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AN
ANGLER'S
LINES.

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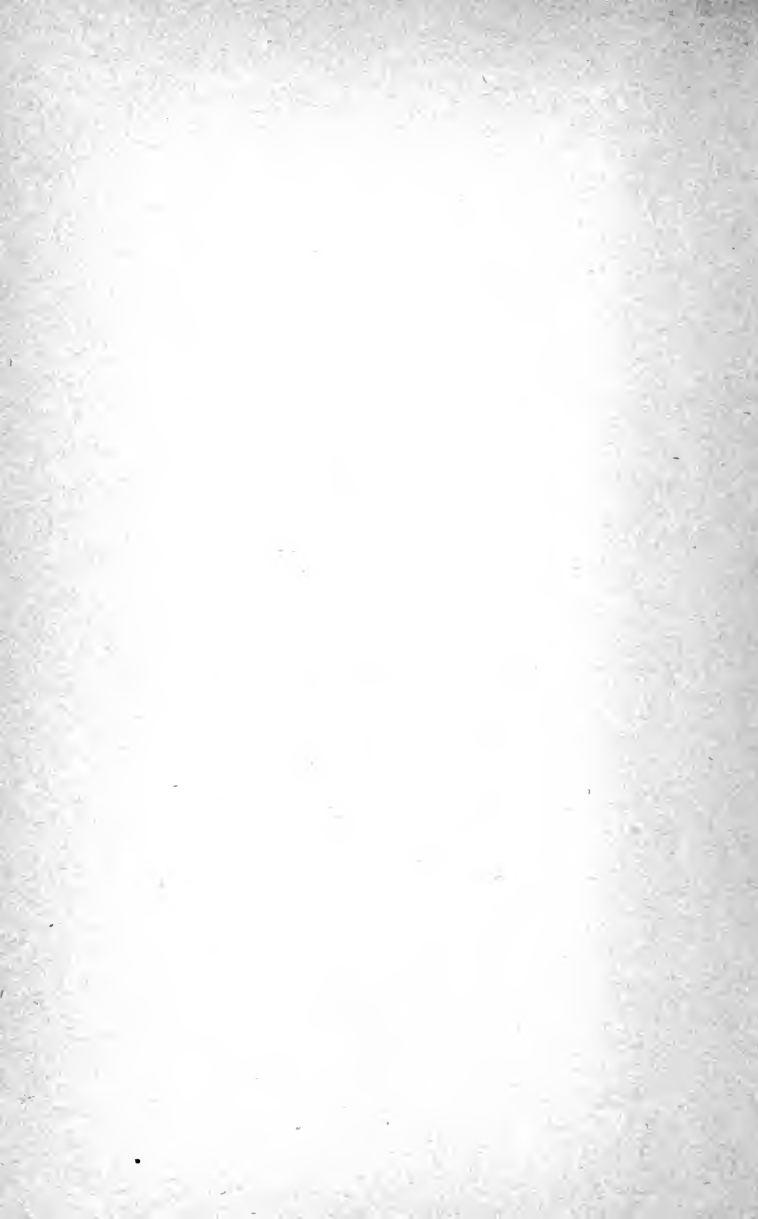


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AN ANGLER'S LINES.



An Angler's Lines.

By

A. J. Price.

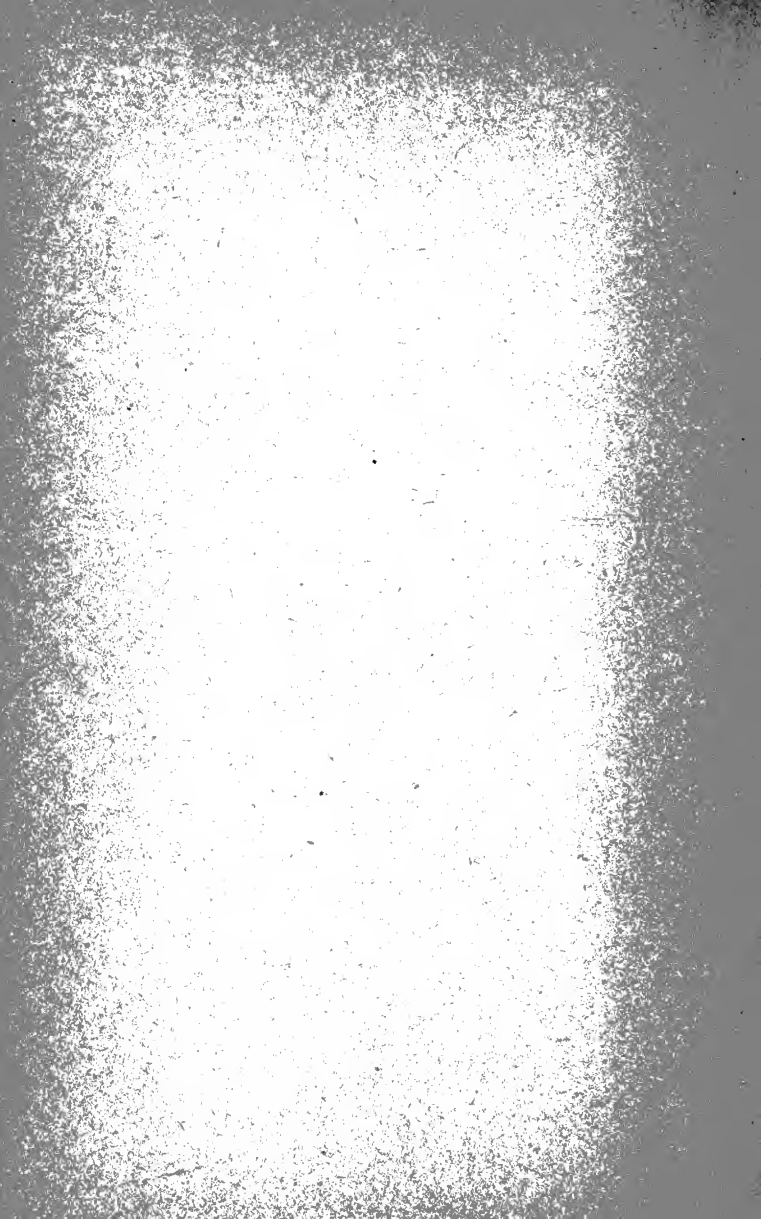
(A. J. P. "*The Field*.")

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SH439
P7

TO
MY FATHER,
IN MEMORY OF OUR HAPPY DAYS
BY MANY WATERS.

ly. 89

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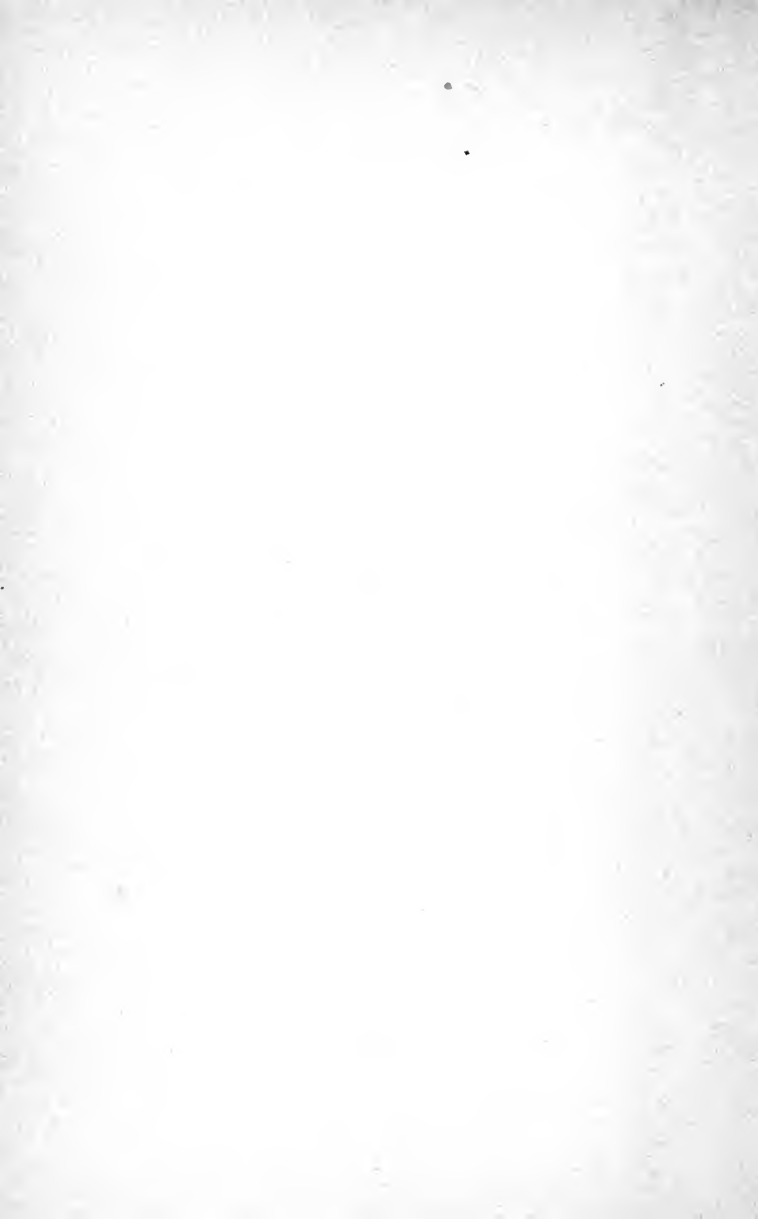
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ERRATA.

Headlines pp. 35, 37, 39 & 41, *Weathers* NOT Waters.

„ „ 67, 69, 71, *Off and On* NOT On and Off.

„ „ 73, *Off and On the Towing Path* NOT A Tragedy of the Mere.



A PRELIMINARY CAST.

I FEEL that whatever I write respecting this book must be of the nature of an excuse—excuse for its lack of comprehensiveness in that it narrates the taking of but certain kinds of fish, excuse for its literary frailty, and lastly, yet most needed, excuse for its publication at all. And, am I painfully conscious, I have no excuse to offer. Therefore I must leave it with all its imperfections and shortcomings to the reader's kindly charity, pleading in part extenuation, even as the maid-servant in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, "please, it's a very little one."

Should, however, a perusal of its pages bring some slight sense of pleasure to any reader, or help him to participate in the keen enjoyment that has been mine in the days that I record, then I am content.

I am indebted to the proprietor of *The*

Field for permission to republish the following "lines," which, with the exception of *Saturday* and "*Varium Et Mutabile*," appeared in their original form in that journal. May I state that the incident related in the latter is authentic, and not drawn from the realms of fancy.

The illustration on the cover (a view on the fishery of the Friendly Anglers Society on the Colne, near Rickmansworth) is reproduced, by the courtesy of Messrs Kodak, Ltd., from a photograph by Mr. F. Napier Sutton. Much, to me, that is pleasant of recall, gathers round the Friendly Anglers' fishery. The charm of woodland scenery, the sob and fret of the river where it comes through the sluices, the scent of the honeysuckle clustering on the hut, the snowy mass of horse-daisies by the railway-bridge, the mill on the upper water; all these have their part in the recollection of many a delightful hour with the rod.

My preliminary cast would be incomplete

without a reference to my feeling of deep gratitude to Mr. H. T. Sheringham, Angling Editor of *The Field*, for his valued advice and assistance in my unpretentious writings. Feeble, and altogether wanting, is this expression of my thanks, yet behind it is a great appreciation, a great sincerity.

A.J.P.

SATURDAY.

“**A** WORM at one end and a fool at the other.” Maybe; 'tis an old saying. Yet I am disposed to challenge its truth. The only illustration which makes me concede any accuracy to it is a man fishing with worm when he ought to be using paste. And I am constrained to make the exception by the thought of my own condition.

It is a perfect summer day in this year of grace 1911. From a sky of palest blue, in which a few fleecy clouds hang all but motionless, descends a wealth of sunlight. The cattle seek the shade beneath the two old oaks where they lie and chew an endless cud, while a gentle breeze murmurs in the leaves and struggles fitfully to temper the heat. I, too, have sought the protection of a tree that overhangs the pond, and sit in the flat-bottomed boat which is tied to a branch. My rod projects from the side, and on the seat is a tin

wherein are worms, lovely big fat brandlings, acquired with much labour and no little discomfort from the depths of a farm-yard heap of particularly evil odour. One by one, for two long hours, have I sacrificed their fellows on the altar of angling with never a sign that the offering is accepted, and still, in my crass foolishness, the martyrdom goes on. Then wisdom returns, and I clamber out of the boat and beg a slice of bread at the house. Converted into paste, a piece is lowered into the pond and, instantly, the porcupine quill travels slantwise, dips, dips again, and is gone. A short struggle, and a carp, not exceeding big but big enough to need the net, is lifted out and lies flopping in the bottom of the boat. It is not my purpose to detail the taking of the 5lb. weight of fish that follows, the "catch" will not rank in piscatorial annals, but it points my exception when the adage is right. O you poor departed worms, if you were at one end, —— I was at the other!

And now, having placed the rod in its case,

and put the brandlings in a cool spot under the hedge to await a befitting occasion when their use shall bring me no self-reproach, I repeat—I challenge the truth of the saying.

Angling to the man (and, of course, woman) who loves it not, is the ugly duckling of sport. For it, and those who take their leisure therein, his scorn is merciless, his contempt unveiled. 'Show me an angler, and I will show you a fool' is the tenor of his thoughts, if not his words. He is in grievous error. The man who goes forth with rod and line is neither to be contemned, nor viewed with lofty scorn. Too often the end of the day may find him with a bag lighter than the morning pictured it in hope and imagination, but what of that, his has been a full measure of innocent, health-giving enjoyment. The scent of the hay was not less sweet, the song of the birds less melodious, the music of rippling water less delightful; the worlds of insect, animal, and vegetable life were not less beautiful and wonderful because his fly

has been unnoticed or the float has remained motionless. He has been Nature's guest, has seen her face to face, and is a better man in mind and body. Believe me, ye scoffers, such an one is to be envied; he is no fool.

Fate has ordained that the angler whom I depict, and for whom I fling my cap into the ring, shall live his life amidst the stress and turmoil of a crowded city. Fair weather or foul, heat or cold, he must take his allotted place in the world of work and labour for his daily bread. Perhaps, at times, in the ray of sunlight that comes in at the office-window, he sees a vision of green water-meadows and catches the far-off echo of a babbling stream; and he thinks of the trout that rises in the tail of the eddy just below the little wooden bridge. Then the office reasserts itself; he must wait till Saturday. All the cares and worries of the preceding week vanish and are forgotten as he journeys on that day, the oasis in a desert of work, towards that little wooden bridge, with the trout looming large in his

thoughts. And if evening come and find the trout, not in the creel, but left behind, rising in the same old place, well,—the angler is still happy and content; the hopes of getting that fish will sweeten the labours of another week. His enjoyment is not to be measured by the number of the slain; he is no mere seeker after “blood.” Should fortune send him great things he is becomingly grateful; should she withhold her benefits, yet has he other cause to be grateful, for the actual *taking* of fish is but a question of degree in the sum of his day’s pleasure.

Thus the “Saturday” angler. *Hoping much* (an angler without hope is unthinkable), *expecting little, content with less.*

If these be the attributes of folly, then is it a folly to be commended to all worthy men.

It is as a “Saturday” angler that I write.

THE PIKE FROM THE DITCH.

IN the valley of the Hertfordshire Colne is a certain backwater. To the privileged it is known as "The Ditch." A backwater small and insignificant, and, to the casual observer, uninteresting, despite the sylvan beauty of a stately park that, rising gently upward, watches over its brief career. Its width, at most, does not exceed 15ft., and in many places is considerably less, while in depth it is anything from 3 ft., to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft., except one solitary hole which can boast of 8 ft. or 10 ft. Nor in its length is it imposing. From the old moat, half hidden by a group of clustering trees, whence it derives its being, to where it merges silently with the canal, is barely a mile. If historical records speak truth, this same moat surrounds the spot whereon stood one of the palaces of Cardinal Wolsey, and where that prelate frequently entertained his royal benefactor Henry VIII., who, after the Cardinal's downfall, took

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possession of the place and occasionally resided there. Many years before this the site is reputed to have been occupied by a monastic building connected with the Abbey of St. Albans.*

For a stream possessing such royal and ecclesiastic traditions 'twould seem an inglorious end, this emptying of its waters into a canal. Yet to the angler is it justified, for when, distressed by autumn gale, the canal runs turgid and bank-high, pike seek the shelter of the backwater from the turmoil outside.

The Ditch was ever a favourite Saturday haunt of mine, and the memory of a previous visit when it had given me a fish of 7 lb., followed, within a very few minutes, by one of 6 lb., urged me to give it a further trial to-day. The growth of weed that chokes its bed during the summer months had disappeared, victim to winter's frosts, and the colour of the water was that beloved by the angler. A faint breeze sent a shivering

* "*The Move*," by Henry Mitchell.

amongst the rushes that lined the low banks with a fringe of brown and green, rushes suggestive of pike, and sunshine, such as a January day is not often blessed with, completed an auspicious combination of sky and water. But, in spite of all, I was fain to confess that things were slow, wretchedly slow. In an early stage of the proceedings a small jack had seized the live dace attached to a Jardine snap, and had discovered, probably for the first time, that a lively appetite has its drawbacks. His youth, however, served him in good stead, and I returned him to the water, there to ponder the extraordinary ways of mankind and the painful deceitfulness of little fish.

But this had happened a good while back, and the greased line was still floating listlessly in the wake of a float that showed never a tendency to bob beneath the surface. Meanwhile, I made a pilgrimage to places where, on former occasions, success had usually attended my efforts. But nothing had come of

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it, and to judge from outward and visible signs there might not have been a fish in the water. I glanced at my watch. Two o'clock was numbered with the past, and a bare hour and a half remained of daylight!

To fish the top of the Ditch would necessitate a slight *détour*, owing to a copse which extended on my bank to the water's edge, and placing my rod on the ground, I debated whether, in the unfavourable state of *Esox's* appetite, it was really worth the trouble the extra walk involved, when the *pros* and *cons* were cut short by the sudden disappearance of the float and the running out of the line. Hope revived once more. The ensuing struggle was short and spirited, the fish contesting every inch, but with the landing came disillusion, and he was tossed back, for a two and a half pounder should have no place in the pike fisher's bag.

The slightest of encouragement, and the ardent angler at once becomes an optimist, even though black disappointment has hitherto

marked him for its own, and the fates have seemed banded together against him. I decided to try the upper water. Picking up my bait-can I trudged onwards, and, crossing the bridge a quarter of a mile away, regained the Ditch by the other bank.

The backwater here presented a forlorn and neglected appearance, and, moreover, its course was partially obstructed by a bed of weeds which faced me on the opposite side. Close by was the deep hole already referred to, which I proceeded to exploit with a paternoster, but, try as I would, there was the same disheartening result. Leaving the hole I resorted once more to float-tackle. With little, if any, hope of success, for the Ditch shallowed considerably and was scarcely 3 feet deep, I shortened the line between the float and the bait and cast over towards the weeds. The sun had set, light was failing badly, and in the air was the chill of a coming frost. Disappointment, apathy; in turn I had long since experienced both, and now was conscious only of an irritable in-

difference to everything. Of what good was it to remain, I would pack up and—*what was that?* From behind, a splash, so loud and startling as to rouse me effectually out of my moody reverie. I turned to see the cause, fully expecting from the noise to find that a dog had plunged in for a swim, but only the disturbed water with its ever widening ripples, met my enquiring glance. Here, at last, was my opportunity, for there was no doubt that the sudden commotion had been caused by the dash of a hungry fish after its prey. Anxious eagerness succeeded indifference as I baited anew with a lively little dace and cast into the centre of the ripples which, even now, had not subsided. I waited and watched while the bait worked its way to my bank. It came in untouched. Again I made a cast, and again the bait returned.

Even an angler's patience has its limit, and, wholly dispirited, I began preparations for departure. Then, what impulse it was that prompted me to try a few feet further down

stream—just *once* more, it whispered,—I know not, but try I did.

For one brief second my float rested on the water, the next, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning, it shot down out of sight. So unexpected was it that I scarcely realised what had happened, but the exultant cry of the reel recalled me to myself and I drove the hooks home. Then I knew that I had to try conclusions with a good fish. With a mighty rush, away he went up stream, whilst the line raced through the rings and the reel shrieked a protest. A pause, and back again he came, for the reminder from the rod was not to his liking. But the pace was too mad to be sustained, and he sought relief in desperate plunges that made the stout greenheart bend as though it were the veriest wand. The potential danger of that weed-bed opposite was ever in my mind, and, when the fish resumed his former tactics, I followed hastily along the bank rather than surrender line that might lead to complications in that quarter. And it was

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well I did so, for, tiring of futile journeyings to and fro, he suddenly made a dash across. But the strain I brought to bear was not to be denied, and a broad back and vicious looking head showed on the surface. Then, with an angry sweep of the tail that churned the water into foam, he was away again. The lessened curve of the rod, however, told of weakening strength, and soon I was able to coax him to the side. Unslinging my gaff I bent over to land him. Even now was I all but undone, for, in the act of stooping, I had carelessly allowed the line to slacken. A sullen plunge, and the fish was out in mid-stream, heading straight for the dreaded fringe of weeds! Only strong measures could avert a disaster, and I spared neither rod nor line. It sufficed. The gallant fight was ended, and I lifted him on to the grass at my feet, a truly handsome fish of 12 lb., 9 oz.; 18 inches in girth; and twice that in length.

What need to tell of the two-mile walk, in the dark back to the little country station

with the strap of the bag cutting deep into my shoulder at every step? As I write it all comes vividly before me, and, with a still unchallenged record for the water, from a glass case there looks out the Pike from the Ditch.

A success. It was more. It was a "Saturday" triumph.

A MORNING IDYLL.

HIGH in the heavens a lark is singing a full-throated *Te Deum*, and from thicket and copse proceeds a twittering accompaniment. A moment, and the pæan of praise breaks off abruptly as the singer drops to earth. A moment more, and it is taken up by a robin. The burden of his song is the same, the joy of living. It is only the setting that is different.

The spirit of the early morn is upon me also, and I find myself humming a refrain from sheer lightness of heart as I press onward towards the brow of the hill, over furrowed land, with its scent of newly turned earth, and through long grass that at every step discharges a cascade of dew over boot and gaiter.

Down in the hollow a little stream, where it escapes from the tyranny of bushes to meet

the caresses of the sunlight, gleams like a thread of silver wire. A wayward, irresponsible, coquettish little stream, now flowing demurely with scarce a ripple, now racing with noisy *abandon* to where it circles in some diminutive pool. It is not broad, and, save in a few open places, the bushes on opposite banks meet and intertwine.

A distant village church strikes six as I crouch low and gently drop a fine gut leger into an eddy. Almost immediately the rod top bends and the slack of the line becomes taut. Brief, but vigorous, is the contest; then a 5 oz. trout is lifted out, victim to a little red worm. Soon another completes the brace, and, behind a willow, I wait in hope rather than expectancy for the eddy to yield a third. Through the leafy screen I see where the rod rests on the grass, with its slender top projecting over the water. But there is no movement in it, and my watchfulness flags, and in the solitude, unbroken save for the music of the stream and the call of birds, my thoughts stray from the catching

of trout to the little ailing maiden away up at the farm to whom, in the caprice of appetite, the success of my rod means a slender nourishment or an all too willing fast.

Into the sunlight there comes a sudden flash of dazzling blue, and the next moment the greenheart top sways and bends 'neath the weight of a kingfisher that rests but for an instant, and is gone. By the old gnarled oak the stream frets and circles sullenly against a barrier of fallen branches and decaying leaves; then, creeping slyly round the ends, it races on in rippling triumph. It bears away the unshotted line and takes it swiftly along, now under one bank, now under the other. The hook fouls, comes free, barely in time to save a catastrophe for the bulge of the line is floating perilously near an outstretched snag, and then continues its erratic course. An uneasy feeling is growing upon me as to its ultimate recovery, when three sharp tugs in rapid succession are telegraphed up the line. I tighten instinctively, then hastily reel in, for

procrastination would be fatal, and, with many a splash and many a struggle, a $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. trout comes over the net—the fish of the morning. Once more the hazardous venture is made; but the hook returns not again. The next swim down, the worm is taken greedily by a fish that subsequently owes its salvation to lack of inches. But the little rapid, on the whole, is kind, and I do not begrudge the four hooks it claims as the price of three sizable trout; more kind than its neighbour just round the bend, which, if it does not thieve my hooks, is exasperatingly fruitful of lost fish, in stages ranging from the “lightly pricked,” to that of freedom regained even in front of the waiting net.

A movement, two movements, on the other bank where it juts out abruptly into the stream, attract my attention, and two water-voles approach from opposite directions. Converging, each in blissful ignorance of the other's presence, they come face to face at the point. Mutual surprise gives way to mutual

indecision; then, with tooth and nail, Greek meets Greek in furious conflict. An obstinate and savagely fought battle while it lasts, but the third round settles the question of supremacy, and the vanquished turns tail and dives into the water, with the vanquisher in hot pursuit.

The church clock speaks again—six, seven, eight. 'Tis time for breakfast, and the little invalid expects her trout.

THE DUCK POND.

“**W**HY, I've seen them there as long as this,” said the farmer to me, placing the edge of his right hand on his left forearm, midway between elbow and wrist. “I don't know what you call them,” he continued, “but they're fish of some sort.”

Further questioning as to shape and colour failed to elicit anything more definite, and, in order to satisfy myself as to their identity, I proceeded to describe the appearance of perch, roach, tench, and carp. The only result was to complicate the matter horribly, for, according to the farmer, his fish embraced individually all the characteristics of those I mentioned! Then I gave it up. In my inmost self I was sceptical of the existence of fish “as long as this,” in fact of fish at all, in the pond. Its very look ridiculed the idea. Now, there are ponds that invite the angler's notice and woo

his attention. They proclaim aloud the information, "fish here." This was none of that variety; could not claim even the most distant relationship. It was insignificant in size, was freely patronised by a goodly number of ducks and geese at all times of the day, and the water, decidedly pea-soupy in consistency and colour, was the *rendezvous* of errant feathers that made absurd voyages with every breath of wind. Had it come to that? Were all my dreams of rivers, with trout to be angled for for the asking, to end in a pond wherein were mysterious fish of unholy combination of perch, roach, tench, and carp? "*Expecting little,*" yes, but—a duck pond!

Alas! it was that, or nothing; for in this corner of Sussex rivers are not, and even brooks, few. But the farmer was emphatic, proudly emphatic about his fish. He was equally so in his repudiation of fishing. "Too slow a job" for him. This relieved my mind of a certain suspicion that his statement might be the outcome of an angler's fertile imagination. So

it came to pass that, *faute de mieux*, I embarked one morning in the leaky flat-bottomed craft of which it was impossible to tell bow from stern, both ends being conveniently pointed, with designs upon the fish "as long as this." The landing-net was by my side, but methought its customary vacuous look was changed to one of reproach.

The opening of the proceedings was somewhat trying, for the appearance of my float on the water immediately excited the curiosity of every duck in my vicinity. With raucous "quacks" of expectancy they bore down upon it, and from the end of the pond came answering quacks as still more ducks hurriedly left the shore and made for the scene. In vain I "s-s-s-hed," and waved my arms frantically. My gesticulations interested them mildly, nay, seemed to afford them pleasure, for they put on a spurt. Sailing up, the leader critically inspected the float; then, to settle her doubt as to its edible qualities, took it in her bill and deliberately chewed it.

Wrathfully I uplifted the slack of the line, and, with horrid commotion, the company of Aylesburys scuttled in all directions. One breasted the line in her flight, and entwined it around her neck. It was a tense moment. Already in my mind I saw a strangled bird, and, with calm resignation, wondered what the market price of ducks might be. Suddenly the rod sprang back into the straight, and the reel ceased its shriek. The prisoner had become unwound, and, quacking dismally, started to lower all records for one length of the pond. I hate ducks.

Once more peace; the feather ships resumed their voyaging, and I my fishing. When in doubt, try worms. I did, but after some time of patient waiting and much consumption of tobacco, I came to the conclusion that the denizens of the pond were not carnivorous. A change to paste, and the float gave a tremulous movement. Down it went, until only the extreme tip was visible; came up again, and for a second or two remained

stationary; then, after a few spasmodic jerks, it slowly sank out of sight, and the line sprang taut. Whatever the unseen, it was a sturdy fighter. No puny struggling was there, but one steady, stubborn resistance, and visions of fish "as long as this" rose before me as the line, tight as a bow-string, cut a wide semi-circle in the water. Nearer and nearer it came, and, submerging the net, I lifted out a carp of 1 lb., and plump enough to keep for the farmer's breakfast, in accordance with his wish. Another piece of paste was swung out, and met with speedy attention.

Bites finnicking, bites genteel, wary bites, voracious bites; I had example of each, and soon a second fish lay in the bottom of the boat. Nor had I long to wait for the third and fourth. If youthful and guileless, they were fighters all, and required respectful treatment. The fifth, eluding the net, bolted under the boat, and broke the fine gut line in twain. It was a sorry happening, for now carpely confidence gave place to suspicion, so that even

experimental nibbles became few and far between.

To the angler who sits by the river-side, this waiting for bites is a dull, wearisome business, but there is no dulness for the man on a duck pond. The latest nibbler had come and gone, when a subdued hiss proclaimed a new distraction. Glancing round, I beheld some seven or eight geese approaching in Indian file. The look in their eyes told me that they had no intention of diverging an inch from their course. They were out to assert their right to the pond by force and destruction, if need were. I capitulated at once, hastily dragged in line and float, and, with a hiss of execration, the procession passed on, unhurried, haughty, supercilious. I detest geese.

But perhaps I am mistaken in that parting hiss. It may have been a blessing, for certain it is that thereafter the float was seldom still, the net frequently in demand, and the farmer's breakfast was assured, aye, and his wife's, too, if she would, and I wish them joy

of their meal. Desire for further conquest waned. One more fish, and I would go. Then a duck swam by. It was mine ancient enemy. Still doubtful about the composition of my float, she turned sharply, and made towards it. With fell intent, I drew it closer in. She followed. Closer, and closer still, and then I smote her over the head with the top of the rod. It was a pleasing incident—to me. So engrossing was my satisfaction that the required fish took my paste and escaped with impunity.

The steelyard told of a 10 lb. catch, and the duck pond had acquired a reputation. But among the fish there were none “as long as this.”

I fear the farmer is a bit of an angler after all.

IN DIVERS WEATHERS.

i. That Phantom Twenty-Pounder.

AS every soldier of France is said to carry a marshal's *bâton* in his knapsack, so I, when I go a-fishing for pike, always have a twenty-pounder reposing in the bag. That is to say, in the morning. It is never there on the homeward journey in the evening. During the hours that intervene, however, the thought of my imaginary burden is sustaining, and of much comfort. Moreover, the actual weight of that fish is as nothing, and therein lies the superiority of the shadow over the substance. But I am prepared to forego this advantage if a happy chance should offer me the substance. Meanwhile, as becomes a "Saturday" angler, I find solace for its tardy appearance in patient hope and calm content. Nor does hope deferred make my heart sick, and when my friend said, "You must come and have a

couple of days on our water; there is always a good fish taken in February," I rejoiced exceedingly, for, in addition to having his cheery companionship, was there not a chance of realising my long-cherished ambition of securing a twenty-pounder.

At the end of the first day I retired to bed slightly perturbed, for, despite most favourable conditions of weather and water, and a total and reckless disregard on my part of the value of live bait, the result had been one solitary fish which, not to put too fine a point upon it, was somewhere about 19 lb. short of my modest standard.

The following morning I inquired of my friend what he thought of the leaden sky that greeted our re-appearance at the river side.

"Not much," was his reply, and the tone discouraged further remarks on the subject. Acting upon the keeper's advice, I swung my dace on float paternoster to the far side of the pool and waited for the coming of the twenty-pounder. As I waited, something cold and

adhesively, moist struck me in the face, and, looking up, I saw a few white particles floating in the air. They were the scouts; companies followed, then battalions, and finally, the whole army of the Snow Queen. Borne on a biting wind, the flakes hurtled along with relentless fury, and it seemed to us that we were the objectives of frontal attacks, rear-guard actions, and flanking movements, all simultaneously. Even the keeper forsook us and fled, under the plea of fetching his mackintosh. He must have experienced some difficulty in finding it, or, what is more probable, he knew rather more than we, for four hours elapsed ere he returned.

In the meantime I steadily regarded a float that showed dimly through the laceries of driving snow, and speculated on the number of twenty-pounders the river held in my vicinity.

A whitish form, which gradually resolved itself into that of my host and companion, loomed in the distance, and in the Father Christmas (without the beard) who now stood

before me, *The Field*, I fancy, would have been hard put to it to have recognised its Angling Editor. He had been spinning a smelt (his favourite style of fishing for pike), but, like the patient angler in *Happy Thoughts*, his reply was, "Nothing!" Remarking that perhaps a tramp round the meadow might help him to realise that he still possessed those portions of his anatomy known as feet, he proceeded on his way. Another live bait was dispatched on its errand and then came a wild surging of hope as the water closed over my sinking float. If the fish were the desired pike he played very lightly, but I reassured myself with the thought that at times this is no criterion. I gathered him in, and—returned him. He may have weighed 20 oz.; I do not know. My friend is needlessly emphatic that he did not go sixteen, but that I attribute to envy. The pike, however, is entitled to notoriety for it was the only one I saw that day. At five o'clock we ceased fishing; ten minutes later it ceased snowing. It has been

my lot to fish in many weathers, but six hours in a searching snowstorm is an experience.

The rain it raineth every day. It fell persistently, remorselessly, uncompromisingly, when four days later, in company with another friend, I pursued the twenty-pounder from a punt on a certain water, wherein, unless report speaks falsely, there are some whoppers. Two pike, totalling 6 lb., had already fallen to my rod, when a six-and-a-half-pounder monopolised my companion's attention. I thought *it* had come, for so powerful were the struggles that even the stout rod had to bow before them, and, alternately plunging and swirling mightily, the fish for some minutes defied all attempts to bring him in. After such a fight the ultimate verdict was somewhat of a disappointment. With raindrops occasionally trickling down the back of my neck, I lifted in another, though a smaller, pike for him, afterwards performing a similar office for myself. Close to a bed of rushes my float gave a spasmodic jerk and shot beneath the

surface, where I could see it travelling at a rapid pace towards the punt. I reeled in, preparatory to the strike, but the fish was moving faster than I could revolve the handle, and, when I struck, a certain slackness resulted in a broken line. Then ensued a variation of hunt the slipper. Very cautiously I worked the punt to where the float was bobbing up and down, but as I stretched out with the gaff, down it would go, to reappear some distance away. This performance was repeated for some time, much to my companion's amusement and my disgust, until at length, in anything but the sweetest of tempers, I relinquished the profitless chase. A change to deeper water proved a change for the worse, for there we waited for runs that never came, so I settled down to the oars again. As I rowed, a white object on the water attracted my notice, and proved to be my erstwhile float. Fully expecting a repetition of its previous behaviour, I approached as quietly as possible, but, to my surprise, it remained without movement, and

snap-hooks, lead, and float were retrieved, needless to remark, without the pike, for the loss of which, however, I comfort myself in the belief that it was not the twenty-pounder. Before the end of the day five more fish enjoyed (temporarily) the seclusion of the well, but *it* was not there.

Perhaps, one of these days, the phantom will materialise, and in the bag will rest, not a morning fancy, but an evening reality. Who knows.

ii. "A Top-Hole Day."

The heat was suffocating, annihilating. During the short railway journey the unfortunate dace in the can had borne alarming testimony to the fact by persistently floating wrong side up, despite my desperate and perspiring endeavours to keep the water aerated. And yet, according to the calendar, we stood within the threshold of October, a time of year when the discomforts of the dog-days should have been a thing of evil memory,

not of present suffering. As I stood beneath the scorching rays of the sun and watched the float take an erratic course across the river, I smiled derisively. Pike-fishing in a temperature of 110 degrees! It was absurd, preposterous. But there was no help for it, for my companion, who had killed salmon in Norway and slain trout in Scotland in the most approved fashion, had hitherto not essayed the capture of the "tyrant," and fate and compelling circumstances had decreed that this day, of all days, should be the one for his initial attempt. Moreover, a few weeks hence and he would become a "fisher of men," and then there would be little opportunity and still less leisure for the attainment of his desire.

A lively hopefulness had marked his every reference to the expedition; but I knew the water, and had "ma doots!" Quantity rather than size characterised its pike, in spite of the 3 lb. limit that obtained, and from bitter experience I knew that, even in orthodox pike weather, three-pounders were

all too coy and hard to please. Small wonder then, that, as I wiped the moisture from my brow, I smiled in derision at the whole proceedings. But the smile was suddenly arrested by the disappearance of my float, and the subsequent necessity for the net. The incident was satisfactory in that it showed that the pike, after all, were not quite indifferent to the delicacies provided for them, but it contributed nothing to my bag, for the fish came lamentably short of the requisite standard, and was not retained. Compelling curiosity to see the "catch" had brought my companion back from down stream, and, in reply to my inquiries, I learned that for him the object of the day's mission had yet to be accomplished. Where the river makes a slight curve he had seen sundry small fry leap high out of water, but a protracted trial there had yielded him no result. Working slowly down I came to the place which he had vacated, when instantly my dace was seized from below. I tightened, the float jauntily reappeared and—that was all.

After no little persuasion, at length I induced my friend to re-occupy the position, while I stood by and awaited results. Then, not once, but twice, did the history of my own experience cruelly repeat itself in his case, and the angler, hoping for, and practically in touch with, his first pike, may be pardoned that look of keen disappointment when finally, either suspicious or satiated, the fish ignored all further overtures.

Man, however, must feed, whether fish elect to do so or not, and a tramp back for lunch in the comfortable little hut where the river surges through the open sluice gates, was decided upon. The elusive pike had laid a spell upon my companion, and the afternoon found him again at the little curve in the river, watching a float, from which depended a paternoster, in mid-stream. I left him reclining in the welcome shade of a tree, and wended my way to a certain pool some three or four hundred yards distant. Half an hour elapsed, during which I was more occupied in applying

my handkerchief to my face and neck than in fishing, when I became aware that someone was shouting, and, moreover, shouting lustily.

A hasty look around revealed my companion standing up, making frantic signs to me with one hand as with the other he endeavoured to control the movements of a rod that was arching beautifully. Snatching up the landing-net I made towards the spot, yelling breathless instructions, that I might have known could never reach him, as I ran.

Hot and panting, the perspiration streaming down my face, I arrived to find the elusive one hooked at last and in full play; but it was evident that he was not going to give in tamely, and the reel sang out again and again as the line went forth in sudden jerks. But the net was waiting, and in due season my companion had the gratification of seeing his first pike on the steelyard, and the weight he saw registered there was very little short of 5 lb.

We caught no more; but what matter, for

he had obtained his desire, and both of us were the richer by a happy memory. He called it "a top-hole day!"

"*Hoping much, content with less.*" In my clerical friend, I fancy that I see the making of a "Saturday" angler.

iii. A Fragment of History.

Now there was a certain country squire possessed of a lake of goodly size having a worthy reputation for pike, who did invite two fishers to angle therein. With exceeding eagerness they awaited the day of their desire and when, in the fulness of time, it came, their hearts were sore troubled, for behold, there came with it plenteous rain and great darkness throughout the land, insomuch that they shrank from the prospect of an open punt, and gat them, even at the station, sadly back to their own homes instead. Whereupon the squire, having much kindness of heart, had pity on their condition, and made them welcome to

another day. So, when February had but one more day to run, these two fishers ventured forth again, and, with minds set only on the taking of mighty fish, gave no heed to the low estate of the weather-glass, yea, though it spake of wind and tempest and divers troubles. And in this were they as children who will not be forewarned, but must learn by much tribulation.

Coming to the place of their journeying, and the weather being fair, albeit with much cold wind, they embarked and made for the open water. Then did the younger man, who had charge of the oars, find this same wind very grievous to contend against, so that he would fain have let go the anchor, but the elder, who, from his more comfortable situation in the stern, knew not of its power over the craft, did urge him to continue.

After no little striving they came to a place that seemed good to them, some fifty paces off an island, and cast their lines. With merry jest and words of cheer they waited for

the coming of these same mighty fish; but awhile, and the jest waxed feeble, neither were there heard any words of cheer, and the younger man uprose in his wrath and gat him to his oars again. The wind, blowing now over the stern, did impel the punt, so that they fetched another place with slight labour, where they did essay anew with tackle of cunning fineness. But the pike continuing of sullen disposition, the men became exceeding sad, and their countenances were like unto their rods for length. Then had they resort to meat and strong drink.

Yet even as they sought material comfort, away in the north the sky shaded to a bluish grey. Swiftly the shadow advanced, hiding the face of the sun, and deepening to awful blackness until the whole heavens were covered as by a vast funeral pall. The light of day was veiled beneath its sinister touch; the wild-fowl ceased their call; and all nature seemed to pause, hushed and expectant. And lo! as a giant aroused, the wind came down with

fearsome hissing sound, driving before it a blinding cloud of snow and hail, so that the two fishers became as forms seen dimly through a fog, the while the heavens were rent by lightning and thunder. With exceeding great violence, insomuch that nought might contend against it, the blast struck the punt, whereby the anchor loosed its hold, and, the oars availing nothing, she was as a straw blown hither and thither, and did go quickly to the shore, even into the midst of many rushes.

Then, after great labour and much sore distress, did these miserable fishers gain the land, and in sorry plight did leave the punt on hands and knees, fearing to stand upright.

But into their souls had come a deep dejection, and with fishing were they fed up for the day.

COSTA.

LIFE is a strenuous business my masters, but it has its compensations. There are rifts in the greyness of the day-by-day existence of every toiler; breaks when the office and all its cares are laid aside, and, for a while, he is free! It is not always work. And if he be a lover of the gentle art, with opportunities all too limited for indulging in his beloved sport, and the break is the result of a kindly friend's welcome invitation to fish a certain water jealously preserved, then, how rich life's compensations. It is with some like thoughts to these that I have watched fields and villages slip by, as the Scotch Express has borne me on towards ta' Costa.

The home of Costa is Yorkshire. Its Alpha, a series of springs at Keld Head; its Omega, the river Rye, near Malton. Eleven miles it flows between the two, as fair a chalk stream as ever rejoiced the heart of a dry-

fly fisher. Costa is an ideal dry-fly river, with slowly eddying pools, wherein the grayling lie in wait for autumn duns, and placid stretches of water, broken here and there by the ring of a rising fish. See the same placid stretch in June, during the "duffers' carnival," and it is one continuous boil as each trout strives for his share, and more than his share, of the host of Mayflies weaving their mazy dance above his head.

It was Tuesday, to visitors a *dies non* for fishing, so, laying aside the rod and assuming the duties of gillie instead, I accompanied my host along Costa's banks. Trout were sacrosanct, for October was already three days old, but there remained to us their sporting cousin, the grayling.

A dour and gloomy morning with a north-east wind which bit shrewdly, did not augur any too well for the chances of a heavy basket, and we were not surprised to find but few surface-feeding fish. The fly was put over the most promising of these, and in one or two

instances there was a response, but the grayling came short, and then incontinently retired. A short reach between two deep pools, however, held out hopes of better things, for a regular glutton was discovered there, taking every insect that came along. In quick succession ring after ring appeared on the surface, and, each time, a dark fin showed for an instant in the centre. Dropping on one knee, my host was soon hard at work, but the gourmand exhibited an all too epicurean taste. Again and again we watched the fly pass over him untouched, then, the next minute, up he would come, and suck in a living insect. Once, the artificial floated down side by side with the natural; there was a momentary disturbance, and—the "barbed betrayer" travelled on alone. Black gnat, red tag, and green insect; all were tried in turn, and in turn rejected. A dark olive quill, however, brought the grayling to the surface in a twinkling, but a too-eager strike caused him to make a hasty descent. Probably meditating upon the unorthodox be-

haviour of this particular insect, the fish did not re-appear for some minutes and I feared that he had been put down for good, but presently he was up again, as voracious as ever. At last, as luck would have it, the olive fell lightly between two autumn duns, and the trio came down abreast. For an instant I caught another glimpse of the fin, and then the arch of the dainty little Bernard split cane told me that, this time, there had been no mistake. As is the manner of his kind, the grayling bolted down stream, a preliminary to the struggle that ensued, during which, weeds, floating and submerged, played an exciting part. Twice was the fish brought to the net I extended for his reception, and twice he shot off just at the crucial moment. The third time he came in on his side, and the meshes inclosed a plump $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. fish. Right well did the angler 'deserve his success, the result of fifty minutes' persistent, undaunted, effort.

The near report of a gun interrupted the celebrating of victory, as practised by those

of the rod who are not strict teetotalers. Straight towards us down the field raced a hare for dear life with ears laid back, hard pressed by a brace of dogs. On she came, until, in the blindness of her terror, it was but a matter of a few feet that separated us and we could hear her sobs of distress; then, becoming aware of our presence, she turned sharply at an angle and made for the hedge through which she wormed her way. The dogs ran whining to and fro, seeking an opening, but Puss had effected a useful check, and, by the time they were through, had scudded across the adjoining field, and made good her escape. A pressing invitation to join the shooter at dinner that evening, then he and the keeper proceeded in the direction taken by the dogs, and we turned our attention to grayling again.

Retracing our steps, we made a halt at a pool where one had ignored all my friend's earlier overtures. We found the fish still rising occasionally. The olive quill in this

instance was ineffective, but a claret bumble proved the feeder's undoing, and another purple fin was added to the basket, increasing the weight thereof by $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb. The wind was now responsible for a startling surprise. By degrees it had been gaining strength, and casting was difficult and gloriously uncertain. In an attempt to get the fly over a fish on the opposite side a sudden gust took it and sent it back close in under our bank, and before I realised what had happened, my companion was hurrying down stream in the wake of a tight line. Presently he turned, and I saw heading towards me, just below the surface, a grayling, every ounce a two-and-a-half pounder, with a back fin like the sail of a Chinese junk. Now up, now down, then across; one moment at the side, the next, out again into the centre of the river, went the fish in his endeavours to free himself from the unwelcome attentions of the tiny bit of feather, which, despite all his efforts, would not leave him. For me, who could only

watch and wait, it was a period of tense excitement. The minutes passed, and the grayling still held his own; but the time came when he strove no longer, and inert and beaten, showing now in all his grand proportions, he floated nearer and nearer to where I awaited his incoming. Already I pictured him reposing in the outstretched net, but reality followed hard upon imagination, for I had reckoned without the small patch of weeds which were hidden beneath the surface. Too late I saw the danger. Entangled and motionless lay the fish, an inch outside the furthest limits of the net handle. Despairing, struggling, straining, I endeavoured to reach him, but it was no good, the distance was beyond my power, and as I tried, the hook tore away and, with a feeble movement, the grayling slowly sank out of sight. Our disappointment was too great for mere words and, heedless of the storm of soaking rain and sleet that had come down upon us from off the Wolds, we stood staring at each other in

silence. Then, with a sigh, we turned and fled for shelter.

Varied, and each delightful, are the memories that cluster round my visits to Costa. Mingled with those of fishing, is the recollection of a dance held in the village school-room. It was the football club's annual "benefit" and the floor was polished for the occasion with a lavish application of French chalk which rose in a cloud, and distributed itself generously on the dancers as they threaded their way in circling couples, so that, at the end of the measure, they resembled dusty wayfarers. The fair sex was represented by farmers' wives and daughters, some of whom, with their relatives, had driven in for miles. Rosy cheeks and buxom figures; there was no need to invoke art to aid nature. For the men the orthodox dress suit was not insisted upon. Some were in breeches and gaiters, but others wore trousers with morning coats, or jackets, and effected a happy compromise with white ties and "button-holes." So long as a man made

himself agreeable *and would dance*, he was welcomed. The Church looked approval on the proceedings in the person of the curate, to whom, it was whispered confidentially, the lady at the piano was engaged. During the intervals, certain of the guests favoured the company with songs and duets. Remarkably pleasing voices they possessed too, and it was not difficult to understand the reputation of Yorkshire folk for singing. It was a light-hearted and unaffected gathering upon which the Elephant and Giraffe looked out from the Natural History Plate that adorned the wall, and 3 o'clock in the morning had struck ere, with linked hands, it sang "Auld lang syne." Then there are recollections of whist and music and generous hospitality at a farm house; pleasant evenings it is true, but not to be recommended as a preparation for the ensuing day's hard work with the rod.

An impression that lingers of one of my visits is that of wind rather than grayling—wind that came from off the Wolds in sudden

gusts, catching one's line and hurling it back in hopeless confusion, or bitter blasts that roared in fiendish glee through the trees, depositing the fly in unexpected, and most undesirable, places. Often rain, but always wind.

It was the punishment of a sceptic, for had I not laughed to scorn a friend's earlier reference to the direful fate attaching to any enterprise begun on a Friday?

In his letter of invitation my host had expatiated upon the continuance of calm fine days and the readiness with which the grayling were taking a dry-fly, so that, in the brilliant October sunshine, I started on my journey north with expectations inflated to a degree unusual even for that hopeful creature, an angler. At York all sunshine had disappeared. At Malton I climbed up into the dog-cart in fine persistent rain, through which I was driven the remaining eight miles beneath a sky threatening worse things in store. During the night the elements were positively hysterical. The following morning

we sought certain bends of the river sheltered from the stiff breeze that swept down stream, and I waited for the grayling to exhibit some of the readiness that I had been led to expect. After two hours' abortive effort, and many a change of fly, I acquitted them of any indecent haste, and, resorting to an Alexandra, I fished a long line down stretches of broken water. Once, and once only, there came a pluck followed by the vision of a spotted side, as a trout leaped high in the air. A nice fish; but, alas! for me, it made the acquaintance of the net a fortnight too late. My burst of exultation on having seen a fish at all, was drowned forthwith in a downpour of rain that put an end to further attempts. Even with the addition of my host's two undersized grayling, the bag for the day was not overwhelming. On Sunday the conditions for fishing were perfect, and a stroll by the riverside revealed many a tempting rise; but then, one does not fish Costa on the Sabbath. My plans for the next day had been conceived in a spirit of

strong determination to do—well, something, but the morning brought a wind with which I wrestled in vain, and which extended my line like a semaphore, howling the while in derision at my efforts to bring it down to the water. The struggle, however, was not without some little successes of mine to chronicle. I do not allude to the adorning of a bush on the opposite bank with one of my flies, or to the masterly way I cracked off another, to be borne away by my adversary into space. At a place where the river turned sharply, almost at right angles, a sheltering belt of trees on the far side rendered a cast possible. Nothing was showing, so I put a soldier palmer over the water in the hope of provoking a rise. A grayling immediately accepted the invitation, and shortly afterwards I rose and hooked a second fish, but neither reached the requisite 11 inches.

Shifting my position, I placed the fly just at the bend. I watched the speck of red float down to me, rising and falling on the

ripples, and close to some piles on the other side it disappeared, leaving a momentary circle to mark the place. Towards, and then past me, the line cut quickly through the water, to travel back once more as I judiciously applied pressure. The grayling played deep, and I carefully noted the position of the piles, but, strangely enough, he made no attempt to reach this possible salvation. In due course I lowered the net, and the fish came towards it with the gut cast coiled round his body, then, with a movement, he unrolled himself and made a furtive attempt to renew the struggle. The hook still held, however, and his reception into the net was safely accomplished. My first takable fish, for he had the inches and to spare, and I placed him tenderly, almost lovingly, in my hitherto immaculate bag. Just then a fish showed a few yards above me, close in towards my bank. He rose to inspect the fly, but, striking on a now water-logged line, I put him down very effectually, for neither iron blue, Wickham, nor red tag,

would tempt him up again. Then followed fish pricked, or missed altogether, general muddling, and utter vexation of spirit.

For a visitor to fish Costa on Tuesdays or Fridays, is to incur sundry pains and penalties, so it was not until two days later that I essayed once more to stem the flood of my ill-success. After cracking off my first fly in the preliminary cast, and allowing its successor to fall through my fingers, to be lost to me for evermore, I felt that I was not showing to advantage. A soldier palmer brought me some slight comfort, inasmuch as a brace of grayling had cause to regret its close attentions, but this comfort was much qualified when their size was revealed and which necessitated their return to the water.

In a wind more aggressive than ever, and the consequent agitation of the river, the continued use of a floating, more often an aerial, fly was an absurdity, so I changed to a small March brown, losing two more flies, which were blown away, in the process. The

change was effective, a 12 inch grayling taking the fly well under water, but so gently, that only when the rod point was raised for a backward cast, did he make his presence known. The popularity of the March brown was short-lived, and soon an Alexandra reigned in its stead.

Casting down a rough wind-torn stretch of water, I saw the slight twitch of the line, heard the sudden demand on the reel, and, as the slender 7 oz. rod made obeisance, experienced that delightful and thrilling sensation, the play of a good fish. I coaxed him half way across the river, saw the yellowish undersides of a body that rolled over on the surface, and then the rod straightened. It was my one good fish, and the Alexandra had come free!

Even now was my chastening not complete, for on the morrow, my last day, came a wild orgie of weather, and, from out of streaming windows, I stood and watched the mad fury of the blast and listened to the splash of ever-falling rain.

The ills foretold by the man of omens had come to pass.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, when I told him all, "if you *will* start on a Friday, *que voulez vous?*"

I was silent. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have selected some other day.

Nevertheless, it was a delightful week for a "Saturday" angler, but, now, when I take up my *Field* and scan *Reports from Rivers, Lakes, etc.*, I think I understand what is meant when, for Yorkshire rivers, I read "strong winds and gales." The Dry Fly Enthusiast says *he* does, on the Costa; and I know that the trail of the Alexandra is in his thoughts.

A violent gust; the sound of a match being struck; a muttered exclamation. The first two synchronised, the exclamation followed.

Thus guided, I sought the other side of the hedge, and found him, with rod spiked, standing in the midst of a little circle of dead

matches that had flashed out their all too brief existence. Even when, with the help of one of stronger vitality, the pipe was duly kindled, he was far from happy. A dry-fly enthusiast of the deepest dye, and on this day wind and stream had entered into an alliance whereby his theories became inoperative. *Hinc illae lachrymae*. A spiteful gust laid the split-cane level with the grass and sped onwards, howling with delight in the consciousness of something attempted, something done.

There was no help for it; the dry-fly, together with the theories, must be buried in the depths of the pocket, and yield pride of place to an Alexandra, with a soldier palmer for dropper.

Personally, I was not on fishing bent; but, on the understanding that I effaced myself as much as possible from fishy view, I was to be permitted to follow the fortunes of the day. Further, I was to be entrusted with the care of the net (the bag containing his lunch, and flask, he said he preferred to retain in his own

possession), and, providing I exhibited no tendency towards smiting a hooked fish on the nose with the rim, was to put it to legitimate use should occasion arise.

The Dry Fly Enthusiast remarked that it was a nor' west wind, then turned up the collar of his coat. From the temperature, I should have said that it was east nor' east and remarkably well developed. The next instant I fled precipitately, for, with a hiss, the line extended itself backwards in alarming proximity to my unoffending person. The D.F.E. was getting to work.

Ordinarily it is a particularly sedate, well-behaved little river; but evil communications with the October gale had corrupted its good manners, and, instead of placid glides, I gazed upon a riot of waves and a tumult of broken water. My meditations on the possibilities of the Alexandra on such a day are rudely interrupted.

“ Come on with that net! ”

Thus adjured I come on, to find the

speaker's rod bending gracefully in tremulous response to the movements of some unseen power down stream. The line shortens as it cuts through the waves, up stream now, then travels rapidly towards the opposite bank. Slowly, reluctantly, inch by inch, it comes back to us, I justify my responsible position, and the unseen power resolves itself into a grayling of $\frac{3}{4}$ lb., a victim to the Alexandra. The raising of the rod is the signal for me to retire hastily once more outside the danger zone. The luxury of idleness, however, is denied me. Another shout, and I am back, and again acquit myself with credit. This time it is a slightly smaller grayling the Alexandra has lured to its death. The D.F.E. replies to my congratulations with a lament respecting his beloved dry-fly. Such a lack of appreciation of what the wet-fly had done for him was to meet with a fitting punishment, for, at the second cast, there came a "crack," pregnant with meaning. Both flies had severed

the partnership. The dropper had not proved a success, so it was decided that an Alexandra should now, in racing parlance, "carry all the money." An interval of two fields, in one of which we came upon the keeper intent on the slaughter of his sworn foe, the pike, and I was again called upon to exercise my prowess with the net. I had in the meantime taken my courage in both hands and gradually drawn nearer to the angler, and had been able to observe the sudden call made upon the rod point. The fish moved a few inches downstream, then performed an acrobatic feat that proclaimed its identity. With a mighty rush it went against stream, pointing, boring, here, there, and everywhere; but the Alexandra was not to be denied, and, in the end, a good trout of over 1 lb. was translated from water to land. Very tenderly the fly was disengaged, and with a whisk of the tail, the next minute *Salmo fario* disappeared beneath the waves.

Swish, swish, swish, sings the line, as it works down, and across, the river, while the

gale roars in thunderous diapason amongst the trees. A fish is found just under the far bank, but almost immediately a sagging line tells the tale of "gone away." The fly here forms a strong attachment for a blade of grass overhanging the water at the bottom of a steep bank. I volunteer to free it, and, with no small labour, partly scramble, partly slide, down the declivity. After groping about for some time without being able to discover the "insect," I am hailed by the D.F.E. with an inquiry what I am "grovelling down there for?" With yet more labour and many back slidings, I climb up again, and am coolly told that a sudden jerk had long ago effected a divorce, whereupon I find it necessary to make a few suitable, but pointed, remarks. Into a hole at the bend of the river the Alexandra is sent on its mission. When next seen, it is fast in the mouth of a grayling that is subsequently found to scale 1 lb. 2 oz. Further on, in a long stretch of water, where the wind holds high carnival, the peacock feather

exercises a fatal fascination for two other grayling, whose respective sizes are well above the limit.

The D.F.E. is now in favour of going home, says it is no joke casting in such weather; but I point out what a desirable thing it is to attain to three brace first. So we proceed.

A certain noted part of the river is fished exhaustively without any response, and the angler declares he will try no more, but he yields, though under protest, to my optimism respecting the few yards that are left before a small tributary flows into it. My hopefulness is not misplaced, for the rod bends, and the reel sounds, just before this junction is reached.

For, and into, the turmoil of meeting waters rushes the fish. The danger is but too obvious, and, at all costs, he must be allowed to have his way without hindrance. Presently he continues his flight into calmer water, then, as if realising the security he has just left, turns, and heads up stream. But he has

neglected his opportunity, thrown away his chance of salvation, and I claim the penalty.

The third brace is a thing accomplished.
The trail of the Alexandra is ended.

OFF AND ON THE TOWING PATH.

LIKE a pistol shot came the crack of a whip from the towing path. The rope tightened, then sagged for a moment, finally became taut, and the barge *Catherine and Ellen*, on which I stood dodging the smoke from her cabin chimney, passed out between the ponderous gates of the canal lock.

Locks are frequent in this part of Hertfordshire and I had begged a passage as far as the next barrier. In silence, broken only by the ripple of the water, as it parted at the bow and slipped gurgling from the sides, or the occasional creak of the tiller, the boat glided past low-lying meadows dotted with grazing cattle, to enter upon a reach between an avenue of stately trees, whose foliage of russet and gold, telling of the passing of summer, darkened the water with deep and

gloomy shadows. Then out once more into open country and the autumn sunshine.

Round a bend of the canal my destination appeared in sight, whereupon the whip gave forth a perfect volley of deafening cracks, signals of our approach. From the lock came an answer in the rattle and clank of sluices being worked, the *Catherine and Ellen* hove to outside the closed gates, and the horse availed himself of his brief respite from labour to crop a scanty meal. Inside the lock, I took my leave of the obliging skipper, and stepped ashore.

Not many yards from where I now stood was the famous roach swim which, during the past few days, had been yielding fish varying from $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. to 2 lb. each, but, as I neared the place, the sight of a roach-pole stretching out over the water told me that I was forestalled. I found the owner, however, on the point of departure, his patience having been exhausted by an hour's fishless efforts. Before going, his companion, a lad of some twelve years,

expressed an earnest desire to catch a jack, a fish he had never yet taken, so, to humour him, inpromptu tackle was rigged up, a cork doing duty for a float, and a gudgeon given a roving commission. There was no rod available so the youthful angler held the reel in his hand, but his look of eager expectation was almost pathetic in its intensity. His ambition appeared to be doomed to cruel disappointment, and, after a few minutes' grace, the man bade him take the line in, which he proceeded to do with marked reluctance. Inch by inch the cork came nearer to the bank, then, when but a short distance away, it bobbed down out of sight. Instantly the boy gave a terrific tug at the line, something came flying out of the water, described an arc in the air, and, passing over our heads, landed in the hedge behind. It was a small jack! It is a moot point which was the more astonished, the boy or the fish. Of course it was woefully undersized, but the lad's delight carried our thoughts back to that memorable day when

our first jack was taken, and it would have required a hard heart indeed to have returned it to the water, and respecting its fate I will maintain discreet silence.

Left in sole possession of the swim I deemed it advisable, after the recent disturbance, that it should have no further troubling for the next half hour, and lighting a pipe, I took a leisurely survey of my surroundings.

How familiar they all were, and what different memories they revived. How many hours I had spent with a pike-rod by the little backwater that flowed into the canal by yonder bush. Hours when success had come sparingly, and again, shall I confess it, hours when it had been withheld altogether; but happy, delightful, hours nevertheless. Then, in the twilight of one winter evening, it had given to me its best, and a lasting and tender memory invests it. My eyes rest upon a dark line that marks the course of a small and narrow stream bisecting one side of a meadow.

I see myself that cold November day essaying to jump across, burdened with overcoat, bait-can, rod, gaff, and bag. My foot slips as I take off, and I feel the oozy black mud engulf my legs, and the icy water mount up to my waist. I see a roaring fire in the tap-room of the little country inn, before which I sit, clad in a pair of trousers belonging to mine host, the while my dripping nether raiment is being dried in the kitchen. Mine host is a man of 16 stone and portly withal, I scale but 9, and in the higher parts of his trousers there is a superabundance of material for my needs. For some mysterious reason the garment is innocent of all buttons! The discovery is startling, the effect embarrassing, for to stand upright is to court catastrophe, and, perforce, I sit for one hour and a half with legs rigidly crossed, and a hand pressed firmly in either trouser pocket. My own clothes are restored to me, dried and brushed; even boots and gaiters have been cleaned—and polished! yet for all these services can neither the landlord

of *The Queen's Head*, nor his wife, be prevailed upon to accept any manner of recompense whatsoever. Should these lines come under the notice of that worthy couple, may it afford them some slight pleasure to know that my remembrance of their kindness is as abiding as my gratitude. The distant hedge that skirts the road, begets a recollection of the summer evening when, tired of waiting for the "fly" that tarried beyond its appointed time, two weary anglers started for the station on foot. The air was hot and stifling, we had had a long day, roach-fishing, and, as we tramped along the dusty road, our blessings on the driver and all his kind, were loud and fervent. A third of the distance completed, when, on turning a bend in the road, we came upon our conveyance. But there was no clatter of hoofs, or rumble of wheels, to indicate its presence. One half lay on its side in the ditch, detached from the fore-carriage which, with the Jehu sitting on the head of the prostrate horse, rested in a field on the other side of the broken

hedge. In the dim half light it all looked very alarming, but with timely assistance from the driver of a passing vehicle, the animal was loosed from the shafts and raised to its feet. and it was with relief that we discovered that man and beast were unhurt. Walking beside the driver, as he led the horse back home, we learned that on the way out to fetch us, it had shied and then crashed through the hedge, and into two minds came the same thought—*what if it had happened on the return journey!*

Thoughts of the past gave way to consideration of the present as I recollected the purpose for which I was on the towing path, and the handful of ground bait that I threw into the swim was now quietly followed by a lump of bread-paste on a light float leger. It seemed however, that, in my turn, I was about to experience the same ill-luck as my predecessor, for never a fish came my way, despite a liberal dispensing from time to time of additional ground-bait. Roach, perch, and bream alike; they were right off the feed.

Nothing appealed to them, and to add to my discomfiture, a fitful wind, at times greatly disturbing the water, had sprung up, making it exceedingly difficult to detect bites. During the tedium of waiting, my attention was fully occupied with wasps. In fact, they were all over me. They swarmed up my rod, settled on my jacket, disputed my right to the bait, and when, at length, I did succeed in obtaining a 9 oz. roach, their interest in the event was unbounded. But we settled our differences of opinion in an amicable manner, and I am still able to say that I have never known the sting of a wasp.

A passing barge now stirred up the bottom, and, shortly after, my float gave a perceptible quiver, then lay flat on the water and was gently drawn beneath the surface. The result was a roach of 13 oz. Another followed about the same size, but any unseemly exhilaration on my part was speedily checked by a return to the *status quo ante*. I looked at my watch and found it had taken me four hours to catch three roach!

Directly facing me on the opposite side a river joined forces with the canal, the place of meeting being a haunt of sundry water-fowl. I glanced across and saw a shoal of small fish leap suddenly from the water, their bodies falling back with a pattering as of rain-drops. The next instant a dabchick rose to the surface with a little captive crosswise in her bill. I meekly acknowledged her superiority, and, leaving her to enjoy the spoils of victory, with a light bag and a light heart trudged homeward along the towing path beside the sunset-crimsoned water.

“—— *for the actual taking of fish is
but a question of degree in the sum of his
day's pleasure.*”

A TRAGEDY OF THE MERE.

A MERE of considerable extent whereon wild duck innumerable were disporting themselves in the sunlight; a stiffish breeze that sent the waves lapping against the side of the punt in which were seated a companion and myself. Such was the setting.

The occasion; a despairing endeavour to patch a slender reputation as a slayer of pike with which I was at one time invested. A grievous thing to live up to, this reputation, acquired by sheer luck rather than ability, for luck is a fickle jade and, as is her wont, of late she had basely deserted me, so that my small repute had by degrees become thin and thread-bare, and now, alas! was rent and torn beyond recognition.

At the first run my trace of fine wire broke in the strike; at the second, a new one of salmon-gut followed suit; at the third cast,

the live dace promptly disassociated itself from the proceeding, leaving the hooks and float to follow its flight at their leisure. These misfortunes elicited from my companion, not sympathy, but the remark, of cold comfort, "I never knew you to fish so badly."

I retaliated by securing a fish, and then another, before his dace attracted the attention of an inquisitive pike. A strike, and lo! his trace, also of thin wire, had parted in twain. The experience of fine tackle sufficed, and, like myself, he fell back upon gimp. I was still using a snap mounted on some of the aforesaid wire, and paid for my temerity by leaving the hooks, and two inches of it, in the next fish, while my companion shortly afterwards suffered defeat by allowing a slack line after the strike.

It was a beginning that called for much stoicism and the exercise of a fine Mark Tapley spirit. A fish each somewhat lightened our gloom, but depression gripped us again when bared hooks and extravagant loss of

live-bait were the sole outcome of repeated runs. The punt was shifted to a part of the lake where rushes abounded. Their promise of pike was not belied, and six fish soon entered the seclusion of the well, but the size, varying from 4 lb. to 5 lb., was disappointing when one remembered the potentialities of the water. What they lacked in weight they made up in gameness, for each fought a desperate fight to the bitter end, and oft-times disaster threatened. Then came a new event. My friend's float went down, and there ensued a mighty conflict betwixt fisher and fish. A gain of a few inches of line, negated by a rush that took out more than double the quantity, a stubborn resistance to coercion, a grudging submission to the steady pressure of the rod, an apparently beaten fish, and then a dash for a jagged stake that stood up from the bed of the lake. He was round it! He was free!!

Upon our lamentations there broke a sudden answering cry from off the face of the

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mere—a cry that had in it an undefinable touch of pathos. Into the midst of a little company of three wild duck resting on the water in fancied security, grim tragedy had entered unseen, and was claiming one of its number. Uttering shrill, pitiable cries, the bird strove frantically to rise from the lake, wildly beating the air with its wings in vain impotence to release itself from the invisible power that held it down as in a vice. From sedge and flag there issued forth a procession of other duck towards the place, marshalled by two stately swans, curiosity having mastered their fear of the “humans” in the punt. They, too, were desirous to know the cause of the unusual commotion. Meanwhile, with wings and voice, the captive continued the unequal contest in an agony of futile effort; but the unseen was inexorable, and, while the other birds gathered wonderingly around, the unhappy duck was drawn slowly down beneath the surface, and the next instant, in vivid contrast to the despairing cry of life, there came a stillness, as of death.

The mere had upheld its credit for big pike, and we, if we had not caught one, had at any rate been privileged to witness a spectacle that cannot often be vouchsafed to anglers' eyes.

A SUSSEX BROOK.

*“ Perhaps, at times, in the ray of sunlight
“ that comes in at the office-window, he sees
“ a vision of green water-meadows, and catches
“ the far-off echo of a babbling stream.”*

TUMBLING and splashing, it turned the mill wheel. This duty performed, it hurried on a tortuous course beneath overhanging trees and bushes to the road, under which it passed through a culvert piercing the masonry of a small low bridge. On the other side it fell with noisy tumult into a pool, then, rippling over shallows, proceeded on its way between thickly wooded banks to where its waters blended with a neighbouring stream. It was a very unpretentious brook, narrow, and without depth; but at this pool the action of its constant fall had worn a deepish hole which extended for some yards. This was, too, the only comparatively open place. Even here,

a giant oak flung its branches over the seething water, and touched the parapet of the bridge.

The murmur of the brook and the music of the fall greeted me as I crossed the bridge, rod in hand, late one afternoon towards the end of May. It had been one of those ideal spring days when blue skies and fleecy clouds speak of summer, and through the branches the rays of the setting sun rested on the miniature cascade and touched it with a thousand points of scintillating light.

I could detect no sign of a feeding fish, and, as there was but little fly on the water, possibly owing to the north-east wind which had prevailed for the past two days, I was somewhat at a loss to know what to try. I went through my book, and finally decided upon a small alder, sunk. The oak was sadly *de trop*, but, at last, I succeeded in placing my fly, with a low underhand cast, where the fall entered the pool. A second time I evaded leaf and twig, and as I worked the line round at the tail of the eddy, there came a distinct pluck;

then a pulsating resistance told me that the fish had fastened. Across the pool, towards some half submerged *débris* on the further side, brought down by a winter spate, he went. If his goal were reached I knew that it meant certain entanglement and any odds on a break, and, raising the point of my rod, I strove to bring him over to my bank. As I did so, the fish flung himself out of water and I caught a momentary glimpse of a spotted side. I hastily lowered the rod, and he raced hard down stream to a place where, from unhappy experience on a former occasion, I knew, only too well, a sunken root was concealed. This time, however, the danger was averted, but before I succeeded in bringing him over the net, the trout had made another leap for freedom.

While I was disengaging the hook, I became aware that there had been a spectator of the proceedings, for leaning over the bridge was the gamekeeper, returning from his evening round.

"A very nice fish, sir, for this little brook," he remarked, and coming through a gap in the hedge, he passed a foot-rule over the trout.

"Twelve inches and a half, and in splendid condition."

During the next few minutes I was more occupied in talking to the keeper than in fishing, and this was responsible for a belated strike and a missed opportunity. My next fish was a rainbow, too small to kill, and he was replaced in the pool none the worse for his adventure. The keeper hereupon, after wishing me good-night, whistled to his dog, and passed on over the bridge. I had known him for many years, a good, honest, worthy fellow, and little did I think that "good-night" was to be "good-bye" for we never met again. Within the fortnight pneumonia had claimed him for a victim, and he was borne to his rest in the little village church-yard.

Continuous whipping of a water is good neither for man nor fish, and sitting down, I

proceeded to load my pipe, when something happened which caused me to restore it, unlit, to my pocket. The something was an expanding circle which had suddenly appeared on the surface of a short stretch of unbroken water linking the shallows with the pool. My interest increased as the ring, after a brief interval, appeared again. That it was caused by a rising fish there was no doubt, but what he was taking I had not the smallest notion. A coachman on a "oo" hook seemed a likely venture, but the difficulty was, how to bring it over the trout without any drag. To get below the fish was an impossibility, owing to the wooded surroundings, and my only chance was to let the fly float down with the stream and hope for the best. Of one thing I was very certain, if the first attempt failed there would be no "second time of asking," for the recovery of the line must inevitably put the trout down. So it was with no little anxiety that I watched the white wings draw nearer and nearer to the fateful spot. A

moment of hope and doubt, then the ring re-appeared and my fly was sucked down in the midst. The contest that followed, if short, was marked by infinite variety. Hither and thither the fish scurried, now in, now out of the water, but, although he leaped and fought splendidly, the trout did not seem to have any definite plan of campaign like the first, and his tactics never threatened danger. Still, he gave me a certain amount of trouble before I was able to bring him in. The trout was smaller by an inch than his companion in the basket, but, like him, in excellent condition.

By this time the sun had dipped behind the hills, the fall had lost its sparkle, and the little pool was one of shadows.

Before daylight deserted me altogether, I was anxious to try the point where the two streams joined, so, leaving the pool, I followed the brook down for about a mile until I reached the spot. Here it was a policy of "drift" again, as the water, if anything, was more shut in than at the place I had left, and, in addition, had a high bank.

In the fast gathering darkness I dropped the fly, the same coachman, on the water, and, with straining eyes, watched it float away until it disappeared beneath the bushes. I must confess the only result that I anticipated was the loss of my fly, if not the cast as well, and for some seconds I continued to pay out line in fear and trembling. Then, instead of the expected hitch, there came the unexpected pluck at my rod-top, and it was borne in upon me that, somewhere down stream, I had really risen and hooked a fish. To describe what followed would be to describe what I never saw. It was like playing a fish blindfold. The darkness confused me, and made me nervous lest I should do the wrong thing. Once I felt the line slacken, and heard a splash far away beneath the bushes. I thought the end had come, but the next instant the throbbing strain on my rod reassured me. How I brought the fish up into the eddy, caused by the meeting of the waters, I have no very clear idea, neither

can I explain my subsequent escape from a foul, for, even in daylight, the spot was an awkward one in which to venture a hook, being a halting-place for all the flotsam and jetsam brought down by both streams. At last the fish, an active resister no longer, came under the top of the rod. Lying full length on the ground, I reached down with the net, and the brook was the poorer by a nice trout of 1 lb.

AN EVENING BY THE MILL POND.

THE sun is slowly sinking behind the hill, sending shafts of golden light through the traceries of the lofty elms. A gentle breeze touches the leaves, and their latticed shadows on the footpath dance merrily in response. From some farmhouse, remote and unseen, comes the occasional bark of a sheepdog or the lowing of kine; and nearer, the cawing of rooks busy with domestic arrangements for the coming night. It is the hour of nature's *Angelus*, and over all is the restfulness and peace of a great calm, the calm of a summer evening.

Upon the mill pond the glory of the setting sun rests caressingly, transforming it into a shield of burnished silver, wherein is reflected a field of wheat that stretches upward on the farther side in golden radiance.

Where the water deepens by the closed

sluice, I sit and watch the red-tipped float drift nearer and nearer to the patch of yellow water-lilies growing close inshore. A leaf stays its progress, then, guided by some invisible power, it moves again, and is drawn beneath the surface. I feel the hurry-scurry of a startled resistance, the tense line zig-zags sharply amidst the floating-pads, and, anon, another roach lies glistening on the grass.

From out the bed of rushes two black beady eyes regard the squeezing of a fresh piece of paste on the hook with marked distrust. Then the grating of sharp teeth at work on a quivering blade is renewed. A splash, and the water-rat departs on another of his hurried excursions by the side of the bank. We have become good friends, this brown furry vole and I, and his reappearance from time to time brings a curious sense of companionship in a solitude that I am conscious of, yet loth to admit. Scarce have the diverging ripples in the wake of the swimmer died away, when the net is again brought into use.

Generously has the pond responded, but, withal, it is a pond of fickle mood, and now it assumes an uncompromising indifference.

The grey humility of twilight succeeds the crimson majesty of sunset; a sombre hue creeps over the face of the water, and I wait and watch a float that stays motionless. Tentatively the bait is changed, and the spell of inaction is broken by a perch that takes the proffered worm, then makes for sanctuary among the lilies. He makes a valiant fight for freedom, but in the end he is lifted out, still struggling, with dorsal fin defiantly erect. Two others share his fate ere the hook fails; and a perch goes free to give the alarm, only too effectually, for not another will the pond surrender. Instead, it demonstrates the unsuspected possibilities of its depths, for the float goes down abruptly, and the handles of the reel become merged and lost to sight in the rapidity of its revolutions. For a second there is the sensation of a heavy body contending fiercely; the next, a broken line comes feebly in.

Conjecture is busy with the identity of the destroyer as the keeper crosses the stile and comes upon the wreckage. "One of them jacks," is his verdict. It may be, but a roach fails to move him again, and the disturbance has caused both perch and roach to flee in terror.

As he turns to go, a rustling movement in the rushes arrests the keeper's attention. A searching glance towards the spot, and the gun comes to his shoulder. An odd feeling of regret possesses me, for, intuitively, I know the tragedy impending. Then the shot rings out and dies echoing away in the distance.

* * * * *

The rookery is long since quiet and all is still. Only a bat hawks to and fro, as I collect the spoils and mount the stile.

Behind me, on the mill pond, the shadows of night are gathering over a little furry body with a crimson stain on its upturned breast.

“VARIUM ET MUTABILE.”

THE two men sank wearily into opposite corners of the railway carriage, after placing a bundle of rods, a gaff-handle, and a couple of mackintoshes in the rack, and on the seat a long white bag, from the end of which protruded three shiny broad tails. Muddy boots, bespattered gaiters, evident fatigue; all spoke of a strenuous day.

“Well, it’s not been so bad after all,” remarked the elder of the two as he settled himself more comfortably, “though I wish we could have got hold of a big one. But there, 60 lb. is better than our luck of late on other waters. What’s the weight of the three in the bag?”

“Between fifteen and sixteen pounds,” was his companion’s reply. “No, thanks,” as the other offered a cigar case, “I would rather have a pipe. I wonder” he continued,

watching the wreaths of smoke curl upwards and then hang clustering round the lamp, "what my wife will say to-night when she sees them? Her usual remark, 'What, no fish again? Well, you are duffers!' will hardly come in on this occasion, and I rather fancy that it will be our turn to score."

"Never be too sure of scoring off a woman," was the reply, spoken with the wisdom and experience that comes of superior years.

With a jarring and grinding of brakes the train pulled up at a station, and the door opened to admit a passenger, obviously one of that ancient race, the Jews. The anglers glanced casually at the new comer, who seated himself by the bag at the end whence the three tails appeared, then continued to smoke in silent meditation. Profound and all-absorbing were their thoughts and soon the very existence of the man was forgotten.

"Do you gentlemen want to buy any shtuds?" The two friends looked round in astonishment; then shook their heads, for their

fellow-passenger was holding out a card of bone collar-studs.

“ Feesh! ” exclaimed the man excitedly. He passed a hand, that exhibited distinct traces of long freedom from soap and water, over the bulging outlines of the bag. The Jewish desire for fresh-water fish was awakened.

“ Ah! it is alive! ”

The hand was hastily withdrawn, for one of the tails was twitching convulsively as though in resentment of the liberty. For a little while the man appeared to be revolving some weighty matter in his mind, and the expression on his face was one of deep thoughtfulness. Then, having apparently come to a decision, he addressed to the custodian of the bag the startling inquiry;

“ Do you want to sell those feesh? ”

“ *No, certainly not!* ”

The reply was curt and the tone of voice unmistakable, yet the man showed no sign of annoyance and merely resumed his former pensive attitude. Presently his hand stole into the recesses of his coat.

"I haf a nice vatch for sale," he remarked. "It is a good one; very sheap. Only ten and sixpence. Here, take it in your hand and see for yourself. It vill bear looking at."

Before he could decline, a lady's "gold" keyless watch had been forced upon the indignant angler. Only for a moment did he retain possession but he noticed that it was going to time, had split seconds, and, altogether, looked worth the amount asked. Then, with a gesture that admitted of no misunderstanding, the younger man handed it back. Upon being appealed to in turn, his companion signified, in no less equivocal a manner, his disinclination to purchase. With a final statement respecting its "sheapness" the importunate one returned the watch to his pocket, and proceeded to stare thoughtfully out of the window into the darkness beyond. Occasionally the grimy hand would wander in an abstracted manner over the bag, until the angler could endure it no longer and was on the point of removing

the thing of strange fascination to another place, when the Jew, producing the watch once more, leaned over towards him and whispered eagerly,

“If you vill gif me those feesh, I vill gif you this vatch.”

* * * * *

With the air of a triumphant warrior who awaits the acclamations of the multitude, the younger man displayed the three pike to his wife and, incidentally, related the tale of the watch. Then he realised that not yet was it his turn to score, for over the fish she enthused not one whit, but, with a world of meaning, exclaimed,

“Why didn't you take the watch? Now that would have been worth having!”

* * * * *

“— Angling to woman — is the ugly duckling of sport. For it, and those who take their leisure therein, her scorn is merciless, her contempt unveiled.”

But, as the angler sadly reflected, his wife always did lack the true sentiment of fishing.

DAYS ON A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LAKE.

ANGLERS are not more blessed than other folk in their ability to control the weather, else, on the occasion of one of our expeditions to the lake, it would not have happened that hill and dale were obliterated by a white fog; so dense as to blot out the very hedge-row on either side of the line. There was no heaven and no earth, and the train seemed to bear us through illimitable space. When things are at their worse, they begin to mend; and so it was with the fog. Just as we had decided (there were two of us) that our programme must be altered to the extent of taking the first train back to town, it lifted, rolling away in billowy masses which lingered here and there in the hollows like huge lumps of cotton wool; and when we reached our

destination we found a clear atmosphere and a cloudless sky.

“ Not a very good day, gentlemen, there’s no ripple.”

The keeper’s parting words, as we pushed off in the punt, were ominous, and only too faithfully expressed our own opinion.

“ Ripple! ” I said to myself disconsolately, “ Why, the lake is a sheet of glass. It could not have been in worse trim for ——”

Click, Click, Cl-i-ick, my reel broke in.

“ Bear a hand with the gaff! ” shouted my companion from the stern.

“ Sorry I can’t,” I replied from the bow, “ I have a fish on myself.” And then, in syncopation, came the music of both reels.

Glancing over my shoulder, I noticed that his fish was proving anything but docile, and not likely to be ready for the steel just yet. I also discovered that both pike were fighting their battles on the starboard side. Mine was carrying on the contest in a series of powerful jerks, a proceeding I greatly disapproved, for

these sudden tugs awakened misgivings in my mind as to the strength of my trace of single salmon gut which had seen service on previous occasions. Finding these tactics did not answer, the pike yielded submissively for a few yards to the shortening of the line, then, with a plunge, dashed off in the direction of his brother in adversity. Doubt of that trace again obtruded itself and I dared not apply much pressure, although I noticed, with apprehension, that the two lines were drawing dangerously close together. They met, crossed, and a foul was only averted by the passing of my companion's rod over my hastily ducked head. Both fish were now making a hard fight for it, and, from the strength mine put forth, I was hoping for a far heavier specimen than the bare 5-pounder it proved to be. I had but time to lift it in, when the other required a similar attention, but, although the bigger of the two, it failed to reach 6 lb., the limit for this water.

A long period of inaction followed; even

the live baits grew weary of gyrating over unappreciative pike, their movements became more and more feeble, and then ceased altogether. *Esox lucius* was decidedly apathetic. What else could one expect, with not a zephyr, and the sun shining with all the power and brilliance of early summer? Indeed, except when one's eyes fell on the rich autumnal colourings of the trees, it was hard to realise that the month was November and not May. And, as I gazed upon the peaceful beauty of wooded land that all around sloped upward in gentle undulations, and listened to the call of water-fowl, or watched the little procession of wild duck passing overhead, I felt that the *taking* of fish was not all, but that, in Nature, there are compensations for the angler, even if the fates decree a slender bag. "*Should fortune withhold her benefits, yet has he other cause to be grateful.*"

A change of position to the channel dividing the queer little island from the shore, only

revived tantalising recollections of good fish taken there on former days; it produced nothing tangible now. So, back once more into the open; encouraged thereto by a sullen splash in that direction. Here a wandering current of air ruffled the monotonous calm of the water, and, apparently, exercised an awakening effect upon the fish, for it was not long ere the two rods were busy, each with a struggling captive. As before, both were engaged simultaneously; but this time there was no threatened complication of lines to lend excitement to captures which increased our scores by 4 lb., and $4\frac{1}{2}$ lb., respectively. The possibilities of our pitch appeared to be exhausted when a further fish, one of really depressing dimensions, had been taken, for not another run occurred to enliven the proceedings. Then the slight breeze died away, the ripples gradually subsided, and our punt lay "As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

We were roused from the condition of

lethargy into which we were fast sinking, by the sudden disappearance, over the side, of my companion's rod. Resting on the gunwale, a movement of his sleeve had precipitated it into 10 ft. of water. Luckily for him, one of the triangles had become hitched in the thwart, and, when every inch of line had been drawn off the reel, the rod was triumphantly hauled up. Obviously it was useless to remain where we were, so a further move was made. Our new anchorage was surrounded by a bed of weeds which grew to within 2 ft. or 3 ft. of the surface, and looked a promising place. My first cast must have been made right into the open jaws of a waiting pike, for the float struck the water and instantly shot out of sight. Rapid, and sustained, revolutions of the reel, however, caused me to realise that I had a run. I was using a single hook inserted in the lips of a small dace, so the fish was allowed to go his way unchecked, until the time came to give him a pointed reminder of my existence. Then, with a swirl, he came to the

top. I relaxed the strain, and the next minute he had found an asylum amongst the weeds. All attempts to dislodge him proving unsuccessful, on the principle of Mahomet and the mountain, there was nothing for it but to up anchor again and work the punt over his hiding-place. Upon an application of the gaff-handle, the pike evidently had misgivings as to the security of his position, for he made a hurried exit, enveloped in clinging strands of weed. These hampered his subsequent movements, and led to his undoing. Truth compels me to state that he was unable to pull the pointer of the steelyard below $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and should any reader exclaim, "What a fuss over such a small fish!" I can only assure him that he expresses the thought that passed through my own mind.

Rampant misfortune was now our lot; my companion had a lost opportunity to deplore, and I a great disaster.

The bob of my float and the demand upon my reel indicated that, perhaps, the

long-hoped-for was about to happen. As always, it was the unexpected that happened. After travelling a little way in snatchy jerks, the "pilot" stopped; and, carefully gathering in the slack line, I struck! With the strike came the sound of a sharp, loud, crack; the line fell in folds, and my rod clattered on the floor of the punt, broken at the top ferrule, and again, half-way down the butt! Grasping the line, which was now running out rapidly, I mercilessly hauled the pike in. But the chances were all against my securing him. Even as the fish came to the side, he opened a cavernous mouth, and, with a furious shake of the head, freed himself from the hook.

I declined the generous offer of my friend's rod, and applied myself, with all the dignity and composure that I could muster, to the task of straightening out the ghastly muddle of broken wood and tangled line which met my gaze. Examination of the wreckage revealed hitherto undetected worm-holes, and these, in conjunction with the weeds, had

brought about the downfall of my favourite rod.

Of three fish afterwards credited to my companion, not one approached anywhere near the desired standard. Night was now enshrouding the lake in a white mantle of mist, and, liberating the nine restless captives in the well, we stepped ashore, bearing an empty bag and a ruined rod. *Maledicite!*

Although, as I stated in the opening sentence of this chapter, the power of ensuring any desired type of weather is denied to mortals in general, and (I write feelingly) anglers in particular, there are times when, maybe as a set-off against the many disappointments that they are made to endure, a pitying providence bestows upon the disciples of Isaak Walton "the very thing" in atmospheric conditions. Not often, mark you; but occasionally, very occasionally, it does so happen. With our recollections of another day spent on the lake, one of these "happenings" is inseparably associated.

There was no doubt about the wind.—a rough, blustering, nor'-wester.—It roared, amongst the leafless branches of the trees, which bent beneath its fury, and swept the surface of the water, where wave after wave gave evidence of its mad embrace. Moreover, there was a spiteful touch of cold about it which, now and again, broke through the the defence of a top-coat. Wind, clear sky, plenteous sunshine; ideal conditions for live-baiting for pike. Such was my thought, as our respective floats danced and curtsied to the waves which lapped incessantly against the side of the punt. I, at least, had no complaint to make of lack of sport, for the first, second, third, and fourth fish, each exceeding 6 lb., had fallen to my rod and been consigned to the well. As a beginning, 26 lb., all within a quarter of an hour, was distinctly auspicious. But my companion, strange to say, had not been so blessed, and, while I was thus employed, not one fish had come his way. My good fortune appearing to have ceased, we

decided to try by the island. Here he soon hooked, and landed, a $7\frac{1}{2}$ pounder, whilst I secured a small fish, under 3 lb., which, no doubt to its own satisfaction, was promptly liberated. Here, too, I struck a good fish, but, the hooks failing to hold, a terribly mauled bait was the only result. The other rod, however, in the meantime had been responsible for another tenant of the well. Now, satisfactory as our sport had hitherto been in point of numbers, we had not obtained a fish whose weight went into double figures, and in both our minds were thoughts of the far heavier pike known to be in the water, but which were not in evidence at this particular place. Therefore a move to the other side of the island was suggested, and acted upon.

Our new moorings were situated considerably nearer the mainland than where we had been fishing. A cluster of tall trees on the shore faced a similar plantation on the island, making a regular gully for the wind, which lashed the water into a miniature sea.

Its force was something tremendous, and the navigation of the punt to the spot was a matter of no little difficulty. Truly, it was a case of fishing in troubled waters, but banks of rushes on either hand, extending well into the water, warranted the hope that a good fish or two might be lurking in their midst.

My companion had not long to wait for his chance. As his dace worked the outskirts of these rushes, the float went down suddenly, and the rod was nearly dragged from his hand, warning him that he was about to do battle with a pike far exceeding in size any that we had yet taken. So violent was the resistance following the strike, that an attempt at holding the fish would have spelt instant disaster. The one thing possible, was to supplement the check on the reel by careful rim pressure. All at once the line ceased to pay out and there came a pause in the proceedings. The moments went by, and, no further movement being made by the fish, my friend, with extreme caution,

reeled in an inch or so, which *Esox* no sooner felt than off he dashed again with a force which, alas! proved too much for the line, and for the next few minutes, there were two very rueful countenances in that punt. While he was repairing damages, loudly bewailing his ill-luck all the time, I had been kept well occupied with a couple of fish, and was about to make a cast when I observed his rod bending again in active service; so I stood by, in the hope of being called upon to lend a hand with the gaff.

There was little doubt but that he had another good fish on, vicious plunges affording ample testimony that its ultimate capture would only be when the last inch had been successfully contested. A dash of the pike away from the punt carried out yard after yard of line, which had to be smartly reeled in again as the pilot float gave warning that the fish had doubled, and was now coming towards us. Once he made direct for the chain attached to the anchor, and I held my breath,

but any design he may have entertained in that quarter was frustrated by a rigorous application of the butt, the consequent strain causing him to rise to the surface, and shake his long black head in marked disapproval of the whole business. Foiled in his intentions respecting the chain, he made an effort to reach the friendly shelter of the bed of rushes, but it lacked his former strength, and in due time I had the pleasure of lifting a handsome fish of 10 lb., 7 oz. over the side for my companion.

Success and failure had been pretty evenly distributed, and my turn soon came to get in touch with a good fighter. Having discarded the "snap" in favour of a single hook, I made a cast. The float had barely time to cock when down it went, and my reel gave forth one prolonged shriek. The speed with which the line cut through the water was terrific, and in one place, for a distance of some half a dozen yards, to the right and left there leaped out, high into the air, a shoal

of small fry, through which the pike had evidently dashed, the piscatory fountain indicating the tyrant's course more effectually than any pilot float could have done. The sun's rays shone full on the sides of the terrified fugitives, and they became scintillating splashes of silver. As we admired the charming effect, the pike stopped. Allowing him sufficient time to turn the bait, I gathered in the loose line. The strike, however, was never made, for, at that instant, the float abruptly reappeared on the water, and the line came in with the gimp bitten through as evenly as though severed with a knife. The shoal of small fish still had their enemy left to reckon with!

Now, a rousing nor'-wester may be "the very thing" for pike, but the angler, after three hours of continuous buffeting in an open punt with cap jammed over ears and eyes (my companion is a sight for the gods in a hat tied down under his chin) when eating a sandwich is a furtive and fearful operation and

a "smoke" an impossibility, is disposed to cry "Hold! Enough"; and the shelter of the boathouse, where these creature comforts could be enjoyed in peace, was a welcome change.

Upon venturing out again, we found that one of those sudden, and inexplicable, changes to which pikely appetite is liable, had taken place, for fish were now as shy as they had previously been bold, and it was some time before another was taken.

In the well, now so full that the prisoners were packed like sardines in a tin, sounds of violent commotion could be heard from time to time, and, with startling clatter, the lid would come flying off, displaced with blows from the tails of the discontented occupants. So the few subsequent fish were weighed and immediately returned to the water.

Black and threatening clouds had come up; thick driving rain made our position anything but pleasant; prospects for further sport seemed to be more than doubtful, if desirable under such conditions; and the punt was headed for the shore.

Two of the biggest of our captives were kept as trophies, and executed forthwith, the remainder being tossed overboard to live to fight another day, and we started on our homeward journey, happy, contented, and, above all, grateful for the privilege so generously granted, so thoroughly enjoyed.

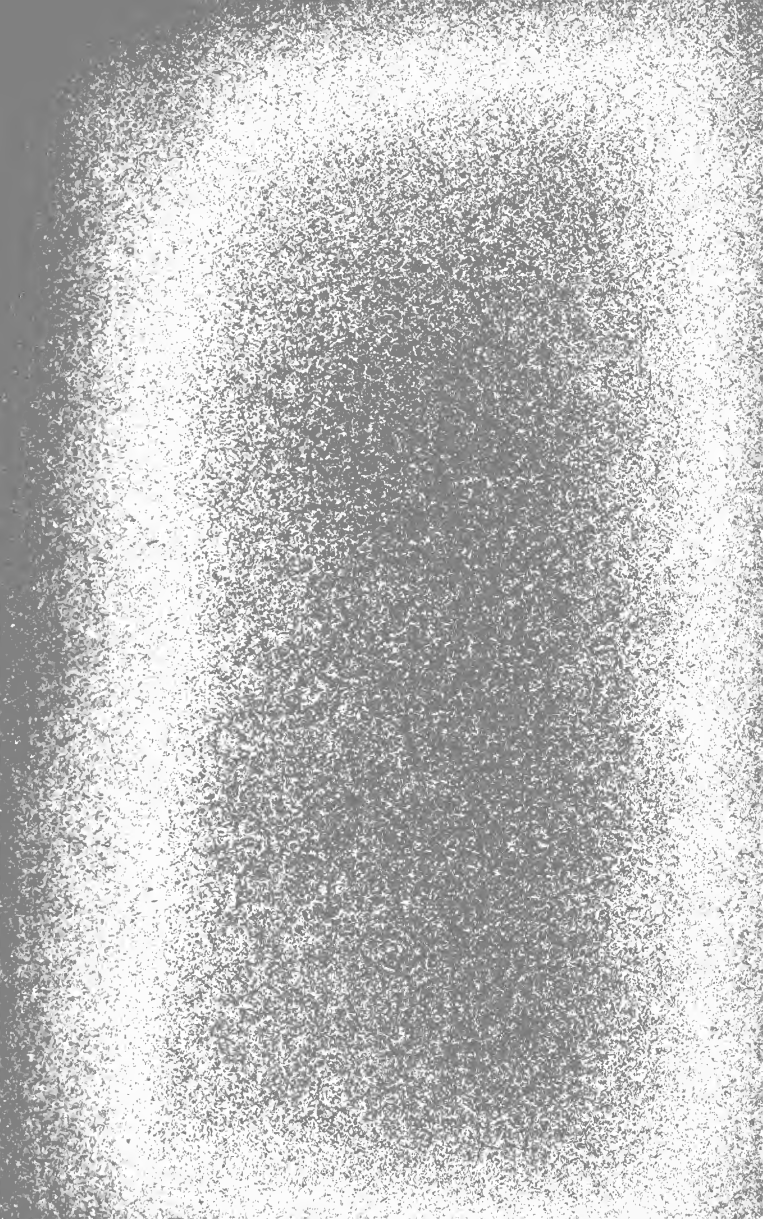
Over the little three-course dinner in the cosy room at *The Crown*, we examined the day's entries. 22 pike, 138 lbs. *Benedicite!*

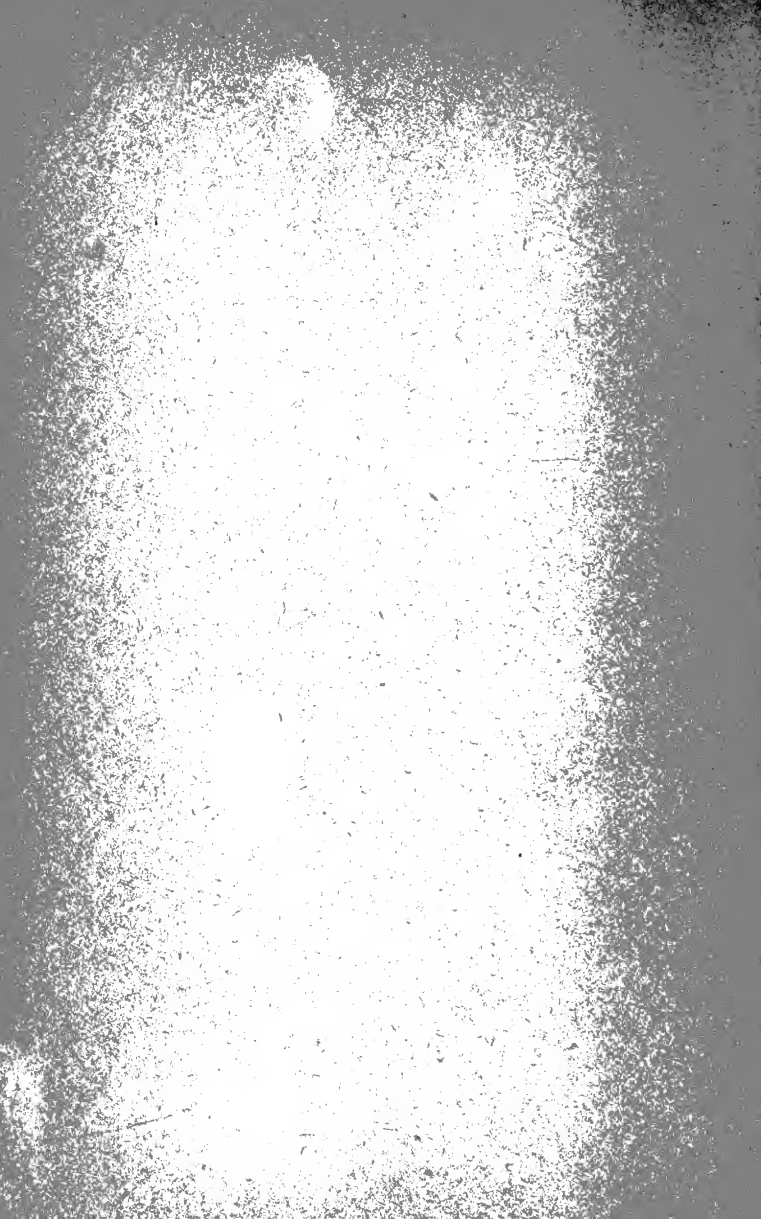
*"Should fortune send him great things
" he is becomingly grateful ——."*

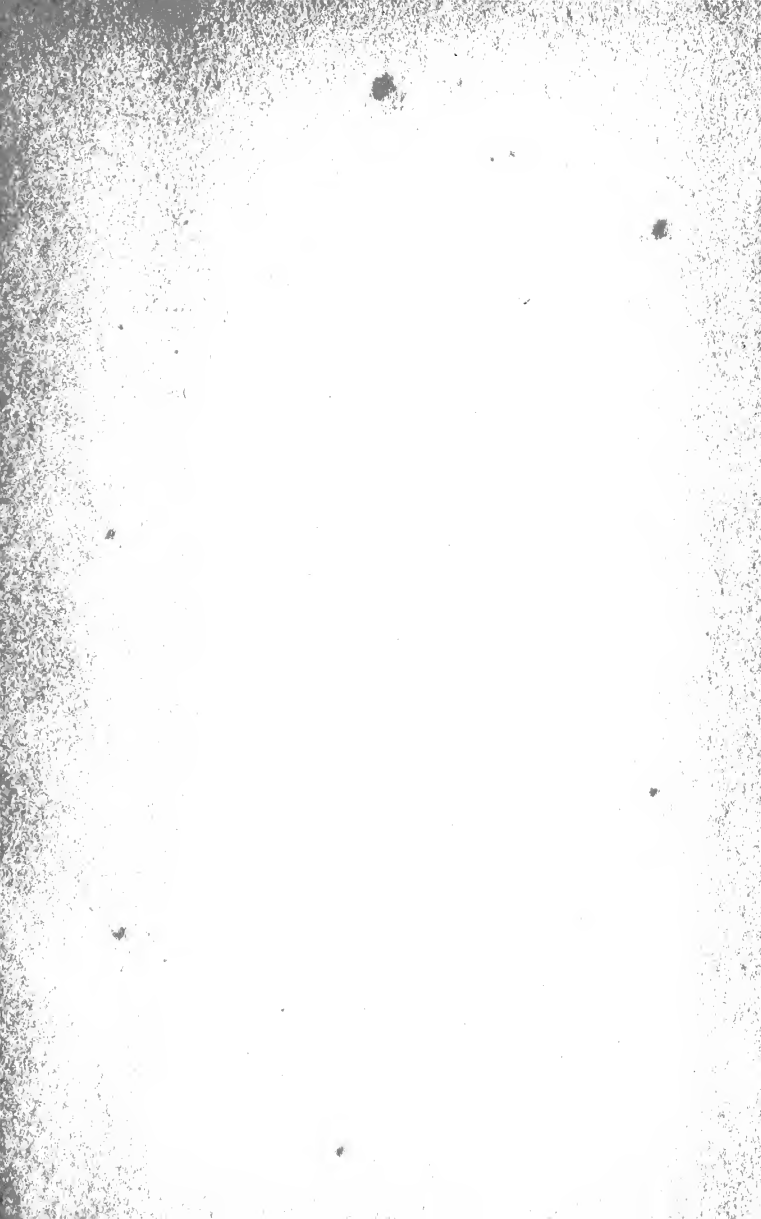
*“ Thus the “ Saturday ” Angler. Hoping
“ much (an angler without hope is unthink-
“ able), expecting little, content with less.
“ If these be the attributes of folly, then is
“ it a folly to be commended to all worthy
“ men.”*

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