

SYBARITES ON THE TOBIQUE.

A FISHING AND CANOEING TRIP.

BY CHARLES C. D. ROBERTS.



We have had enough of action and of motion
we.—*The Lotus Eaters.*

CONTRARY to our habit*, on this trip we were enamored of Sybaris.

weather as it was that mid-July! Who would work when he could lie at ease, with the ripple of water slipping past him, the lisp and rustle of leaves thick over his head? Besides, by many an arduous cruise, unaided, accomplished—by many a stormy rapid subdued with no help but that of our own muscles, working in practiced harmony with our white spruce poles, had we not earned good right to a taste of unmitigated luxury?

With a unanimity which saints might have envied we resolved to do the Tobique *en prince*, each with an Indian behind him. This firm resolve was shining in our countenances when, on a sultry, yellow, vaporous afternoon, the New Brunswick Railway deposited us at the little village of Andover.

Andover is on the River St. John, some three miles below the mouth of the Tobique, which flows in on the opposite or eastern shore. The Melicite Indians, on whom we had decided to rely for guides and canoes, have a village at the Tobique mouth. Our party consisted of the "Ecclesiastic" the "Artist" and myself. The Ecclesiastic is a veteran devotee of birch and paddle. The Artist was a novice, but being of frame and spirit fashioned to withstand the thousand unnatural shocks which the canoeist is heir to, he soon proved himself one of the ini-

tiated. Without much difficulty, and for a consideration of \$1 a day, we provided us each with an Indian, and each Indian provided a birch canoe, warranted unstable but waterproof.

Our supplies we laid in at the Andover grocery. As an essential, they included an open tin baking oven—an apparatus with which the Melicite bakes excellent bread at the camp fire.

The start was decreed for Friday morning, but rain and the non-appearance of our Melicites postponed it till the afternoon. A word in regard to these Melicites, whom let me commend to explorers of the Tobique. They were Steve Sollace, chief guide, and his two nephews, Tom and Frank.

About 1:30, in a spell of clear sky, we paddled off from Andover and fancied ourselves under way; but the Indians had a stop to make at their village. Here was a delay of nearly two hours, which left us little of the afternoon for journeying. Not far ahead were "The Narrows," the toughest piece of navigation which the whole length of the Tobique could bring to bear against us, with the possible exception of Red Rapids. We decided to employ the remnant of our daylight in demolishing the obstacle, that we might have clear poling to look forward to on the morrow.

A mile of easy water, and "The Narrows" were reached. Here the Tobique has chiseled itself a cañon through, a range of calciferous slate which had sought to bar its way to the St. John. The little difficulty, I understand, was settled some ages back, but the river still chafes furiously at remembrance of the opposition; the gloomy crags still threaten, as if they brooded over their defeat. Redly into the gate of the gorge streamed the light of the low, unclouded sun, filling the water with fervent greens and olives and flushing the naked faces of the cliffs.

But the gorge is tortuous and the sunshine was speedily shut out, while the rocks drew closer and closer above, as if they would strike their sombre foreheads together. The toppling black walls were scrawled over with tracings of white

*See article entitled "Birch and Paddle in New Brunswick Waters," in *OUTING*, April, 1885.

where the thin seams of limestone displayed themselves. Here and there we marked the cordial green of a cedar tree swung from some scant roothold on the steep. Once we came to a spot where the cañon widened, giving room for an eddy which served us for a breathing place. At high water a passage of "The Narrows" is an impossibility. No small craft would live in such water. But at this season the water was low. Instead of volleying down the gorge in an endless succession of great white roaring surges, as is its wont in time of freshet, the current now darted on like a flight of green arrows, splintering into a hiss of foam on every point and ledge, and occasionally dipping under a group of stationary "ripples."

Though this devious chasm is not a mile in extent, we occupied two hours and more in its passage. For all that, we had little time to appreciate our grim surroundings. We had to catch our impressions. With straining shoulders and flashing paddles, we aided to our utmost the poles of our sorely-perspiring guides. Sometimes we would grasp a jutting rock and hold on like leeches while the panting Melicites breathed. We thrust and paddled desperately, now on this side, now on that, as a spiteful cross current would tug fiercely at our bow to drag us into some small but malignant Charybdis. All the while our ears rang with the rushing clamor of the rapids, doubled and trebled and hurled back by the chasm's resonant walls. At last the walls fell swiftly apart before us, revealing a far, bright stretch of placid waters, bedded in low, green shores, with a sundown sky of clear sea green and amber widening out peacefully above it.

Beheld from this cavern of tumult and gloom, the vision came to our eyes as the veritable embodiment of a dream. Though close ahead, we scarce could realize that we should ever attain it. And, in truth, we did attain it only by mightiest effort. That last fifty yards! The rapid was like a long fall. The trough was deep, and there was never an eddy to shelter us, nor rock to offer us room to cling and breathe. We crept up inch by inch. At times we crept not at all, but hardly held our own. The water swished and curled at our bows, sheering off to either side like the streaming tail of a comet. At last, with a grunt from Steve, the Ecclesiastic's birch shot out of

the rocky jaws and floated deliciously in the pale evening.

At sight of this my muscles woke refreshed; attainment *was* possible! Tom surged mightily upon his pole, and in a few moments, breathless, we too were floating idly upon quiet waters. But as for the Artist, his hand was not yet skilled to the paddle, and Frank had the fight to fight alone. Not *quite* alone, for sheer "cussedness" lent effect to some of the Artist's lunges. Twice the craft was swept back helplessly, and in the intervals Frank elaborately "coached" his crew. Upon the third assault victory perched on the paddles, and we struck up a chorus of welcome which might have killed with envy many nightingales but for the fact that nightingales don't greatly frequent the Tobique.

On the morrow it was rain, rain, rain—now mist, now drizzle, now "pitchforks." When it happened to remain a little season in the mildest form; a wet mist, we struck tent, and got under way. This was at about 11 o'clock. At once and without warning came on again the rabid form of "pitchforks." With waterproofs buttoned up to the neck we endured in silence till we had scored a moist three miles. Coming to a farm house set temptingly close to the stream, we resolved to break for cover. Then the sun came out, and summoning our Indians from the barn we resumed our journey. The rest of the day remained capricious, the tender blue of its sky being dappled with grayish clouds which wept over us effusively at intervals.

Between the showers the Artist was busy with his sketch book, whipping it under his mackintosh at 'the least sign of a sprinkle. The Ecclesiastic and myself, being ardent followers of the gentle Isaac, got our rods together and kept casting from side to side as the canoes climbed onward. We had no expectations to be disappointed, however, as at this season the large trout were in the head waters or at the mouths of the small brooks, and one must not look for a salmon before reaching the Oxbow. Yet certain of the small fry were on hand, and we took enough to supply our pan fairly. The Ecclesiastic, highly favored among anglers, struck and landed a small grilse, which the Indians said was a very unusual capture in that part of the stream.

The fertile soil along the lower Tobique is being rapidly taken up by set-

tlers, so during all this day's fishing we were rarely out of sight of some sign of civilization. Now it was a graceful and lofty bridge leaping across some lateral ravine. Now it was a white village perched upon a hill, with a wall of dark fir trees behind, and the little refuse of its saw mill covering the low levels in its front. Toward sunset the showers ceased finally, and in the exquisite air we grew all too indolent to wield a rod or pencil. We dreamed along between the changing shores, and were disposed to complain when the Indians halted for supper. To the halt, however, we grew reconciled when the savor of the browning trout stole out on the hay-sweet breezes. After supper we pushed on through the gathering dusk, while the twang and cry of night hawks filled the upper sky with magic, and we caught' a far-off piping of belated frogs and the lowing of cattle from a farmstead back of the hills. Reaching a wooded island in midstream, we saw that it was good, and we pitched our tents. For a night and a morrow this was the place of our sojourning, and we called its name "Camp Roberts."

The camp was on the east side of the island under a pair of stately black ash. What a mighty fire we built that night to glare across the water! It served at the same time, truth compels me to add, the less romantic purpose of drying our socks and so forth. All our clothes were wet, and our *cheep-lah-quah-gan* could not satisfy our needs. The camp was full of *cheep-lah-quah-gans*. It was also, as we soon realized, full of sand flies—the insidious and all-pervasive "bite-um-no-see-um"—and with a firm Tobique variety of the mosquito. These troubled the Artist greatly, while the rest of us, knowing them of old, had hidden our faces beneath a panoply of tar ointment. Of this compound the Artist stood in awe. He fled to it at last, however, after bitterly inveighing against the Tobique for having brought him to this pitch.

At 11 o'clock on Monday we reached Red Rapids, and finding the water very low we disembarked, leaving our Melicites to push through alone while we took a settlement road up the shore. Soon, to our astonishment, we came within sound of laughter and singing and shouting. A turn of the road brought us out upon a clearing, all alive with tethered teams and strolling couples. In the midst of the clearing was a barn, wherein was

being held a sort of picnic tea meeting, From the Month, from Arthuret, from Andover even, they had gathered in hilarious parties and many-colored attire. We were received with frankest hospitality. It was a gay time for us, till the Ecclesiastic pointed out that we had consumed well nigh three hours in this primitive Vanity Fair. The Artist and I had made a host of acquaintances, some of whom did not want us to go away. We had played many games, interesting and more or less naive, in course of which (I blush to tell it) it had fallen to the Artist's lot to kiss the prettiest damsel present. We had been treated to the dubious delights of the swing, which made us dizzy, and we had laid out a vast amount of precious muscle in assisting to swing the many and buxom maidens.

At length the Ecclesiastic was obliged to remind us of our families and to point out that the rural beaux were looking grim; so with pockets full of cookies, conversation lozenges and other tender tributes, we gathered up our tackle and withdrew, Perchance we imagined it, but it seemed that a gloom fell over the company as we left.

At the mouth of Trout Brook we found our Indians awaiting us. Had we kept them so waiting all day they would never have complained, such is their tireless patience. In the last hundred yards of Trout Brook we found good sport, taking, with red hackles chiefly, a number of active little fish running from five to eight ounces. The Ecclesiastic said a good many of them would weigh a pound and over! Such delicious ambiguity is the safeguard of a fisherman's reputation.

Further on we came to an ancient mill dam, not a stone's throw from the river, and of course we went ashore to explore it. The pool above was overgrown with water lilies, a stagnant-looking place enough. From under these lily leaves we lured out some big but lanky trout, which we did not like the look of and would not eat. There was fair sport in them, though, as they darted from under the leaves with fine ferocity and engulfed our hackles in their black and ugly mouths. Our Indians ate them.

For the rest of the day we little cared to fish. We reveled in the *dolce far niente* which our unwearying Indians and this peerless river made possible for us. A word as to comfort in the bow of a

birch canoe. Let your Indian place a broad shingle nearly upright against the bar, and over it drape artistically your coat. In the bottom arrange an armful of grass and ferns. Then stretch out and be glad. Smoke if you like, as there is no law against it on the Tobique. We smoked.

Leaving behind the Wap-skehegan (or "Wabsky"), said to be troutless, we came to one of the "lions" of the Tobique, the beautiful Plaster Cliff. With a low shore opposite, the cliff towers straight from the water's edge, a beetling face of many-colored rock. The surface crumbles rapidly under the frost and

The stealthy depredations of gray rain.

The naked wall loomed over us, but could not look forbidding with its lovely mixture of cool blues and grays, reds and browns and yellows and umbers, sombre purples and rosy or creamy white. Wheresoever there was a ledge, or fissure, or slope, there would be gathered a rich detritus, bearing a perfect hanging garden of wild flowers. The pendulous cups of the harebell swung airily from every crevice, sometimes so thickly as to hang a veil of blue lacework over many square yards of the rock. From the dizziest shelves drooped the twisted pea-green cables of the vetch, studded with its vivid purple blossom, and the white aromatic yarrow flung a silvery mantle over the lowermost slopes. The Artist was enraptured and wished his pencil were compounded of the rainbow. The Ecclesiastic found a sermon of marvelous eloquence in these stones!

The next landmark of importance above Plaster Cliff is the Oxbow. Perhaps I should call it a watermark. The river here twists strangely between sombre, soft wood, has precipitous shores, and the lingering waters take on a deep olive hue. We halted to cast for a salmon. We tried our most alluring flies, but the salmon were not open to conviction. The trout, however, were numerous and feeding freely. The Ecclesiastic chose to fish from shore, whither Steve followed him with the landing net; the Artist went ashore to sketch, while I, with Tom's assistance, fished from the canoe. Steve had been evincing some desire to try his own dusky hand at the bewitching sport, so at last the Ecclesiastic handed him the rod for a moment, with a few cautionary hints, and betook

himself up the bank to a spring he had espied among the rocks. I held my hand to watch Steve as he stood proudly holding the unaccustomed lancewood, and in that position the Artist immortalized him.

All the preliminaries the Indian accomplished with skill, but presently a good-sized trout seized one of his flies and started up stream. Now Steve was in a piteous quandary. He had forgotten all that he had been told to do. He understood not the mysteries of the rod, and was afraid the rod was going to break. He simply stood and gazed, with an expression of profound concern on his mahogany face. When the trout started back, he pulled in some of the slack with his fingers gingerly enough, but let it go at once as soon as the fish seemed to want it. No one would go to his assistance uninvited, lest the Melicite dignity should be wounded. At last a variation was introduced. A larger fish took the disengaged fly as it trailed about the pool; and then Steve raised a cry for help. The Ecclesiastic, with Homeric laughter, ran up and grasped the rod, and after a struggle brought both prizes to basket. The two together weighed a pound and three-quarters, and Steve, with undisguised complacency, plumed himself on being their captor. For all that, however, he would not again take the rod, perhaps dreading lest a more dubious success might tarnish his piscatorial laurels.

Just beyond the Oxbow we came to the Gulquac, one of the Tobique's largest and most important affluents. At its mouth was an island, treeless, grassy, and miraculously stony, whereon we encamped. The Gulquac joins the Tobique in a long, straight, shallow race, just swift enough to dimple and bubble deliciously. This race was alive with trout, of all sizes, saving the largest. Leaving the Artist to sketch and the Melicites to get supper, the Ecclesiastic and I whipped the Gulquac. We used a small brown fly, and in half an hour killed three dozen, ranging from six or seven ounces to three-quarters of a pound. As the dusk thickened we put on small moths, and with a lavender fly I killed two fish that went each well over the pound. They were sprightly creatures and well worth the taking. Just as the Ecclesiastic was preparing to reel up he struck a heavy fish, and found his hands full, I stopped fishing and went to him with the landing net; but he waved me aside, and in a little while steered his cap-

tive skillfully into a cove, a tiny outlet, where he could seize him with his fingers. Truly it was a beauty, and tipped the beam at two and a quarter. Thenceforward we rioted in trout, till we began furtively to look for vermilion spots on our sides.

That same night we went salmon spearing. Do not let it be imagined for a moment that the Ecclesiastic and I, ardent fishermen, could have aught but reprobation for such poaching. But the Artist wanted to see it, to get "a subject," and we were willing to be acquainted with the sin that we might arm ourselves against it the more effectually. We tried to convince the Artist of the enormity of the thing, but his conscience was hopelessly flaccid. The night proved fairly propitious, though Steve, as master of ceremonies, grumbled at the film of mist which gathered over the waters. Our torches, made of oblong strips of birch bark, four feet in length, folded three times longitudinally and tied with the inner bark of the cedar, were piled ready for use. A cleft sapling, fixed upright in the bow of a canoe, served as candlestick.

Steve, the only one who actually took hand in the sinful proceedings, had Frank in the canoe with him to paddle and the Ecclesiastic to absolve him. The rest of us stole behind, as spectators, in a second canoe. We poled quietly up stream a few hundred yards before the torch was lighted, Steve stood erect in the bow, just behind the torch, balancing the fish spear. The strangeness of the game, its romance, its fascination, began to unfold themselves before us. The moon, large and white, was not yet clear of the tree tops. Her light was drowned by the shifting glare of the torch, that in pitchy rolls of smoke cast thick shadows across the crimsoned current.

Very slowly and in deepest silence we stole along, the Indian in the bow poling with the handle of his spear, his keen eyes searching the bottom. Now on this, now on that side he peered, bending and swaying stealthily. The dead branches, the whitened trunks, and the rocks along the steep shore took on weird shapes in the veering confusion of light. They seemed to twist grotesquely, filled with a sort of goblin life and alertness—and filled, too, with eyes' where the wet leaves gleamed out watchfully. The breathless stillness was growing almost oppressive, when suddenly the Melicite's spear flashed

downward like lightning. The captive which it brought up wriggling turned out to be a tremendous sucker. We were much disappointed; but Steve swore to the worth of his prize, from a Melicite standpoint, and said, consolingly: "Salmon, mebbe, ugh, nex' time!"

"Nex' time" came not for a good ten minutes, but then, when the spear was launched forth, it was not brought back so easily. A mighty tumult and lashing of the water arose, and the canoe rocked in excitement. The Ecclesiastic almost got overboard in his eagerness to help. Then appeared a splendid salmon, with the prong of the spear through his back, the ashen forks inexorably gripping his belly. A tap on the snout stilled his struggles, and Steve announced that it weighed "all o' fifteen pound, mebbe!" Our scientific interest satisfied, and the Artist fairly gluttoned with torchlight effects, we returned to camp and blankets as soon as possible. We were sleepy when the sinful excitement was over. But if our consciences would not wake to sting us, there was found another agent to perform the office. We named that place "Camp Mosquito;" and though we buried ourselves beneath the blankets and so escaped their beaks, we were nearly smothered by the huge brutes trampling over us all night long.

In the morning the Ecclesiastic and I paid a visit to a pool which we had marked in passing the evening before, Tying the canoe to a projecting branch a little above the pool, we made long and crafty casts. We used smallish gnat flies, such as are most killing in the Nepsiquit, and kept them on the surface. Presently, as my fly fell softly on the outermost edge of the eddy, there came a strange little whirlpool right beneath it, followed by a screech from my reel. The Ecclesiastic dropped his rod quickly, slipped the knot and seized the paddle. Then he took time to reel in his line.

Like a silver crescent the salmon shot into the air, straightened himself and fell slap on the spot where he expected the line to be. But it wasn't there. I had looked out for that. Without a pause, another and a wilder leap, right toward the canoe; and we saw him fiercely shake at the tiny feather sticking fast in his jaw. Then, after two more leaps and an attempt to dart under the canoe (foiled by a strong sweep of the Ecclesiastic's paddle), he hurried off down stream, while the

reel sang and the canoe followed in haste. When he had taken off about sixty yards of my line he started for an up-stream scurry, which was hard on him. I checked him then severely. At this another series of leaps and another rush, and it was nearly twenty minutes ere the fish seemed to weaken. Then he gave up all at once and lay half on his side, close by us. The Ecclesiastic lifted the gaff. The sight roused him to one last effort. He whizzed off and brought up blindly in a shallow pool close to shore. We drew in and cut off his retreat. The Ecclesiastic has a just dislike to the gaff, so he slipped overboard, got both arms under the fish and threw him out on the grass. "How about the 'favored clergy' now?" inquired the Ecclesiastic. I said nothing. And the salmon went thirteen pounds!

At Two Brooks—why so called I know not, as we could discover but one—we got superb trouting and lovely surroundings. The brook was ice cold, and a long gravelly point gave us clear space for casting. Here some days might have been well spent, but we caught more than we knew what to do with in a couple of hours. That evening we pitched tent in a dry, sweet wild meadow, round which the river swept in a narrower channel. "Plenty salmon here, mebbe!" said Steve, and we went in search of them. Two or three large trout rewarded us, but we found no salmon. Next morning, however, brought us better fortunes. Standing at the lower corner of the bend I raised a small salmon. But there was a flaw in my casting line, and to my deep disgust he sailed off with two flies and a couple of yards of gut. Thereafter, I daresay, he tried some fishing on his own hook. A few minutes later I heard a shout from the Ecclesiastic on the other side of the bend. He was very busy for the next twenty minutes or so, and brought ashore a ten or eleven pounder. Ere this was accomplished I had the mate of it to show him. This was a good record for "Camp Schell."

After breakfast we pushed on for the Forks, our objective point, passing through a barren and fire-ravaged country.

"The Forks" was the trout ground of the river, and a resort of the salmon as well. At this point three large streams flow together. From the south comes the Campbell River, commonly known as the Right Branch; next the Mamozekel—"River of Alders," as the Melicite rightly puts it, forming the middle tine, as it were,

of this delectable fish fork; and from the north, the Left Branch, alias the Little Tobique, alias the Nictor.

The tongues of land between the converging streams were of luxuriant, weedy meadow, melodious with bobolinks. After dinner, leaving the Artist to his pencil, we took two of the canoes and crossed to the side where the Right Branch emptied in, Our Melicites held us in position by thrusting their paddles into the bottom. For a time the sport was merely good, neither better nor worse than that we had had already. Our persevering casts for a salmon elicited no response whatever. Then the breeze moderated, the trees began to cast longer shadows, and all at once the pool became alive.

We shifted our flies a little, but soon found that the trout of Tobique Forks, when bent on making a meal, would make it off whatever came handiest. Each new fly seemed better than the last. Three-quarter-pound fish were reeled in with an alacrity which set the Melicites eyes glistening. I had already killed a couple of two pounders and a deep-set, solid fish that I flattered myself would pass the three-pound notch. The Ecclesiastic, to judge from appearances? was having no worse luck. At last, as it drew near sundown, the Ecclesiastic struck something heavy. I thought at first it was a salmon. Just then the fish came half out of water and I saw it was indeed a trout, but a patriarch among them. "Five pounds!" I shouted wildly; but the Ecclesiastic shut his lips and said never a word. He was bent on knowing to the ounce the exact weight of that trout, which gave him the trouble of a salmon twice its size.

How finely the Ecclesiastic conducted that combat! When he netted the captive it was without having stirred from his post. Just from water the fish weighed four pounds and eleven ounces.

It was all down stream for us on our way home, so the Indians fixed us each a couch in the canoe, and a framework of plaited saplings above our heads hung awnings which shadowed us deliciously.

My remembrance of the down trip is for the most part a bright confusion of greens and blues and browns, streaming away behind us in endless succession, with a vivid effect in rose and white at Red Rapids, and a study in black, with lightning high lights, as we passed the Narrows in a thunder storm.