear because it proves that he still likes her. However, that is about the only pleasure she can get out of it if he really made the selection without help.

Neighbors think Bessie Preeny has up a serious case. The young man goes to see her so often that the dog has quit barking at him.

Mrs. Dave Preeny always objects to buying anything because there are so many other things that she needs worse.

youngest to return to his mother and the little chap began pulling at her dress.

Long before noon Mrs. Preeny was taking care of her three children and she found them even more trouble than at home. She just couldn't keep them out of

The only unpleasantness was the argument between two sisters over the baby. Each sister wanted to tend to the little fellow and for a few minutes it looked as if they would pull the youngster to pieces trying to take him away from each other. But in a short time, after everybody had kissed the baby and he had got in a bad humor, he was returned to Mrs. Preeny. And before long the grandmother had to look after her work, so she allowed the next