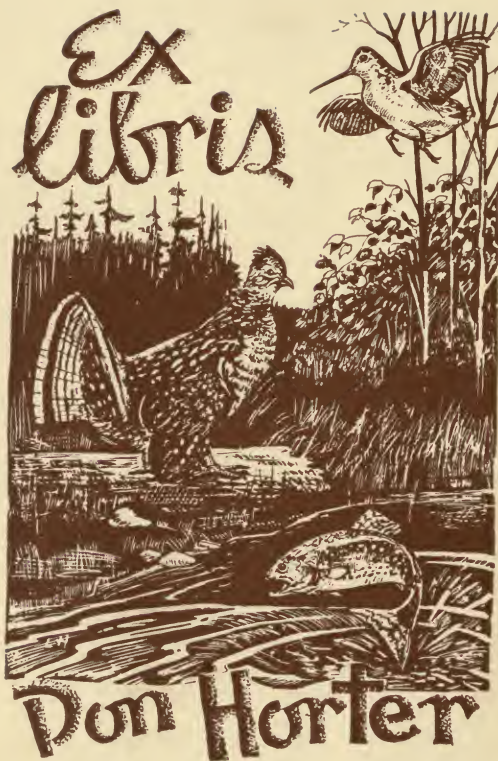


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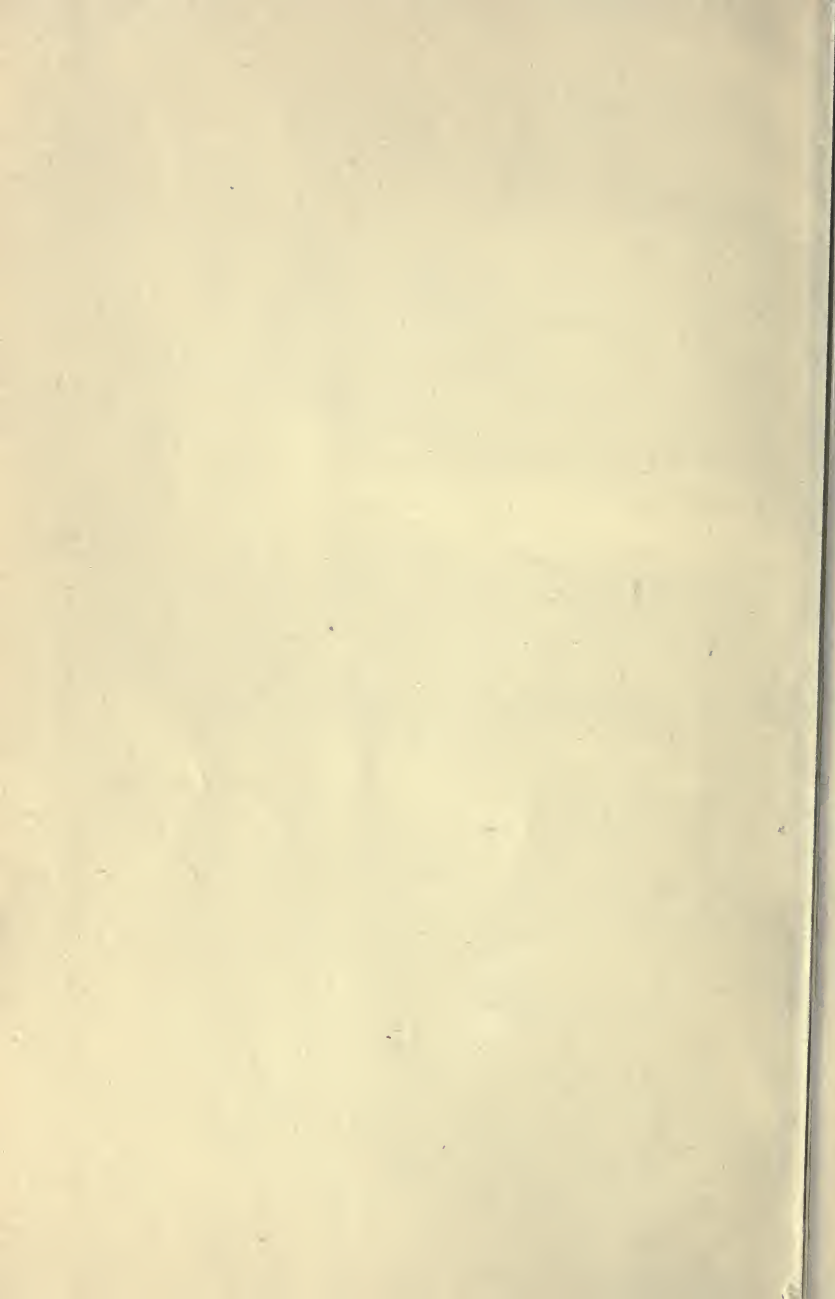
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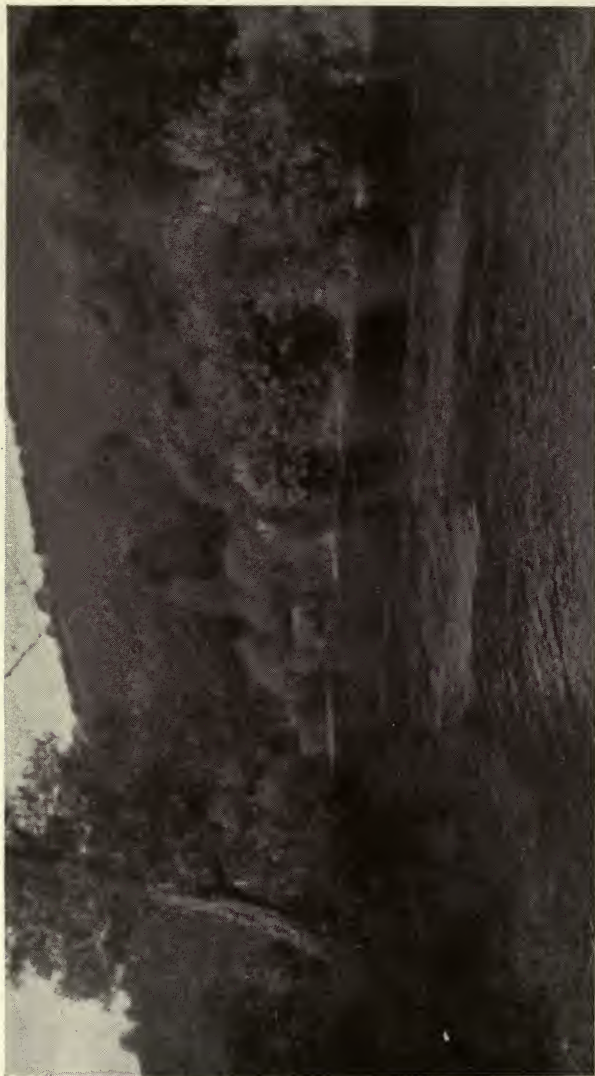




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CATCHING THE WILY SEA-TROUT



WHERE SEA-TROUT RUN

CATCHING THE WILY SEA-TROUT

BY

A. R. HARRIS CASS, M.B.E.

Author of

"The Budding Angler"

"Sea-Fishing from the Shore"

"Angling for Brown Trout"

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PREFACE

THIS is not a theoretical book : it is a practical exposition of how to catch sea-trout both by day and by night.

Having had belligerent relationship with the fish for more than half a century, I have no hesitation in offering the book as a simple guide for the novice and graduate alike, as in it are suggestions of value not previously placed at the disposal of sea-trout anglers.

A. R. H. C.

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TO : THE PRESIDENT

FROM : THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: [Illegible]

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CATCHING THE WILY SEA-TROUT

CHAPTER I

THE SEA-TROUT

MUCH has been written concerning the salmon, while the dainty "brownie" has received an amplitude of attention both in books and in the angling periodicals, but that grand fighting fish, the wily sea-trout, has escaped with only a modicum of notice.

When the white-tipped rollers thunder on the beach, to the accompaniment of the sharp cries of the gulls, he who prospects from the sea-shore accepts with genuine satisfaction the "flats" which fall to his lures, but he hopes earnestly that a spirited bass will be his next victim. Similarly, when the leaves are past the prime of summer green and the cuckoo calls no more, most trouters are content to collect nice baskets of fish, but many yearn for the day when the tug of a sea-trout will be felt.

Even the salmon fisher, who longs to gaff a forty pounder, is not averse from sampling a fresh-run sea-trout; yet the migratory trout, to give it its legal name in conformity with the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act, is often an "also ran" according to the publicity which it receives in some districts, and frequently it does not gain the kudos which is due to its status.

Probably the reason for this comparative difference in treatment is owing to the fact that in trout waters the

ubiquitous beauties are ever ready to give good accounts of themselves, while the salmon are waiting throughout the season to take advantage of spates, whereas the sea-trout in some rivers do not make their appearance until spring has given way to summer. Therefore, from the opening of the season until the close, both trout and salmon rods can be employed with a fair measure of success, but the sea-trout specialist has to exercise patience until his quarry decides to venture a run.

Again, the trout man and the salmon fisher may choose, at any period in the long season, the day of days when sport is at its best, but such good fortune, in some districts, cannot be enjoyed during the same extended period by the seeker of the sea-trout.

Personally I do not regard the sea-trout seriously in the rivers which I fish until midsummer-day is past, as I consider the prospect as being hopeless. True, an odd fish may run in the early days of the season, but to whip pool after pool with the object of connecting with a solitary fish does not appeal to me as being sufficiently alluring.

We anglers, however, desire something more than mere opinion to influence us; therefore, with the aim of obtaining documentary evidence to support my views, I scrutinized a year's fishing reports in the angling press, and my labours were well recompensed, as I discovered many informative notes which upheld my contention.

One contribution from an Irish correspondent was most illuminating. He stated that latterly sea-trout had been appearing much earlier than formerly in the rivers of Antrim and Derry, for May and even late April had seen the arrival of these fish, as against late June and early July of some years back.

The writer of the April angling notes on the Lancashire Lune, that excellent sea-trout water, reported

that sea-trout had come up earlier than usual, several having been seen in the middle reaches, but none, as yet, had been caught. He added that the big sea-trout of the Lune are always elusive early in the season.

Right from the commencement of the season interesting notes were forthcoming from all rivers of the capture of salmon and brown trout, but not until the year was well forward was there mention of a sea-trout catch, and then of only a single fish.

These odd fish establish no guide to the sport. In February, many years ago, when fishing from a South Devon beach, I hooked and landed a bass of eight pounds in weight, but no one would dream of suggesting that these fish were inshore, as we sea anglers know that bass rarely approach the shore before June.

To-day, September 25th, when walking round my garden in South Devon where snow is almost unknown and a severe frost is an exception, where my mimosa tree, as high as an average elm, is a yellow cascade of bloom in black January much to the amazement of visitors, I picked a bunch of wild sweet smelling blue violets in the hedge-bank, but I know that spring is not yet. No, you cannot arrive at a logical conclusion by accepting solitary examples as fundamental standards.

To enable me to make a comprehensive survey of the peregrinations of the sea-trout I compiled a chronological record, month by month, of the reports emanating from all parts of the British Isles. March was a blank. The notes for April provided me with the news that a flood had brought a fair run of large sea-trout to the Teign. The reports for the month of May were more hopeful, as not only were the fish seen running in the rivers of such widely separated counties as Devonshire and Lancashire, but mention was made of small catches in the Tavy, the Lune and the Rheidol.

The records of June did not show much improvement on those for May, although the sea-trout came more into prominence, as correspondents covering many rivers stated that the fish were running, while the Irish scribe suggested that on the Connemara waters sea-trout fishing would be in full swing during the coming month. The Mourne reporter stated that though some sea-trout had been noticed the time was too early to expect them in numbers. Some fish, however, were reported to have been taken in a few rivers in England.

July provided a plethora of pleasing reports. From the rivers of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales came records of excellent catches of sea-trout, both in numbers and in weights. These fish, turning the scale at anything from a pound to seven pounds, were rewarding day and evening anglers alike.

The news for August and September was equally satisfactory, and the good work of bringing nice fish to the net continued until the close of the season at various dates.

From this short summary, intending sea-trout anglers can have no difficulty in deciding the best period in which to ply their art.

Of course it must be clearly understood that I have been dealing solely with river fishing. In such waters as the lake at Waterville, County Kerry, as this stretch is called locally, and Loch Lomond marvellous sport with sea-trout can be enjoyed practically throughout the season.

Of the comparative scanty amount of literature devoted to the sea-trout there are, albeit, some books of outstanding merit, and mention of a few of these may be welcomed. Hamish Stuart was responsible for a noteworthy work on the subject. Bridgett's book on sea-trout fishing is another admirable effort. On the "Life

of the Sea-trout " there is, I think, nothing better than G. Herbert Nall's book, while the name of Henry Lamond stands out conspicuously as the author of a book concerning the sea-trout. Should, however, your bookseller have difficulty in obtaining for you copies of the books to which I have referred, an advertisement in *Angling*, the *Fishing Gazette* or other similar publication which caters for the angler might prove effective. There is always the possibility of someone possessing a book which he no longer requires, but there is small hope of a collector parting with his treasures. To-day, the hobby of making a collection of works on angling is greater than it ever was, and many fishermen are the proud owners of rare and valuable old editions, in addition to the numerous modern volumes on nearly every aspect of angling. In fact, literature devoted to fishing seems to be as popular as is the sport.

If your quest for a book on the life of the sea-trout is not fulfilled, perhaps a few brief notes here on the life history of the fish may be opportune.

The ways of the sea-trout are very similar to those of the salmon. The chief difference in the respective habits of the two fish is that the salmon, on leaving the rivers for the sea, travel far away, perhaps hundreds of miles into the ocean, while the sea-trout on reaching salt-water are content to travel up and down the estuary, without making a journey of any real distance out to sea.

Sea-trout, like the salmon, return to the waters in which they were hatched, and the spawning methods of both species are practically identical. On reaching the redds, the hen fish selects a favoured place on the gravelly bed and lays her eggs, the cock fish cruising in close attendance ready to milt the deposited eggs.

One remarkable difference between the salmon and the sea-trout is that the former is computed not to be capable

of exceeding five spawnings, whereas the sea-trout, by the markings on its scales, has been known to spawn on nine occasions. From the striking dissimilarity in the number of spawnings the fact is deduced that the sea-trout can stand the effects of spawning much better than can the salmon.

The sea-trout, like the salmon, spawns in late autumn or in early winter.

When the salmon has spawned it is a very poor looking object. Gone is the silvery hue, and, instead, the colour of the cock fish changes to a dark red. Even the head of this male fish alters in shape. Many of these kelts die from disease, while others are easy prey to poachers and otters.

The sea-trout also suffers from the spawning effort, but in a lesser degree than the salmon. When the sea-trout is fresh-run it is a beautiful creature in its silvery garb, and, when cooked, its flesh is pink in colour. With its sojourn in fresh-water, it gradually loses its lustre and becomes darker and darker. Then, when cooked, the flesh will be found to have lost its appetizing pinkness.

When the young sea-trout return to the rivers they do so in large shoals, and the average weight of each of these fish is generally between one and two pounds. The larger fish, usually ranging from three pounds to six pounds in weight, with sometimes a specimen of ten pounds, seek the fresh-water much about the same time as their smaller brethren, but they do not associate with the youngsters.

An angler, fishing a good pool and providing that the fish are in a taking mood, should, without undue optimism, expect to bag ten or a dozen of the smaller fish.

Most small fish are gregarious, and I regard school sea-trout much in the same manner as I do small pollack and shoal bass. When the small pollack are inshore, you

can catch them as quickly as you can re-bait your hook, while shoal bass are equally obliging. Recently I stood on a pier and watched a score of rodsters monotonously hauling up small bass. A friend of mine, when he had reached a hundred and fifty fish, ceased operations as he said that he was tired of the fun.

The trouble with shoal sea-trout, however, is that you cannot be sure that they have not left your favourite stretch. I have known innumerable cases of the fish running in a night through what are rightly considered to be splendid holding pools and next day not a fish has rewarded the labours of anglers working those pools, while, at the same time, three or four miles farther upstream, excellent results have been achieved.

The larger sea-trout are not so erratic as the smaller fish, and to connect with a weighty one is not beyond the limits of possibilities, even if the youngsters have forsaken the lengths which usually appeal to them.

An outstanding example of how these big sea-trout remain in the same stretch of water for a long period came to my notice several years ago. In a salt-marsh a small rhine is cut right across for drainage purposes, and the water-way is about two feet wide and a foot deep. In the summer months this channel is nearly concealed by overhanging rank growth, and the end distant from the river is choked by cress and other water-loving vegetation.

One evening in early September my wife and I were strolling over the land, and while my companion was picking a bunch of wild flowers, I, obeying the irresistible urge enjoyed peculiarly by wielders of the rod, peered in to the still water, hoping thereby to discern a fish, even if only a minnow. Suddenly I stood in amazement and could scarcely believe my eyes for there, with their heads little more than a foot from the barrier of tangled

weed, were two of the finest sea-trout I have seen. Calling my wife, we took up positions well behind the pair and studied them for a considerable time. Their beautiful silvery livery denoted that they were fresh-run and I estimated that each fish was between eight and ten pounds in weight. I wondered whether they were spawning bent, but, apart from an almost imperceptible movement of their fins, they were motionless and apparently were indifferent to their confines. How they had entered this narrow and shallow course was a mystery to me, as, for months, no appreciable rain had fallen, and merely a mud patch connected the channel to the river.

Day after day, for more than a week, I visited the entrancing scene and found the two fish ever in the same place. There was no legitimate method of catching them, and to deal with them ignominiously did not appeal to me: such an act would have been similar to that employed by a "sportsman" whom I once met and who, failing to sprinkle bolting rabbits with his gun, shot, at short range, a wretched trapped one and carried it as proof of his prowess until somebody naïvely drew his attention to the fact that the rabbit, with a smashed, bleeding and dangling leg, had very recently been removed from a gin.

One morning, on paying my self-appointed routine call to the rhine, I received an unpleasant surprise: the two fish had disappeared and, though I carefully scrutinised the water from end to end, there was no sign of the beauties. I was satisfied that no one had taken the fish, as the marsh is far removed from habitation, and is not frequented by anglers, workmen or walkers. Somehow the pair had regained the river.

That evening an angler, a stranger to the district, fishing for sea-trout within a hundred yards of where the

cutting joins the river, hooked and landed a brace of bonny fish each turning the scale at over eight pounds. Whether his success was a remarkable coincidence, or whether he had accounted for the pair which had escaped from the rhine I know not, but the strange part of the story is that this river can in no respects be described as being good sea-trout water. Probably in a season it yields no more than a score of fish. However, this catch gave the river much publicity and established an undying record for it.

One question that is put to me regularly, year after year, is whether sea-trout feed when, for spawning purposes, they return to the river, or whether they are like salmon which, during their stay in fresh-water, according to the accepted theory, ignore all tit-bits.

Some salmon fishers, with the utmost assurance, will tell you that salmon snap at a fly merely out of curiosity, other men will glibly inform you that the fish is irritated by the proffered bait and seeks to destroy it, while other users of the salmon rod are equally positive that the fish cannot resist sampling a properly thrown dainty morsel whether it be fly or prawn, minnow or plug, or even a bunch of garden worms. I have no means of deciding what is the mental attitude of a salmon concerning the value of the variety of lures offered to it, but in an attempt to gain knowledge, I have lain on a river bank, under which a salmon has been sheltering, and have flicked lobworms into the water in the vicinity of the fish. Several minutes after the worm has settled on the bed, the salmon has appeared, picked up the prize and vanished under the spreading bushes. Whilst on many occasions from my lookout I have observed a salmon dash, again and again, through a shoal of minnows. Further, I have seen a salmon, with a six inch trout broadside in its mouth, slipping through a pool. Whether any of these

incidents can be accepted as evidence that salmon feed in the river I cannot say.

To carry my investigations a stage further I have examined the contents of the stomachs of brown trout, salmon and sea-trout respectively. The results regarding the brown trout are most conclusive as its stomach is usually packed with all kinds of fare, together with a strange assortment of grit and shells, but the maw of the salmon contains nothing but a slimy substance. In the stomach of the sea-trout, be the fish fresh-run or stale, I have observed a slight similar slimy composition and consequently I suggest that sea-trout do not feed up-river in the same way as do brown trout.

Further, on opening a fresh-run sea-trout I have noticed that there is a quantity of fat inside, but a stale fish, one that has been some time in the river, is always minus this fat. The deduction that I draw from these facts is the sea-trout whilst up-river lives on its own fat.

To satisfy myself by independent testimony I put the question to an aged poacher who, since his boyhood, had worked illicitly a certain river, and in those early days he had done so under the expert guidance of his father, another notable poacher. I repeat his views for what they are worth as they are somewhat interesting. His definite opinion is that salmon and sea-trout do not feed in the usually accepted sense of the meaning, but that both species take into their mouths acceptable delicacies, suck all the nutriment and then eject the unwanted remnants.

The old chap based his belief on the ground that a kelt, if it remained in the river for a lengthy time after spawning, improved in condition and weight. He concluded his argument with the contention that no fish could accomplish that by living on water alone.

This novel exposition certainly deserves more than

passing notice, as any suggestion which assists in revealing the mysteries of the finny world should be received with respect, if not enthusiasm, as, however much we may know about this rather obscure subject, there is still room for further research.

CHAPTER II

WHERE TO FISH

WHERE to fish is a problem that confronts innumerable anglers, and unfortunately the situation deteriorates steadily with the passing of time. - Every season sees a marked increase in the fishing ranks, and the reasons for this augmentation are two-fold, inasmuch as not only are more young people turning to angling for the initial sport in their careers, but hundreds of hard-bitten golfers, no longer able to use the courses owing to these being required for other purposes, are seeking a fresh recreation by the water-side. Further, pollution is restricting considerably the chances to wet a line, as, unhappily, some streams which, in the days of my youth, were crystal waters fit to drink, are now little better than open sewers.

Again, many rivers which I can remember as holding excellent heads of fish are at the present time nearly denuded of their rightful inhabitants as the results of poaching and the capture of immature fish. I have, again and again, seen men, men who should have known better, bag brown trout much below the takable limit, also parr. Why these rodsters act against their own interests is an insolvable mystery to me, especially as

the ethics of true sportsmanship are based on honesty of purpose and consideration for other followers of the game.

Another difficulty with which prospective anglers have to contend is the disinclination of certain local fishermen to afford information concerning the rivers which they fish. Much to the annoyance of some of these individuals whose one standard is personal interest, I have refused to be muzzled and, for the benefit of angling friends and others, I have, without fear or favour, reviewed the merits of various waters as they have appealed to me.

Years ago I was approached by several anglers who requested me not to mention the river which they fished. They said that they desired to keep the water for their sole use and to be free of visitors. My answer, at once, was to the effect that I could not entertain such a selfish suggestion. My explanation of my refusal was that I had always supplied information which I considered would be useful to the readers of the angling press and that I could not see my way clear to depart from my usual procedure. The members of this pettifogging clique were most chagrined at my reception of their entreaty, and were more so when they found that my word had been kept irrespective of their pleadings. In fact, ever afterwards, these individuals failed to be civil to me. That puerile gesture, however, did not bother me, and I was delighted when followers of my advice later tried the river with good results.

The extraordinary feature concerning the incident is that the applicants for their river's immunity from notice were strangers to the district. They were men of wealth and they had outbid the "locals" for the fishing rights of that particular stretch of river. Then, having been successful, they, by a gradual extension of their

preserves, ultimately squeezed out the remaining angling tenants.

If this kind of practice becomes general, the day is not far distant when the opportunities for the free-lance angler will be severely restricted, and he will be forced to rely on club or hotel waters, as owners who let rods on their rivers will cease to exist.

The angler who possesses a copy of that admirable book "Where to Fish," published by the *Field*, will have no difficulty in making a satisfactory choice of suitable venues, as the work is both comprehensive and highly informative. Unfortunately, an edition of it has not been published since the year 1939, and available copies of that issue are now very scarce, with the result that to obtain a second-hand copy is well-nigh impossible.

Upon obtaining the edition for 1939, I discarded an earlier print. One day, however, I lent my sole copy to a friend who allowed an angling acquaintance to borrow it, and when I tried to retrieve it the book had gone "no address."

In addition to furnishing complete particulars of the fishing obtainable in every lake, river and stream in the United Kingdom, "Where to Fish" supplies a really good list of hotels and inns which will satisfy any man with a rod. While included in the pages are numerous germane details.

So lost have I been without this handy *vade mecum* that I have made many endeavours to procure a copy, but, up to the present, nobody seems willing to part with the book, so, like other would-be possessors, I must wait in patience until the *Field* prints a new edition.

Sea-trout are to be found in most of the rivers of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, except in those which are too polluted to allow the fish to live in them,

or in those rivers which flow into estuaries so contaminated that the passage of fish is impossible.

Many rivers, which at one time were the happy haunts of both salmon and sea-trout, no longer offer a fair way to either species. On numerous occasions I have seen salmon, which have taken the wrong turning and, entering a sewage infected river, struggle valiantly to force a course through the poisonous filth, eventually only to turn up, succumb and float on the surface of the ebbing tide.

Usually, both salmon and sea-trout frequent the same waters, but to assume that this association is immutable would be erroneous, as although in certain rivers the run of salmon is plentiful, sea-trout are unknown in those lengths. Further, there are other rivers in which sea-trout abound, but salmon have never been known to enter them. Hence, before deciding on a river in which to seek the sea-trout, inquiries should be made to ascertain whether, as a rule, these fish run in the water.

Of course the seasons vary considerably. One year a river may teem with sea-trout, yet the run in the following year may be most meagre. A difference in the depth of the water is often the reason for these anomalies. One season may see a series of heavy rainfalls, and the following season may be noted for an abnormal drought, so the angler must always be prepared for disappointment even on his favourite streams.

In a good season the tributaries are often better than the main channel, as sea trout have a habit of quickly running through the deep waters during heavy spates. Perhaps the chief charm of angling is in trying conclusions with the unknown.

I heard of a case recently of a casual angler who had never hooked a salmon and whose catch of sea trout during many years could, in the aggregate, be counted

on one hand. This aspiring devotee went for a week's fishing holiday in August to a river not bearing a great reputation for sport. When he arrived the river was recovering from a serious flooding following an abnormally heavy fall of rain. During his week's stay he accounted for four salmon, together with over a score of sea-trout, and all the fish were fresh-run. I may add that he was using only sea-trout tackle, and he confined his fishing to daylight hours. No doubt, to all his friends he advertised his good fortune, but if those brother anglers visit the river during another August, I am constrained to think that their catches will not prove so exhilarating.

An excellent plan before making a journey for sea-trout fishing is to get into touch with an angler on the spot so as to ascertain the probable prospects.

In making such inquiries be sure that the "local" clearly understands your meaning, as, in some districts, to make reference to a sea-trout would fail to be comprehended, for the sea-trout has received a number of names. In some areas it is commonly known as salmon-trout, and in others it is described as salmon-peal. In Ireland it bears the name of white trout, while Welshmen prefer to call it sewin. In some parts of Scotland it is often styled finnock. By Devonshire anglers it is invariably known as peal. It also passes under many other names, such as herling, scurf, truff and whiting, to mention only a few.

To know the origin of these various designations would be very enlightening, as at first glance there does not appear to be any appropriate connection with the fish. No doubt, however, the respective peoples have reasons for their nomenclatural selections.

On a farm I once heard the farmer bawling to a boy to bring out the evil. Being nonplussed by the unique demand, I asked the farmer what he meant, and he replied :

“ Oh, us allus calls a dung-fork a evil.” In that particular instance there does seem to be a genuine relationship.

To furnish a complete list of all the rivers in the country wherein sea-trout may reasonably be expected would be too ambitious for a book dealing in general terms with sea-trout angling, so I will content myself by mentioning those rivers which have afforded me some reward, together with others which have been thoroughly recommended to me by reputable angling friends who have given prolonged trials to the waters of their choice.

Forming an opinion of any river by an abbreviated visit of an odd week or so is too superficial to constitute a reliable guide to the possibilities of the water, as not only can successive years produce marked fluctuations in the sport obtainable, but even in a single season there is an enormous dissimilarity in the conditions for attack, and thus there is no standard for any river.

Cases after cases have come to my knowledge where followers of the art have made short sojourns to a river, and, having experienced lean times, have spoken most disparagingly of the water. These reports have been neither fair to the river nor to other anglers who have contemplated future visits.

Had the expressed views been qualified by a clear statement of the attendant circumstances, the opinions would have conveyed a totally different meaning regarding the actual value of the water.

The result of an angler's efforts, whether poor or otherwise, during one week is no criterion as to what will happen to another rodster at a later date.

Luckily, we anglers live in inexhaustible hope, and each believes that his essay will be an improvement on that of the other fellow.

There is no trouble in finding pleasing sea-trout rivers in England, whether the angler is domiciled in the north or in the south. The Cumberland Derwent offers good opportunities in July and August, and reliance can be placed in the Aln during August and September. The Esk usually provides some sport with the arrival of September; while specimen fish and shoal fish frequent the Lune throughout June, July, August and September. The Wyre is also worth attention in July, August and September. In the Arun anglers will do well in late July and early August. From midsummer onwards the Devonshire rivers are very attractive, and of these special mention must be made of the Tavy, noted for some big fish, the Teign, a really fine length, the Taw, yielding on occasion a big fish of eight pounds, and the picturesque Dart, which, in the season, is fully stocked: the latter river, however, suffers from peat-stained water after violent spates.

Many of the rivers and lochs of Scotland are renowned for their ample supplies of sea-trout, and while to name any of these waters is a trifle invidious, I should, perhaps, refer to the River Ness, where nice baskets can be obtained from June until the close of the season, and Loch Lomond, which can be fished hopefully from May onwards.

Ireland, both in the northern and southern areas, is a country where sea-trout fishing may be pursued with a maximum of success. In the western waters the best time is during July and August. Intending visitors to the Irish waters should make a note of the Mourne and tributaries, the rivers of Antrim, the Connemara stretches and those in the Belfast radius. A drawback to numerous Irish rivers is the presence of flax water pollution, which is prevalent in late August.

Several rivers in Wales give most satisfactory results, and the man in quest of sea-trout will not go far wrong

if he wanders along the banks of the Teify, the Rheidol the Usk or the Towy.

Naturally inquiries concerning rights, charges and licences should be made regarding any water before it is fished.

To this small nucleus of rivers famed for their sea-trout, the angler, wherever he lives, should, with his local knowledge, be able to add many more waters and so build a record that will be advantageous both to himself and to his fishing friends.

Those who intend to take up sea-trout fishing seriously will be well advised to keep a record of their operations. Not only are these particulars useful for immediate purposes, but in the twilight days they provide memories of past glories and food for pleasant reflections.

Nothing is more alluring to the arm-chair angler, past the time when the river calls, than to sit, during a winter's evening, in the comforting glow of the fire, turn over the pages which chronicle deeds of yore and live once again in the thrills that the rod has brought to him. Therefore take the advice of an old hand and prepare for the time when active participation in the game wanes or is no longer possible.

A useful method of preparing the requisite data is on the following lines :

Date.

Name of water.

Number of fish caught.

Weights of fish.

Climatic conditions.

Water conditions.

Other notes.

If you act on this suggestion you will, believe me,

never regret the time devoted to it, for once an angler, always an angler, even if the angler lives to be one only in sweet recollections.

CHAPTER III

TACKLE

NOT long ago a member of the American armed forces, an ardent fisherman, wished, whilst training in this country, to test his skill with our sea-trout. He had no gear, and he solicited the assistance of a British angler. Together they visited a tackle shop in a small town in the provinces. The tackle dealer, after listening to a list of the items desired, said that he had all the necessary requirements, and produced a rod, reel, tapered line, tapered casts, together with a quantity of flies. The outfit appeared to be satisfactory in all respects, but the total sum required was in the neighbourhood of twenty pounds. The prospective customer intimated that he was prepared to pay that amount, but his adviser considered that the price was too heavy for only a few days' angling, and hinted to the American that he should visit a nearby village inn which catered for sea-trout anglers who fish an adjacent river.

The suggestion received a ready response and contact was soon made with the landlord, who enjoys using a rod as much as his numerous clients. Quickly a derelict rod, an old-fashioned brass reel much the worse for wear, a short length of discarded line, a new gut cast and a fly, popular for day-time fishing on this particular water, were assembled.

No fisherman ever went forth more gaily than did this man of the States, and his quips regarding his lack of experience with the monsters that he had heard were to be caught in the English brooks greatly amused the more orthodox members of the craft staying at the inn. He declined the offer of a landing net, as he said that he thought that by the employment of such a devastating instrument he would be taking an unkind advantage of any fish which patronized his efforts.

Within a couple of hours he returned with a brace of nice sea-trout, each weighing a pound and a half. So elated was he that he said he would have willingly paid the twenty pounds for the kit offered to him by the tackle dealer, as the sport that he had enjoyed was worth any money. He added that no broncho could jump and rear like the two fish which had caused him such a sweat, and he promised himself a real good time with the hell-fire little devils when the war was won.

I quote this incident as an answer to those who maintain that sea-trout can be taken only with expensive tackle. Not unnaturally, most anglers are fond of displaying rods and other equipment of a costly character, but price alone is not the deciding factor for achieving success with the sea-trout.

To deal satisfactorily with this much-debated subject concerning tackle, the better way is to divide the chapter into two parts and to consider fly-work and spinning separately. Each of these two classes of angling has a large number of followers, while many fishers find pleasure in resorting to both methods.

Choosing fly-fishing firstly, the most important item to be taken into account is the rod.

Some anglers are of opinion that for sea-trout and grilse a stout rod of twelve feet or more in length is required. If these men are content to wield a rod weigh-

ing approximately a pound, hour after hour, they are welcome to the exertion. Personally, I see no point in making a toil of pleasure, and I most certainly do not appreciate the need for heavy weapons.

Having hooked and landed a salmon of thirty pounds with light trout tackle, I refuse to load myself with a long and comparatively weighty rod for the purpose of catching a sea-trout of two or three pounds, or even the more unlikely specimen of eight pounds.

My favourite sea-trout rod has a length of nine and a half feet, with a weight of about seven ounces. This is simply an ordinary built cane trout fly-rod, and this article has never let me down.

You do not require a rod with which to skull-drag your fish or to lift it bodily out of the water. All you need is a rod with just sufficient power to enable you to guide your fish away from ugly weed-beds and snaggy banks, and to play the fish to a standstill. The landing net will accomplish the heavier duty of removing the fish from the water.

There are many suitable rods on the market and, in normal times, you should experience no difficulty in making a proper selection.

With this type of rod I think that you cannot improve on an ordinary aluminium fly-reel. From choice I use one with a fixed check. With the optional check there is always the risk of an overrun if the check is unwittingly left off. The size which I prefer is one of three inches. The agate line guard is an asset to the reel, as, with constant wear, the line will make cuts in the aluminium cross-bar of the reel.

In selecting a reel try it first on the assembled rod, so as to be sure that the rod and reel form a perfect balance. This is a highly important qualification for ease and perfection in casting.

Of course, there is a wide range of reels formed of brass, bronzed brass, gunmetal and bakelite, but the aluminium patterns will take a lot of beating. In addition, reels with choice devices and mechanisms are at your command, and every angler has his own predilection.

The line is the next item for serious thought. There are many excellent makes from which to choose, and if one of these, the product of a reputable manufacturer, be selected, the angler will be saved unnecessary misgivings.

The double-tapered pattern is deservedly popular, and, if possible, you should obtain one of these, but see that it is pliable ; also satisfy yourself that it possesses a fair amount of stiffness so as to permit of an easy shoot, especially against a strong wind. These lines are prepared in various tapers to suit different lengths of rods, and you are advised to buy one to match your rod, otherwise you will upset the balance as a whole.

An ingenious tapered line is one known as the duplex design. This has a different taper at each end and fulfils the functions of two distinct lines.

Many good types of level lines are also on the market, and these fully answer their purpose. The price of these level lines is much less than that charged for the tapered kinds.

The usual length of thirty yards, together with a similar amount of backing, is ample for most occasions.

A note of warning is not out of place at this stage, and this is, take every care of your line. After your day's trip do not leave a wet line on the reel, but dry it naturally either on a winder or round the back of a wooden chair. Never, for drying purposes, place the line near a fire.

If the line is treated kindly it will be reliable for years,

but if it does not receive proper attention it will soon rot. I have heard many complaints about alleged rotten lines, but invariably the fault has been with the angler and not with the manufacturer.

A generous supply of casts is essential, as accidents are prone to happen, however careful an angler may be; awkward trees or submerged roots have a pernicious habit of creating trouble, and to be deprived suddenly of the only suitable cast is a catastrophe.

I am a strong believer in fine tackle, and for day-work with sea-trout 3X satisfies me, but for night fishing I mount 2X. As I never attach more than one fly, a cast of two yards fulfils my requirements.

Naturally, this is merely a matter of opinion, and every angler follows his own inclination. Numerous sea-trout fishermen need casts of much heavier size, but I think that a fine cast stands a greater chance of accounting for fish, especially in clear water.

I have never lost a fish owing to a fractured cast, but every time before starting operations I make sure that the cast is in a perfect condition, and, as my casts are ones of silkworm gut, I do not run risks by employing one for too lengthy a period. Silkworm gut weakens with use, so to abandon a doubtful cast is much wiser than to miss a good fish.

To apply the acid test to a cast, so as to ascertain whether it is sound, take the cast, when dry, in both hands and give it a strong, steady pull, experimenting with about eighteen inches at a time. Do not, of course, subject it to vicious jerks.

In addition to the silkworm gut, casts are formed of gut substitute, synthetic gut and other materials. Many claims are advanced for these artificial gut casts, but only experience will prove whether the silkworm gut can be ousted.

Silkworm gut and gut substitute must be thoroughly soaked in water before the casts are knotted. The time allowed for soaking depends on the gauge of the cast. The fine sizes need about half an hour's immersion, and a period of two hours is not out of proportion for the thick type used for salmon fishing: a few minutes too long is better than a few minutes too short.

Synthetic or artificial gut can be knotted without being soaked.

In selecting any casts be sure to purchase a good brand. Silkworm gut varies considerably in quality and reputable manufacturers use only the best.

We will now turn our attention to the tackle needed for spinning. Here again we are faced with a diversity of views. Probably this broad outlook has its virtues, otherwise we all would be working to one standard, irrespective of individual tastes and abilities.

Some anglers are not content unless they are sweeping through the air huge rods of sixteen feet in length, with a weight of two pounds. Others, not quite so robust, prefer less unwieldy instruments for their task. The disciples of each school, however, will assure you that theirs is the better proposition, and, what is more, both sects have complete faith in their respective contentions. How difficult it is, therefore, to offer a convincing lead to the lay mind. The most that any unbiased fisher can do is to leave the subject an open one.

Hundreds of persons, when embarking on their initial fishing exploits, select a certain type of rod, persevere with it and thus become unresponsive to the efficacies of other kinds. This is very regrettable, as possibly these recruits would have grown more expert had they given trials to a variety of rods and then decided upon the pattern which they could employ with the greatest of ease.

If the chance occurs to you of making a few throws with a friend's rod, especially if his rod is totally at variance in length and weight to the one which you use, avail yourself of the opportunity. By so doing you can form a ready estimation of the merits and demerits of both makes.

Although when purchasing a tackle outfit you assemble the rod and reel and make several false casts, you cannot arrive at a true opinion of the articles until you have made a test with them in actual waterside conditions.

A spinning rod may be regarded as being effective when, *inter alia*, it facilitates distant and accurate casting.

Most spinning rods are built in lengths ranging from eight feet to twelve feet, but many light ones of an intriguing character, in lengths from seven feet to eight feet six inches, are obtainable.

While some spinning rods are constructed of green-heart, the more expensive types are built of cane, and the refinements supplied with the better-class rods vary in proportion to the price.

Rightly you will expect me to offer a suggestion on this complex subject, but I must confine myself to the results of personal experience.

Many spinning rods have passed through my hands, and the one which meets with my approval was built to order. It is in reality a spinning rod built for salmon fishing, but I know none better for sea-trout. It is constructed of cane with lockfast joints, and is ten feet in length. The three joints are closely whipped and are fitted with agate rings, three on the top joint, three on the middle joint and one on the bottom joint, in addition to the usual agate end ring.

With a specific object I mention the number and placings of the agate rings. If you examine most spinning

rods, you will find that the top joint is supplied with two agate rings and the second joint with a like number. If a heavy salmon is hooked and it gives some trouble, the rod with the larger total of rings together with close whippings will bear the strain without ill effects. If the strain is not so equally distributed, the possibility of a fractured rod is ever present.

This special rod, fitted with a Coxon aerial reel of four and a half inches, is superb in action and has stood the test of year after year. Even now it is as good as when it was built.

Although I have specified a certain reel, an opinion should not be formed that this is the only or the best reel at your command. I mentioned this reel precisely as it is the one which I mount on the particular rod. There are, however, numerous excellent reels suitable for spinning from which to make a selection. Some of these reels are truly marvellous in their perfect mechanism and are noted for their high standard of workmanship.

I must confess that if, with the object of purchasing a spinning reel, I entered a tackle shop in normal times, I should be at a loss to make up my mind, as there are so many reels worthy of notice; and if I had unlimited means I should probably buy a score of different patterns to try out. No doubt, after serious experiments, I should still be unable to suggest which is the finest tool. Therefore my advice to a tyro is to decide on a model produced by a reputable firm and be satisfied.

A level-plaited silk line of sixty yards in length and a breaking strain of ten pounds is appropriate for spinning for sea-trout. If not waterproofed, the line should be thoroughly dressed with oil, as this will prolong the life of the line, while the oiling also tends for smoother running.

Some minnow tackles are supplied with a gut mount

of a yard in length, including two steel box swivels, each generally three-eighths of an inch long.

If you wish to mount metal minnows you will require a stock of gut casts one yard long and 1X in size, together with a supply of small steel box swivels. I suggest a somewhat heavier size of gut casts for spinning than that used for fly-work, as the trebles are liable to foul weeds and twigs, and, to retrieve the minnow, force has often to be employed.

Should you contemplate threadline fishing, you will require a special reel, usually described as a "fixed spool" or "stationary drum" pattern. Several reliable makes are now on the market, and each will function with a maximum of ease. In addition, a suitable line is necessary: A waxed, plaited silk one of fifty yards, with a breaking strain of six pounds, will suffice for sea-trout spinning, but some anglers prefer to use a gut substitute line.

The advantages of threadlining may be briefly outlined as follows. The minnow or other similar bait can be cast long distances direct from the reel, without the risk of an overrun. The slipping clutch of the reel permits a hooked fish to jump suddenly and bolt without breaking the line, although at that instant the angler is reeling in the fish. Further, the line can be retrieved with the utmost rapidity.

I am not a lover of threadlining, as the time occupied in playing a fish is, in my opinion, altogether too long. If you hook, in a desirable pool, a sea-trout of two pounds, the fish, by the time it has spent itself, will have covered practically all the water and, as a result of its wild darts, will have so disturbed the pool that other likely fish will be put down for a lengthy period.

This style of fishing is, I maintain, suitable only when the angler is working private waters and then when he

has the reach for his sole enjoyment, otherwise the thread-liner is a nuisance to his fellows. He then is on a par with a "rabbit" on a golf course who, by his footling, holds up all the other players, but in that contingency you can relieve yourself by shouting "fore."

Some years ago I was, with half a dozen other fishermen, trying for bass from a bridge that spans an estuary. We were float-fishing and were doing nicely until the advent of a man with a threadline outfit. This fresh arrival soon found himself engaged with a pugnacious bass weighing a trifle over six pounds. But what a commotion ensued. To and fro, forwards and backwards, the hooked one raced and splashed, gathering first one and then another of the drifting tackles belonging to the helpless anglers. Ultimately, after some relevant, albeit forcible, remarks from the aggrieved ones, the threadliner left the bridge for a more convenient stance on the bankside and managed to coax his quarry ashore. By this time the remainder of us had, in disgust, packed our rods and gear, leaving the modernist in undisputed occupation.

As another sidelight, and a new one on threadlining, I cannot do better than to quote the original and spontaneous views of an expert salmon and sea-trout fisher, a man who, on English and Scotch waters, is noted for his extraordinary ability with the rod. In the course of a fishing trip along a river-bank, during the past month, I met the skilled one just as he had grassed a beautiful fresh-run cock salmon of thirty odd pounds, and jokingly I asked him if his success was due to threadlining. "Threadlining be damned!" he answered, and continued, "I've given the idea a proper trial, but I consider that it is a brutal and cruel method. I shoot and fish, and although I am everlastingly killing God's creatures, I do so as mercifully as possible. See that fish. Well,



STREAMY WATER



LIGHT AND SHADE

it was out of the water and dead within eight minutes of it taking the minnow. Now, if I had been threadlining it would have been tortured for two hours before I could have brought it to the gaff, and I call that wanton cruelty. There's no sense in it."

Strange as it may seem, this legitimate killer of birds and fish has a very tender heart, and in the sanctum of his fishing cottage there is a beige curtain hanging over a door. This curtain he will never allow to be touched, as in the autumn it is a sanctuary for many butterflies, Red Admirals and peacocks, tortoiseshells and brimstones; and the old "sport" derives a wealth of happiness by gazing affectionately on what he calls his pets.

Truly, we are a queer mixture, and anglers are not wanting in peculiarities.

As threadlining is growing in popularity, every aspect of that form of fishing deserves careful analysis and deep thought.

CHAPTER IV

OTHER TACKLE, FLIES AND MINNOWS

HAVING disposed of the fundamentals needed for sea-trout fishing, attention can now be paid to the ancillaries. Of these many are essential, while some, being of secondary importance, may be relegated to the sphere of joyful anticipation.

The chief obstacle in writing a book on angling is that the author has to cater for both the novice and the expert. The former will say, "I should like to read more about that." while the latter will dismiss much

with the words " I already know all about that." Therefore, for obvious reasons, the book has to be guided along the middle course with the object of endeavouring to satisfy alike the unsophisticated and the blasé.

While to accumulate any and every item of gear is very alluring, there is much to be said for the man who prefers to travel light. He who, when going fishing, clutters himself with every imaginable gadget is not always to be envied. On the other hand, the angler who cuts his paraphernalia too fine may, on occasion, be placed in the unhappy position of finding that he is minus something which at that fateful moment is of primary value.

A landing net is very necessary and the one customarily used for brown trout is adequate for sea-trout up to a weight of three or four pounds. Beyond that limit a larger net is usually required.

Some anglers, hoping to connect with a specimen of eight or ten pounds, arm themselves with a gaff. For outsize fish a gaff is decidedly convenient, but care should be exercised when employing this weapon. If possible, force the point of the gaff through the root of the dorsal fin which is exceedingly tough. If you unluckily puncture the back of the fish, blood will flow profusely and to such an extent that the fish will quickly deteriorate. Should you be faced with this misfortune, lose no time in plugging the hole with grass. By resorting to this act of first aid you will stop the bleeding.

Numerous fishers have a strong partiality for the tailer. This implement is most effective if properly employed. Further, it is light and easy to carry.

A fishing bag of ample proportions is another item of utility, for in it you can pack a not inconsiderable quantity of tackle, together with your spoil. These bags, constructed of various materials, are made to suit the economical as well as the wealthy man. The superior patterns,

in addition to providing many pleasing devices, are cheaper in the end, as they defy years of hard wear.

A fly-box is highly essential, and the types from which to make a selection are so varied that the desires of the most fastidious angler can be met. Boxes with respectively six, twelve, sixteen or twenty-four compartments are the ones in general use. Other boxes are fashioned with clips, and these have capacities for holding any number of flies up to a total of 120. In addition there are such novelties as revolving boxes, and others are supplied with plastic material. Yet again there are many forms of fly-books.

Another useful adjunct is a tackle-box for carrying metal minnows and like lures. Some anglers are content to drop into their fishing bags these minnows with trebles attached. If you possess a tidy mind, you will avoid confusion and annoyance by packing your minnows orderly in a partitioned receptacle.

An item which should not be omitted from your kit is a damping-box for casts. As may be expected, many of these utensils are fashioned for your choice, and you will have no trouble in making a wise selection. A note of warning should, however, be sounded. Do not leave your casts between the damp felts when your day's angling is finished. Continuous moisture will weaken the casts and eventually cause them to rot.

There are many forms of line dryers, and as several of these are most inexpensive, you should not fail to procure one.

A balance for weighing the captured fish is considered by some anglers to be a luxury and an unnecessary one, but I can assure you that you will experience a lot of gratification by attaching your capture to the hook of a balance and reading the weight. These balances are definitely not prohibitive in price, and, in addition to

those with small ranges, you can secure one that will register up to fifty pounds.

Now the time has arrived when consideration can be given to that debatable and inexhaustible subject of artificial flies and minnows. I must confess that I approach, with circumspection, if not diffidence, this evergreen topic, because I swear by one fly for night fishing and one minnow and three, perhaps four, flies for day work. An extremely small repertoire, I admit, but, having given fair trials to scores of other lures of similar character, I take a stand on years of experience, and contend that if the sea-trout will not accept my favourites, they usually will look at none else.

One benefit which accrues from my methods is my complete indifference to fly-boxes and tackle-boxes when I answer the seasonal call of the sea-trout.

But, naturally, as all other anglers are not of my way of thinking and will, no doubt, welcome a list of serviceable attractions, I must run through a portion of the gamut of sea-trout lures.

Although for salmon and brown trout-fishing there are hundreds of different and seductive flies and minnows, I really believe that for the sea-trout enthusiast the available hook coverings are multiplied *ad infinitum*.

A sea-trout fly is much larger than the size mounted for brown trout, and smaller than the salmon pattern. The size of the hook which I favour for night work for sea-trout is number 3 Redditch scale or number 12 Pennel or "New" scale.

Most of the sea-trout flies are merely replicas of salmon flies and are known by identical names.

Ones which I have tried with mixed results are Alexandra, Black and Gold, Black and Teal, Blue Boy, Butcher, Claret Jay, Dusty Miller, Fiery Brown,

Jock Scott, Peacock, Silver Doctor and Thunder and Lightning.

There are, of course, many more standard patterns, some of which are, I think, more deadly on particular waters, at certain times, than the ones which I have enumerated. The angler should, therefore, endeavour to glean from local people the type of fly which kills most fish.

The flies which I have mentioned, together with the other orthodox models, are dressed on single hooks, two hooks and a double hook, and even with three double hooks; while fly spinners are also supplied to tempt the angler as well as the fish. If the fisherman is unable to find a fly that appeals to him, he must, indeed, be exceedingly hard to please.



FLY SPINNER

Of course, like the philatelist, he can amuse himself by making a pretty collection.

An old angling friend of mine was smitten with this craze, and he was ever adding to his hoard. On wet days he would employ himself happily by gazing at the gaudy dressings and fingering them. He rarely visited the river as he was past the age for fishing activities, and I firmly believe that he had reached a stage when he would have regretted wetting a feather. Whenever he was asked if he missed very much the thrills of the winding waterway, he would look up smilingly and intimate that in his day he had made the most of his golden opportunities, then add cryptically, "As they say in some parts of the country, you can't have two forenoons in one day." However, he enjoyed, in the dry, many hours with his gay specimens, and he was always delighted to recollect that with this pattern he

caught a six-pounder, or with that an eight pounder ; such is the fascination of angling.

Metal minnows, in an almost endless variety, are made for the anglers' benefit. Devon minnows, slotted and slotless, with left or right-hand spin, are supplied in gilt or silver, green or blue, brown or spotted and in sizes upwards from an inch in length. Some shanks are round, others have flat sides and several are fluted. These are furnished with one, two or four trebles.

The metal minnow is a delusive instrument if it is not built properly, and here, I suggest, the crux of the spinning situation is encountered. No doubt you have seen the natural minnow, on your approach, dart from the bank-side. Probably you have watched these little rascals sailing idly through the water. But I ask you at once, have you seen one swimming obliquely upstream ? Of course not, for they cruise on an even keel. They may rise quickly in a slanting position to the surface, but their normal movement is in a horizontal plane. What, then, do you think of the action of a spun metal minnow that, as you wind your reel, comes all the way towards you with its head up and its tail down ?

If you have never given consideration to this entertaining problem, take my advice and scrutinize carefully the movements of your minnow when you next go spinning. I am satisfied that the difference between a fisherman's failure and success can, in many instances, be traced to the swim of the minnow. If anglers, when spinning, paid greater attention to this important detail, I am sure that the time so spent would bring its own reward. Unfortunately for them, many anglers mount metal minnows, cast and retrieve, hoping for the best, without giving a second's thought to the elementary

rule of the need of providing lifelike displays by their artificials. A fish is not a ninny, and no self-respecting sea-trout is likely to fall to an obvious impostor.

The fault with numerous metal minnows is that the wings are fixed too far forward, with the consequence the



MINNOW
Wings too far forward



MINNOW
Wings in right position

balance is upset, and the tail droops. Therefore my suggestion is select, or have made, minnows with the wings mounted well back on the shank. If this desideratum is attained the minnow will swim in a level position, and its natural poise and progression cannot fail to attract any fish in its vicinity.

For all my spinning I adhere to one size of metal minnow and that is a length of $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches. This may sound a wee bit conservative, but the shanks are specially made for me to my own specifications and, by constant use, I have become so accustomed to their weight and flight that to throw the lure is now merely a mechanical

motion. Habit is very remarkable and somehow, after years of casting, I expect the minnow to drop at a certain distance and travel a definite number of yards before the familiar thud of a taking fish is felt. I work in accordance with this schedule each time when I start operations in a favourite stretch of water, but should my efforts be unavailing within a brief spell, I adopt other tactics and continue with various experiments until fate is kind.

My many friends who fish the river of my choice are just as methodical in their line of approach and on the conclusion of our trips we revel in comparing notes. By this mutual exchange of ideas we are ever learning more about the secrets of our particular length of river, and, undoubtedly, every reach of water repays the angler for an intensive study.

Metal spoon baits, in scores of patterns, may be regarded as being sure enticements to the sea-trout, while all manner of patent spinners can be obtained at the more important tackle shops. The sea-trout angler has thus no grounds for complaining that his wants are not truly and fully met.

Years ago the "Colorado" spoon brought to me a fair amount of success, but I switched over to the minnow which I prefer and which never seems to disappoint me. However, every man must follow his special taste, and some men are more partial to a spoon bait than to a minnow.



"COLORADO"
SPOON

Notwithstanding that the main articles have received attention, there are several oddments which occur to me as being worthy of notice. These, although they are not really essential to the sea-trout angler, may be placed in the category of highly desirable trifles.

or aids to more efficient labour. Some certainly will appeal to the careful man, whilst others may be noted for future consideration.

Reel bags, so often ignored by fishermen, are something more than a fussy man's fad: they are covers for pieces of delicate mechanism. When you realize that some fixed spool reels are composed of thirty or more parts, ranging from tiny screws and washers to the eccentric bearing, you will appreciate the need for safeguarding the reel from dust and grit. However heedful you may be, a fishing bag has a knack of collecting bits of dirt; and to drop an unprotected reel into a general hold-all is simply asking for ultimate trouble. Strong waterproof reel bags can be purchased for about three shillings each, and they are well worth that small sum. As an alternative, I have known men who have used discarded socks for the purpose of shielding their reels against dust and danger. Anything is better than to allow a valuable reel to be exposed to the risk of insidious damage.

Another asset is a stout rubber band placed round the butt of the rod. Before assembling the rod and reel, slip the band over the butt above the reel fitting. If the band is too slack, merely give it a twist and let it make a double turn round the rod. This will provide an ideal means of holding a metal spinner or even a large fly. The fly rings mounted by the makers on many rods are not large enough to take the barb of a big hook. When passing from pool to pool, or climbing over fences, a dangling treble or a drifting fly can entail inconveniences and irritations. Consequently, this simple rubber contrivance will prove of much benefit. Further, if at the end of your day's trip, you do not wish to strip your gear, you will find the rubber wrapping a perfect method for confining the lure in readiness for the morrow's expedition.

A small file is not always included by the angler in his equipment, yet this tool is invaluable at times. A treble frequently fouls boulders and stones, with the result that the points are either blunted or slightly turned. The hook of a fly also occasionally meets with a similar fate. A few light rubs with the file will quickly remedy these defects.

Before making the first cast, a wise precaution is to satisfy yourself that the hooks are true, as when you tighten in a fish, you want to be sure that the hook goes well home. If the hook is badly turned or the point is weak, you should have no hesitation in scrapping it immediately, for to use a doubtful hook is poor and foolish economy.

Be foresighted and carry a tin of "Lineflote" in your fishing bag, as, if you visit outlandish places, you may be unable to obtain a tin at the time that you require one. Although waterproofed lines do not need dressing, the application periodically of a little "Lineflote" or similar preparation, will cause the line to be more buoyant. When using the "Lineflote" the best way is to hang the line between two posts and then, with a small piece of rag, work the mixture, yard by yard, into the line. The object of suspending the line is to avoid picking up particles of dirt by letting the line fall on the ground.

In my fishing bag can always be found a small coil of string, and that provision for times of emergency has saved me many unpleasant experiences. In addition to the repair of accidental breakages too numerous to mention in detail, that string has come to my assistance when, with a back cast, my fly has lodged in an overhead branch. If all other attempts have been abortive, I have obtained a suitable stone and, with the string attached, have tossed the missile over the offending

branch. Then, with a steady pull on both ends of the string, I have drawn the spreading twigs within reach of my hand and have thus been able to recover my fly.

A length of stout cord or binder twine is another useful item. If you should be sufficiently fortunate to land a really big fish, an easy way to carry it is to tie the cord round the root of the tail, pass the cord through the gill and mouth, and bring the cord back to the loop round the tail. You can thus carry the fish by means of the cord, in the same manner as you would carry a bag. This is the way we usually deal with a salmon.

Whatever else you omit from your collection of gear, do not go fishing without your penknife or a small pair of scissors, otherwise you will be in want of a necessary implement immediately on reaching the water, for the vagaries of an angling trip are usually unexpected.

Finally, if your journeys to the river have to be made by rail, give serious thought to the purchase of a rod case, as the luggage rack is not adequate for an unprotected rod. You may be cautious, and you may take every precaution, but, notwithstanding your studied care, the chances are that somebody will hurriedly push a heavy bag against the rod tip, and, though the culprit will say "Sorry," your expedition will be spoilt. Rod cases, such as aluminium tubes, are made in appropriate lengths for single rods, while, if you desire to take several rods, wooden boxes are constructed to hold rods in quantity and of various lengths. Although these boxes are a trifle cumbersome, you will prefer an encumbrance to a broken rod.

The sum total of an angler's sea-trout requirements is not very alarming, and the wise man can generally reduce his outfit to a limit which will give to him complete satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

OTHER MEANS OF CATCHING SEA-TROUT

FROM the foregoing chapters you may imagine that sea-trout can be caught only by mounting an artificial fly or by spinning a metal minnow, but that is not the case as the sea-trout, like most fish, will fall a prey to other devices.

To renew my many associations with sea-trout angling, and to bring my experiences up to date, I have, for several months, been staying within a hundred yards of a noted salmon and sea-trout water which, from time to time, for a score of years has afforded to me innumerable thrills.

Before commencing this chapter, I strolled down to see an old angling friend, whose house is situated on the river-bank, and who owns the fishing rights for several miles on this river. After an entertaining pow-wow on sea-trout in general, and on those fish in particular which come through his waters, I quietly put the innocuous question to him, "Besides fly fishing and spinning, are there other means of catching sea-trout?"

The old gentleman, in a most leisurely fashion, tapped the spent ash from his pipe, refilled his constant companion, and, after satisfying himself that the fresh charge was well alight, looked at me fixedly for a few seconds. Suddenly he broke the silence by saying, in an unmistakably determined way, "Yes. Poaching." I might have expected such an answer, as my friend is a whole-hearted "purist." With fly, and fly only, may the brown trout in his river be caught. He permits of no

other method, and for a fisherman to ask him whether a worm could be used would probably cause the fly exponent to have an apoplectic seizure, so bitter is he towards "wormists."

Throughout the length of this river, a person who employs a worm is always described as being a poacher, and is regarded by the local rod-men as being outside the pale of honest anglers.

However, my duty is not to moralise, but to offer information, whether or not I am in agreement with the means to which resort is made in luring the sea-trout.

Before describing the different ways of worming, I must warn intending followers of this form of fishing, to read carefully the regulations on their licences, as in some instances the bye-laws are most definite on the subject, and the failure to abide by such may lead to unpleasant consequences.

As an example I will quote from the bye-laws which refer to one Fishery District.

"No person shall use in connection with fishing with rod and line for migratory trout in any waters within the Fishery District any float carrying or supporting any lure or bait." This, without question, puts paid to float tackle with worms.

"No prawn, shrimp or worm shall be used in connection with fishing with rod and line for migratory trout in any waters within the Fishery District before the first day of May in any year." Here again, is a district ruling and one which, while allowing the use of a worm, does so only after a certain date.

Another interesting bye-law for this Fishery District reads, "The period during which it shall be lawful to use a gaff in connection with fishing by a rod and line for migratory trout shall be the period between the

thirtieth day of April and the first day of September following."

As some anglers cannot understand this injunction, I may state that its object is to prevent the destruction of kelts which may stay in the river and perhaps mend prior to the 30th April, also to avoid killing, after the 1st September, salmon ready to spawn: those red cock fish with their elongated beaks, and the hen fish no longer silvery but unpicturesque with their dark backs and leaden hued bellies.

Having cleared the air regarding the possibilities of worm fishing, we will consider the tackle required for this manner of catching the sea-trout.

The ordinary fly rod, reel and line may be pressed into service, although I should hesitate to use my fly rod for this purpose, as the probability is a fat eel will take the bait and twist its tail round a snag or a stone when it notices the pull from the reel. Far better to work with an inexpensive coarse fishing rod built with plenty of power, so that the spoil, be it eel or sea-trout, can be lifted bodily out of the water. Of course, angling of this character precludes all the niceties of playing and netting the hooked one. There is no need to be finicky about gut and hooks: strength must be the chief qualification, as the time for worming is when the water is coloured and thick. A "gut bottom," as it is described, is good enough. This should be formed of one yard of gut, ix in size, with a hook number 6, 7 or 8. A tin of split shots is also necessary. If, in the water of your choice, you are allowed to use a float, any one of the numerous roach or Sheffield patterns is suitable.

If you have never dabbled in this form of recreation, you will rightly ask if the crafty sea-trout can be won in so prosaic a manner. I can answer that question with

an emphatic affirmative and add that, as the worm is the natural food of most fish, the wriggler is a deadly lure for sea-trout.

An illuminating illustration of the killing properties of this common worm came to my notice recently.

Entering a river much favoured by sea-trout, is an insignificant brooklet which, in the summer months, is nothing more than a series of muddy pools connected by an almost imperceptible trickle.

One year, during spring and summer, no measurable rain fell for several months, and the river was at a lower level than had ever been known. Salmon fishers were in despair, and sea-trout anglers gloomily regarded the shrinking waters. The pools in the brooklet evaporated and the course was littered with tins and other debris.

Late September brought with it tropical rain, and consequent heavy floods. The river spread itself over its banks and the brooklet's way was transformed into a dirty torrent. An old man through whose garden the raging stream raced, assembled a shabby rod and some rough tackle. Then, for an hour in the morning, he endeavoured to fish with a lobworm, but the current was too strong. In the evening, however, the fury of the spate subsided and, close to a bend in the bank, a tiny backwater provided an opportunity for keeping a baited hook quiescent on the bed of the stream. The old man was fully alive to this fact, as he was no novice at this game, and in a couple of hours he hiked out eleven brown trout of goodly size and four sea-trout ranging from a pound to two pounds in weight. A stranger to this district would scarcely have thought that sea-trout could be taken from such an inauspicious place, but angling supplies some queer illusions for those not initiated in all its secrets.

Should you intend to try your hand when the water is low and clear, finer tackle is more serviceable, and I recommend a "gut bottom" with a gauge of 3x, but you will have to be alert and strike quickly, so as to circumvent the nibbles of eels. A sea-trout usually takes the baited hook unhesitatingly and darts away, but an eel starts on the head or the tail of the worm and quietly gorges both worm and hook.

There are many ways of fishing with worms, and I will deal briefly with a few of them.

When employing a float, sufficient split shots should be squeezed on the gut, so that the float assumes a perpendicular position: in other words the float cocks. In arranging the split shots, place one about a foot from the hook and add more at intervals of three or six inches until the weight is sufficient to cock the float.

This float tackle can be used either stationary in a backwater, or by allowing it to drift with a very slow current. In both these cases the worm should clear, by two or three inches, the bed of the river.

If no float is attached to the gear, less split shots are necessary, and the baited hook should either lie on the bottom of a backwater, or move with a strong and fast current.

Ledgering and upstream casting are other methods of worming.

In a similar manner to the use of worms, other natural baits such as a bunch of maggots or wasp grubs may be employed; while various preserved baits, including prawns, can be purchased.

Live baiting with a natural minnow finds favour on certain waters, and spinning with a like bait is also practised.

Thus, what with patent lures, there seems to be no

end to the artifices offered to the angler for the undoing of the sea-trout.

To those who, after reading these notes on worming, feel tempted to put the methods into operation, I cannot resist saying "Don't," and to those who are already experts with the worm I make a special appeal to give the artificial fly a prolonged and an exhaustive trial.

Fly work is easy, clean and sporting. Further, fly fishing is not the privilege of one class of anglers, it is the right of all, and there are no grounds for thinking that it is an expensive hobby. Before war conditions sent all tackle prices soaring to ridiculous heights, a complete equipment of rod, reel, line, casts and flies could be purchased new for a sum under a pound. In fact a beginner's fly fishing outfit at the price of eighteen shillings and twopence is advertised in a catalogue issued in 1940 by one of our leading tackle manufacturers, and that firm, while catering for the slender purse, specializes in goods of the highest grade; therefore, the outlay of a modest amount did not mean that the articles were "cheap and nasty," as behind the transaction was a guarantee by this firm of repute. Consequently I sincerely hope that this statement will be read by the many who regard fly fishing solely in the light of expense.

Worming is not always considered to be *de jure*, even by its followers who sometimes practise it surreptitiously. No doubt, the expressed opinions of these anglers would be very definite, but the opinions implied by their actions is more convincing.

One day, two fishermen arrived at an inn where I was staying and they impressed me with their ability to slay sea-trout. They produced for my benefit a lovely collection of flies and spinners, and recounted tales of their huge successes in distant waters. As, up to then, my trip had not rewarded me with much sport, I anticipated

with pleasure the reports that would be forthcoming from these two experts after they had wetted their lines in the contiguous river. They spent that afternoon in assembling their gear and mounting flies in readiness for the evening's expedition. After tea they started for the fray and they were faultlessly equipped with gear and waders. I was standing outside the inn at the time, and naturally I wished them the best of luck. One angler had proceeded about a dozen yards, while his companion had stopped to adjust his net. Suddenly, the foremost one halted, turned round and called out, "Have you got the worms?" The one with the unruly net glared at his questioner, saw the uncontrollable smile on my face, burst out laughing and exclaimed to his friend, "You ruddy idiot. You bawl out, so that all the ruddy village can hear, have I got the ruddy worms. Oh, you." The joke and its sequel were so spontaneous, that the three of us laughed heartily without restraint.

However, when the two returned from an evening's hard toil, neither had touched a fish, but I did not inquire whether the flies had failed as well as the worms.

Yet one more amusing tilt at another wormer's subterfuge. At a well-known resort, frequented by numerous sea-trout anglers, arrived two friends, strangers to me, eager for conquest. As I was intent on night fishing at the time, my offices were sought by the couple. My experience was unreservedly placed at their disposal, and I displayed the flies which had already assisted me in collecting a few fish. The three of us mounted identical flies and we set forth gleefully when the sun had finished a September day's duty.

Upon reaching the water I explained the layout of my favourite pool. Without any ado one of the pair elected to remain near me, while the other said that he preferred the lower end of the reach. The night was cloudless,

and the full glory of the stars gave enough light to enable us to see the river plainly and the dark bushes bordering the far bank. As no breeze played upon the trees and undergrowth, the silence was intense, for even the river flowed quietly. So subdued was the atmosphere we could almost hear the grass grow. Ever and anon, a flitting bat collided with my extended line, causing me to make a momentary strike in expectation of a feeding sea-trout. Meanwhile, from the tail section of the pool came repeated sounds of slight plops and reel windings. At last, wondering what was the meaning of these signs of action, I remarked to my nearby companion, "Your friend appears to be doing some business." A laugh greeted my comment, and then came the reply, "Yes. He is throwing a worm. He does not believe in a fly." Thus was another alleged sportsman and illicit wormer unmasked.

However, if you must worm, be true to yourself and to your confrères by playing a straight bat. These peccadillos which I have described lead nowhere and they do not hoodwink your fellows who will undoubtedly think better of you if you have the courage of your convictions.

The worst example of duplicity to come to my knowledge occurred several years back. A small party, staying at a country house for the purpose of participating in the joys of sea-trout fishing in private waters, included one member who kept himself somewhat aloof from the other anglers, and when arrangements were made for a day's visit to a distant length, the detached one worked in the home waters; while if the consensus of views was in favour of a trial in the immediate stretch, the only objector departed for a lonely jaunt far upstream.

Strange as it may seem, this peculiar person was always decrying the use of worms, although the other rodsters were not interested in the irrelevant subject.

One morning, having to deal with some pressing corre-

spondence, I was unable to accompany those who were bound for a place two or three miles away up the river.

When lunch was finished I decided to have a look at the state of the home waters, as during the preceding night a considerable amount of rain had fallen.

Passing round a bend which is obscured by a thick spinney, I came unexpectedly near our unsociable associate. I stopped, looked and continued my walk. With a float he was swimming a worm.

On the following day this gentleman decided that business required his return at once, so from my ken disappeared another wormer, leaving behind him, in my estimation, a not altogether creditable reputation.

You will now probably appreciate that my suggestion to play a straight bat is founded on something more than mere opinion, and I may add that whilst I am a keen supporter of clean rivers, I am equally in favour of clean sport.

CHAPTER VI

HAUNTS OF THE SEA-TROUT

IF we but knew where to find the sea-trout, to persuade them to be caught would be an easy task. The difficulty which presents itself to the angler who wishes to make contact with these elusive fish is the lack of information concerning the actual whereabouts of the quarry. These fish are here to-day and gone to-morrow. Thus the anxious man with the rod can make only a shrewd guess regarding the latest movements of the sea-trout.

The greatest asset that any angler can possess is a thorough knowledge of his river. He should be acquainted with the various pools, the many stickles, the customary depth of the water and last, though not least, the manner in which the river rises as the result of heavy rain. From these data he can form a fairly reliable opinion as to the probable resting-places of the fish.

For example, if the summer level of a river, excluding from our calculations deep pools and shallow runs, registers two feet, we know that the sea-trout, providing that they have left the estuary, will be hiding in the pools. Supposing that sufficient rain falls to cause the level to reach two feet six inches, we may be sure that the fish will travel farther up the river, and, unless more fish leave the estuary, the pools that held sea-trout before the arrival of the spate will be without fish afterwards. In fact, during a freshet, it is not unusual at night-time to hear the sea-trout splashing up the stickles.

A river running, say, thirty miles from its source to the sea, will hold a certain head of fish, but those fish will not be evenly distributed throughout the length of the water, as sea-trout are ever on the move upstream if the conditions suit them.

The angler who lives near the river has every aid at his service, for not only is he cognisant of the peculiarities of the river, but he can work intelligently in accordance with rainfalls, together with first-hand details regarding the rise and fall of the water. The stranger, however, is at a big disadvantage, and he must rely on the help and advice of the "locals."

But there are a few generalities with which every visiting angler should be acquainted, and if he acts upon these he should not return with an empty creel. I will therefore mention them for the benefit of the novice.

The shoal sea-trout usually take shelter in deep water,

and in day-time they keep under bushes which spread far out from the bank.

The big fish remain in the deep pools, and in daylight they should be sought near the head of those pools. At night-time, however, the place to expect them is at the tail of the pools.

Of course, these are not rigid rules: they are merely quoted to serve as a rough guide. I generally start operations in conformity with these ideas, but if they fail to achieve their purpose I relinquish them and adopt other guiles.

Perhaps the best testimony in support of the notion that the big fish frequent the tail of the pool when darkness falls is the practice adopted by poachers. These knowledgeable nomads ford a pool, dragging a trammel after them. When the net extends from bank to bank, with the corks floating and the leads resting on the bed of the river, the other members of the gang work up from the tail of the pool, casting stones into the water as they go. The fish are thus frightened and driven into the net. You can always learn a lesson or two from the unwritten laws of the poacher's code, which are always based on personal and persistent observations.

Although sea-trout are ever journeying upstream and leaving excellent reaches to the sole enjoyment of the brown trout, there are many pools wherein the large sea-trout seem satisfied to stay for lengthy periods. These pools are, in most cases, very deep and are bounded by a bank completely obscured by trees and thick undergrowth. In some instances both banks are thus wooded. The fish apparently know that they are safe in these shaded depths, as, if both banks are protected by natural barriers, the sea-trout are never molested by fishermen, while if one bank gives accommodation to a mass of

trees, the branches are usually so extensive that to throw a fly is scarcely practicable.

I am acquainted with a pool of the latter character, and there is only one spot where a fly can be cast satisfactorily in a length of some hundred yards, and that is where an opening of a couple of yards across the water is due to a branch having been lopped. Throughout the season you can at night hear the hefty plops of specimen fish turning over in this pool, and at the place which I have indicated many a redoubtable beauty has been played to the net. From my experience I am prepared to guarantee that on every night, when the conditions are propitious, the chance of hooking a fish there is real.

Notwithstanding that an appreciable proportion of sea-trout escape capture and live to return to the estuary, numbers find their way up small tributaries and tiny branch streams, there to meet destruction at the hands of poachers.

After a spate in the spawning season I have heard of a pool, barely twelve feet square, at the head of a side stream, being literally packed with both salmon and sea-trout. The "locals," at such times, enjoy a remunerative harvest by "snatching" these fish. The *modus operandi* for this game is to cast across the pool to the far side a metal spinner furnished with several trebles, allow the contraption to sink and then reel it in slowly. The fish are so congested that the failure to foul-hook one is nearly an impossibility.

In spite of the diligence of the fish-keepers, this illegal business proceeds merrily, as for the spoil there is always a market, be it only a black one, and the big sea-trout are sold as salmon to unsuspecting customers.

True, there is nothing new under the sun, and I remember, in the days of my boyhood, the wholesale attacks that were made on shoals of grey mullet which took up

their station near the mouth of a narrow estuary. These fish, in their hundreds, would cruise up and down in a length of water not exceeding a furlong. Such close company did they keep that they could, in racing parlance, be accused of bumping and boring. They could be divided roughly into two classes—the school variety which kept to the middle course, and the bigger fish, of from two to three pounds in weight, which manœuvred between their younger kind and the banks.

Anglers in those far-off days were wont to try their skill, but the fish were not very responsive, and the capture in large quantities of these esteemed grey mullet was left to the “snatchers.” The gear of these men was formed of a long length of strong cord to which was lashed at right-angles a stout piece of wood. From this wooden crosspiece were suspended many wires of different lengths, each carrying a big fish-hook.

Taking one end of the cord with him, one man would cross the estuary to the far bank by means of a bridge, leaving the other end of the cord with his confederate on the near bank. When the two accomplices were ready they would take turns in pulling the wooden contrivance across the water, and each haul was accounted to be poor if only one fish was foul-hooked.

Man’s ingenuity for catching fish by fair means or foul seems to be unlimited, but I most assuredly do not advocate “snatching,” either by a specially-constructed device or by a metal minnow and its deadly trebles.

When the river is deep, in consequence of a spate, sea-trout run quickly, but a noteworthy feature about these fish is that when they are travelling hard through fast-flowing dirty water they will take a spinning metal minnow. A salmon, however, cannot be bothered in such circumstances.

In endeavouring to place before you a true picture of

the haunts of the sea-trout, I must qualify my remarks by stating that I have dealt, in general terms, with a river as a whole. Obviously, if you divided the river into a dozen sections, the description which applies on one day to number one section, would not necessarily be applicable to the other sections on the same day. Similarly, if you selected any other section and my comments held good for that particular one, you must not assume that identical conditions prevail elsewhere, as the results of sea-trout angling depend firstly on the state of the water and secondly on the manner in which the fish are moving. As I have already stated, the fish are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and I cannot stress that fact too much.

Another important point to be borne in mind is that while salmon require an ample flush of water to make them come in from the sea, old sea-trout can always be relied upon to make valiant efforts to struggle upstream through the shallow water. Thus there is ever present a possibility, even in bad seasons, of connecting with a fish of decent proportions; so do not despair if the fruits of your first venture's labours are not as you would wish, but persevere in likely places and then, if unrewarded, try other spots.

Without doubt salmon seasons fluctuate considerably, but the variations in the running of sea-trout are not so impressive, as, in the summers which are deficient in rain, there is enough water for a fair number of sea-trout to come through, even if they are checked here and there. At the time of severe drought the upper reaches naturally suffer the most from a paucity of fish.

If you gaze in the water as you saunter along the river-bank you will see plenty of brown trout darting away as you near their haunts. You will also espy a salmon that has not been alarmed at your approach, but you will have to be very wary to light upon a resting

sea-trout, as these fish are easily scared; in fact they seem to be endowed with an eerie faculty for scenting impending danger, and before you have an opportunity of sighting them properly they have bolted into water dark and secretive.

How crafty, therefore, must you be in your line of access. A pool may contain several sea-trout, but if you do not watch your steps you may as well cast on a meadow as into the water, for the fish have no desire to offer favours to you. I am convinced that sea-trout are more easily frightened than any other fish in our rivers. Unfortunately, numerous anglers fail utterly to recognize the need for caution and go blundering to the water's edge. Worse than that, many wade like bullocks in the water.

You should try to obliterate yourself on the river-bank, whatever species of fish you are stalking, but with sea-trout your attempts to screen yourself must be redoubled, and even then the odds are ten to one against you.

When, in day-time, I intend to throw a fly over a pool which I am satisfied holds a sea-trout or two, my movements are most guarded, and when nearing the water I take advantage of every scrap of cover. Sometimes, so as to avoid causing any disturbance amongst the fish, I crouch on my way and make sure that my rod is not raised above a horizontal position behind me. Yet, after exercising all this care, my plans are often frustrated by the wading angler who journeys up the river as if he were otter hunting.

One day a visiting fisherman remarked to me that I acted by the river as though I were afraid of being seen. I agreed with him, and added for his edification that I was decidedly afraid of being seen by the fish.

I rent a rod on an excellent sea-trout river which in

the past has yielded hundreds of fish yearly. In one pool alone a friend of mine has accounted for as many as 160 sea-trout in one season, and the best of these weighed ten pounds and five ounces, but on this water, during the war years, sea-trout fishing has been completely spoilt. There is still a splendid run of fish every season, but to try for them is nigh hopeless, as day after day ten or a dozen holiday anglers go marching up and down the watercourse as though on patrol.

I do not mind how many fish are brought to hand, for that has little or no effect on the sport, but I do resent fish being put down by this senseless wading. The river in question averages no more than fifteen yards in width, and any ordinary rodster should have no difficulty in covering the water from either bank.

What the object is of this wading is a mystery to me. Certainly it cannot be for the purpose of catching fish, and I can but assume that the idea is simply to dress the part.

I have watched scores of visiting anglers, some of whom have spent a whole day tramping about in the water, but I have yet to see one hook a sea-trout. A member of this irresponsible crowd worked his way up half a mile of water in about a quarter of an hour late one evening, and when he reached me he shouted to me, "Where are the fish?" Although I had a brace of nice sea-trout in my bag, I was too disgusted with his stupid action to say other than "I don't know."

On talking over the subject recently with a few local fishers, one expressed his opinion that this wading business is the outcome of crass ignorance. I may add that, of the many local anglers, men who catch sea-trout, not one wades, and each is a firm believer in the policy of keeping well back from the edge of the bank.

During fine weather we are content to wear studded

shoes, but if the grass is wet owing to rain or heavy dew, a pair of rubber boots or Wellingtons is adequate.

I fish another sea-trout river of about twice the width of the one to which I have just made reference, and wading in this water is strictly prohibited, much to the satisfaction of every angler who uses it. There visitors are few, and rods are limited to a specific number each day. Consequently the sport is admirable, and everyone enjoys a fair share of the spoils.

In conclusion let me add emphatically that to know the haunts of the sea-trout is of no avail, unless approach is made to these desirable spots in a circumspect manner. Further, if an angler has no respect for his own chances, he should remember that, anyhow on strange waters, consideration for other anglers is perhaps more important than his personal pleasure.

If visiting fishermen were somewhat more thoughtful concerning local interests, I am of opinion that unattached angling enthusiasts would not be regarded with so much disfavour as that which several have earned in some districts.

With much regret I am forced to state that during late years I have noticed many thrusters on the river-bank. There was a time when an angler fishing a pool would be left in undisputed possession, and an approaching angler would discreetly make a detour to the next pool so as to avoid disturbing his colleague. That recognized procedure was and is adopted by all sportsmen. On several recent occasions, however, I have seen a second rod who has had the audacity to start operations in a river pool already being worked by another fly-man. This lack of ordinary courtesy is appalling, and is comparable with an incident which occurred in my presence a few weeks ago.

I was returning from a fishing holiday and at the

railway station of departure was a big throng of intending passengers. When the train was made up and backed into the station, the crowd was fairly distributed along the platform. In front of me were three ladies and a gentleman forming one party. The quartette had a large quantity of hand baggage, together with coats, stacked beside them. The gentleman entered a compartment, and, taking the baggage handed to him, completely filled both luggage racks. The ladies then joined their companion and the corner seats were quickly occupied. When the other passengers, including myself, entered the compartment, there was not an inch of available space on the racks, and the selfish four assumed vacant expressions whilst the last entrants, to the number of six, endeavoured to balance their belongings on their knees.

As we journeyed mile after mile in needless discomfort, I could not help thinking that if this present-day doctrine of "what's yours is mine and what's mine is my own" enters the realms of sport, angling will be a very poor business, and we can say a sad "good-bye" to all the old *esprit de corps*.

CHAPTER VII

DAY FISHING WITH FLY

AN opinion which is held by a number of anglers is that sea-trout cannot be caught during daylight hours. This view is altogether too sweeping in its suggestiveness to be accepted seriously, as there are so many pros and cons to be taken into account. In the first

place the all important state of the river must be considered. Then attention has to be paid to the kind of lure which will prove most suitable.

In a general way I am prepared to agree that sea-trout do not come into the picture to the same extent as do brown trout. Perhaps the cause for the difference is due to the fact that sea-trout are so easily frightened. Again, in some waters sea-trout figure markedly in returns for day-time angling, while for other rivers the records for the same hours are poor.

If a river is well bushed and is not over fished, I see no reason why sea-trout should not be taken by the astute angler when the sun is up. If, however, the river is open, there is not sufficient cover for the fish and the sea-trout are consequently more shy, especially if that water is fished other than rarely.

With a river low and clear, the difficulties of the angler are accentuated, and he will have to employ all his wiles to fill his bag. Even in having to contend with those adverse conditions, there is ample justification for him to anticipate a fair measure of success, providing that the sea-trout have arrived in the reach where he is fishing.

A safe guide to be followed is to work with a fly when the river is at or below summer level, and to postpone the use of a metal minnow until such time as when heavy rain brings a rush of coloured water; but the results obtained with a fly cannot be expected to be so good as those achieved when a minnow is employed, as everything is in the fisher's favour when the time is opportune for mounting the metal device.

There are divers ways of exploiting a fly. A simple method for the angler who specializes in the dry fly for brown trout, is for him to proceed in a similar manner for sea-trout, but the fly used should be somewhat larger than the ordinary brown trout pattern. If you are

accustomed to mount a number 13 for brown trout, try a number 10 for sea-trout. For this class of fishing I usually rely on a Rusty Brown or a March Brown.

For all my fly angling I use hackled flies, as I am confident that they are better than the winged type, but, of course, this is purely a matter of taste.

For wet fly work I never depart from our old friend, the Dusty Miller, as first choice when the water is exceptionally low, although Jock Scott and Silver Doctor are in the placings if my favourite is rejected. In selecting flies for day duty a wise point to remember is that sea-trout seem to prefer pretty colours. A bit of gold or silver twist will often cause the wily old fish to slip from its path of rectitude.

A noteworthy example of the sea-trout's partiality for bright colours came to my notice a couple of seasons ago. One very hot morning in August, I had been trying ineffectually to coax a sea-trout to forget itself. The sun's rays were scorching and fishing seemed more than a pastime. On the far bank was a cluster of trees which cast a seductive shade on the closely cropped grass, and I decided to exchange warm work for refreshing leisure.

As I crossed a road bridge I could not resist the temptation to examine the water, and, when my eyes became accustomed to the rippling flow, I espied half a dozen sea-trout sheltering in deep water beneath a tangle of overhanging bushes. Immediately all feelings of fatigue deserted me and, selecting a well concealed position on the bank, my fly was sent on its mission. Again and again I cast without reply, and a change of flies was unproductive.

Thinking that probably I had sent the sea-trout scuttling upstream in consequence of my repeated throws, I returned to the bridge for the purpose of observations

and my astonishment was great when I saw that the impeccable ones had not moved.

I was in a quandary, as my vauntful lures had been despised. Making myself comfortable in the shade of the trees, I looked in the pockets of my fly-book to see whether there was anything which would arouse the curiosity of these disobliging fish, but my search was unsatisfactory to me. Then I chanced upon an envelope containing some flies which I use for pollack when fishing from the rocks : gaudy, clumsy dressings that are fit for only stupid fish. However, I decided to mount one, consoling myself with the thought that, at the worst, I could but put the fish down and that was more than I had achieved with flies of repute.

Occupying the same stance as previously, I put my wretched counterfeit well under the far bushes, and, almost before I had time to straighten my line, a sudden thud told its own tale. Within a quarter of an hour, three sea-trout were on the bank, but that was the finish as evidently the turmoil of the hooked ones had sent the remainder of their kin to safety.

A cyclist, who from the bridge had been watching me, intimated excitedly to me that that was the first time he had seen three sea-trout caught in so short a time, and that he was content if he brought a brace to his net in a day.

As an item of interest I will describe the dressing of the fly which did the damage. Two tail feathers from a fowl are employed, one white and the other dyed red. These are sufficient to dress dozens of flies. The eyed hook used is number 6 Redditch scale, or number 9 Pennell or "New" scale. Along the upper side of the shank are placed a few fibres of the white feather, and along the lower side is placed a somewhat smaller quantity of red fibres. A piece of yellow worsted is next

put along the shank, between the white and red fibres. Round the partly dressed shank a whipping of silver tinsel thread and red silk is applied. The white feather extends for about an inch and a half beyond the whipping, while the loose end of the red feather is roughly three quarters of an inch in length. The fibres of the white feather curl upwards and those of the red feather downwards. The end of the yellow worsted is untwisted and this extends in a straight manner for approximately an inch beyond the whipping.



POLLACK FLY

Finally the whipping is finished with some quick drying fixing solution. I use "flexible collodion" which can be obtained from a chemist for sixpence per ounce: this is war-time price. This "flexible collodion" soon dries and it forms a thin film. It is absolutely airtight and waterproof. An ounce will last a considerable time, providing that the bottle is kept well corked. A screw top cover is best. In applying the solution the easiest way is to use a small glass rod.

With the price of rustproof sea hooks at two for a penny, the total cost to me of dressing these flies runs to about a penny each. I know a man who does a big trade in them at fourpence each. This is an enormous difference to three shillings apiece which I paid recently for a few standard sea-trout flies. With my cheap variety I have no hesitation in discarding a fly immediately it

has done its duty in collecting three or four fish, as to mount a new fly is more satisfactory than troubling to file a point and thereby risking a fractured barb.

This fly can be dressed without difficulty in a minute or two as the size of the materials is large, and there is no need to be fastidious in the work. A vice is not necessary: lithe fingers without other aids can do the deed.

I should be the first to admit that the eager acceptance of this crudely formed artificial proves nothing, as, when my flies of repute were sent over, the sea-trout may have been snoozing or chewing the cud of contentment, and had I persevered with my specials at the time when I cast the feathered monstrosity, the fish may, with alacrity, have sampled the customary lures, for with fish and fishing you never can tell. Nevertheless, I have given further trials to my pollack fly and it has deceived the sea-trout and surprised me.

To see how this fly acts in the water, I reeled it slowly against the current and I was impressed with its nimbleness. It darted to the right and then to the left with every quarter turn of the reel, and it came towards me like a fluttering chip off a rainbow: so probably its sparkling liveliness is the reason for its defeat of the sea-trout.

At the commencement of this chapter reference was made to the use of a dry fly. To attain a modicum of reward from this artistic method calls for extra finesse on the part of the angler. No slack work pays in this affair. Some men seem to think that they can clump upstream, throw an abnormally long line and hook a sea-trout, but those fishers are, I think, nurtured on very vain hopes.

Lengthy casting has its advantages on lakes and on wide open rivers, but on narrow waters I condemn it

outright. Trees and bushes usually preclude long throws upstream from the bank on small rivers; while, when wading, the angler enters the tail of a pool and immediately any sea-trout loitering there dash helter-skelter from that section. In this mad rush they frighten other fish lying farther up the water and this alarm is repeated until the exodus is practically complete. Then, when an unduly long cast is made and the line hits the water, any fish remaining between the line and either bank promptly shoots away or goes to the bottom.

With other men on the spot, I am a firm believer in a short line for dry fly business on a small river. We "locals" work from the bank, stand well back from the edge, take shelter behind every bit of scrub, and cast under bushes along the near bank. Another benefit accruing from this system is that, when a sea-trout is hooked, the fish is better controlled with a short line than with a long one, as it does not have the same opportunities for going to weed or diving under awkward roots and other snags.

The employment of a wet fly presents a totally different proposition as in this case the far bank has to be reached and a longer line is necessary.

For this style of fishing some anglers regard a dropper as being indispensable, others vote for two, while a few are not content with less than three droppers. Should you decide on one dropper, a suitable plan is to fix it three feet away from the tail fly. If you elect to use more than one dropper, spaces of two feet should separate the respective flies.

I am satisfied to eliminate droppers from my service, and to rely solely on the tail fly. Sea-trout flies are a trifle heavier than those mounted for brown trout, and I like my single fly to search with a minimum of splash

under the far bushed bank. Further, if a strong head-wind is blowing, the risk, with flapping droppers, is ever present of throwing a bird's nest. I write rather feelingly on this subject as, on one exposed river which I fish, a blustering half gale from the west always seems to be racing straight across the water into my face. As I rent one bank only, I am unable to put this mischievous wind to a useful purpose. However, I have grown so accustomed to the technique of placing a lonely fly that the thought of selecting a dropper never occurs to me.

In shooting the wet fly, aim at the far bank and allow the fly to float with the current. The fly, in its travels, should form an arc from the opposite bank to the near one. When fishing similarly for brown trout you retrieve your line, at the end of its journey, by slow motion; but for sea-trout you need to act differently, and the most killing way is to recover the line by a series of fast jerks. A safe method by which this result can be attained is to point your rod downstream, and then wind the reel in a sequence of one slow revolution to three quick ones.

The reason for this apparently unorthodox reeling is because a sea-trout is not lethargic in its actions. If a fish is lurking under the near bank and it is in a taking mood, it will mouth a fast moving object without hesitation, but it will ignore a fly that is being gently retrieved. I may add that I have caught many a beauty by adopting this stratagem. On lochs the fly is always regained by a succession of sharp jerks: the idea being to impart a life-like attractiveness to the artificial. When I deal with spinning a metal minnow, I shall elaborate on the peculiarities of a snapping sea-trout, and you will then be more convinced concerning the effectiveness of quick reeling.

After the cast is made and the fly is carried with the flow, every care must be exercised to avoid drag. The

line must neither retard the run of the fly, nor precede the lure. This endeavour to obviate the objectionable drag may, at first, produce some heart-burnings, but by practice, and practice alone, the fault can be eradicated.

If your efforts do not bear fruit immediately, try manipulating the tip of your rod and, at the same time, recover the slack of the line with your disengaged hand. You can either pull the surplus line into a long loop, or coil it in your hand. Ultimately you will correct the defect unconsciously.

On learning to drive a car you have to think of all the various actions when you change down, but with years of experience you effect the change mechanically and you would probably have difficulty, on the spur of the moment, in stating in detail exactly what you have done. So with a dragging line you scarcely know what steps you have taken to free the tendency, as the operation becomes second nature.

Do not forget to study your background, when fishing in daylight for sea-trout. If the land is flat behind you, and you and your flashing rod are silhouetted against the sky, you must stand far back on the bank. If the ground in your rear rises abruptly, you and your movements are, to a certain extent, camouflaged, but, even so, I urge you to keep away from the water as far as your ability to throw a good line permits.

When I stroll along a favourite river-bank and see my friends trying for sea-trout, I cannot help noticing the distance each stands back from the river. A stranger might think that a competition for long distance casting is in progress, but these old and seasoned hands know the value of keeping out of the sea-trout's sight, and I trow that each of these anglers would tell you that his entire success is due to the essential need of working unseen.

If I have laboured this item of seclusion overmuch, I

have done so deliberately, as the fundamentals of a fishing manual are to assist the reader to catch fish, and I offer no apology for the prolongation of the topic, as, from years of experience, I know that hundreds of visiting rodsters to sea-trout rivers fail to achieve their purpose because they do not fully realize that sea-trout in daytime are so timid.

You may be able to throw a fly artistically and far, and you may be able to collect big bags of brown trout, but I assure you that you cannot take liberties with sea-trout. On many occasions I have caught, with a dry fly, a nice brownie within five yards of my feet, but no sea-trout has ever fallen a victim to me in a like manner. A sea-trout seems to have eyes in its caudal fin, so quickly does it scuttle from an approaching shadow. Hence, be warned.

The greatest compliment that a writer on angling can receive is to know that someone has benefited from his advice, and I hope that many fishing readers of this book will be able to say that they have caught sea-trout owing to my well-meant counsel.

Before passing from this chapter on the fly method of enticement, I should, perhaps, refer to that hermaphroditical lure called the fly spinner, although it could be included equally well in the following chapter devoted to spinning. This fly spinner is a composite contrivance embodying both fins and feather. It is manufactured in a variety of forms: sparsely dressed and heavily dressed: with treble hook and with single hook: with and without swivel. It can also be obtained with a dressing of any standard trout, sea-trout or salmon fly; so you can either make a wise selection or form a collection.

These fly spinners can be used in clear water, but I prefer to work them when there is a suspicion of colour

in the pools, either immediately following a heavy shower or when the river is fining after a deluge.

One approved way of employing the fly spinner is to cast it to the far bank and then to retrieve it fairly quickly in a series of gentle jerks.

Another deadly manner is to cast downstream and recover the line slowly by steady reeling. The current in this case will impart a realistic appearance to the lure : no doubt causing the sea-trout to imagine that the weird insect is either exhilarated or in pain.

When I look round a tackle shop I cannot help meditating on what our master, Izaak Walton, would think if he could step inside and see the gorgeous assortment of picturesque devices provided for tempting fish. " Would he be spell-bound or crestfallen ? " I ask myself as I remember his words, " Is it not an art to deceive a Trout with an artificial Fly ? "

Still, with tens of thousands of anglers flicking the waters to-day, no doubt every lure is mounted by one or another, at sometime or other, and thus there is no wonder that the sea-trout suffers from attacks of nervousness.

CHAPTER VIII

DAY FISHING WITH MINNOW

THE most killing lure for sea-trout is unquestionably the metal minnow, providing that conditions are suitable for its use. While the possibility exists of catching a sea-trout by spinning in a clear pool, a heavy bag can be expected only when the river is full and slightly coloured. At any period of the season an odd

fish or two may seek the higher reaches irrespective of the flow, but a considerable run does not materialize unless the water is sufficiently attractive. During long spells of drought, the better course is to leave the minnow in the tackle case and so obviate hard work and disappointment. An expert minnow caster, who lives close to an excellent sea-trout river, told me that, during the year 1944, he tried his hand barely a dozen times, solely because, with the exception of two or three occasions, there was so little water moving. Yet, day after day, visiting anglers struggled hard against adversity, hoping that their minnows would connect with a stray fish.

When the river is low, there are other displeasing features to be taken into account in addition to the pellucidity of the water. Then more rocks and boulders are scantily covered, weed clogs the surface and hidden roots are greater bugbears. With a good volume of water flowing, the chances of the minnow fouling snags are small, but with every drop of six inches in the level, the risk of trouble increases proportionately. An anchored treble is calculated to try the patience of the most complacent angler, but when the misfortune is continually repeated I would rather not be the victim's companion. Hence, I suggest that a minnow should not be mounted unless the prospects are auspicious.

When the river is in perfect order, spinning may be enjoyed at any time in the day, but when the water has fined to nearly its normal colour, the best time to throw is within an hour or two of sundown. With the lessening of the river's tint, sea-trout do not seem to be so interested in scintillating minnows when the sun is high as they do during even-tide.

There are several effective ways of casting the metal minnow. Some anglers are content to throw from bank to bank straight across a pool. I am not exactly in love

with this plan. The sea-trout are lying facing upstream, and I maintain that the area directly across the river, in which the fish can be enticed, is somewhat limited. I prefer to cast more to the tail of the pool, in which case the travelling minnow will, in all probability, pass more fish.

With a long stretch of open water, the ideal cast, to my way of thinking, is one which shoots away downstream to the far bank. A throw of from forty to fifty yards in these circumstances is tolerably easy, and, with efficient winding, the minnow covers some grand ground.

Although to possess the ability to throw a long line is advantageous, there is far more in spinning than in merely making the minnow fly. A thorough knowledge both of spins and of rates of recovery is essential when sea-trout fishing, if the angler wishes to rank a trifle above an average spinner.

Some month ago I was walking with a fishing friend along a river bank. This friend is one of the best present-day adepts with the metal minnow, and his angling opinions are always to be respected. Having finished with our rods, we were on our way downstream to our homes. As we emerged from a thicket I noticed on the opposite bank an angler just as he had completed an unusually long cast. Directing my friend's attention to him, I remarked that the unknown rodster seemed to be capable of a mighty lengthy throw. My friend eyed the stranger for a few seconds and replied somewhat tartly, "Yes. He's got a hotel ticket. He was here all yesterday, but he did not touch a thing. I passed him this morning, and could see that he would do no good. Of course, he might hook an orphan; beyond that I would not give much for his chance. He can put the line out all right, but the trouble is he is using the wrong spin. I spoke to him as I came up this evening, and would have put

him wise, but he is one of those grumpy individuals who are best left alone."

As I ventured no comment, my friend continued, "Look now. You've a couple of brace and I have three brace. If we had not selected the correct spin, I'll wager any money that we should not have come home with more than half a brace between us. As I told you long enough ago, the correct spin is more important than everything else. A right-hand spin when a left-hand one should be mounted, or a left-hand spin when a right-hand one is correct, will not catch sea-trout. The extraordinary part of the business is that of the umpteen visitors who fish this water, nine out of every ten know nothing about spinning. True, they can cast, but they don't work with their heads."

Yes, my old tutor had, times without number, drilled into me this instruction concerning the proper spin. In fact the manner in which a metal minnow should revolve had, I feel sure, become a fetish to him.

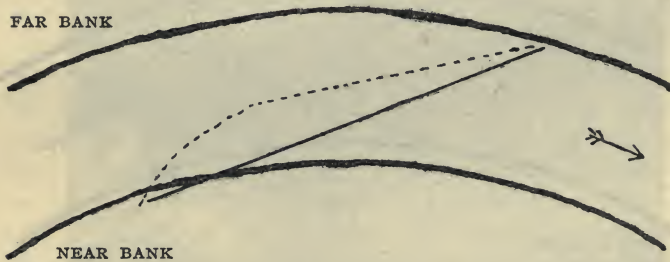
When he started teaching me in the dim past he was not only painstaking, but he amplified his opinions with logical argument, and as a consequence the reasons for his statements were easily understandable.

If you are not acquainted with the secret of the correct spin for sea-trout I will elucidate the mystery. Before doing so, however, I should perhaps preface my remarks by giving the grounds for my choice of terms.

When you stand by a river running to the west and face the way of the sea, the north bank is the right-hand one, but in similar circumstances, with a river flowing eastward, the north bank is then the left-hand one. But rivers are journeying in all directions to the sea, so to rely for nomenclature on the points of the compass might lead to confusion. Further, I wish to use the expressions of right-hand spin and left-hand spin,

hence to avoid any misunderstanding in that respect concerning the words of right and left as applied to the banks, I will endeavour to make my meaning as lucid as possible by describing the respective banks thus: the one upon which you stand is the near bank and the opposite one is the far bank. By employing this method no ambiguity should arise, and, whatever the course of the river may be, my explanation holds good.

I crave the indulgence of the expert angler regarding



INCORRECT SPIN

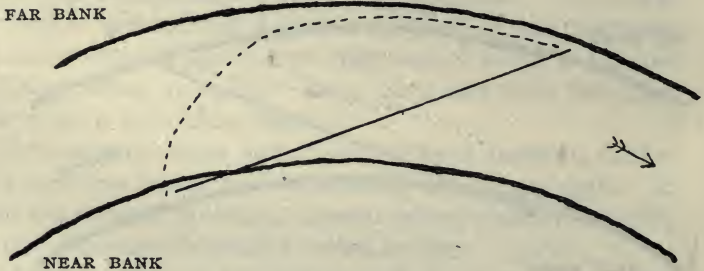
Unbroken line denotes flight of minnow.
Broken line denotes return of minnow.
Arrow denotes flow of river.

the foregoing exposition, but I want the tyro to comprehend fully my meaning in the easiest way, as the use of the proper minnow is the most important step in his spinning career for the sea-trout.

When from the near bank to the far bank you cast downstream and retrieve your line, the minnow will either sail towards the middle of the river and follow up the centre until you reel it hard to your bank, or it will spin towards the far bank and hug that bank until the time comes for you to reel it across the river. In the first

instance the minnow is spinning incorrectly, and you should change it immediately. If you are employing a right-hand spin, then a left-hand one should be mounted, and *vice versa*.

In the second case, when the minnow spins close to the far bank, you are using the proper spin. As I have mentioned previously, the sea-trout of the shoal variety keep to the deep water under the bank's bushes and consequently your minnow, to be effective, must spin

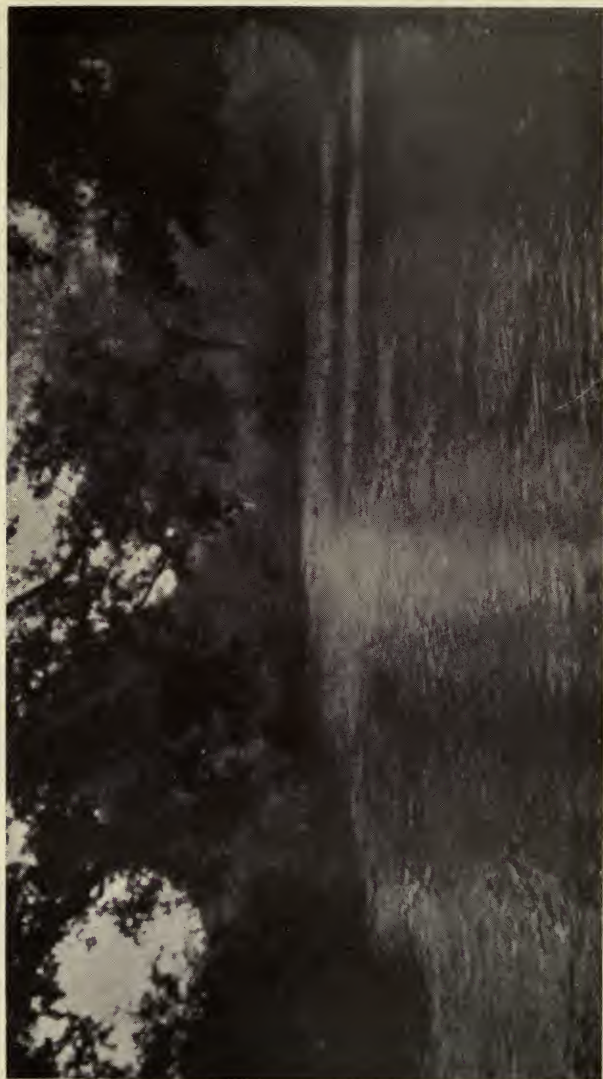


CORRECT SPIN

Unbroken line denotes flight of minnow.
 Broken line denotes return of minnow.
 Arrow denotes flow of river.

through that water. A simple plan to adopt is to attach a right-hand spin minnow at first, cast and note the result. If the spin does not achieve the desired purpose, change the minnow for one with a left-hand spin. Naturally, should you cross the river and prospect from the other bank, you must work with a minnow of the opposite spin.

I am convinced that if you act in accordance with this advice you will be astonished at the marked increase in your sport.



A LONG STICKLE



BUSHY BANKS

This suggestion relating to the selection of a correct spinner may seem to be insignificant, but do not forget that the finishing touch brings a picture to perfection.

The next item to be taken into account is the manner in which the spinning of the minnow should be performed. All preconceived ideas of the "sink-and-draw" and "slow-and-fast" methods must be scrapped. To spin for sea-trout is in a class by itself. You may be an adroit spinner for pike, but the style which you favour for catching that fish will serve you nothing in spinning for sea-trout. No fish is more energetic or quicker in its actions than the sea-trout. Therefore, to spin successfully, smart reeling is imperative. Do not be afraid of briskly turning your reel, and, if practicable, watch your minnow. I have known an occasion when a sea-trout has followed a metal minnow concernedly through fast water and then, at the moment when the consummation of the race was in sight, the minnow, reaching a bit of slack water, has lost its spin. In a twinkling the sea-trout abandoned the contest, turned tail and no doubt congratulated itself on having detected a sham. Probably had I reeled vigorously so as to neutralize the effect of the dead water I should have kept alive the interest of the crafty fish, but after thoughts do not circumvent past errors: all that can be done in such vexatious circumstances is to make a note for future guidance.

An illustration of the consequences produced by the difference in the rate of reel-winding was brought to my notice not long ago, and as this confirms my plea for fast reeling when spinning for sea-trout, the record of it may prove of much value to intending spinners.

A friend of mine, and a champion spinning enthusiast for salmon, invited a crony of his for a day's sport with the salmon. The programme arranged by my friend, whose water the pair were going to fish, was for his

guest to work in advance downstream, and wait at a bridge about a mile distant. When the two fishers arrived at the river the host gave his visitor half an hour's start and told him to sample every pool, saying that he would take what was left. I was covering another length up to the bridge where the three of us intended to have lunch. When I reached the rendezvous the visitor had already arrived, and he was elated by having caught four sizable sea-trout, although he had not seen a salmon.

Not long afterwards our friend put in an appearance. He was hot and tired with the exertion of having carried four salmon, and our pleasure on his success was intensified when he informed us that he had left four more salmon on the bank about half a mile upstream. But he had not touched a sea-trout.

When the four discarded fish had been recovered and our attention was focused on lunch, we held an inquest on the morning's proceedings. I may say that both fishers were using identical tackle, as my friend had fixed up his guest with a metal minnow and trace.

Upon deliberating on the fact that the visitor had accounted for four sea-trout and no salmon, while his companion had grassed eight salmon and no sea-trout, our host, after listening to our respective theories, said, "Both of you are down the wrong street altogether. The sole reason for the different catches is the rate of reeling." Picking up his rod and pulling off a quantity of line, he turned to his guest and said, "See, to catch salmon you should wind like this." With a somewhat slow but methodical wind he demonstrated the appropriate action. "Instead of which you reel like this and attract the sea-trout." At the same time he wound the reel at about twice the speed which he had employed when showing the rate required for salmon.

Finally he remarked to his confrère, "Now, my boy, there's a salmon in yon weir pool. After we have finished our meal you shall come and catch it, if you will not be too impulsive with your reel. Don't forget salmon are most deliberate in their taking, and really a salmon is the most stupid fish in our rivers. Anybody can catch one if he will only reel slowly, but a sea-trout is a flash of fury: it darts and snaps without giving the minnow two thoughts."

When we had disposed of our lunch and our smokes were giving satisfaction to us, we strolled across to the weir pool. Our guide said, "As I came down the bank before lunch I saw a nice salmon jump near the far side, immediately to the right of that guelder bush. Now put your minnow about a foot upstream beyond the bush and retrieve your line slowly."

The minnow was cast accordingly and the master of ceremonies commented, "Capital," and then "No, no, no. You're reeling much too fast. Now try again. Let the minnow sink a few inches and start reeling ever so slowly, just to prevent the treble fouling a snag; then keep to a slow, steady wind."

Once more the minnow whizzed, and this time the rodster strictly obeyed his instructions. Then of a sudden the water was churned, and in about ten minutes a fresh-run salmon of a dozen pounds in weight was lying on the grass. "Now you know at what rate to wind for a salmon," laughingly remarked the gratified instructor.

I think that you will now realize that to catch sea-trout with a metal minnow there are two leading principles to be observed, apart from scientific casting, and I place them in this order: one, the selection of the correct spin, and two, quick and uninterrupted reeling.

If you are a prospective candidate for spinning honours,

I have no hesitation in recommending to you this style of working. Even if you are experienced and have been trained in another school, I suggest that you give the ideas which I have detailed an extensive trial and then compare the new results with those that you achieved previously. Should your old methods have given to you greater satisfaction, you can easily return to them and be in a better position to offer an opinion on the respective merits of both ways of spinning.

I am often asked why I adhere to the slotless metal minnow carrying only one treble at the tail. The answer is simple: I know that this pattern meets all my requirements. I have a notion that the type with one treble spins more sweetly than the slotted variety furnished with four trebles, or even the slotless one supplied with two trebles at the tail. Further, the single treble is not so likely to gather weed or to foul roots as is the one with four trebles. Again, my favourite seems to me to be a better pretender than one garnished with many hooks. Another advantage of the minnow with one treble is that it is so easily assembled; this is purely a personal reason, as I make my own traces; and, in addition to effecting laudable economy, I find that the benefits of my special tool outweigh those of shop articles.

For many years I have refrained from using the four treble pattern. Not only does that one savour too much of ironmongery to please me, but when at the initial stage of casting you are endeavouring to avoid a treble forming contact with contiguous brambles and shrubs, the hooks are apt to seek your clothing. To remove your jacket for the purpose of releasing an offending barb is but a small inconvenience, but when a treble connects with the rear of your breeches, you may be excused for offering your opinion in a voluble and an unequivocal manner.

Although I have a strong leaning towards the metal minnow with one treble, I would not presume to state that this is the best type on the market. No one is in the happy position of being able to express such an absolute opinion about any angling item. Few of us have tried the majority of artifices manufactured for our sea and fresh-water pleasures, and even if anyone has found time to flirt with every fishing instrument, he would still be unable to dogmatize convincingly, as that which may suit his needs would be turned down by someone who held other views. Hence, in all angling matters, experiment for yourself and form your own opinion, but at the same time be ever ready to consider impartially every informative idea.

If you are contemplating a day's spinning in a river, be sure to arm yourself with spare metal minnows. For patrolling one bank the minimum number of lures to provide should be either two right-hand spinners or two left-hand spinners, according to the bank from which you propose casting. Should you intend to throw from both banks, see that your stock comprises two spinners of each variety. This may sound banal advice, but you cannot afford to spoil your trip by lack of spare parts.

Prior to the outbreak of war I was staying at a country inn which I had made my headquarters whilst fishing for sea-trout. One evening a young man arrived for his first spinning venture in quest of that fish. He was a nice lad and was immensely keen on the sport.

To his mother, who had accompanied him, he dilated throughout the evening on his expected success when the morrow came, and when he knew that I was bound for a similar errand his delight was unlimited. I was able to tell him that the river was in perfect fettle for spinning, as it was full and slightly coloured after a night's heavy fall of rain.

He asked innumerable questions regarding the course of the river, and I was glad to supply him with plenty of information, including a rough diagram of the water showing the localities of the best pools. He was most grateful to me and confided in me that he could throw a longer line than could his father, with whom, on Saturdays in the winter months, he went spinning for pike.

On the following morning the exuberant young man could scarcely wait to finish his breakfast, as he was in such a desperate hurry to be off with his rod, and he was well clear of the inn soon after nine o'clock.

As I was otherwise engaged my fishing was neglected that morning, but at noon I decided to go for a stroll along the river bank and see how the water was fining. After journeying for about half a mile upstream I met the young enthusiast returning. His appearance was very dejected, and to my query as to how he had fared, he replied, "Had beastly bad luck."

I turned back with him, and I will let him tell his own story. "I thought that I would try some of the far pools that you mentioned, so I hurried down here, and for the next two miles padded through swamp and jungle. My, the going was hard! All the way I didn't see a decent place to throw a line, and I never met a soul. Then I came to a clearing and a topping open pool. I'll bet it is full of sea-trout."

It is, as it is the best holding pool in the river. The near side ends in a strip of shingle, while the far side, which never carries less than eight feet of water, is bordered by an impenetrable mass of undergrowth and overhanging trees.

"Well, when I saw the pool I knew that my dream had come true. I had a good look around, and picked a nice spot from where to throw. I don't know how it happened, but my first cast landed the minnow right

into a blackthorn bush on the opposite bank. I tried every dodge to dislodge the minnow, but there was nothing doing."

"I remembered that you said there is a bridge farther up, so I propped my rod against a tree and bolted. I found the bridge, crossed it and came down the bank. I knew approximately where I had left my rod, and soon I saw my line stretched across the river. I tried to get through the bushes, but they are too dense. I had to give up the job. Why, I'm like a butcher's shop. Well, I came back, and the only thing to be done was to pull the line, and hope to lose as little of it as possible, but my only spinner went west. You see, when I'm at home we fish a fine open reservoir, and there are no ghastly trees to watch. Father carries a spare, but we never lose a minnow, so I did not think of packing an extra one. Now I've spent a morning for nowt, and lost a minnow into the bargain."

This is not the only angler whom I have met who has been caught napping by depending on a solitary minnow; hence you are advised to profit by other fishers' lapses.

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT-FISHING—ANTICIPATION

NIGHT-FISHING for sea-trout seems to me to be more of a business of catching fish than pleasant sport. I am prepared to agree that, all things being equal, more sea-trout can be taken by night than by day; for to return with a basket of four brace as the result of a night's toil is nothing unusual, but I would

far sooner be rewarded with one fish as my quota for a trip in daylight.

Between bouts of serious casting during a sunny day in late summer, to laze occasionally in the shade of a leafy elm and to watch the white woolly clouds drifting slowly against a sky of blue, to listen to the rhythmic purr of a binder and to see the sheaves of corn tossed aside, to see a streak of turquoise as a kingfisher flashes upstream, and to hear the harsh call of a pheasant, to watch a heron flapping its way in search of a fresh fishing stance and to listen to the mews of the buzzards that sail and wheel high overhead, to see the young bullocks standing knee deep in the river and to watch baby rabbits scurrying from their burrows to explore the unknown, to see the sheep contentedly settled in the shade and to study the butterflies that flit from flower to flower, yea, even to watch a water-vole feeding on the succulent grasses at the water's edge and to see a moorhen scuttling across the river, afford me more satisfaction than creeping about in blacked-out spinneys at night, tripping over brambles and slipping on unexpected mud patches. I much prefer to note the pageant of mellowing summer than to wander half blind in the murkiness of an unlit night.

Although through several decades I have given night fishing exhaustive trials, I cannot say that I have completely revelled in my trips.

Further, when you strike a good fish at night I think that you miss the real joy of angling. True, you see a silvery flash when the fish jumps on feeling the barb, but after that the game generally deteriorates into a bit of skull-dragging, unrelieved by a display of finessing. In day-time you are not only thrilled by a jumping fish, but without difficulty you can follow the movements of the fighting victim, and ultimately play it

dexterously to the net. In which case your delight is enhanced by the knowledge that you have fairly won the contest.

Nevertheless, we are not all cast in the same mould, and I know scores of men who affirm that they derive as much gratification from fishing in the dark hours as they do when the sun is shining.

Although I should have no hesitation in expressing an opinion to the effect that night work is better suited to the young and strong, I have encountered many anglers in my midnight travels who cannot claim the advantages of youth and strength.

One old gentleman who had passed his eightieth birthday was in the habit, for several years, of visiting one of my favourite rivers. He came solely for sea-trout fishing at night, and he was most regular in his proceedings. At ten o'clock each night, whatever might be the weather, this octogenarian, accompanied by a local gillie, would wend his way to the river, and he would fish until one o'clock in the morning, or later if he had not caught a brace. The gillie had to stand far back from his master and wait until he received a call. Then, on hearing the warning shout, he had to run and net the fish.

After the old gentleman had finished his holiday one year and had departed, the factotum volunteered the information to me that he looked forward every season to that angler's visit on account of the handsome pay and tips which he received, adding, "But I don't like the hours. It's cold and monotonous standing still, and I'm afraid, every time I go, that the old chap will make a night of it, as he keeps saying that he will try another pool after each blank one that he has worked; so I am jolly thankful when he has got his brace, though he generally ends up with two brace, as he is a marvel with his rod."

Another exceptional character was a county cricketing amateur of some merit, who completed his life's innings a few years back. He had the misfortune to suffer from rheumatoid arthritis and he could walk only with the greatest trouble, though he was able to stand. His chauffeur would drive him to his fishing hut near the bank of the river and then assist him to the brink, from which position he would cast until he decided to try elsewhere. Once more the chauffeur would come to his aid, and, having fixed him in the desired spot, would stand behind him in readiness to net the spoil.

Lastly, an old friend of mine, who has nearly reached four score years, was warned many years ago by his doctor not to fish alone at night. The old sport laughs at the suggestion and, when he knows that the sea-trout are up, he makes for the river as soon as the sun has set. There, with the zest of a youngster, he fishes in the dark, and rarely returns with less than a brace. Therefore, should you be past your prime and feel the weight of advancing years, take courage from those who have battled cheerfully with age and infirmity. But, whether you be old or young, do not wade at night unless you are acquainted with every inch of the river's bed, for some rivers are most treacherous. In one, which I fish, there are ledges of rock extending for several yards and are covered by about a foot of water, then suddenly there is a sheer drop of anything from six to eight feet. Daylight wading in this river is fraught with danger, but to attempt that action in darkness is simply asking for a catastrophe. I offer this caution because so many anglers visit unknown waters for a fishing holiday of a week or two in anticipation of catching sea-trout at night. At an angling inn, where I often stay, scores of enthusiastic night fishers are to be found every season. There, the young bloods turn night into day, as they start on their adven-

tures at about 10 p.m. and never cease operations before 3 a.m., while their breakfast is usually served between eleven and noon. One night, a venturesome member of a party waded too far, and a calamity was averted merely by the fact that his companions were able to go to his rescue at a critical moment.

To render night fishing worth while and agreeable, attention in every detail must be paid to preparation. The methodical angler in daytime scores the most points, but even he must make doubly sure of his readiness for night duty. Each item of tackle should have its allotted place, so that, if need be, a spare can be found by touch. Consequently, before starting for the water, satisfy yourself that all the requisite articles are in order.

The first essential is to see that you are suitably clad. During the heat of a summer's day you may be tempted to ignore the probable low temperature at night, and, if you are new to the business, you have no idea how thin and cold the atmosphere is at midnight. As you stand in the dewy grass by the side of the chilly river, the air becomes charged with dankness that seems to penetrate to the marrow of your bones: hence some additional protection is highly necessary.

I favour a suède jacket to be worn under an ordinary coat. This light but warmth-providing article can be carried easily in a fishing bag, and can be donned at the water-side, after the exercise of walking to the selected pool has set up a healthy glow.

A fishing novice asked me, one evening in a September, if he might join me in a night's jaunt. I readily agreed, but advised him to augment his day's attire, as he had been wearing slacks and a blazer, without a waistcoat, when trouting. He did not fall in with the idea, as he considered that a nip in the air would be a welcome change after the day's torrid heat. We began casting

just before eleven o'clock, but within an hour his teeth were chattering, and he told me that he was perished with the cold. Although some heartening plops presaged the likelihood of decent creels, the youth decided to pack his bag and hurry home. The nip undoubtedly contained a germ of frost.

In the darkness there are occasions when a light is a paramount necessity, but at these times both hands are generally engaged in duties which preclude the holding of a lamp. Some device, therefore, must be engineered by which a light can be shone in the right direction without resource to the hands. An electric torch attached to a belt worn round the waist is one simple method of supplying the want. Another way is by pressing the ordinary torch pattern flash-lamp into service, and the manner in which this article can be satisfactorily employed is by tying one end of a cord round the butt end of the lamp. The other end of the cord should be attached to the button-hole in the left lapel of your coat. The cord should then be passed round the back of your neck and under the collar of your coat. The flash-lamp should be carried in the left breast pocket of your coat, and the length of the cord from the flash-lamp to the button-hole should be about two feet six inches. When the lamp is required, all that you have to do is to remove it from your pocket, switch on the light and let the lamp hang down in front of you. As a result, you will find that you will be able to use both your hands comfortably in the rays of the light, and thus you can conveniently unhook a fish, mount a fresh fly, exchange a cast or perform other similar tasks.

At night you need to be certain that, when you are about to net a fish, your landing net is functioning properly. If a friend accompanies you, he can turn a light on the proceedings, but if you are working alone,

you have to act in the dark. In which case, you do not want to run a risk with an obstinate net. Sometimes a net fails to sink, and a fish can be quickly lost when you are endeavouring to play it into a floating net. To overcome this defect, a simple remedy is to bind a few strips of lead round the bottom strands of the net. This weight will cause the net to sink immediately, and you are therefore relieved of any anxiety.

You are probably conversant with a particular river and, in the daytime, when casting across it, you can put a fly within an inch or two of the bushes on the far bank, but do not imagine that you can cast with such accuracy at night, or you will pay a penalty out of proportion to your innocent zeal.

Before now, strangers have joined me at night and have remarked on my confidence but apparent unconcern when casting. For this supposed feat no ability is required, I assure you: the nonchalance is merely an illusion. If you are not familiar with the trick which permits of night casting with this ease, I will supply the solution.

When I am throwing over some water in daylight in anticipation of covering it at night, I make false casts until there is sufficient line out to reach the growth on the opposite bank: that consequently is the limit of line to be unwound for my casting in the dark. Then, instead of using the reel, I retrieve the line by pulling it in by hand and coiling it beside me. Next, at a couple of inches from the reel, I tie securely a piece of worsted round the line.

At night, after a few false casts, the little knot of worsted warns me to cease deploying more line, and I can then throw with utter disregard of the dangerous twigs on the far bank: so much therefore for suspected but non-intrinsic skill.

When you spend years by the water-side and associate with all kinds of rodsters, your memory becomes packed with amusing incidents and interludes which cross your mind in season and out of season. One of the greatest charms of angling is this collecting of varied experiences and docketing them for storage in the mental library.

Referring to the means of registering the range for casting at night reminds me of an episode which occurred in my presence not so very long ago.

A friend of mine, who was most desirous of making his acquaintance with a sea-trout at night, arranged to visit me during a week-end for the purpose of wetting a line. In the past he had enjoyed plenty of fun with the brown trout, but he had never attempted sea-trout fishing. After he had put his gear together, I advised him to take a leaf out of my book and, with my marked line as a guide, to decorate his line with a bit of worsted. He pooh-pooed the idea, stating that he could gauge the distance of his cast without any botchy innovations. He is rather impulsive and loathes anything which befits orderliness, so I did not press the proposition.

When we arrived by the river, the light was dim, but we could still distinguish the far bank. After showing to my friend two excellent pools and offering to him the choice of them, we separated and commenced our endeavours.

For a time, casting was unprofitable, and when I was beginning to think that the sea-trout must have moved up the river, a small one of an ounce over a pound came to my net and revived my interest. At the same time I heard some embarrassing language emanating from my friend downstream. As he is somewhat florid in his vocabulary when little things go awry, I gave no heed to the outburst. Presently, however, further vocal profanity caused me to wander down the bank to ascertain

the reason for the irritation. I had no difficulty in locating my friend and, when I reached him, I found him in a state of unsuppressed annoyance. From what I could understand, he had foul-hooked something on the opposite bank. He had tried gentle persuasion in the early stages, but as that was unavailing, he had been incited to resort to more robust measures. He certainly had made a sorry mess of his tackle as, in addition to relinquishing the whole of his cast and entangling his line in a near bank-side bush, he had fractured the top joint of his rod.

As rain began to fall heavily, and as a spectator could not be expected to amuse himself in foul weather, we decided to pack our belongings and turn for home. On our way my friend said he wished that he had put a piece of worsted round his line, as he had formed the opinion that, in the darkness, to overcast is very simple.

On the following day we walked up the far bank to see if we could discover the obstruction which my friend had hit, and, in a direct line from where he had been casting, we found the cast tightly twisted round a length of barbed-wire which passed through the undergrowth. Little wonder was it that mild coaxing had failed.

The preparations which I have described may seem to be trivial in themselves, but in the aggregate they are bound to have the effect of simplifying the task at the pools. No battle is won without detailed plotting, and the discomfiture of the sea-trout at night demands careful planning. The chief benefit of prescience in this case is that you can devote the whole of your attention to fishing. In the dark, you do not want to think about anything except the actual business of placing your fly, and most decidedly you do not want your thoughts distracted from that artistic work by giving heed to minor affairs. While, when you feel a welcome thud at the

end of your line, you need to believe that all is well without wondering whether your net will behave itself or whether you will be able to see to release a hidden barb in the upper jaw of a fish.

In ideal conditions the path of the night fisher is rough, but concentration on the job in hand and confidence in the tools employed will help to lighten his labours. If the angler is blessed with these two assets, and should he form one of a party, he will not be far down in the prize list when the count is taken of the sea-trout captured.

CHAPTER X

NIGHT-FISHING—REALIZATION

IN all forms of angling, climatic and water conditions play the chief rôles, and there is small prospect of filling creels unless those conditions are favourable. When the sea comes creeping gently along the sands, with only wavelets rising, rolling and breaking, the bass fisherman knows that there is little hope of hooking a coveted fish, for bass come inshore only when the waves thunder and crash, thereby disturbing hidden delicacies. The man who throws a fly for brown trout, does not need to be told that when a spate sends the river roaring bank high, a journey to the water-side would be profitless, for he is aware that then brownies are either sheltering under big rocks or resting in coloured backwaters. No fishing, however, seems so doomed to disappointment as is that for sea-trout at night.

On a moonless night, made more dark by a stratus, a

night so black that you can scarcely see your hand before your face, you may be bold enough to venture a trip with the rod, but in these adverse circumstances I do not advise you to tread even a well-known path as I am of opinion you will regret the enterprise. Of course, during a moonless but starry night you may be afforded sufficient light by which you can cover a familiar pool.

I deprecate working in brilliant moonshine, as experience has taught me that sea-trout will not sport so well when moonbeams silver the water. By casting in the deep shade of thick overhanging trees and bushes I have hooked sea-trout but these captures are not conclusive evidence in support of a claim that the fish will take when the moon is high. Whether in actuality the bright light from the moon is responsible for a diminution in responsive fish, or whether the angler's movements in the glare are more pronounced to the sea-trout, thus causing the fish to stay down, must, I am afraid, remain a moot point. Yet another problem is whether the sea-trout become more shy the farther that they run. The reason that I mention this is because on a bright night the reports which I have received from water close to the estuary have been of fair catches, whilst from the higher reaches the returns have been signally poor. While dealing with this abstruse subject the fact that in the illumination one bank may be better than the other must not be overlooked.

According to my bag, the best times in which to try your skill are either from late evening onwards or when the moon is obscured by heavy clouds. For evening angling on open water you should wait until you can just discern the river and the far bank. If, however, the pools are well screened by trees, you can start operations earlier. When the moon has risen, the chances are not so good if the clouds are broken, as every now and again

there is a sudden burst of strong light. The ideal condition is when the clouds are so heavy and uniform that merely a subdued light filters through.

Having selected a night that has given every promise of agreeable fishing, one of the most aggravating setbacks that you can experience is for a bank of fog to come rolling up the valley and to blot out the river. Evening mists of this character are somewhat prevalent in late summer and early autumn, and they have the effect of quelling any desire on the part of the sea-trout to give a performance. When you see a white vapour stealing towards you, the most sensible thing to do is to pack your kit at once and hope for a better morrow.

When reviewing the many disadvantages with which the night fisher has to contend, I think that there is no exaggeration in saying that the odds are in favour of the sea-trout.

I have met men who have paid visits of a fortnight to a sea-trout river and, owing to a miscellany of impossible conditions, have not been able to make a cast during any night. Contrariwise, others who have had to be content with long week-ends, have arrived in time for a propitious spell of weather and have used their rods each night. Therefore, to make arrangements with any degree of certainty of striking a lucky patch is out of the question.

When the outlook is satisfactory, we "locals" usually form a small party of three or four for night work, as company helps to enliven the drab periods when the fish are down. Each of us carries a whistle so that, in time of stress, the one who needs assistance can summon it. A six or an eight pounder requires some manipulation if the sea-trout is to be grassed in the dark, and a helping hand can turn potential disaster into success. If you are using a collapsible landing net at such a time, release the

arms when the sea-trout is safely inside, as the fish can be more easily controlled in a loose net.

Another benefit which accrues from angling with a few kindred spirits is that the homeward journey in the early hours, if made with a friend or two, is more interesting than is trudging alone an uncharted path of a couple of miles.

Most night anglers either keep their rods and tackle in commission or assemble their gear in daylight before embarking on their expedition. If your route is beside bushes and under trees do not fail to disjoint your rod. There is no necessity to dismantle the reel and line. See that the fly is secure in the fly-ring, then simply pull the rod apart and twist the spare line round the joints. You will be able to walk with greater comfort by gripping three feet of rod than by trailing a length of nine feet, and, as a sequel to the foresight, you will arrive at your destination in a better frame of mind. The rod can be taken down and reassembled in a couple of minutes. I urge this point because to reach a pool for which I have a strong partiality, my way meanders through coppices and across marshes. Here and there barbed-wire fences have to be negotiated and slippery hollows traversed. Consequently a journey in the dark is not exactly a delight, particularly with a rod of unwieldy length. Indeed, on a fair path an assembled rod is a handicap when daylight has departed, so you are advised to accept a graceful warning.

When you arrive at the river, do not waste time in flogging glides and broken water, but go straight to the pools. Sea-trout know their river as well as you know the road in which your home is set, and the fish spend their nights in deep pools. If you cannot turn a sea-trout in that water you may be sure that to try elsewhere will be fruitless.

Now we will consider what lure should be mounted. Undoubtedly, an artificial fly is the correct choice. Years ago, for the purpose of research, I experimented with metal minnows, but I am satisfied that a sea-trout will not follow a minnow at night, and this opinion is confirmed by many of my angling friends. Hence we must decide upon a fly.

Of all the arguments brought forward in connection with fly fishing I am inclined to believe that the subject of flies usable for sea-trout at night produces the greatest variance of views. The colours of the dressings and the sizes of the hooks cause endless contention, and each advocate is positive that his style is the best.

During the final weeks of every sea-trout season one fishing inn situated in my neighbourhood is always booked to capacity by visiting anglers, and to listen to the debates which take place in the snugger of the inn is most entertaining. Some of the visitors never seem to weary of giving lectures on the value of black flies, while others amplify those claims by introducing the theory of nocto-vision, but I cannot help noticing that the patient hearers continue to persevere with their own special patterns of flies.

I must confess that, by listening to a tirade on the lethal properties of a fly dressed in mourning, I have been nearly convinced that to mount any other fly than a black one would be futile. However, I have given most dressings, including the much-vaunted black one, genuine trials, and when the fish are in an obliging mood I have never observed a marked discrimination in the choice of the proffered wares.

You would imagine, with numerous anglers, not omitting the black-fly partisans, fishing the identical water at the same time, that one of them would surpass the others in the number of sea-trout to his credit, but

though I have made daily inquiries of the owner of the inn, the report was invariably to the effect that the crowd averaged about one fish apiece, without any star turns; so I venture to think that we can safely allow the black flies to take their turn in the queue.

Without in any way wishing to disparage the efforts of the black-fly propagandists, I suggest that any anglers of an inquiring turn of mind, instead of accepting the doctrine of nocto-vision, would do much better if they studied the habits of our moths. When you hear plop after plop in the pools, you may make a shrewd guess that the sea-trout are jumping for the big moths which drop on the surface of the water. Oak and birch, beech and sallow, ash and blackthorn, bramble and honey-suckle, not forgetting the ivy festooned trunks, each provides a haunt for one or more species of moths, and if you can decide which kind of moth favours the trees that abut on or overhang the pool of your preference, I am of opinion that by selecting a passable imitation of the insect you would mount an irresistible attraction.

Like many other fishers who harry the sea-trout, I have an undeniable penchant for a particular fly, and I regard it with unstinted respect. Possibly I, too, consider my fancy to be without equal. This fly is not a standard pattern, neither is it a remarkable one in appearance. It is quite a simple one, devoid of any garishness. It is well known in the district where it is used, but whether its fame has travelled farther I know not. If you saw it in a tackle-dealer's shop and you were unacquainted with it, you would in all probability merely give it a superficial glance and purchase others that exhibit a trifle more colour.

The grounds for my attachment to this fly are that, to my knowledge, the unobtrusive dressing has decoyed thousands of fish: one angler alone on one river has,

year after year, topped three figures by using it solely. It has also demonstrated to me its reliability not only on the water where it is customarily thrown, but on rivers in the north, south, east and west. In fact it is now as much a part of my sea-trout outfit as are my rod and line, and the thought would never occur to me of mounting another type of fly, for I have no qualms in stating that if the fish will not take this fly they will reject all others.



NIGHT FLY

It is of no value for day fishing, being entirely a night fly, which seems to suggest that the sea-trout mistake it for a moth.

As the fly presents no difficulty in fashioning, you may be glad of the details. The size of the hook is number three, Redditch scale, and the dressing is composed of silver body, ginger hackle and teal wing. I have tried a dressing with a gilt body instead of the silver one, but the response has been poor in comparison. Although to me the difference in the glint of the body is insignificant, the sea-trout evidently have other ideas.

Upon reaching your pool, commence at the tail end, but before throwing a fly see that your landing net is in a position where you can handle it immediately. As I use a collapsible net, I open it and place it in front of me, or in the water, if my side of the river is shallow.

The first cast should take the fly straight across the water to the far bank. In retrieving the line do so somewhat more sharply than you would in fishing for brown trout, but not so quickly as when spinning a minnow. An almost imperceptible jerky motion is

advisable, as these minute impulses impart a lifelike action to the fly. Coil the recovered line in your left hand in readiness for the next cast. By giving your undivided attention to the feel of the line as you draw in the line you know in a trice if the fly is mouthed, and this preparedness to tighten the line at the same instant as the fly is taken makes you master of the situation from the outset.

Do not flog the water with rapid successive throws, but give yourself a breathing space between each cast. Too much energy will tire you, and, what is more, will frighten any hesitant fish that has not made up its mind concerning the tempting moth.

If after several attempts your net has not done service, do not be in a hurry to change your position, but, without moving, pull off a couple of yards more line and drop your fly downstream about half a dozen yards from where you have been placing the lure. Give this spot a few leisurely casts. If you are still denied, turn your face upstream and cast in a similar manner about the same distance from your original mark. With again no score on the board you can credit yourself with having worked that small area of water methodically and well. Hence the necessity arises for seeking a fresh lie. A move of a dozen yards upstream should be ample, but in progressing go quietly and keep away from the water. Heavy walking on the edge of the bank is a serious mistake at any time, but at night, as sound is then accentuated, the error is intensified.

Having made a short detour and selected a convenient stance, repeat your previous operations by casting first in a straight direction, then downstream and finally upstream. Should the result be negative, you must continue in progressive stages until you have reached the head of the pool. If by that time your bag is empty,

you must console yourself with the thought that the sea-trout have run farther upstream ; not a very satisfying deduction, I admit, but if on every occasion that you went fishing for sea-trout you hauled out the fish without limitation, you would soon come to the conclusion that angling is not much of a sport. Believe me, the fascination of the pastime rests in its uncertainty. When you realise that you have to pit your initiative and imagination against the wiles of a cute but worthy opponent, you will appreciate to the full the value of ultimate success.

If time permits and you have the option of other pools, you can wander on buoyed with an angler's unappeasable hope. Should you eventually return empty handed, do not be unduly disappointed, as there are nights when the sea-trout seem to suffer from labour troubles and go on strike.

One year, when I was in the habit of taking my air-dales for a last run at night, I made a point of walking to a bridge which crosses a perfect pool for sea-trout. My arrival at that bridge was regularly at about ten o'clock, and I made a custom of scrutinizing the water on every visit. When the moon was shining brightly I never saw a fish turn and the pool appeared to be dead. When the nights were dark, or the blackness was relieved by a faint light from the stars, the plops were numerous and continuous. If a very fine rain was falling, no slackening in the jumps was noticeable, but on nights when heavy rain hissed on the water, there was ostensibly nothing doing. When the air was balmy during a dark night movement in the pool reached its maximum, but when a chilliness in the atmosphere suggested that a buttoned jacket would be a wise precaution, the plops were infrequent. If a thick white mist obscured the water I heard not a sound.

As far as I could ascertain, most of the splashing came from under a fringe of low, spreading alders.

From this unscientific study I inferred that an agreeable night to moths was an admirable one for sea-trout fishing. Whether my surmise was right or wrong I have been unable to determine, but I regard the finding as a safe barometer for my guidance in night fishing, and the results have justified my faith.

If you should be influenced to follow my example, I trust that you will not be misled.

CHAPTER XI

STRIKING AND PLAYING

I HAVE heard a great deal of theoretical talk on how to strike a sea-trout when a fly is the lure in day-time, but as I am a practical fisher the arguments set forth have left me cold and unimpressed. Whether the speakers have had more experience of the fat lethargic brown trout of the chalk streams than of the sea-trout has not been disclosed.

To recommend a count of one, two, three before driving the barb into the jaw of a sea-trout is, to my mind, an extremely fallacious proposition. I may be an exception, but I have never known a sea-trout to take a fly in a half-hearted manner. Either the fish rises, sees that the fly is an utter fraud and turns over on its way back to the sheltered depth, or it snaps at the fly in a vicious fashion. True, the fish sometimes, in its unseemly haste, merely manages to make contact with the tip of the feather and then disappears as quickly as it came. It

certainly does not suck the fly to ascertain if the dressing is palatable.

When a sea-trout rises and accepts the fly the angler's only sound course is to strike in a split second. That is my considered opinion, based on years of acquaintance with the fish. By striking I do not mean a sudden upheaval of rod and tackle. All that is necessary is a quick turn of the wrist, so as to send the barb properly home. I am assuming, of course, that the rodster is controlling his line correctly, without allowing any slack.

Naturally, we do not all think alike, and while I have pricked many a fish in my time, I do not plead guilty to having lost one by giving it an opportunity of changing its mind. I firmly believe that if every angler on feeling a pluck tightened the line at once the number of lost fish would be considerably diminished.

At night there is no question of giving a second's respite to a taking sea-trout. The strike is made instantaneously and the fish is truly hooked. That a different code should be advocated for day fishing rather bewilders me. I am beginning to wonder whether the better catches which are made at night are due to the promptitude in striking.

Too much prominence is, I suggest, given to this striking business. The supposable problem can be solved easily by remembering the obvious fact that the barb must penetrate the sea-trout's jaw. A lightning turn of the wrist, whether by day or by night, will accomplish this deed, providing the strike is made immediately that the pluck is felt.

When using a metal minnow the same urgency is applicable, and the strike must be crisp and unhesitating. Even so, I have known cases where the angler has come off second best owing to the fish being a trifle too swift.

Having hooked the fish, the next item on the programme is to arrange for its safe conduct to the net. The

technique for night fishing differs a little from that which is in order for day work. At night, after seeing a silvery flash when the sea-trout jumps, you are at a loss, in the dark, to know exactly the intentions of the fish, and therefore you cannot afford to give the fish its head. At all costs you must keep the fish under control, and the breaking strain of your gear is your sole guide. Apply as much pressure as your tackle will allow, and bring the fish to the net as fast as you can. On account of this harsher discipline I suggested in a previous chapter a slightly heavier gut cast for night fishing.

A man with whom I am acquainted will in no circumstance use fine tackle for sea-trout at night, and he always mounts a salmon cast. He has astonished me again and again by catching small as well as big fish when throwing the thick gut, but he is an adept in dropping the fly artistically on the water.

For playing a sea-trout during day-time a theory is also prescribed, and this is to work in accordance with a time constant. One minute per pound weight is the rule laid down. I often speculate as to what kind of person this genius can be who starts these hares. I have fished for more years than I care to remember, and I have fished with some of the best rods in the country, but I have yet to meet the angler who follows such a hide-bound policy of estimating the weight of the fish which is hooked, be it salmon or sea-trout, and then counting minutes. Think of the various gauges of gut casts which are used, give a thought to the classes of rods employed, picture for a few seconds fast water and slack, and remember the relative fighting propensities of a fresh-run fish and a stale one, then try and figure out the precise meaning of the time constant. Why, I have had to exercise far more pains with a little rascal of two pounds than with a six-pounder.

Take my advice and do not be a foot-beagle, nor go to the expense of buying a stop-watch, but persuade your fish to come to your net as speedily as possible.

When hooked, a sea-trout does not behave in conformity with any set regulations. It is a law unto itself. It may jump once, then squirm and bolt; it may jump two or three times before dashing away in the hopes of gaining liberty, or, without giving you a sight of its sheen, it may dive into deep water. There really is no knowing what to expect, and you have to be ready for any emergency. Therefore try to keep a tight line and endeavour to tire the fish. If it decides on a long run you must, out of consideration for your tackle, humour the contestant to some degree, but apply the brake as soon as you can, not forgetting throughout the fight that, from your standpoint, the decisive moment will arrive only when the fish is securely netted.

During the past season I was concerned in a somewhat unique incident. I was covering a pool which usually contains a nice fish or two, and I was not surprised when I turned a beauty. I saw enough of it in that short time to judge its weight to be anything from eight to ten pounds. Although I put over several more casts, the fish did not reappear, and for further attention I made a mental note of the spot.

On the following afternoon a friend and I were working the river, and on coming to the pool I mentioned to my friend the previous day's happening. I suggested to him that he should have a throw, but he demurred, as he said that the fish was mine. Eventually I prevailed upon him to see whether his fly was more to the liking of the fish than mine had been. By means of some vegetation on the far bank I indicated where the fish had been lying, and my friend placed his fly correctly. Immediately there was a beautiful swirl, and my friend

shouted, "Got it." At the same time he walked rapidly backwards, and gathered yards of slack by pulling in the line irrespective of the reel. "I was afraid that would happen. It shot straight towards me, and it has buried itself in that mass of weed," said my friend. The weed was about four yards distant from our bank.

Every trick in an angler's magic-box was produced, but the fish was obdurate. To lose such a big fish was unthinkable, so, knowing that the hedgers were busy not far away, I said that I would fetch a long branch. Selecting an ash pole of some fifteen feet in length with a twiggy top, I was quickly at the side of the pool, and slipping down the bank, I commenced disturbing the weed behind the fish. Suddenly my friend shouted, "It's out." I saw the line shoot across the water, then upstream, but, alas! it came back, curling significantly. The fish had vanished, and with it the fly. Upon examining the broken cast, we noticed that, about an inch from where the fly had been attached, the gut was frayed, but we were unable to determine whether the fracture was due to friction against a rock or to persistent nibbling of the fish.

A fresh-run sea-trout is endowed with a superfluity of guile, and the angler who can vanquish a hefty specimen is to be congratulated.

The worst phase with which any rodster has to contend is when a fish darts in his direction. For the time being the fish is quite out of control, and the bare hope then is for the fish to swerve either upstream or down.

When sea-fishing from the shore my greatest misfortunes have arisen when the hooked ones have made straight for me. At such a time the speed of a travelling bass is amazing, and there is ever present the risk of a disconnection; so when dealing with a sea-trout disabuse your mind of time constants.

Having struck and played your fish, there is yet one more highly important detail which demands unflinching heed, and that is a merciful and prompt despatch of the victim. Some anglers are so thoughtless that I offer no excuse for referring to this understandable necessity. Do not allow a fish to gasp and expire on the river bank, but give it a crack with a stick across its neck. A smart blow delivered in the right place, even with a small stick, will perform the deed expeditiously.

A short while ago I was intent on extracting a fly from a fair-sized sea-trout which I had killed with the aid of a boxwood ruler, when I was interrupted by a voice, "Shouldn't 'ave thort 'er wude 'ave snuffed 'er." Looking up I saw old Bill fingering my ruler. I must explain that William, affectionately described by all and sundry as old Bill, is a confirmed poacher. Birds and fish are all the same to him, and he cannot keep his hands off them. He does not spoil for gain, as he places far less value on money than he does on snaring the wild; while a bird or a bit of "red hake" often finds its way gratuitously into a home of the needy. Old Bill is not a throw-back, as his proclivity is bred in the bone, for his father was a notorious poacher. Not infrequently William's father had to appear before the bench to answer a charge of having unlawfully taken a salmon, but the old man was never perturbed by these proceedings. When the case was completed and a fine announced, the old man would invariably say "Thank 'ee, gentlman. 'Er came owt o' river," referring to the salmon, and he would add in all seriousness regarding the fine, 'An' 'er 'ull come owt o' river tu."

So far old Bill has escaped the unpleasant notice of the keepers, both fish and game, but perhaps he is more covert in his actions than was his father. He is usually on the river bank, and he knows the lies of most fish.

One day, late in August, he beckoned me, and on joining him he said, "See 'er, ole sow spawning, and thair be killer o'er thair. Never know'd um so early bevore." Old Bill did not need glasses to distinguish the hen and cock fish, though some minutes elapsed before I could detect the cock fish waiting in the dark shade of the bank-side bushes.

Old Bill handed the ruler to me and said, "Purty small fer tu kill that 'un. Us allus uses aller sticks wen us goes clatting fer eels. Fine sticks, allers be. Give um a clout on 'ead and snuffs um in a jiffy."

"Aller sticks?" I queried.

"Yus, um as grows on this 'ere bush. Us allus calls um aller sticks," replied old Bill, pointing to an alder bush.

I do not know the efficacy of an alder stick. Some day, perhaps, I will give a trial to this kind of weapon, but meanwhile I can unreservedly recommend a boxwood ruler.

Before concluding this chapter I should like to make a strong appeal to anglers generally to support their sport. Unfortunately there are innumerable men who go fishing year after year and who never give a thought to the necessity of safeguarding their interests. This neglect is not only detrimental to themselves, but is scarcely fair to those who are striving to protect the game. If everybody failed in what is really a duty, angling would reach a sorry pass. When you remember that, within the lifetime of the present generation, many rivers have become dead owing to pollution and that others are rapidly approaching that horrid stage, you will comprehend the pressing need for action. To catch fish is a most enjoyable recreation, but we have to see that the stock is maintained and if possible replenished. This desirability can be attained solely by every angler being

an active or a passive watchman. We cannot all be direct guardians of our glorious heritage, but everyone can do his share indirectly. Throughout the country there are clubs which cater for every class of angler, and these clubs keep ever watchful eyes on the waters which come within their jurisdiction. Then there are the angling journals, which are always ready to promote the aims of the wielders of the rod, and to give publicity to cases of pollution. Therefore, the least that every fisher can do is to either join a club or to subscribe to a fishing periodical.

Recently, when a friend and I were spending an angling holiday together we talked a lot of "shop," and in course of conversation I asked my friend whether he belonged to a certain fishing association in his district. He replied in the negative, but added that his father when he was alive had been a member of the club for many years. In referring to a debatable article in a current fishing publication I inquired whether my friend had noticed it. He said that he did not take the paper, although his father had subscribed to it. I could not help asking my friend if he realized that to no small degree he had to thank his father for the sport which he now enjoys, and as a corollary I asked him what he was doing for his son who is a very keen angler. My friend smiled and answered that he had never looked at the subject in that light. This, you will probably agree, is a strange example of regrettable forgetfulness.

I am sure that in the majority of instances the lack of rightful support for our national sport is due to thoughtlessness, and, without further labouring the point, I hope that this timely reminder will bear fruit.

CHAPTER XII

KNOTS AND KNACKS

AN angler once appealed to me to explain why his gut casts always split in the top of the loop where he attached his line. He produced several casts and on examining them I noticed in each an ominous crack at the place denoted. As the casts were composed of silkworm gut, I not unnaturally inferred that they had not been properly soaked before being used, but the aggrieved inquirer assured me that he never failed to take this elementary precaution. Thinking that probably the casts were obtained from old stock I subjected them to the usual tests and found them to be perfectly sound. I could offer no valid reason why good casts should crack in this manner and, as a last resource, I asked to see the knot which the angler was in the habit of tying. When the rod and line were handed to me I was astonished to observe that a fisherman of evidently long standing should employ such a crude means of attaching his line to the cast. At the end of the line was a simple knot, and when the connection to the gut loop was made, another simple knot was tied. I inquired why such a makeshift knot was used. The reply was to the effect that it was easy and would not slip. I pointed out that this knot was the cause of all the trouble, as round the gut of the cast's loop there was only one turn of the line. I explained that the strain on the loop was therefore severe in this particular place, and that eventually the thin line would cut through the gut.

I showed to the careless angler how a "figure of eight" knot could be tied, and demonstrated to him that this

knot would not slip. I also drew his attention to the fact that, with this attachment, the strain on the loop was evenly distributed.

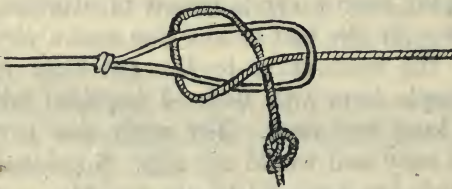
Although most anglers have their pet theories for tying knots, there are certain standard forms of knots



“FIGURE OF EIGHT” KNOT

which will respectively serve most purposes. These knots which need no skill in tying should be included in the curriculum of every angler. If your memory cannot always be relied upon, make a rough drawing of the knots on a postcard which, for ready reference, should be carried in the fishing bag.

When experimenting with new knots, or when instructing a novice in knot tying, I resort to pieces of string, or an ordinary door key and a piece of string.



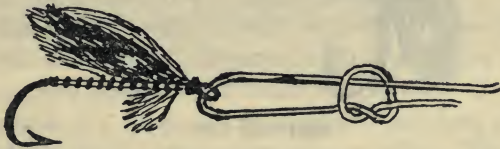
“COMMON BEND” KNOT

With these large scale implements the manipulation of a knot can be more easily followed than when the finger and thumb obscure a small hook and fine gut.

For attaching the line to a cast I prefer the “figure of

eight" knot, as it is trusty and can be untied without difficulty. There is, however, another knot suitable for this purpose and that, in sea-fishing, is called the "common bend." I invariably use it when fishing from the shore as it can be tied quickly and is quite reliable, but I do not care about the extra knot on the end of the line when throwing a fly on fresh water: that is merely a personal fad.

There are several excellent methods of tying the tail fly to a cast, but I think that the "half-hitch" knot is sufficiently satisfactory to be described as being first-class. When using gut substitute do not on any account forget that knots in this article are liable to slip.



"HALF-HITCH" KNOT

If I am reduced to a gut substitute cast, I pass the gut through the eye of the hook and then, at the extreme end of the cast, I tie a simple knot very securely. Next I tie the "half-hitch" knot as close as possible to the first knot. This device prevents the "half-hitch" knot from slipping. For very small flies I am not altogether partial to the extra knot, but better a suspicion of clumsiness than a lost fish. With the larger fly used for sea-trout, the additional knot is not so much in evidence.

Should you wish to mount a "dropper," the necessary point can be attached to the cast by first tying a simple knot tightly and then tying another similar knot. See that you effect the attachment immediately above a joint

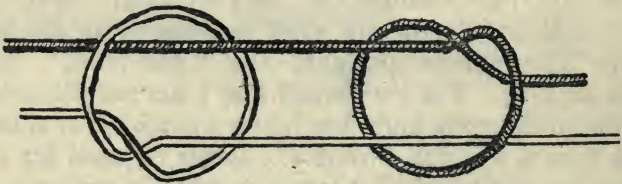
in the cast, so as to obviate the point carrying the "dropper" from slipping down the cast.

If the necessity arises for joining two pieces of gut or for repairing a broken line, the "Fisherman's" knot is at your service. If the gut is of different thicknesses or



DROPPER KNOT

even if the gut is very thin there is a grave risk of the knot slipping, so either thread each end of the gut through its respective knot a second time, or tie a simple knot tightly at the end of each piece of gut before starting to tie the "Fisherman's" knot.



"FISHERMAN'S" KNOT

Although I have given trials to scores of knots, good, bad and indifferent judged from various aspects, the ones which I have enumerated suffice me for all occasions.

As a note of warning I counsel you to test every knot which you tie before bringing it into use. A steady and sustained pull for a minute or so is generally enough to disclose any defect.

Some anglers are exceptionally deft with their hands, and can construct all kinds of fishing utilities. Here is, however, a gadget which every sea-troutman, without any special skill, can fashion, and it is one which, while offering a monetary benefit, will lead, I think, to better catches. I refer to a core for carrying a metal minnow.

I will endeavour to smooth the way by detailing and explaining the process. The materials required are treble hooks, swivels and single steel rust-proofed wire. The only tools needed are supple fingers.

The size of the treble should be number two, Redditch scale, and, as we shall dispense with beads, the eye must be round and fairly large so as to prevent the minnow slipping into the bend of the hooks. Further, the round eye enables the minnow to spin easily. The swivels should be rust-proof best steel, box pattern and should be half an inch in length. I find that fine gauge wire, with an approximate breaking strain of twenty-five pounds, answers admirably.

Now take a piece of the wire about a foot in length, and double it. Thread the ends through the eye of the treble, but in so doing, pass one end over and through the eye, and pass the other end under and through the eye. Pull the ends until the looped end is near the treble. Now give the looped end one complete turn. Let the looped end pass over one hook in the treble. Next pull the ends until the looped end is tightly fixed between the hooks and hard against the shank.

Thread the ends through the eye of a swivel, passing one end over and through the eye and the other end

under and through the eye. Allow a length of one and a half inches between the eye of the treble and the eye of the swivel. Bend both the wires neatly over the eye of

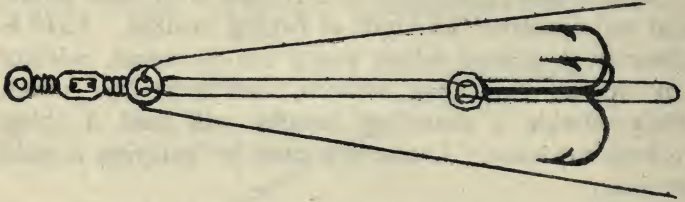


FIG. 1. MAKING THE CORE

the swivel, and bring the ends to the eye of the treble, passing one end over and through the eye, and the other end under and through the eye. Pull the ends firmly, and you now have four strands of wire close together between the treble and the swivel.

Bend the ends back over the eye of the treble. Now cut one end about an inch from the treble. Next hold

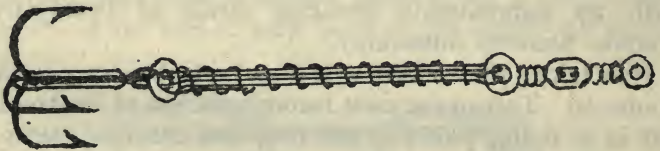


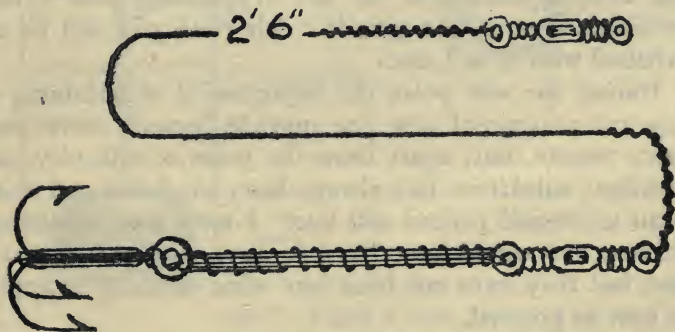
FIG. 2. CORE COMPLETED

the other end rigidly, and twist the treble round and round as many times as possible. This action will cause the held end to form complete turns round the four strands. When the turns have reached the swivel cut the end close to the swivel, and see that this end lies

snugly between two of the strands. That completes the core for the minnow.

Next take a length of the wire of about three feet. Attach one end to the eye of the swivel. This connection can be made by passing the wire through the eye giving the wire a tight bend and allowing a length of about three inches to bind round and round the long length, in a spiral manner. At the other end of the long length of wire, attach another swivel in a similar way. This will give a trace of roughly two feet six inches in length.

The boring in the minnow must be large enough for the swivels to pass through it. Now pass the trace



CORE AND TRACE

through the minnow which, of course, is the slotless type, and the job is complete.

After a little practice the core and trace can be fashioned in a few minutes; in less time than I have occupied in delineating it, but I have taken the construction stage by stage, so that you can follow the directions without difficulty. The details, which may seem to be insignificant, are really most important, as an incorrect winding will defeat the object.

With a short trace as suggested, complete control can

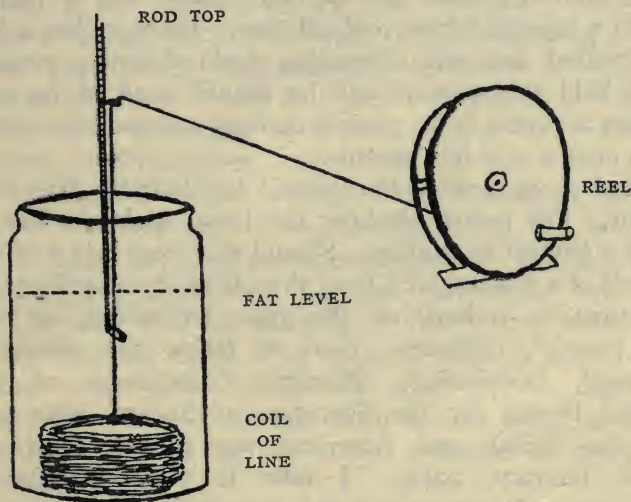
be exercised when casting. If the trace is long, say of five feet, there is an absence of control owing to the swing. This fault is most marked when casting in awkward and tree grown places. With this specially constructed core and trace, the minnow spins sweetly, and you can watch it spin as it travels through the air when being cast.

When I mentioned, at the commencement of this description, that the lure would lead to better catches, I did so designedly as, to my knowledge, this home-made form of spinner has accounted for thousands of salmon and sea-trout. In fact, it is used to-day by several of our best exponents of the art of spinning, and I am confident that, if you give it a fair trial, you will be as satisfied with it as I am.

During the war years the opportunity of obtaining a tapered waterproof silk line quickly became more and more remote, but, apart from the years of difficulty, an excellent substitute has always been available and that is an undressed plaited silk line. I have met numerous anglers who would have liked to have used this type of line, but they have not been sure what dressing to apply or how to proceed.

Here then is an efficient way of curing the line. If possible, procure some deer fat as that constitutes a perfect dressing. Failing that, use mutton fat, but this must contain no salt. Liquefy the fat by making it hot. Obtain a glass jam pot, size two pounds, and heat this so as to keep the fat warm as long as required. Pour sufficient fat into the jam pot until a level approximating two thirds is reached. But before heating the fat make the following preparations: take the top joint of a rod, and thread the end of the line through the end ring and the next ring. Secure the end of the line to the reel which you use when fishing.

Now drop the drum of line or the coil of line into the hot fat and leave it there for several minutes. Place perpendicularly the rod top in the jam pot, and, if possible, prevail upon somebody to hold the rod joint in



HOW TO DRESS A LINE

this position. Next wind the line slowly on the reel. By this time the line will have absorbed enough of the fat.

When all the line is wound on the reel, leave the fatted line to cool thoroughly. Later, or on the following day, you will notice that the line on the reel is encased in hard fat: that is an advantage. When you go fishing, simply draw the line off the reel in the usual manner and the fat will grease the rings of your rod, and the line will thus run smoothly.

As a spot of fat will go a long way, you will be well advised when operating, to place some newspapers under the jam pot containing the hot fat, so as to avoid any adverse domestic comments.

A friend of mine, a well-known salmon fisher, has used this kind of greased line for many years, and he prefers it to a tapered waterproof silk line. He says that a line so treated, and with a breaking strain of sixteen pounds, will hold any salmon, and he should know as he considers a season to be poor if he does not connect with a fish or two of thirty pounds.

And so we come to the end of "Catching the Wily Sea-trout," but before finishing the book, I should like to pay a tribute to angling. Should this work fall into the hands of a non-angler I trust that, if he is not sufficiently tempted to embark on the great adventure, he will, by precept, influence others to follow the advice of General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces for the liberation of Europe, who said to the British and American war correspondents on 17th January, 1944, "I take it you are just as anxious as I am to win this war and get it done so we can all go fishing." A grand sentiment expressed characteristically.

Some years ago, one of the chief officials of a Government office was fishing with me, and he told me that in his Department the average remaining life of a man, on being superannuated at the age of sixty, was only three years. As all the men who enter the Civil Service are what are termed, selected lives; that is they have to pass a medical examination before appointment, I was more than surprised by his statement. I have no means of verifying the information, still I have no reason for doubting it. But, think of it; three bare years of freedom. Yet I can fully understand that a man, who, year

in year out, for forty years or more, has lived under official restraint, may crack when the halter is removed, if he has no outside hobby or pursuit with which to occupy his mind.

Sport is a splendid antidote for the ills of man, but, as creeping age extends its icy grip, the spirit may be willing though the flesh is weak. I write knowingly as I have experienced the cramping tendency of passing years. At forty I was still good for rigger, at fifty I played my last game of cricket on the Trent Bridge ground at Nottingham. Sixty told me that tennis is a trifle too hot, and at seventy I found a round of golf somewhat fatiguing. Now, having passed the allotted span, I have returned more seriously to my first and ever abiding love of angling. Yes, and now when I take the rod in hand and see the glint of the flowing river, the same kind of thrill that coursed through my veins those many years back, still urges me to throw a natty fly. That I am not alone in this wondrous feeling is borne out by the voiced opinions of my aged fishing friends.

One esteemed comrade in arms, who is on the brink of four score years, rises at five o'clock on many mornings during the winter months, makes a long journey by rail, and tramps over the soggy and gloom-shrouded meads for the purpose of sitting on the river-bank in the hope of catching a specimen red-fin or a weighty chub. When he returns home late in the evening, with glowing tales of otter and fox, teal and pheasant, and not infrequently with an empty creel, he always says that he has spent a glorious day : such is angling.

If, therefore, these men of the Civil Service, who die young, had but spent a pound or two on rod and tackle, they would, I venture to think, not only have lived to a riper age, but they probably would have been enamoured

with the idea of catching the wily sea-trout, while in one way they would have benefited by, in the words of Milton, "the helpful experiences of hunters, fowlers and fishermen."

THE END

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