

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GREAT MOSQUITO LAGOON.



daylight, next morning, the schooner drifted down opposite the inlet, and a pilot-boat came out to her. Then she was headed for the breakers, which rolled up the sands on either hand, and burst upon the wreck of a vessel almost in mid-channel. A steamer came out,—the "George M. Bird,"—and the schooner was towed in through the narrow, tortuous, and dangerous channel, and tied up to a wharf on the left-hand bank of the lagoon.

They were, at last, inside the famous Mosquito Inlet, about sixty miles south of the historic old city of St. Augustine. From the outside the inlet presents only a long line of foaming breakers, with no entrance visible; and it requires pilots of nerve and experience to navigate its devious channel, which sometimes shifts about with every gale that blows. Any vessel drawing more than eight feet of water would have hard luck in entering, and probably strike and go to pieces. But the "Wandering Wind" had been here before, and she was loaded light with hay; hence we find her passengers safely landed on the shore of the great Mosquito Lagoon.

The collector of the port, at the time of the arrival of the expedition in Florida waters, was Major Alden, a lineal descendant of the redoubtable John Alden; and he received the boys with all the

hospitality to be expected of one of this historic name. His house was perched upon a shelly bluff overlooking the inlet, the Mosquito Lagoon and Halifax River coming down from the north. There were but two houses between the Major's and the inlet, two miles away, and his wharf was the best in the lagoon.

Half a mile from his house, across a sunken plain covered with scrub-palmetto and live-oak forest, was the sea-beach, which ran southward many miles without a break. Here the boys went in bathing on the fourth day of January, finding the water excellent, and not cold at all. But a big sea-wave came roaring up and washed off their clothes, which they with difficulty rescued, and they thought they could see the fins of several sharks cutting the water amidst the foam.

Sitting on the broad piazza of the Major's house most of the time during the first week in January, the boys arranged the details of the exploration they had undertaken.

North of them lay the inlet with its foaming bar, two miles away, hidden by a palm-fringed headland; westward from that could be seen the lower end of Halifax Lagoon, and the peninsula between this salt river and the ocean, stretching northward. West was a broad expanse of marsh, intersected by numerous creeks, dotted with mangroves and palmettos, and bounded by a horizon of pines. Nearly southwest across the marsh lay New Smyrna, showing only three houses of its small hamlet. Stretching southward was a vast waste of scrub-land and pine-barren, with a line of mangroves fringing the Hillsborough River. It was very pleasant to sit there and watch the scene spread out below them,—the peaceful river, over which, every morning, flew flocks of wild ducks and fish-crows, with great blue herons fishing on its margin, and flocks of terns, plover, and curlew skimming its surface. The curious shear-water, or scissor-bills, enlivened the scene by his odd flight at times, and the willet and kill-deer plover by their tell-tale cries.



LIGHTHOUSE ON THE COAST.

A prominent point in sight between them and the inlet was Massacre Bluff, where a crew of shipwrecked sailors were killed by Seminole Indians forty years ago.

But what was this expedition, thus undertaken, and the members of which we find sunning themselves upon the Major's piazza?

In brief, these two boys had undertaken to explore a portion of Florida that was absolutely unknown at that time. The leader



SCISSOR-BILLS FISHING.

had already been once to Florida, but the younger member was now taking his first long journey from home.

As each one bore equal share in the arduous labor, each had his adventures, and each took his turn in writing the journal of which this story is the outgrowth and faithful record, no special prominence will be given to any member of the expedition.

It is the expressed wish of the participants in this exploration that their individuality be merged into one, and that the story be told as though written by one person. In this manner all heart-

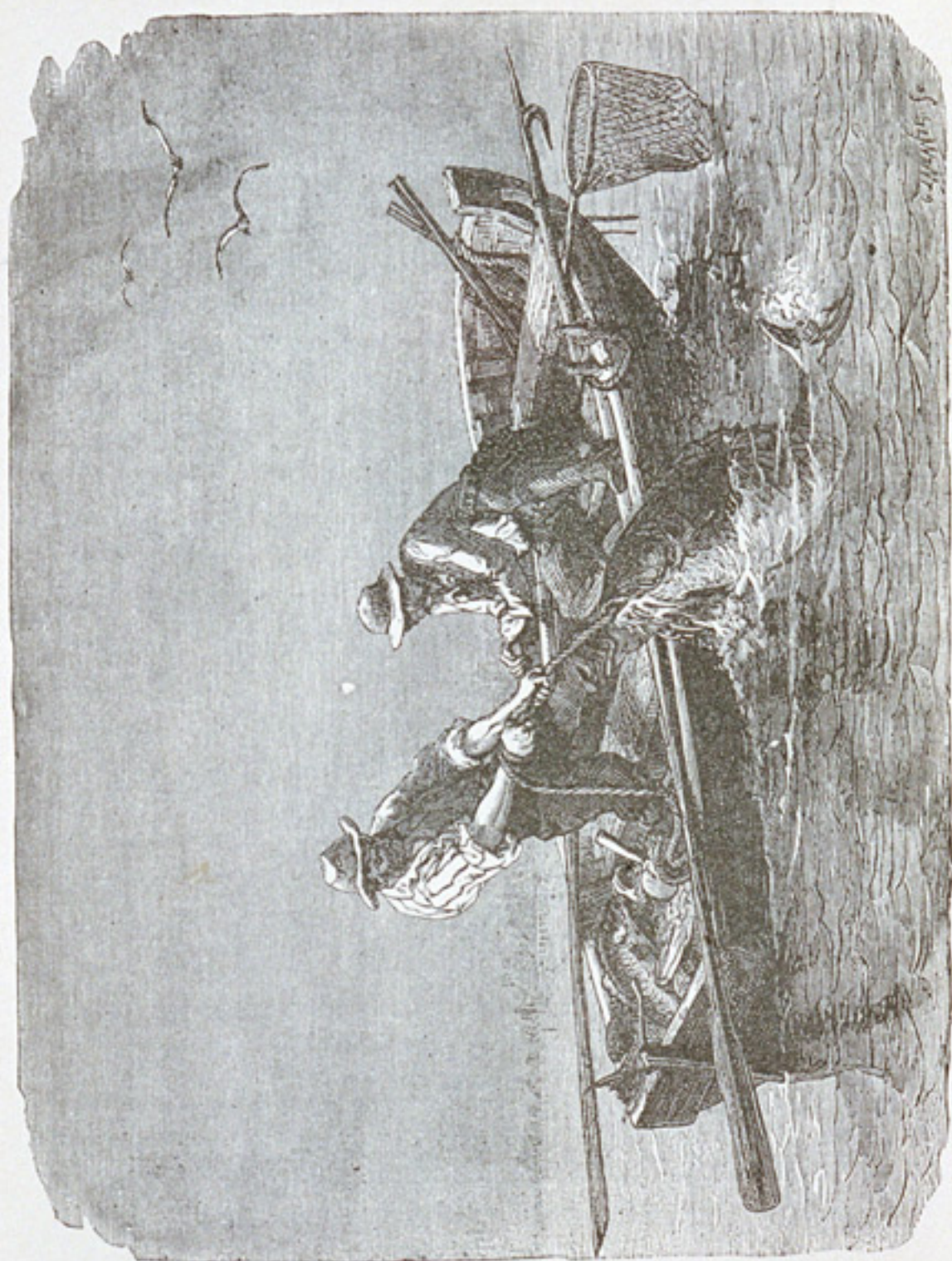
burnings will be avoided, no one will feel slighted, and the reader's undivided attention may be given to the narrative.

But each boy (or *young man*, if you prefer) had his individual preferences, manifested by the attention he paid to certain subjects. One of them was as eager for new birds as Audubon; the other was equally interested in the history and antiquities of Florida. Both were united in the desire to co-operate for some end, and wished the result of their exploration to be good in every way.

To further this they had had built, in Massachusetts, two flat-bot-tomed boats, one twenty-one feet long and seven broad, and the other twelve feet long, to act as a sort of tender to the larger. They were made of white pine and very light, yet capable of carrying heavy loads. These they launched, soon after their arrival in the lagoon, and loaded with their goods as fast as they could be removed from the hold of the "Wandering Wind." A more miscellaneous lot of material had never, probably, been brought to Florida's shores; for it included dry-goods, groceries, arms, ammunition, arsenic (for preserving bird-skins), beads and jewelry (for trade with the Indians), and, in fact, everything necessary for subsistence in a wild and thinly settled country. When loaded with their goods, the large boat was brought nearly to the water's edge; and then it was discovered that every-thing must be taken out, and a centre-board be put in, to improve her sailing qualities.

This took several days; so the tent (which they had brought with them) was pitched on shore, and all the goods stored under it, and a watch kept over it, night and day, to keep away the half-wild hogs that roamed the beach.

Little by little the plan was unfolded to the Major, and his approval gained. When he learned that the young men had as their destination the great Lake Okechobee, and that they intended to explore it fully before their return, he was nearly wild to accompany them. But this he could not do; so he lent his



FISHING ON THE FLORIDA COAST.

aid and experience to them in providing for the long and dangerous journey.

He was open-hearted and generous in his dealings with them, and determined that they should succeed; hence he kept them with him until fully equipped for their long voyage, and it was nearly two weeks before they took their departure.

The day before they left him, he came over from New Smyrna with the mail, and, calling all the boys around him, read to them the following, from the columns of a well-known paper published in New York:—

*Our Florida Expedition.*—Just as we had begun to bewail the probable loss of our Commissioner at the bottom of the deep blue sea, we were gladdened by the announcement of his safe arrival at Mosquito Inlet, Indian River, and two days subsequently at New Smyrna, Florida, after a tedious passage of twenty-five days from Barnstable, Mass., in a coasting vessel.

St. Lucie will be the headquarters of our correspondent. Thence he will penetrate inland, and explore regions almost inaccessible, including Lake Okechobee, of which latter he has already written extensively and minutely in these columns. These investigations will continue until April, and be aided by all necessary attendants and apparatus. He has two boats, tents, two men, the complete ordinary outfit of a sportsman, photographic apparatus, with one hundred negatives, and a stock of artist's materials,—all of which were taken with him from New England,—and also an Indian and native Florida guide, with swamp ponies, etc. His labors include commissions to collect specimens of Natural History and Indian relics for the Smithsonian and other scientific institutions. Altogether, the expedition is fitted out at considerable expense, and for the object sought to be accomplished, will prove itself eventually of considerable importance, and attach some credit to the enterprise of this Journal, under whose auspices alone it has been instituted. Both government and private enterprise have essayed explorations from time to time into the interior of Florida; but the information gained has been so far of little practical value or benefit, even when most needed, as it was during the seven years' Seminole War. How frequently we shall be able to hear from our correspondent, we cannot say, as there will be intervals of time when access to mail facilities will be impossible. However, the material

furnished will be voluminous in the aggregate. He will write over the signature of "The Historian."

"Well, old fellow," he said, turning to the leader of the expedition, "what do you say to that? You did n't tell me you were out here under the auspices of a newspaper."

"No," returned the leader (who will be hereafter designated as the "Historian"),—"no, I did not, because I thought, as has now been shown, that the paper could 'speak for itself, John,' as an ancestor of yours once similarly remarked."

"That is true; but is it your expedition, or is it theirs? One would think by reading this item that theirs was the whole risk and expense of the entire exploration; but from what I have known of newspapers in general, they allow somebody else to do the work, and claim all the credit. Come, now, is n't it so in this case?"

"You are not far wrong, Major. To tell the plain truth, I have got seven hundred dollars invested in this enterprise, and the entire amount pledged by the great journal does n't reach one hundred."

"Just as I thought. But why do you let them do it?"

"Oh, well, it does n't hurt me, and the paper seems to enjoy it. Its subscription list will be increased, and its readers have a taste of new adventures."

"Perhaps you are right," returned the Major. "It is better to take these things philosophically; but I should n't like to do all the work and let another man get all the credit."