

FISH AND GAME.

FRANK BATTLES.

The ancient plantation of Penny Cook, the township of Rumford, now the flourishing city of Concord, and its immediate vicinity, from a topographical standpoint has been, and still is, admirably adapted to the propagation and growth of many of the most valuable of the edible animals, birds, and fishes. The varied woodland growth on the surrounding hillsides, interspersed with the necessary swales and brushy pastures, afford abundant protection and food for the ruffed grouse, commonly known as the partridge, and the woodcock,—two of the most important game birds of the state,—while in the same covers foxes, coney rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, freely breed and flourish. The numberless sparkling streams, which have their origin in the springy soil of these elevated localities, form natural breeding places and homes for the peerless brook trout, always eagerly sought. The half dozen or more ponds within the city limits, and many others in close proximity, have furnished in the past, and yield to-day to the persistent fisherman, handsome strings of the more common yet highly esteemed pickerel, perch, and pout; and in a few of them, as well as in the Merrimack river, the result of transplanting from other waters, black bass may be said to be numerous.

Animals and birds recognize no human boundaries over which they must not roam or fly, and the fish inhabiting the waters in this vicinity are not cognizant of any town lines which may extend to, or cross, their domain. So that whatever is said of the fish and game of this immediate locality is equally applicable to the section about Concord as well. It may be stated that the all-round sportsman can safely make his headquarters in Concord, from which within an easy distance he will be sure of pleasure to a reasonable extent, unless he wishes to engage in deer hunting or to try his luck with landlocked salmon. Deer are now frequently seen in Merrimack county, and in several instances have invaded the precincts of Concord, but they are protected by the law the year round in this part of the state. The efforts to stock the waters of Concord with landlocked salmon are of recent date, but even now show satisfactory results.

If the reader will examine the records made by the authorities in years long gone by he will find that the titles of the land lying on the Merrimack river, which back to about 1732 was divided into dis-

tricts, were conveyed in the crude though unmistakable language of the times, and that the boundary lines of many such districts began and ended with such and such a tree, giving the name, whether of white pine, red oak, or other variety; and it requires no stretch of the imagination to infer that when the Indians first came upon and decided to remain on what is now the rich arable interval land bordering upon the river, they found it covered with a bushy growth with here and there an area of woods, consisting of pine, maple, oak, walnut, and other species.

As the character of the American Indian ever prompted him to eke out his existence with as little labor as possible, one of the first acts on his arrival in the neighborhood was to burn over the lands for the double purpose of clearing valuable space on which to raise his absolutely necessary corn, and to change original rank growth to succulent verdure, in order that the deer inhabiting the woods adjoining might be enticed into situations which would render their capture a comparatively easy matter. That the Penacook tribe, domiciled in the main as they were for years on territory which is now included within the limits of Concord, subsisted largely on fish and game will be readily admitted from the nature of things; but, with the advent of the white man, in accordance with established methods of civilization, records and narratives of current events and conditions were begun and continued, so that from the day of his coming there is at hand information from which the student can inform himself concerning the happenings of any particular period of time. From these records, antedating, of course, the memory of persons now living, much of interest relating to fish and game of those early days and their capture for food may be culled.

The gunner of to-day follows his pointer or setter with nothing to divert his attention from the pleasure he is enjoying. The fox and rabbit hunter listens undisturbed to the music of his hounds in the most unfrequented places. The coon hunter, during the darkest nights, plods through the trackless forests and over rocky pastures, ascends the tallest trees to kill his quarry, with no possibility of harm coming to him. The angler enters the water or crawls along the slimiest places with no thought of danger. The sportsman of other days or the head of the family in quest of food did not, however, roam the woodlands with the same immunity or without sense of fear. In the early times the country about this beautiful city abounded in savage and obnoxious animals and vermin.

In the records referred to it is learned that determined efforts on the part of the settlers to rid the country of pests were absolutely necessary, not alone to insure their own safety, but for the protection

of their stock as well ; and organized hunting parties were the order of the day for many years, to scour the woods and destroy as many as possible of the bears, catamounts, wolves, and rattlesnakes which infested the township. These efforts were encouraged to the fullest possible extent by the town officials, who were authorized by vote of the inhabitants year after year to pay a bounty on all such animals and reptiles destroyed. The sum paid for the killing of wolves varied with different years from three pounds to one pound for a full-grown wolf and from one pound ten shillings to ten shillings for a whelp. For each rattlesnake killed there was paid from sixpence to a shilling. Year after year the warfare was kept up, with the result that the settlers finally had the satisfaction of seeing the "varmints" practically exterminated, the rattlesnake lasting the longest, as it was well into the forties of the nineteenth century ere it ceased to be a pest in some localities. Who now, as he dwells in the city of his choice, enjoying the comforts which he can obtain here and which are made possible by the efforts of the rugged yeomanry he calls his ancestors, can but admire their perseverance in the face of obstacles which to-day would be considered unsurmountable ?

There is no doubt that the early settlers and their immediate descendants depended largely on fish and game to supply their tables. There was a sameness and plainness in their daily fare, to say nothing of its limited quantity, which made the fish and game they could readily catch and kill the only luxuries with which they could supply their larder. Deer were fairly plentiful ; hares, grouse, and wild pigeons were abundant ; the river at the proper season was alive with salmon and shad ; the brooks contained large numbers of trout ; and the ponds yielded liberally of the coarser native varieties of fish. These conditions continued until the march of progress and the increase of population marked the beginning of the manufacturing era, when the building of dams across the river diminished the large run of salmon and shad to their spawning places at the headwaters. The gradual increase in the number of these structures, some of them so built as to absolutely prevent the passage of fish, finally caused them to disappear completely from the Merrimack, although it was not until the year 1898 that the salmon gave it up entirely, several fish of that species, gigantic in size, having been seen that year in the river abreast the city.

The passenger pigeons, which our forefathers and their descendants to within a few years held in such high esteem, and which inhabited the entire country east and west in such immense numbers as to be reckoned by the million, have been exterminated by the ruthless slaughter carried on among them at their roosting, breeding, and feed-

ing grounds, so that to-day the only specimens which certainly exist are in confinement.

With these exceptions, and that of the upland plover (all migratory species), the quantity of fish and game around Concord will compare favorably with that of any ancient day of which there is any record. This statement may be questioned, but is based upon an active experience of nearly fifty years in the woodlands of New England and other sections of the country in pursuit of game and fish, and in corroboration it may be said that during each of several days' shooting in the fall of 1900 as many partridges were started as had ever been noted in any one day of previous years. The same abundance has also been noted in other recent years, and it is believed that partridges are as plentiful as ever and will continue to be abundant so long as pine forests grow and laws to prevent snaring and trapping are enforced. Occasionally there has been a year when some disease has reduced their numbers, and it has then taken two or three seasons to fully recover the losses, but the conditions are still most favorable to their propagation.

The woodcock, another migratory bird, has rapidly decreased in numbers apparently with the advance of civilization, but the season of 1900 witnessed a remarkably large flight of these birds. The same abundance has been observed at intervals of a few years apart, with proof almost every year that a large flight had passed along, making but a brief stop in this vicinity. In any event, the fact that this variety breeds exclusively in the north and is killed by the thousand in the south during the winter, shows that they are still very much in evidence, although on their southern passage they may some years elude the Concord wing shots.

The "highlander," or upland plover, to within twenty-five years, passed over the intervals by hundreds on their southern flight from their breeding places on the hills in the adjacent north. They are still more than abundant in the west and are by no means scarce here.

It may seem extravagant to assert that there are as many trout in this vicinity as there were a hundred years ago, but is it not so? In olden times the farmer or his boy went to the brook and took out enough for a mess and was satisfied. To-day the fisherman makes a day of it and cleans up the brook for the time being. There are hundreds of fishermen now where there was only the farmer or his boy to fish in those days, and still the trout hold out, as there are many fine strings taken in every year very close to Concord.

Black bass have superseded the pickerel in many waters, but this has been accomplished by the hand of man in the line of supposed

benefit. Large sums of public and private moneys have been expended in the artificial propagation of food fish to keep up the supply. These expenditures have been going on now for a number of years with varying degrees of success towards obtaining the desired result. Within the past few years, also, quite extensive efforts have been made to introduce into this, as well as other sections of New Hampshire, valuable game birds other than the native varieties, notably the quail and pheasants. The hopes of those interested, so far as the quail is concerned, have been more than realized, as flocks of these beautiful little birds are reported in all directions, and not a few of them have been brought to bag during the last three or four shooting seasons. The result of raising and liberating pheasants around Concord and other localities in New England has been very far from satisfactory. The experiment, however, has not proved a complete failure, although generally believed to have been so.

To sum up then, with the changes that have been noted and with the additional statement that the coney rabbit has driven out and supplanted the hare and that the gray squirrels have not held their own against the woodman's slaughter of the chestnut forests, the visitors to the woodlands and the waters of this vicinity in this the beginning of the twentieth century, will not find it so vastly different in its natural history from what his ancestors found it at the beginning of the preceding one. Wherever original forests, second growth and wild uninhabitable lands are found, there will flourish animals and birds, the edible with the worthless, and in the public ponds of the state, under wise protection, valuable fish will breed and thrive.

In no part of the state has greater interest been taken in fish and game than in Concord and its immediate vicinity. Here was organized the first practical fish and game league of the state. It is true there was an earlier league organized in Cheshire county, but it was limited in its character and was largely a social organization. Years ago, in the palmy days of the late John B. Clarke, there was a state league, and work attempted under that well-known pioneer was of practical value. Later on, the Merrimack County Fish and Game League was organized February 15, 1883, with the writer as temporary chairman, who outlined the possibilities in the line of sport that might be derived through concentrated action on the part of those interested. The meeting for organization was held at Union hall, White's opera house, and was largely attended. The organization was perfected by the choice of Thomas A. Pilsbury of Concord as president, Walter Aiken of Franklin, Henry McFarland, and Dr. F. A. Stillings of Concord, vice-presidents, John M. Hill of Concord, treasurer, and James M. Morris of Concord, secretary, with an execu-

tive committee representative of various sections of the county. The activity of this league and the co-operation of the other leagues of the state, with the wise counsel and valuable assistance of the state commissioners, have secured a code of laws for the protection of fish and game, legislation wise in its inception, because of the intimate connection of sport of this character with the largely increasing summer business of New Hampshire.

By way of appendix to the foregoing it should be said that several fine salmon were taken with rod and reel in Long pond during the season of 1902, the largest one, weighing just above fifteen pounds, being captured by Harrison A. Roby.