

CHAPTER III

FISHING

Grandfather had a sister seven years older than himself, Clymena, a very lovely and beautiful girl of whom Grandfather was very fond. Her untimely death at the age of nineteen cast a great gloom over the home and the home never again had in it the joy which it had when Clymena with her bright and attractive ways filled the place with love and joy.

But we promised to write only of the pleasant side of our child life and until Grandfather was twelve, Clymena was a real part of that joyous time. One of Grandfather's playmates, Eddie Cole, also had an older sister, Frank, and she was Clymena's chum. When Grandfather was a small boy, perhaps six or seven, it occurred to his chum and himself to go fishing. Our sisters, being older, had fishpoles - long cane poles with lines and real fish hooks which, from time to time, we had admired in our barn.

It occurred to us it would be all right to borrow these fish poles and go over to the river and fish. To be sure, we should have asked our sisters whether we might borrow their poles. It was very naughty to take their poles without doing so, but we felt quite sure they would not care. Furthermore, it would have been much better to have asked our mothers whether they would approve of our going fishing and it is with much embarrassment that Grandfather has to record that we neglected to do this.

Grandfather's chum, being a year older than Grandfather, had been fishing once with his sister. Grandfather had not been deemed as yet old enough to go on such an excursion. Eddie explained that we were to take a little pole which hung beside the long ones, bait a tiny hook with a bit of angle worm and catch a minnow. Then we were to place the minnow on the big hook, toss the baited hook into the water and soon without doubt we would catch a big fish and soon in our childish imaginations this fish we were going to catch began to look very large.

We hastened over to the river. Eddie soon caught a minnow and proceeded to fish, but had no luck. Grandfather finally landed a big "shiner", put it on his hook and tossed the baited hook into the river. The minnow and line kept right on going down, the pole began to bend and Grandfather found both pole and himself in imminent danger of going into the river.

Grandfather shouted he had caught a whale and the other boy came running and between them, with a strong pull, they brought the head of a huge catfish out of the water. But the catfish shut his jaws with a snap, broke the line and swam away with the hook. In wild excitement, we rushed home to tell the story and found, to our surprise, that our sisters were not so well pleased with our having borrowed their poles as we thought they would be. We also found that our mothers did not approve of our going fishing as we assumed they would and we were much disappointed when they would not allow us to go back the next day to catch that fish. So we never did land him - and Grandfather to this day is convinced that is the biggest fish he ever had on a line.

Later Grandfather became a most persistent fisher; in fact, after he grew up, the boys of the next generation said that Grandfather had caught all the fish and that the fishing was never any good after Grandfather's time. Well, it was a fact that Grandfather did most assiduously fish, having oodles of time without much else to do, and did earn pin money by selling the fish, for, curiously enough, Grandfather got tired of eating the fish he caught. Yet, Grandfather always believed that what really happened to the fishing was that some big mud turtles which got into the bayous ate the small fish and the fish eggs.

There were three kinds of fishing in Grandfather's day: (1) Trolling, by walking along the bank and dragging a spoon-hook or a live minnow in the water, by which means were caught occasionally pickerel, black bass, and once in a while, a "wall-eyed pike"; (2) fishing with a pole and line and bobber, with hook baited with worms for "bull heads" or "sun fish"; (3) with "set lines". These lines were about fifty feet long with a stake at one end and a weight - usually a discarded railroad spike - at the other end, and three or four hooks strung along the line toward the end carrying the weight.

After dark, which came quite late in summer, we would "set" about a dozen lines. To "set" a line we would wade out in the water, drive the stake into the bed of the river and then, whirling the weight around and around our head, would throw the weight with the baited hooks out into the river. At daybreak next morning (which was quite early in June - the best month for fishing) we would hasten to the river to haul in the lines. Frequently we caught "suckers" and "redhorse", sometimes "catfish" and

once, to Grandfather's great surprise and delight, an eel.

We needed to be very careful in setting the lines to hide them and also careful to go very early to prevent poachers getting our fish and especially because a sort of a crazy man used to go along with a rake and pull up the lines and carry them off. Just what he did with all the fish lines we boys never found out - probably he was just crazy.

That Grandfather was really a persistent fisher as well as a diligent reader and enthusiastic swimmer may be illustrated by quoting extracts from his diary of 1886 when he was fourteen years of age. It may be said, in passing, that his grandfather each year sent him a diary to record the important events of each day.

Sunday, February 28, 1886

I read all day, finishing Dickens' "Bleak House" and did not like it, especially the end.

Monday, March 1

In the morning I shoveled paths, the snow being pretty deep. I went to school all day and after the mail in the evening. I commenced reading Gen. W. T. Sherman's "Memoirs" which I like quite well so far.

Saturday, March 20

One day in the history class Miss McNair, assistant teacher, called me a "walking encyclopedia" and in last week's and this week's "Register" (the Brodhead weekly newspaper) they have written pieces about me, calling me by that name, but as they have not said anything very bad, I don't care.

Tuesday, March 23

I went to school all day and had a final examination in Constitution of the State and stood 100. In the evening I studied some and went after the mail, sawed some wood and played polo.

Wednesday, March 24

I rose about seven and went to bed about nine. I sawed a little wood and went to school all day. I had a final examination in reading and stood 88 and a partial final in history and stood 97. In history I was the highest in the class, the next highest being 90.

Sunday, March 28

I finished reading "Arctic Explorations" and commenced "Life of Frederick the Great".

Wednesday, March 31

I took the \$5.00 which Grandfather gave me and got Washington Irving's complete works except "Life of Washington". There are ten volumes and about 5,400 pages. I finished "Life of Frederick the Great" today.

Tuesday, May 4

They started the electric lights tonight. They work well and everybody is satisfied. (First electric lights in city.)

Saturday, May 22

I went fishing and caught one fish, read some and went swimming for the first time this year.

Sunday, June 27

I rose about 7, went to bed about half past nine. I went to church twice, read some and picked some raspberries (in our own garden).

Saturday, July 10

I rose about 7 and went to bed about 11. George Frazee and I tore down a wasp's nest that was in his barn, caught 31 frogs for their hind legs to eat and went swimming. I read some.

Tuesday, July 13

It has been comfortable but we need rain very bad. I rose about 7, went to bed about half past ten. I read Washington Irving's "Tour of the Prairies" clear through and finished reading his "Mohamet and His Successors". I went swimming.

Sunday, August 1

I finished reading "Conquest of Granada". It was the last book of the set of his works that I got last March. I have enjoyed every one of his (Washington Irving) works very much.

Friday, August 6

Rose about 7 and went to bed about 10. Went fishing and caught five fish. While fishing I changed the pole's position and got a bite and pulled out two fish. One was a bass about six or eight inches long that had bit on the hook and the other was a pickerel twenty-two inches long that had bit on the bass but had not injured it any.

Fought some yellow jackets and got stung eight times. All the other boys got stung several times.

Monday, August 16

Very warm. Read some. Went swimming and went fishing and caught seventeen fish.

Tuesday, August 17

Cool. Read some, went swimming, went fishing and caught eleven fish.

Wednesday, August 18

Hot. Rose about 7, went to bed about 10. Went fishing and caught no fish. Read some.

Thursday, August 19

Hot. Rose about 7, went to bed about 10. Read some, went swimming and got some wild plums and grapes.

Friday, August 22

Hot. Rose about 7, went to bed about 10. George Frazee and I went hazel nutting with his horse and carriage and got two large cloth sackfulls a piece. Read some.

Saturday, August 21

Cool and rained very hard this evening. Rose about 7, went to bed about 10. Read some, went swimming and got some wild plums and grapes. Commenced shucking my hazel nuts today.

September 1

Shucked some hazel nuts and finished read "The Count of Monte Cristo". I like it.