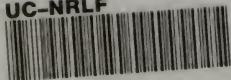


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THE SONG
OF
THE REEL



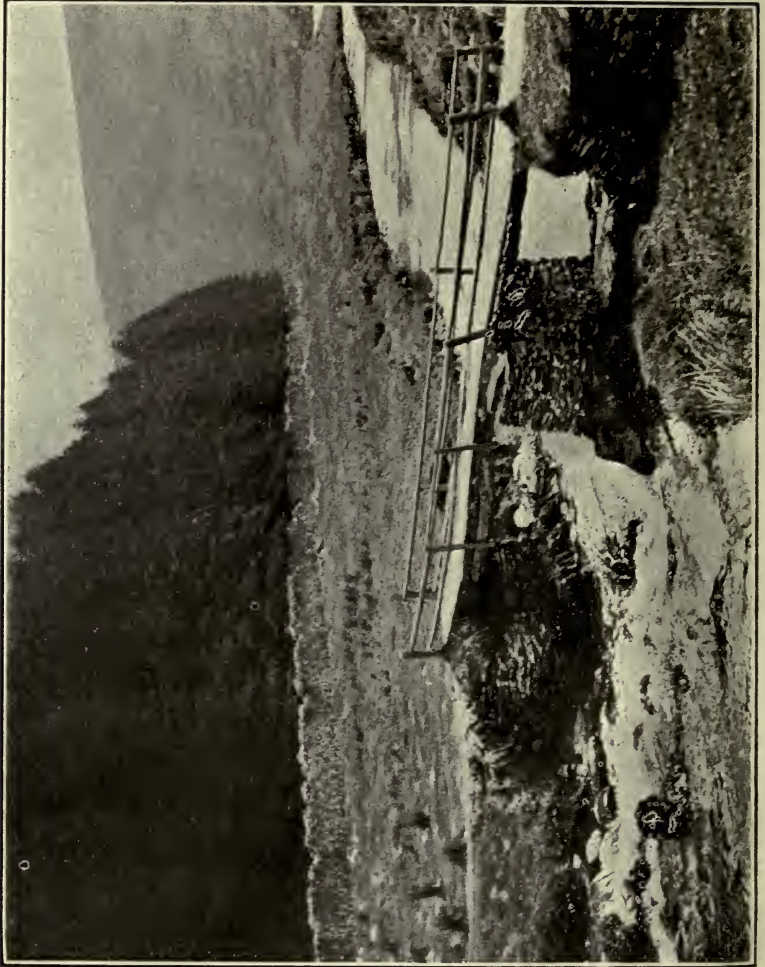
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C. A. STEVENSON

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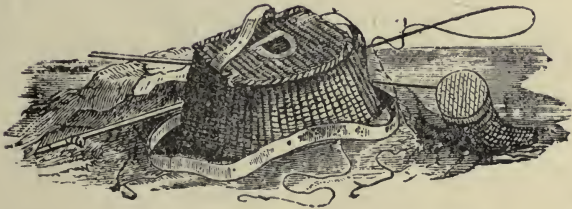


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THE
SONG OF THE REEL.

BY
C. A. STEVENSON.
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NOTTINGHAM:
H. B. SAXTON, KING STREET.

1914.

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INTRODUCTION.

Hark to the music of the reel !
We listen with devotion ;
There's something in that circling wheel
That stirs the heart's emotion !
Songs and Ballads of Sport.

What exquisite thrills the harsh battle-song of the reel sends through the frame of the angler ! Every nerve becomes tense, every muscle tightens, at the sound of the shrill, discordant music. It rings with a note of coming triumph, and of the realised joy of strife: the angler has overcome all preliminary difficulties, and at last is at grips with his fish ! One of the supreme moments of an angler's day has come to him—a moment of "glorious life."

But, speaking metaphorically, the song of the reel is not merely a song of death. It sounds also a far finer note, a note more subtle, more intense—an elfin symphony—a song of the poetry and wondrous romance of the rod.

On the banks of one of the swift and beautiful streams of Exmoor, the writer once met a man of the district, who solemnly imparted the fact that he considered fishing dreadfully slow unless he was catching fish continually. "I wait until the rain has replenished and clouded the streams," said he, "then, using worm, I have some rare sport, frequently filling my basket with forest fish."

This man, who judged of the joys of angling by the number of fish he caught, had, as it were, all the wonder of Exmoor at his feet: a region pregnant with the memory of John Ridd and the Doones: a region abounding in such delectable streams as the Barle, the Exe, Badgworthy Water and the far-famed Lyn, which last

flows down a rocky gorge to the Severn Sea. Devon, also, had he at hand—Devon, the “Shire of the Sea Kings”; the land of junket, cream and cider—with all its wealth of lovely trout-streams, and moorland and sylvan scenery. Yet this man saw neither poetry nor romance in angling; whilst others find both in the far less beautiful midland rivers, on sluggish fenland drains, or even on the prosaic banks of canals.

Successful sport with the fish is undoubtedly the greatest delight of the angler, but this does not constitute his only incentive, his solitary joy. Certainly a man does not don the garb of a Waltonian merely that he may study Nature, or spend the whole or part of a day in idleness; but, whilst pursuing his leisured pastime, he finds ample time to observe and study those things that are not exactly part of the gentle art of angling. For example, the bottom-fisherman, seated on camp-stool or basket; the dry-fly man, watching for a “rise,” and the wet-fly man, passing from one stickle to another, have unrivalled opportunity for gaining exact knowledge of the habits of the numerous beautiful wild birds that frequent the riverside meadows, or, if less scientifically disposed, for revelling in the countless beauties of a luxuriant countryside. And, although the angler is often too much preoccupied to feast his eyes upon all the pictures and phenomena of Nature, he nevertheless feels and is influenced by their presence. As a fellow Waltonian so charmingly expresses it: “To lure the speckled trout is after all a small thing compared to the associations which surround the recreation of the contemplative man, active withal in his recreation. The wielding of the rod, the casting of the fly, is in its way the most artistic and elegant of sporting accomplishments that man has made for himself and woman has graced herself with as an accomplishment.”

The genuine angler is an admirer of the beautiful and a lover of the ancient. He delights in anything that is shrouded in the mystery of the dim and distant past; he revels in legend, folk-lore and in the quaint and homely rustic characters he meets in his wanderings. And, when he has decided upon the scene of an angling

holiday, he consults the guide-book and notes the historical associations of his chosen ground. It is not sufficient for him that some beetling turrets, decayed and storm-beaten, rear themselves above the crumbling, ivy-wrapt ruins of a one-time noble castle; he must know the history and the secret of the stricken, gloomy pile. And, whilst gazing upon its decayed estate and compassionating its departed magnificence, he peoples it in fancy with the picturesque and stately figures which enhanced the martial glamour of its prime and splendour.

Sometimes, after an exceptionally dour day when misfortune has dogged his every effort, the keenest angler entertains serious thoughts of "giving up" fishing. However, at the bottom of his heart, he knows this can never be. In reality, blank days, even of the blankest kind, serve but to make the angler the more of an enthusiast—fanatic, if you will—in his art. He burns to atone for his late inglorious performance—to show that his hand has not lost its cunning. Moreover, he is deeply aware that once again he will hear and follow the seductive song of the reel, whose true inwardness and mystery those only who are anglers do know.

THE SONG OF THE REEL.

CHAPTER I.

My Bridge of Dreams.

A COMPARATIVELY insignificant little structure, time-worn and moss-grown—such is my Bridge of Dreams. A merry streamlet glides beneath its single arch, and spreads over golden gravel, in shallow, translucent waters that anon are swirling and splashing among lichen-covered boulders ere they tumble to rest in a diminutive pool, foam-flecked and slumberous. Thus, for a while, the happy streamlet tarries below the bridge, whence again it flows reluctantly, with many a twist and turn, past mill and farmstead, to lose its individuality in that of a mighty river.

This Bridge of Dreams, which has found so intimate a corner in my heart, is built of stone; and, though insignificant, is decidedly picturesque, and congenial in its situation. Its low, broad parapet might have been designed specially for the angler's behoof, so pleasant is it to lean upon; whilst, like unto all other bridges, this one possesses that attraction of semi-mystery, which ever stays the immediate progress of the wayfarer. No friendly tree casts shadows there, nor hill nor mountain offers shelter; the bridge is in an open spot, breezy and sunny, and full of the murmurings of restless waters. Yet never was the shadiest woodland sanctuary more conducive to meditation than the atmosphere that clings about the mossy stones

of the weathered parapet ; never was fisherman more winningly invited to linger, nor so readily induced to dream.

There, even at the foot of this age-mellowed bridge, Nature—so it seems—loves to shake her tresses after winter sleep and unfold her wondrous treasures, honouring this spot before all others with the first glamour of her awakening. There blooms the earliest snowdrop, coltsfoot, violet and primrose, what time the remnants of the withered vegetation of yester-year are still in evidence on almost every hand. And there, flaunting themselves to the sun, the catkins on hazel and alder swing to and fro in the March winds ; whilst other signs abound which tell of spring's approach.

Whosoever comes to my Bridge of Dreams loiters thereon, and peers over the balustrade into the limpid streamlet. Around this grey old structure the pulse of rural life indeed beats feebly ; yet Time hangs not heavily there, for the drowsy hours speed by all too swiftly. Shadowy forms flit through the waters shaded by the bridge ; hence the loiterer infers that fish of some kind lurk beneath the ancient archway. The discriminating angler, however, recognises these fish as trout and grayling ; and oftentimes he may watch them lying in the shallows or poised in the deeper waters.

Ere the Ides of March are passed, a subtle attraction draws me to my Bridge of Dreams. Thither my footsteps trend ; yet I know not the reason of my going, unless it be that upon the little bridge I can best anticipate that happy hour when rod of mine no longer shall hang idly upon the rack, but, being liberated from my city trammels, I shall journey in quest of trout to some sparkling rivulet of the "wilds." Thus do I drift away from this prosaic old world of ours into the enchanted land of day-dreams.

Visions arise of broad rivers watering sylvan plains dotted by sequestered villages ; of brooklets meandering through the umbrageous valleys where, of yore, Arcadians may have danced to the shepherd's pipe ; of garrulous streamlets chattering past lonely hamlets in the hills ; of rollicking becks disturbing the silence of heather-covered wastes ; and of foaming torrents hurling themselves furiously from regions of mountain solitude and grandeur.

Although the little bridge is dear to me chiefly on account of the memories it awakens, nevertheless, whilst I lean upon its mossy parapet, there is much to interest and provide me with entertainment. Each token of Nature's wondrous processes, or man's purposeful handiwork, bears a significant message. I note the purple sheen spreading over the leafless hedgrows; also the whitish marks that stand out conspicuously upon the withy trunks, showing where slim boughs recently overhung the stream. For, when some sturdy yokel is lopping the willows that flourish in the water-meads, I know that preparations for the opening of the trout-season are proceeding apace. And, before many days are over, all those boughs likely to impede the angler's efforts will have been removed, so that, some little time hence, the lord of the manor and his guests may cast a fly upon the streamlet without undue hindrance.

A short distance away, at the three lane-ends, stands a row of tall elms where dwells a colony of noisy rooks. Doubtless the rookery has existed from time immemorial; a place of corvine clamour from, say, Candlemas to All Hallow's Eve, or even Martinmas. Inharmonious yet indispensable is the music of the rookery; how sadly would it be missed were it to cease for ever! How strange a spot would then be my Bridge of Dreams! Happily, however, year in, year out, let but winter relax its severity, even if only for a while, and the birds resort to the trees and busy themselves in repairing the storm-battered nests. Scanty respect indeed is paid to the ancient tradition of St. Valentine's Day, for many of the rooks mated months ago, and now, in the first warm sunlight of the new year, they perch above their old homes and, with much ado, assert their right of possession. Hence, from the majestic elms, a raucous uproar arises, the harshness of which is mitigated when one remembers that this bucolic discord is synchronous with the dawning of the spring.

If, in March, the weather be genial, the song of the great tit and the twitter of the yellow-hammer are heard, whilst the skylark gives thanks with a full heart, and, at eventide, the rapturous melodies of thrush and blackbird ring throughout the valley.

Sometimes several trout are to be seen poised in the translucent pool below the bridge, or in the deeper water above. In either place they are somewhat difficult to discern, since, in the first instance, their liveries are in concord with the small boulders and golden gravel with which the stream is strewn. If but a fish or two lie there, they are almost imperceptible to the eye; but, when poised in considerable numbers, as is the case occasionally, they can be seen quite plainly. Above the bridge the water is deeper, and one's gaze has to penetrate the depth ere trout can be observed, but sometimes they "stand" nearer to the surface.

On my last visit, there were a few fish poised above the moss-grown structure. I counted seven, all trout. For a while they remained seemingly motionless, then each, in turn, with a smart action of the tail, would move first to this side, then to that, examining everything that might be edible. Occasionally, one would drop down-stream and be lost to sight in the bridge's shadow, shortly to reappear to take up its former station. Then a fish more venturesome than the others would ascend to the surface and rise at something or other, I knew not what.

In weight these trout ranged from a quarter to half a pound, but presently there appeared among them a monster fish—for this streamlet, a leviathan. A two-pounder, at least, I estimated it to be, and when it glided down to the bridge it looked clumsy and out of place in so small a water. Approaching the archway, it swung round and faced the stream, then gradually it fell back with the current and disappeared under the bridge. A considerable time elapsed ere it left the shelter of the arch; upon doing so it darted through the deeper water and seemed to wriggle along inelegantly across the shallows, over a stretch of fine sand which the action of the stream had thrown up into little ridges that resembled those on the sea-shore.

Yes! there is usually some little thing or other to attract the attention of whomsoever is beguiled to linger on the Bridge of Dreams. Ever is it a pleasant place, but never more so than when the first anemones and daffodils appear, for then, if skies be clear, it

is full of the bright sunlight that, in the early days of the year, is so welcome to nature and humanity alike.

Wayfarers love to tarry on my Bridge of Dreams, and I have heard them liken the streamlet unto the " Brook " whereof Tennyson sang. To them the spot is one where they may luxuriously rest awhile, and perchance smoke a pipe of peace ; where, lolling against the parapet, they may watch the graceful movements of the trout and grayling. But to me, especially in the " sweet of the year," it is a place of shadows and of dreams.

CHAPTER II.

The April Day.

THE angler, to whom the April day appeals, is a fisherman of the wet-fly. At present the sunk-fly reigns supreme, for the time of the dry-fly is not yet. True, there are days during fickle April, and even in moody March, when the dry-fly man may beneficially venture to the water-side. But these times are few and far between; and even the wet-fly man's April day is occasionally compressed into one short, noontide hour. However, the angler who, when April's here, loves to ply his art, on rapid streams, according to the canons of the wet-fly, is happy in the knowledge that he enjoys many advantages over his brethren of the dry-fly.

He has felt elation on the "rampageous" streams of the "North Countrie," of Wales, of Derbyshire, and of Devonshire; he has imbibed the wholesome air of the region "betwixt ling and lowland," and has been enraptured once again by the dauntless, wild half-pounders what time the dry-fly man is still anticipating his days on the southern chalk-streams.

He confesses that he harbours deep sympathy for the dry-fly man, although he does not envy him. He, too, has tasted and approved the sweets of the world of the dry-fly—a world at once alluring and entrancing! He knows that to fish the floating fly effectually it is necessary to employ tact and science, and he recognises that to fish it well is to achieve that which embodies all the highest ideals of the gentle art of angling. Yet, on the whole, he still retains a strong affection for the wet-fly, fished in the irreproachable upstream style. He regards it as an almost incomparable

mode of angling, and his enthusiasm for it is unquenchable. And so, when fickle April comes, he seeks the game half-pounders in the rough and tumbled waters of a boulder-scattered stream.

Very often, the lover of the April day is the object of much ridicule on the part of the dry-fly man, the "butterfly" fisherman, and the non-angler. They declare that he goes to the riverside with the sole purpose of catching fish; that he fails to accomplish his purpose and suffers great physical discomfort. Furthermore, his scoffers say that, after he has been beaten and buffeted by the raging wind, drenched to the skin by the rain, and chilled to the bone by the intense cold, he returns home with an empty creel and a miserable and dejected countenance, and proclaims what a "glorious" day he has had! He replies that it is this battling with the elements that constitutes the charm of the April day. The capture of trout in unpropitious weather gives not less pleasure, but probably more, than does the capture of the same under more genial conditions. He does not deliberately wait for an unfavourable day on which to visit the stream: but he will not be deterred from carrying out his arrangements by bad weather, so long as it is not absolutely impossible. He prefers the balmier April day; but he enjoys the blustering one. He abides the rough with the smooth, and maintains that, as it takes all kinds of people to make a world, so does it need all sorts of weather to complete the education of the angler. Who will dispute the fact that but few hours of the season are spent entirely in vain on the river bank, even though the weather be dreary and the day unremunerative in the matter of sport?

Nature and the trout-stream have always something new to tell the angler; they have always something to show that gives him cause to deplore his ignorance. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that there are times in early spring when it would be absurd and useless to put together his rod. And he also avows—without shame—that there are days on which the inclement conditions do not exactly give him pleasure during the time he is actually exposed to them. But when he has discarded his waders, embedded his

feet in comfortable slippers, and, after a hearty meal, has sunk into the depths of a luxurious chair, the enjoyment of the day begins to take some tangible shape and form. The cosiness of the old angling inn and the warmth of the bright fire have upon him a soothing influence; the exposure to the open air has endowed him with the glow of health and vigour. It is then—and frequently not until then—that he realises the glories and the pleasures of the April day. Thus it often happens that the after-effects bring more enjoyment than the actual experience. Yet, withal, does not this defiance of the elements appeal to the more robust side of the angler's nature? To many it does; to many, too, it does not. How trying, indeed, must be our climate to the respecer of the weather!

I remember once enjoying exhilarating sport, four brace of trout being landed, one very wintery April day. The portion of the month I had spent in the "North countrie" had been characterised by the most tantalising fickleness on the part of the weather—by mild and blustering breezes; by rain, hail, sleet, thunder and lightning. But there were also the proverbial sunshine and showers of the month, and rainbows of vivid hues, and times when bars of sunlight and shadow chased one another across the fields. Sunsets there were that irradiated the land with flaming glares of crimson and scarlet—sunsets bewildering by their wondrous wildness and beauty. And there were nights of pallid moonlight and keen frosts.

Those anglers who are acquainted with the valley of the Yore, or Ure, will have some conception of its loveliness under the varying influences of the April day. Those who have stood and gazed upon the river where it hurls itself over rock ledges, throwing up spray to glisten in the golden April sunshine, will know its charm, and will agree with Mr. Arthur Norway when he exclaims, "Ah, exquisite Aysgarth! Who would not strive and strive again to reach some true expression of the fair picture which lies glowing in his memory! Words are but a palisade, through whose chinks one can, at most, catch some gleam of all that beauty, and while I sit and vainly

steep my senses in the roar and turmoil of the flashing water, I know well that I might as easily describe a swallow's flight as the abounding loveliness of this great fall at Aysgarth."

None but the happiest recollections will dwell in the mind of those who have looked down upon the Yore from the cliff in the park of Bolton Hall, or who have followed it where it flows past picturesque Wensley, or through the delightful Hackfall Woods. At West Tanfield the river is full of ripples and murmurings, and the old bridge which spans it invites indulgence in the irresistible habit of "bridge-musing." Here in this spot linger memories of John Jackson and "Max" Walbran, two noted Yorkshire anglers. During his lifetime, Walbran was inseparable from Tanfield and the "Bruce Arms," and now rests in the little graveyard, within sound of the song of the stream he loved and fished for over forty years.

A word of warning to anglers fishing this river might here be added. A storm in the region where the Yore is newly born will sometimes cause the water to rise suddenly, and it will thus be seen that too great a care cannot be exercised whilst wading. There are places also in this rapid stream where the shelving ledges of rock form veritable death-traps for the visiting angler. At Tanfield there is a spot the grave dangers of which Walbran himself continually pointed out; and it was there, curiously enough, that he eventually met his untimely end.

Within the hallowed precincts of this charming valley of the Yore I spent the day which stands out conspicuously in the fields of memory. April had nearly traversed its allotted course along the path of Time, and was almost stepping upon the threshold of May. Although morning was ushered in with golden sunshine, it could not be said that great expectations in the way of sport were borne on the wings of the nor'-west wind, for it was keen and boisterous.

"What flies had I best try?" I soliloquised whilst walking briskly towards the river, which sparkled in the brightness of the morning. I decided finally upon the Early Brown as tail fly, with Spring Black, Dark Snipe and Orange, and Waterhen Bloa as first,

second, and third droppers respectively. The Early Brown is the first fly to appear on the streams in the North of England, and as a "stretcher" kills well throughout April, since the seasons nowadays appear to be a month behind their proper times. Other indispensable flies at this period of the year are the Waterhen Bloat—the Blue Dun of the Yorkshire patterns—Spring Black, Snipe Bloat, Dark Snipe and Purple, and several of the Partridge hackles.

I entered the river at the foot of the stream to be fished first. The water, lapping and swirling around my wader-clad legs, acted as a harmless stimulant, and dispelled all forebodings and fears of failure. The adverse wind proved very irritating; but wading enabled me to cast up and across the stream, and my four orthodox spider or hackled flies searched the thin water at the edge of the fast currents. I proceeded up the river, trying all the likely water, and by-and-bye the bending rod denoted the first trout of the morning. Trickily dancing around, it resisted the gentle pressure I applied, but at length came downstream, and I luckily netted it whilst it was darting past me.

Threatening clouds gathered in the north-west and the wind blew in gusts, the great trees swaying to the power of Æolus. And anon, the air was filled with snowflakes, twirled in every direction. Thicker and thicker they fell, to vanish when they alighted on the earth, saving here and there on the bleak uplands, where they settled as if pleased to find a spot willing to give sanctuary to a belated touch of winter. But the sun came out again, and the rod bent to the rush of another trout.

Thus, throughout the day, periods of sunshine and calm, wind and snow, alternated with remarkable persistence, and at length eight gamesome trout were safely in the creel. Two grayling also came to hand from the "flats" but were returned, for they were out of season, and the "Lady of the Streams" is treasured in the Yore.

These fish of the boulder-strewn streams are lusty and cunning. It is one thing to hook them and another to land them. Down

among the rocks they dive, where for some moments they remain, in spite of all the angler's efforts to dislodge them. And often at such moments they are given up as lost—a surmise which frequently proves correct.

When for the last time I splashed ashore, there glowed in the west a sunset of exquisite beauty—wild and brilliant. It bathed the hills in crimson light, and sent clouds ablaze with scarlet flying in confusion across the sky. Shortly, however, the sun dipped down beyond the hills, and although the afterglow still lingered on the far ridges the April day was fast drawing to its close. Gradually and gradually, “sober-suited” night crept over the dale, accompanied by another brief snowstorm. But presently the stars twinkled overhead, and the snow-besprinkled sides of the fells looked strangely white in the light of the moon. The nor'-west wind, with its wintry sting, moaned around the old inn and brought the dalesmen hurrying along the road to the cosy bar to quaff a steaming beverage and discuss the possibilities of the weather.

Snowstorm and sunshine had succeeded one another, and the wind had blown at its will. Darkness had fallen, and the April day had run its course.

CHAPTER III.

In Arcadia.

POETS, both ancient and modern, have idealised Arcadia as a land of peace, innocence and simplicity. The western portion of what was the old Arcadia is described as rugged, desolate and wild, in remoter ages covered by gigantic forests, whilst the eastern part is said to be more fertile, luxuriant valleys lying between hills of lesser altitude. The population dwelt long in a state of barbarism, spending their lives hunting amongst the bleak mountains and tending their cattle. As civilisation advanced, the Arcadians developed a passionate love for music and dancing, but still, as a race, their character remained congenial to their rustic modes of life.

Those anglers who revel in vast spaces affording infinite scope for their chosen sport connect that primitive and interesting land of Arcadia with any pastoral or barron region distinguished for its inartificial beauty. But the Arcadia of my dreams boasts neither rugged wildness nor imposing grandeur. It need not possess a voluminous river, and its meandering streams need not contain game fish alone. The word "Arcadia" pictures to my mind a bosky, fruitful and secluded district—a land almost literally flowing with milk and honey.

One such spot I discovered some years ago. It was near where a small stream or brook turned its second mill-wheel. Rising a few miles above in the eastern hills, which upreared themselves as if to greet the morning, the stream flowed down a deep valley—a valley of sunshine and flowers. Its banks, for the most part, were

clothed thickly with hazel, willow, alder and other underwood, harbouring a multitude of birds of varied plumage, whose refuge was rarely disturbed excepting by an odd angler or two, sundry farmhands, or the old, bent shepherd, with his crook and his faithful dog.

The neighbourhood was replete with survivals and memorials of the past; the sound of the curfew was borne on the breeze from a village over the hills. And, amid the pine woods through which the brook purred in its higher reaches, was a spot—known locally as “The Traitor’s Ford”—where, during the Civil War, it is supposed many treasonable persons met their doom.

The brawling but tiny mill-stream was inhabited by the plumpest trout that ever ravished an angler’s eyes. Those fish were truly epicures, for the water held an unfailing supply of their natural food. Upon the table they made a dainty dish, the richness of their flavour being flattered by mine hostess’s excellent cooking.

It was brook-trouting pure and simple. The water, secreted in an ambushment of shrubs, was difficult to approach, and consequently more difficult to fish. But its wealth of cover afforded some consolation, in that it formed a natural avairy to which many rare as well as familiar birds resorted. In several spots, however, the water was more accessible, and in others there was merely a regular line of withies along the margin of the brook. And the mill-pond was sufficiently open to allow of fly-fishing.

In the little stream were to be found, on a small scale, many types of water, emblems of many moods. Restfulness and jollity were represented in its pools and shallows, waywardness and petulance in its cascades and its rapids that delved the bush-hung banks, whilst in its slow and silent stretches were portrayed weariness and reserve.

Although the wasp-grub and the maggot were both successful lures, the trout showed a strong partiality for the worm—either the brandling or the tail-end of a lob. My short fly-rod, supple, yet not too whippy, answered admirably for this style of fishing;

the reel held a fine but strong silk line, and a single hook was preferred to the "Stewart" or "Pennell" tackle. A small piece of dry wood, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ -in. in length, served as a float, but for most of the streams no "tell-tale" at all was necessary. This substitute for a float was picked up on the bank and slightly split with a knife, so that it might be fixed to the line.

My visit to Arcadia was one long round of easeful happiness. Merry May is the most delightful month of the calendar—a month distinguished by the song of the nightingale, the call of the cuckoo, and the fragrance of the hawthorn. Butterflies are again on the wing; birds are making their homes and pouring forth their fervent love-songs. Wild flowers exhibit so extravagant a variety of colours that this period of the year must indeed rank as a formidable rival of fiery autumn, and every tree bears an opulence of new foliage, imparting to the landscape a touch of sweetness and rejuvenescence which, beneath a cloudless sky, renders May a month of ineffable charm.

Armed with the equipment I have described, I strolled each morning through the flower-bespangled meadows, past golden patches of marsh-marigolds, to where the waters of the brook ran clear and cool beneath their canopy of leaves. Pushing my way in between the bushes, I cast the baited hook into the haunts of the trout—some spots were unproductive, whilst others were rich in lusty half-pounders.

The miller's son—a bright lad of twelve summers—was never happier than when acting as my attendant, guide and friend. He loved to carry the landing-net and wander with me by the brook. Those people who lived in the vicinity of Mount Cyllene, and worshipped Diana and Pan, were never noted for their intellectual capacity. In truth, an "Arcadian youth" was a synonym for a dolt. But the lad of my Arcadia was not so lacking in understanding. He talked of fish and knew where the big trout dwelt. Birds, beasts, trees and flowers all had some interest for him. As keen as the proverbial mustard, he was a rare companion during a long day with the rod. When sport was bad, he was ever hopeful and

cheery, and continually encouraged me with the remark: "We shall surely have a fish soon, sir, shan't we?" Whatever the weather, he was eager to accompany me. Six hours' exposure to the drenching rain damped not his enthusiasm. When I met with success he was jubilant, and crept with great glee to each likely-looking spot, repeating on each occasion: "We shall surely have another fish here, sir, shan't we?"

The trout averaged between eight and nine ounces, and it was very seldom that any were caught under that weight. I had several of a pound and thereabouts, and one of a pound and a quarter. The latter made a brave fight, employing all the tricks and feints it was possible for the piscine brain to fashion, in its attempts to regain its freedom. Twice during the struggle the fish leapt into the air, finally jumping amongst the branches of a bush. But I was able to place the net beneath the twigs, and into it fell my fish, the line, fortunately, escaping being "hung up."

Each evening, when the light began to fail, I repaired to the picturesque mill-pond, since to have fished the overgrown parts of the stream would have been disastrous both to my peace of mind and to my tackle. When the shades of departing day gathered and threw into a deep gloominess every nook and corner of the brook that sang its joy-song to the over-arching trees, the all-important judgment of distance became deficient. Any angler who has fished such a water in the twilight is acquainted with the manner in which the falling shadows deceive the eye. The space between himself and certain objects becomes indefinable. He essays a cast, only to be dismayed by the discovery that a branch is nearer to him than he believed.

Angling of a most fascinating yet irritating kind was invariably provided in the mill-dam, wherein dwelt trout of many types—the inveterate "rover," the perspicacious "banker," and various others whose sole aim in life was to tantalise and annoy.

However, one golden afternoon, when for a few moments the sun was obscured and the water was moved by a favourable breeze, the leviathan of trout, who lurked in shallowish water in the shadow

of an oak-tree, mistook my tiny artificial fly, fished dry, for the real thing. But the tale is too painful to dwell upon : for, after leviathan had flung his three and a half pounds of prime trout-flesh high above the placid surface of the dam and had fought a stubborn battle, there came that inexpressibly sickening sensation that synchronises with a sudden slackening of the line.

No dull moments marred my sojourn amid the leafy dells of that pleasant country, where the swifts and swallows went screaming overhead, where turtle-doves cooed softly and brown owls hooted in the night woods. On my last visit, the old mill-wheel stood idle, but the little brook still flowed serenely through the sun-kissed, flowery meadows of Arcadia.

CHAPTER IV.

The Trout of the Moor.

IN a region where man has striven diligently to tame the wilderness, where heathery heights rise loftily from their foot-hills and "brown burns tumble as they run," nestles an old-world village that breathes and inspires peace.

Graceful birch trees and plantations of sturdy firs adorn the sides or crown the summits of the hills, and gaunt veteran pines stand sentinel over the valley. Grass of the liveliest green clothes the lower slopes, its glowing verdancy forming a vivid contrast with the sombre hues of the higher ground—the not yet wholly fertile tract that man has won from the desert, above which the barren hills boldly assert their sullen eminences beneath the sky. Rugged barriers these, hinting at sterner scenes beyond; for they form the hither boundaries of the moors that stretch to the far horizon.

Down in the valley a stream hurries to the lowlands, and you may trace its sinuous course upward to where a bluish haze veils the savage grandeur of the rock-scarred and heather-covered wastes. Far up the vale, the valley escapes from the thralldom of semi-cultivation, and the moors, untamed and untrammelled, slope to the edge of the babbling beck. Thither wanders the angler, drawn by some mystic attraction begotten of salubrious air and boundless space, in pursuit of the speckled trout that lurk in the lucid, peat-tinted waters.

Large trout are conspicuously absent from the streams of the wilderness; it is usually in ounces only that the weight of the single fish is expressed. This lack of size, however, is amply made

up for by might of number, inasmuch as these fish, which range from mere fingerlings to lusty half-pounders, thrive abundantly in the moorland reaches of the various streams. The angler, notwithstanding, must not expect to fill his basket to the brim; nor may the contents of his creel be counted always by the score, or even dozen. For, although less sophisticated than their brethren of other waters, these nimble troutlings, by many fishermen much despised, are more difficult to catch than might be imagined: not only are they surprisingly wary and perspicacious, but also, at times, remarkably shy. Nevertheless, provided weather and water are favourable, these vigorous little fish take the fly quite readily, whilst after a freshet they rise boldly and often recklessly.

A man who once has tasted the joys of this style of fishing invariably thirsts for more. Previous exploits of the kind for ever claim first place amongst the recollections of his happiest outings. Their fascination is irresistible: he must return to the scenes which haunt his memory so persistently. And why? Is it not due to the magnetism of the country wherein he needs must pursue his quarry? The moor—the glorious, open moor! How delightful is the sight of it to the town-weary fisherman! How pure and bracing is the air which he draws into his lungs whilst standing amidst the grandeur of desolation, thankful to be free, for the time being, from every worldly care! As headquarters he uses some quaint old inn, about whose cosy, heavily-beamed rooms is an air of homeliness, productive of comfort which, maybe, the exterior of the house does not at first suggest. Some pleasant savour of old-time romance still lingers about its mellow walls; its very atmosphere hints at associations with ages long since agone. At his hostel the angler obtains a liberal supply of plain, wholesome food, and at night, between lavender-scented sheets, enjoys his well-won repose. Perhaps the inn is situated in some ancient village on the outskirts of the moor, or perhaps it is isolated. In either case the sportsman experiences a charming freedom from the conventionalities which to many men are so burdensome when fishing some of the more frequented waters.

In these sequestered villages and solitary inns the visitor meets with sturdy, healthy folk, whose abrupt manners might easily be mistaken for rudeness. But these hardy natives, who all their lives have been shut out from the world, are good and kind at heart in reality. They are people of few words. Superfluous language is absent from their greeting, yet they welcome the stranger with open arms, and by their actions and quiet attentions soon make him feel at home. They are unaffected and superstitious. Traditions and old-world legends die hard amongst them. Each treacherous bog and rugged height, almost without exception, is, according to them, wrapt in fearsome mystery. The shepherds and gamekeepers are men of the moor. The moor is an integral part of their lives. The influence of retirement and the sadness of great spaces—of the vast, empty spaces of moorland and mountain—have told plainly upon their character. The smell of the peat and heather is carried on their clothes; these men are the true sons of wild nature.

In search of the troutlings, the farther away from the habitations of men the angler roams, the better are his chances of success. He should avoid the worn paths and all signs of the presence of human beings. To accomplish this he must needs be a lover of nature and of solitude; but he always is, since the necessary condition of isolation undoubtedly forms one of the chief attractions of moorland fishing. The poet, however, would have us believe that it is not solitude "to climb the trackless mountain," upon which "things that own not man's dominion dwell," or where "mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been," but simply "to hold converse with Nature's charms."

Let us now turn to the stream wherein our troutlings are to be found. Away in a barren, wild and mountainous spot it is born—a birthplace befitting a stream which beckons to its side the hardiest and most sport-loving only of anglers.

After completing the first stage of its infancy the mountain torrent tumbles down through a wilderness of bog and heather—a land sullen and lonely. Beneath rugged tors and awe-inspiring heights, following whither it leads, wanders the angler, whilst the

stream, "foaming between peat-bogs, amidst mossy boulders at his feet," is continually reinforced by tiny rills, which fall down precipitous rocky clefts. Thus gradually and gradually the tumultuous beck assumes more goodly proportions. If the angler desire he can accompany it to where it flows through the pastoral vale, or to where it mingles its waters with those of another stream, to be carried on to greater rivers, to join them in their music whilst they go singing to the sea. But to-day he is concerned with its higher moorland reaches only. There, below those numerous cascades, behind those frequent boulders, in all pools, tiny, quiet places, and under overhanging banks—in fact, but little of the water is unfishable—lie the eager trout. And in this wild and "savage" region live creatures that love solitude. Maybe it is where the sturdy grouse have their haunts, and also the timid mountain sheep. The hawk is noticed scanning the slopes, whilst the plaintive call of the curlew, especially towards the close of the day, drives home to the angler the sense of the great loneliness, remoteness and vastness of the moors.

Although these trout of the moor rise freely to the fly, the most deadly lure is undoubtedly the worm, fished up-stream in thick water. When the flood-gates of the heavens are opened, and the Storm-god is abroad among the mountains, the whole region becomes a place of hopeless desolation. Countless rills hurl themselves down from the cloud-wrapt heights, and in every conceivable channel the rain-water rushes noisily to the brimming streamlet below. The latter soon swells to a roaring turmoil of peat-stained flood, and, as if rejoicing in its abounding strength, races along madly. Anon the clouds lift, the rain ceases, and in a comparatively short time the turbid stream becomes clearer and decreases in volume and rapidity. Now is the time for the "pot-hunter" to sally forth with a well-filled worm-bag, since in its present state the moorland stream or mountain burn yields up its choicest specimens.

Worm-fishing in thick water, however, is considered a most unscientific mode of angling, being entirely different from "clear-water-worming"; hence the more sportsmanlike angler refrains

from casting his lure until the stream has resumed that pale-ale tint so beloved of the fly-fisherman.

There is magic in the memory of the days spent amid the age-long moorland solitudes. Withal, they are not days of lounging and luxury; rather are they days of toil; from beginning to end—toil of the healthiest and pleasantest kind, yet frequently difficult and strenuous. But they are days spent amid the freedom of wild valleys; the broad sweep of massive hills; the splendour of sunlight and shadow; the glory of sundown; the smell of the moist peat; the perennial prattle of mountain waters: they are days marked by the exhilarating dash of the little brown trout at the end of the line; the adventurous scramble over rocks; the company of the friendly "dipper"; the long walk back to the inn in the gloaming; and, last but not least to certain natures, the crowning mercy of solitude.

Ofttimes, during his exile in great cities, the angler yearns to hear again the music of moorland streams. Down the vista of a broad thoroughfare, bordered by towering buildings, he beholds a glimmer of a sunset sky. Overhead is the azure of heaven's mystic dome; a frail wisp of fleecy cloud hovers suspended in space. The "wild" sounds its stirring call. And the angler longs again to wander, with his rod, beside the waters of the wilderness.

CHAPTER V.

The Derbyshire Wye.

BORN on the moors beyond Buxton, the Derbyshire Wye pursues a sinuous course through some of the most varied scenery in England. In Ashwood Dale, bold and rugged limestone rocks and wooded heights form the river's borders; then, after traversing a bleaker and more open valley, the stream threads a remarkable little glen known as Chee Dale. On the right bank of the river stands Chee Tor. This perpendicular mass of rock rises to a considerable height; its rounded outline and the peculiar horizontal fissure near its summit render the crag both interesting and unique. Beyond the Tor precipitous cliffs overlook the dale; whilst a rocky crescent studded with trees and bushes, and variegated with an abundance of pendulous foliage, towers up on the opposite bank. The river itself adds a finishing touch to the picturesqueness of this small, secluded glen that ever resounds with the melodious "ribble-bibble" of running waters.

Compared with that of Chee Dale the scenery in Miller's Dale is quite prosaic; the hills slope more obliquely to the river and are embellished with sundry plantations and with scaurs of limestone rock. After a while the valley again contracts, and the Wye, flowing tortuously within narrow confines, enters the vaster, more romantic and wildly beautiful region of Monsal Dale, where admiration is justly excited by the harmonious blending of hill, wood and stream.

At length, the sterner and more imposing grandeur that distinguishes the higher reaches of the river gives place to pastoral scenes that are always pleasing and frequently lovely. Here,

gliding along gently, there swirling and foaming, the Wye twists and twines through the "Garden of the Peak," watering the vale of Haddon and ultimately swelling the volume of the Derwent.

The construction of the railway that has opened up this charming district greatly incited Ruskin's wrath. In his opinion, the intrusion of the iron horse into these sacred solitudes meant irreparable ruin to the loveliness of the valley and banishment for all time of its glamour of romance. Concerning Monsal Dale, now spanned by a huge viaduct, he wrote: "There was a rocky valley between Buxton and Bakewell, once upon a time divine as the Vale of Tempe; you might have seen the Gods there morning and evening—Apollo and all the sweet Muses of the light—walking in fair procession on the lawns of it, and to and fro among the pinnacles of its crags." Without a doubt, certain parts are disfigured by the presence of the railroad, and also by the invasion of the manufacturer; but the glory of the Wye valley has not departed entirely; and here and there an elegant archway even enhances rather than detracts from the beauty of the scene.

The other day the writer chanced upon a booklet entitled "The Buxton Visitor's Guide and Annual for 1876" (published for gratuitous distribution), in which appears the following interesting announcement: "Fishing.—The river Wye, for five miles below Buxton, is well preserved, and, for its length, is perhaps, the most romantic and beautiful river in England. Trout abound, but do not attain any great size. Grayling, too, are occasionally taken. Tickets are issued at a moderate price for the day, week, month or season, and may be procured from the water-keeper."

For many years the length in question afforded excellent sport, but, unfortunately, pollution has robbed the angling visitor of a privilege that nowadays would be highly appreciated, especially in view of the fact that the portions of the river wherein fish thrive are totally inaccessible to the vagrant fisherman. There is, however, a solitary exception; and this a notable one. Through the kindness of the Duke of Rutland, a delightful length of the Wye, between Bakewell and Rowsley, is open to guests at the Rutland Arms and

the Peacock, which Hotels are situated in the aforesaid market-town and village respectively. At both these places there is a station on the main line of the Midland Railway, between London and the North. The number of tickets granted daily from each hotel is limited to four; consequently it is advisable to make inquiries well beforehand, since a permit is not always available in the height of the season. These houses provide first-class accommodation, and the fishing is free, although, of course, a license costing 1/- for a week, or 2/6 for the season, must be purchased.

So exceptionally open are the banks that this length of the river is a most attractive one to fish; and the quiet glides, slumberous pools and rippling shallows should satisfy the demands of either the wet or the dry-fly man, be he ever so difficult to please. Trout are plentiful and average about half-a-pound, although specimens of double that weight are often caught. Trout under ten inches in length must *not* be retained; but for the grayling, which considerably outnumber their noble neighbours, no size-limit is in vogue. Artificial fly only is allowed. The flies should be small and mounted on the finest of casts, for the fish are extremely wary, their appetite fastidious, and their moods not to be anticipated. In fact, even the experts doubt whether there are any trout in the Kingdom harder to lure than those of the river upon whose banks stands far-famed Haddon Hall. The May-fly usually appears on this length at the beginning of June, but, of late years, the annual Carnival has proved somewhat disappointing.

Anyone who has visited Bakewell will have seen the trout that lurk around the bridge there, and doubtless will have noticed several curiously light-coloured specimens amongst them. If he has not seen these fish the fault is entirely his own. For around the bridge congregate the shrewdest and most self-conceited of the fish of the Wye, whose sole object in life, apparently, is to exhibit their ample proportions to the public view. They love to be seen and admired by all, and to be coveted by the fisherman. They lie, seemingly the most indifferent and leisured of fish, idly sunning themselves in the vicinity of the bridge. Anglers—yes! skilled

anglers—have essayed their capture. Flies galore, wet, dry and of every imaginable size and pattern, have been cast before their very noses. With dignified grace the wily fish have moved beyond the angler's reach, or have darted lightning-like to a place of shelter; or else they have remained immovable as a rock, ignoring with quiet contempt the rarest and most deftly offered lures. Surely these are the highest members of a most intelligent piscine race—veritable superfish, evolved for the sport of the superman!

Below Rowsley the river likewise contains a large quantity of trout and grayling, but this length, which is quite short, is strictly private. Here the Wye, reinforced by the waters of the Lathkill, flows through pleasant meadows to join the Derwent. Let John Gisborne describe the scene:—

“ The tortuous Wye

*Appears. Mark how reluctant he withdraws !
How he turns back in many a lingering curve,
As if enamoured of the groves and towers
He lately passed : as if well pleased to paint
On his effulgent mirrors moving slow,
A double picture of the enchanting scene,
The vale's reflected charms. And who, I ask,
Of all that ever roamed these banks or lawns,
Can wonder ? Who that hither bends his step
What time her stars the primrose first expands
Gemming yon hawthorn's root : or July suns,
Pride of the ardent year, invite the trout
With oft-repeated circles to disturb
The glassy smoothness of their lucid haunts ?
Or when, as now, autumnal visions glare,
Or e'en when winter's snow, like flowers, enwreathes
The pinnacles of Haddon ; who can hide
' The forms of beauty smiling at his heart,'
Can wonder at the pausing tide of Wye ? ”*

CHAPTER VI.

A May-fly Story.

THE river whispered sweetly in its meanderings between grassy banks. Tumultuously it raced past a little white-washed cottage, whose porch was gay with roses, whilst at a spot whither the cattle came to water the surface was placid in the extreme. Again it hurried on to dash and foam over weirs, below which it glided gently away. Next it wended dreamily by shady woods, and farther on it made merry music over the shallows. And in silent, slumberous stretches it halted, as if anxious to delay its exit from the lovely vale. Luxuriant meadows and pasture-lands, the latter dotted with idly-grazing cattle, met the view of those who gazed upon the slopes of the wooded hills which enclosed the glorious vale. Down where the river murmured, the roadway crossed the water by a picturesque stone bridge and wound up the hill through an avenue of ancient elms. And, to put a finishing touch to the delightful scene, a dainty village, with its time-worn church and vicarage, nestled amongst some grand old trees.

A small, select club rented the fishing for several miles. Its few members were of the "dry-fly school," and the most sacred of its rules, or commandments, read: "Artificial fly only to be used."

It was charming to stand on the bridge towards the close of the day and to watch the river dimpled by the rings of rising trout.

A short distance upstream dwelt a monstrous fish, unknown to the idlers on the bridge, for it seldom rose. During its unmeasured lifetime it had taken a heavy toll of flies, had smashed many tackles, and had caused more than one angler to utter strange phrases, composed chiefly of words not to be found in the dictionary.

It had grown fat, heavy, and cunning, and now hardly ever troubled to devour any of the frail insects which fluttered over its head. It had discovered that a more substantial meal to support its ponderous body was to be had by feeding principally upon its tiny, tender offspring. So it passed its days in ease and comfort, and, when darkness had fallen, sought for its food.

* * * * *

Down to the brink of the bonny river of an evening came Parson Jones from the vicarage on the hill. It was a pleasant sight to see him coming down the road, with his slow, long-measured stride, and his ruddy, good-natured face moulded into an almost perpetual smile. In one hand he carried his old fly-rod, in the other a worn net with a long handle, whilst across his great, broad shoulders was slung a somewhat dilapidated creel. In his heavy, nailed boots Parson Jones stood six feet two inches, his dark grey Norfolk suit showing off his stalwart figure to the best advantage. Two keen eyes, with which, through a pair of spectacles resting upon the end of his small, plump nose, he made a thorough survey of his surroundings, together with his grey hair, suggested him as being an old and experienced angler. And it was so. Long had he been acquainted with every bend, pool, and shallow. His knowledge of the "gentle art" was such that what he knew not, we might almost say, the bridge knew. He was a familiar figure by the river, since, throughout the season, when not "tending his flock," he was either stalking trout or revelling in the wonders and beauties of nature. But if Parson Jones had a weakness it was a deathless desire to capture that monstrous fish which dwelt by the bridge. One night, years ago, he had risen it; in fact, he had actually "pricked" it. Since then he had toiled hard to accomplish his ambition; he had tried every way and means permitted by the rules to hoodwink that fish. But the old trout, if the truth were known, no doubt enjoyed the attentions bestowed upon it by its reverend friend—or, rather, enemy—and, maybe, waited and watched of an evening for his coming.

* * * * *

The brilliant sunlight of one of the first few days of June was softening into its evening mellowness. The meadows were golden with buttercups, and Mayflies fluttered over bank and river. Down the road came the picturesque figure of Parson Jones, his day's work done, his briar pipe between his teeth, and the same happy smile upon his face. Reaching the water's edge he strolled leisurely upstream. Suddenly he stopped. Surely the old trout had risen! He watched intently. Surely that was the old trout which had quietly taken a luscious-looking Mayfly!

Without further ado, Parson Jones measured the distance with a few false casts. Then the line went out again, and the artificial "May" alighted gently upon the stream. There was, however, no reply, nor was there to a second presentation. The Parson reeled in his line and glanced keenly around, muttering the while the words, "Artificial fly only to be used."

Satisfying himself that no eyes were upon him—there were no idlers on the bridge to-night—the reverend gentleman quickly produced a hook from his tackle-book and attached it to his cast. To capture in his hat one of the Mayflies which were dancing in the air was but the work of a moment, as was likewise the impaling of it upon the hook. Then the Vicar crept cautiously into the shelter of a bush, near to which the old trout had risen.

The faint evening breeze stirred the foliage of the weeping willows, and every now and then sent tiny ripples scudding across the surface of the water. Aided by this favouring breeze, and by means of a little careful manipulation, the mounted natural fly was soon fluttering upon the stream. It was immediately taken by the old trout. . . .

Ten minutes later the fish was brought towards the landing-net. But the end was not then. At length the net lifted the six pounds odd of lusty trout-flesh from the water: but, alas! it had landed one fish too many. Its rotten meshes gave way; there was a snap of gut, and back into its native element went the ancient fish.

For quite one minute Parson Jones stood like a graven image, gazing fixedly at the spot whence the trout had disappeared

with a contumelious swirl of its tail. Then suddenly he turned from the river and walked slowly and mournfully up the road. Whether he remonstrated with himself for neglecting to test his worn net, or whether he regretted his defiance of the sacred rule, "artificial fly only to be used," we know not.

But it was a sorrowful sight to see him pass, with lowered head and shortened stride, through the avenue of immemorial elms which led to the vicarage, what time the westering sun, ere it sank to rest, was flooding the vale with a blaze of glory. Across his shoulders hung an old creel, in his hand he held his fly-rod, whilst under one arm was the long-handled net, its torn and tattered meshes trailing along the road and gathering up the dust during the dejected angler's slow progress up the hill.

* * * * *

Years have rolled by since we witnessed the sad home-going of Parson Jones. Still does he haunt the same familiar spot. His great, broad shoulders have rounded somewhat, and his hair has turned snowy white. The creel has become more disreputable, and the brand-new net old and worn. He fishes regularly even now, but we can safely say that he has never again broken the sacred rule—or any other rule, for that matter—of the club.

And, for all we know to the contrary, the old trout still lurks by the bridge.

CHAPTER VII.

Lone Tarns and Pools.

THERE is a peculiar fascination about the fishing of the lone tarns and pools of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the English Lake District—those waters lying sullenly amid mountain barrenness and impressive solitude.

Scarcely fished by angler or visited by mountaineer, they are surrendered to the gods of loneliness; exposed to storms of a violence those lofty peaks alone do know; and their trout subjected, in some cases, to the ravages of cormorants. Now and again, however, an angler climbs up to their rocky shores, climbs up from the valley below to the rugged heights above—a long tramp, no doubt, through marsh and bog, over boulders and rocks, up precipitous mountain sides. In this connection it should be borne in mind that the higher these lone lakes, tarns and pools are situated, the smaller are the fish to be found in them.

The chief charm originating from the fishing of these elevated waters is the adventure involved by the roughness and the difficulties of the ascent to their shores and the uncertain quality of the sport to be obtained at the end of the arduous and fatiguing climb. Is there not, also, some small element of danger in evading the treacherous, boggy ground, in the scramble over steep and slippery rocks, and in the likelihood of losing one's way should mist envelop the upper portions of the mountains? Whilst if the services of a guide be dispensed with, and the angler be left to his own resources, the exact direction in which the tarn lies may become uncertain, and forthwith unforeseen perplexities may arise.

The pleasant flavour of adventure and danger, in a lesser degree, is to be had by the side of the moorland stream; but, apart

from the fact that it is not so pronounced as that obtained on the shore of the tarn, it lacks one ingredient that is prominent in the latter's flavorful compound of charms, the presence of which makes the same so pleasing and satisfying to the palate of the sportsman. Let it not be supposed that I desire to place the delights engendered by the fishing of lone, still waters over those begotten by the fishing of the fretful moorland beck. No, indeed! The joys of the frolicsome stream amid the "bonny purple heather" are, I opine, undeniable and inexpressible. In the following lines will be found the nature of the aforesaid ingredient that occasions the distinction between the two styles of angling, so similar in many respects.

There is a known limitation to the possibilities of the moorland stream, but not to those of the lake or tarn in the mountains. Experience may have told the angler that the majority of the latter waters provide comparatively small trout only; still, there always dwells within him a feeling that the unexpected may happen, and that some day a fish worthy of a glass case may be enticed from those unfathomed depths. And this feeling is substantiated by the knowledge that, although the lakes hidden, say, among the dark recesses of the Irish mountains may not yield trout heavier than half-a-pound to the visiting angler with his fly-rod, many a larger fish has fallen to the prowess of the native skilled in the various poaching methods. Alas! the Irish peasant is addicted to poaching; and manifold are the waters that have suffered great despoliation from the nefarious method of "cross-lining" and the use of the abominable "otter."

A great deal, too, is heard of poaching in Wales and Scotland. But, on the whole, the Irishman appears to perpetrate his crimes more openly than the Scotchman. Although netting, etc., is much in vogue in the "land of the mountain and the flood," many of the natives conceal their atrocities by cunning and underhand devices. Posing as sportsmen, they, aided by one or more accomplices, employ foul means of fishing whenever possible, and are able, when warned, quickly to change their illicit methods to those of fairness and orthodoxy.

These mountain tarns give the best sport when their surface is ruffled by the winds of heaven ; whilst rough and stormy weather during the summer months is most advantageous to the angler. Perhaps a breeze is necessary in order that success may be commanded ; and it is fortunate that these waters, owing to their position in the high hills, are often affected by wind when lakes in the lowlands are sheltered and placid.

Should a boat be at hand, the toil of the day will be greatly decreased, and a larger extent of water covered accordingly. But fishing from the bank is both pleasant and remunerative ; and the angler will not have to rely upon the proficiency of the attendant in the management of the craft to complete his triumph, or embitter his failure, as the case may be.

In the small bays indenting the rocky shores, around the tiny promontories projecting into the water, and where sundry little rills and streams pour their contributions into the tarn, will be found the sportive trout, eager, if they be in a feeding humour, to seize upon the flies deftly cast from the bank. One day the angler may discover the trout rising well in the bays that lie here and there around the edge of the tarn ; but on the occasion of his next visit the spots from which he previously filled his basket may not produce a single fish, whilst the places that were unproductive when last he gave them a trial, now prove veritable "living waters."

Despite the fact that many of the lakes are deep, and that, in some instances, there is a sheer drop of six, ten, or more feet from the very margin of the shore, there are many others where shallow water extends for some distance from the side. The prevailing feature of these latter lakes renders wading possible, and, accordingly, beneficial, since the angler is enabled to fish at a distance unattainable from the bank. This, of course, involves the carrying of extra impedimenta. It is not wise to attempt to climb to the lake in waders, for not only would the angler be greatly hampered by them, but also the frequent repetition of such usage would mean ruination to the waders themselves. Stockings, socks and brogues can, however, be placed in a haversack ; and, slinging his

load across his shoulders, the angler may set out, little inconvenienced by this addition to his "kit." And, when he has gained the shore of the tarn, he may sit down upon a rock, discard his boots, don his waders ; and then, entering the water, he may enjoy sport that will amply repay him for the trouble of bearing the haversack up the mountain side.

Amongst those rugged heights, Nature is moody and capricious ; her changes are as sudden as they are severe. And furthermore, shelter is absent, or, at the most, scanty in those sterile regions. The angler, therefore, must be prepared to yield himself to the mercy of the elements, and, should he be overtaken by a violent storm, to brace himself to endure.

But adventure and danger amid the gloomy and imposing grandeur of the mountain scenery add in untold measure to the charm of the days occupied in the capture of the unsophisticated trout of the lone lakes, tarns and pools.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Fly-Fisherman's Aftermath.

THE Mayfly Festival has gone by, and with it has gone all but the memory of its attendant triumphs and defeats: the trout, after having held high carnival amongst a superabundance of food, are now heavy and languid with repletion. Homeward has returned many an angler to ruminate upon glorious achievements, or to lament singular and heart-breaking failures. But that fisherman, who resides within easy reach of the trout-stream, and who refuses to lower his dignity by angling for any fish excepting those categorised as "game," still pits his skill against the wary, summer trout. The use of a tiny dry-fly on the finest of tackle may bring success to the man aforesaid during the hot days; whilst less delicate methods may serve in the dusk of evening; but, in any case, considerable skill is needed to tempt the fish that have become shier and more fastidious since the earlier days of the season.

The amount of sport afforded by the trout-stream in the summer months depends to a great extent, however, upon the weather, inclement conditions being more favourable for the capture of the "speckled beauties" than the heat and glare usually to be looked for at this time of the year. But we must leave the man who fishes the pleasing haunts of the trout and turn our attention to the doings of the angler for whom the opportunity of trouting, for the time being, is past.

This is the angler whose home is far removed from troutland, whither the scanty leisure at his disposal prevents his journeying. And he, thus exiled, is forced either to lay aside his fly-rod, or else stoop to the less romantic pursuit of the so-called coarse fish. If he should choose the latter alternative, he will discover that dace, chub, roach, rudd and even perch belie the term rudely bestowed upon them, and that they give by no means trivial sport on the fly-rod during the halcyon days.

Fly-fishing for dace is a mode of angling at once fascinating and artistic. To achieve success in this branch of the "gentle art" the rod-wielder must display a considerable amount of skill, for although these sprightly fish often rise boldly, even recklessly, they are always difficult to hook, since they seize upon and reject the artificial fly with marvellous rapidity. Hence the percentage of fish successfully hooked out of the total number "risen" is remarkably low. Sometimes, at sundown after a brilliant summer day, though seemingly feeding with absolute abandon, these fish prove singularly elusive, one after another being missed by the exasperated angler. However,—this by the way—during one of these "hurricane" rises, at the close of a gorgeous evening, the writer accomplished one of his best performances—namely, the landing of twelve dace in fourteen successive casts.

Dace love most the fast currents over gravel-beds, and throughout the summer months will be found chiefly on the streamy shallows, scours, and at the edge of weed-patches, where they may be taken by both the wet and dry-fly methods.

The dry-fly affords the prettier sport, and generally proves more efficacious than the wet-fly. However, the angler must use his own discretion as to which of the two methods he may employ to the greater advantage. It is often useful to effect a combination of wet and dry-fly fishing; the tail fly is rendered buoyant by the application of a small quantity of paraffin, whilst the dropper is allowed to sink below the surface of the water.

Although, according to Linnæus, the dace has been known to grow to a foot and a half in length, it is seldom that it attains a weight greater than 16oz.—in fact, a dace exceeding the pound in weight is a comparative rarity, whilst one of 8oz. is justly considered a good fish. Nevertheless, there are records of some magnificent dace having been caught on rod and line, amongst them ranking specimens of the exceptionally fine weights of 1 lb. 8oz., 1 lb. 6oz., 1 lb. 4oz., and 1 lb. 3½oz., which have succumbed to the prowess of skilled anglers. During September, 1909, an extraordinary capture of dace was effected in the Kennet—six fish weighing altogether 5lb. 13oz.

Of the rivers renowned for big dace the chief are the Avon (Hampshire), Beane, Cam, Colne, Kennet, Lark, Lea, Little Ouse, Rother, Stour (Dorsetshire), Thames, Trent, Ver and Wensum; whilst mention might also be made of sundry fenland waters, numerous Yorkshire streams, and the large pools of the Welsh Dee, below Llangollen.

The catalogue of useful flies is almost endless; but the Red Tag, Coachman, Soldier Palmer, Black Gnat, Light and Dark Woodcock, Wickham's Fancy, Zulu, and the Cock-y-Bondhu form a list of undeniably suitable and effective patterns, even should the various "pet fancies" of individual anglers be unavoidably excluded. A small piece of new wash-leather, or white kid glove, fixed upon the hook, is supposed to add to the attractiveness of the fly, and this is decidedly preferable to the objectionable practice of impaling a maggot on the hook. The use of live-bait is all very well in its proper place; but a combination of bait and fly-fishing is, to me, at once repulsive and degrading. Dib or float-fish with a maggot at your will. But if, when using the artificial fly, it is impossible to catch fish without so drastic a measure as the substitution of the gentle for the fragment of kid or wash-leather, is it not better, then, to come empty away?

Fly-fishing for dace has been recommended to the novice as an introduction to trout angling; but, personally, I do not agree with this recommendation, since, in my opinion, the two classes of angling are hardly correlative. By fishing for dace the beginner certainly gains some insight into the gentle art of fly-fishing, becoming accustomed to the manipulation of the rod, etc., but beyond this he learns little or nothing concerning the special art of trout-angling.

Perhaps a comparison of these two branches of fly-fishing—a comparison based upon personal experience—may be of some interest.

In the first place, dace are more difficult to hook than trout, for a reason previously given—the celerity with which the former fish take in and reject the fly. But the effect of this characteristic

in the dace is more than counterbalanced by the higher intelligence and greater subtlety of the trout, and the fact that, in general, the latter fish abounds in streams clearer by far than those frequented by the dace ; hence the art of stalking and taking cover must be practised in a more marked degree when the angler is fishing for trout.

Furthermore, the fascination of trout-angling is unique ; the thrill of excitement exists from the moment we prepare to cast the fly to that of the netting of the fish ; but can this be said truthfully of dace-fishing ?

Now, in dace-fishing, is not the crisis of the incitation of our sensibilities reached when we drive the "sharp steel" home into the fish ? We obtain the same thrill, though it is considerably feebler than that experienced beside the trout stream, when we cast our fly and rise the fish. But at the moment the dace is hooked there is the end of all fascination. For, although it is lively and fights exceedingly well, the dace cannot be placed on the same level as the game trout. We have seen that it is naturally small ; hence we become so accustomed to bring to bank fish after fish of a quarter to half-a-pound in weight that the repetition has a tendency to monotony. The chief charm of fly-fishing for dace lies, then, in the rising and the hooking of the fish ; and in this point alone does it bear any comparison with that of fly-fishing for trout, in the way of affording gratification to our senses—at least, so it appears to me.

Nevertheless, I would not decry the alluring method of "whipping" for dace. The sport itself has its peculiar delights, and has much in common with trouting, both in the testing of the angler's skill and in the excuse it offers for the enthusiast to seek the companionship of Nature. It also offers consolation at a time when trout-fishing is at its worst, providing incident and enjoyment to fill the halcyon days.

The chub is another of the fly-taking coarse fish. Although it is neither particularly handsome nor in great demand as a table delicacy, this fish, in spite of much unkindly criticism, has made

many friends. It delights in the rapid waters below weirs, also in the strong streams, and from either of these places it may be taken by means of the artificial fly. The gut-cast is stouter than that used in dace-fishing, the reasons for which being the fact that the chub is a much heavier fish than the dace, and that the standard flies used to attract the "cheven" are larger than those offered to the dace. When in a rising mood, however, the chub shows no great discrimination between the many patterns of the orthodox flies, and there are times when it takes a fancy to a small Dun fished dry. On the finer gut-cast, which is requisite when using a tiny dry-fly, a lusty "loggerhead" gives excellent sport, its first mad, headlong rush for the willow roots being especially thrilling; whilst its subsequent stubborn borings into deep water test both the tackle and the dexterity of the angler.

Of flies, the most effective are the large Red and Black Palmers, Cock-y-Bondhu, Coachman, Zulu, Alder and the Governor.

Among the methods of capturing chub there is one that stands out as the most picturesque, though it is practised, perhaps, the least. This is the method of dapping with the natural grasshopper, cockchafer, bluebottle, or a similar substantial-bodied fly.

On a hot, bright summer day, when Nature and her world, with but few exceptions, are enjoying, as it were, their customary siesta, the angler resorts to some tree and bush-girt backwater, or to a spot where, towards evening, when the cows, with shrunken udders, have returned to the pastures and the westering sun has sunk lower in the heavens, the willows by the waterside will spread fantastic shadows upon the surface of the river. There, in the heat of the day, the angler, his face shaded by a broad-brimmed hat, crawls on his hands and knees into a position from where he may best urge yonder fat chub he has espied basking in the sun to accept the tempting bait he is about to offer it. After reaching the shelter of a bush and making sure of the distance between himself and the fish, the angler reels up his line until it is about half the length of his light, stiff rod. Then he gently throws the natural bait into the air so that it may fall upon the water as if from the overhanging

bush ; meanwhile he takes care to allow no line to touch the surface of the river. If the basking fish refuses to bestir himself when the fly strikes the water, the angler trembles his rod, and thus imparts a lifelike motion to the fly, which often proves the undoing of old "leather-mouth."

This style of chubbing takes us back to the days of Walton, and to the pages of "The Compleat Angler." We picture, in our minds, the scene in which Piscator presented "a great logger-headed chub" to the milkmaid's mother, after a passing shower had sent him and Venator to the shelter of "yonder high honey-suckle hedge." To requite the anglers for their gift the women sang three songs, including the one Maudlin had sung on the previous night, when young Coridon, the shepherd, played "so purely on his oaten pipe."

Passing on, we come to the roach and rudd, both of which give interesting sport to the fly-fisherman. The rudd, perhaps, rises more freely than the roach, but is confined to waters in certain districts only. The rivers and broads of East Anglia are famous haunts of the rudd, whilst it abounds in various English lakes, meres and ponds, such as Teeton or Ravensthorpe Reservoir, Slapton Ley and Torcross Ley. It is found also in some of the Irish rivers and loughs. Roach and rudd take any fly of the ordinary stock pattern, and take it, too, in a more leisurely manner than do either trout or dace. Preparatory to fishing with the fly, rudd may be enticed to the surface by throwing in small pieces of bread.

Perch, pike and bleak also take the fly ; but these fish are not, on the whole, very eagerly sought after. The pike requires a huge and gaudy lure placed before it in order to attract its attention, and the perch shows preference for a brightly coloured fly. And, although carp, bream, and eels are known to have been caught by the surface lure, these three can hardly be included in the list of fly-taking coarse fish.

So, during the hot, bright halcyon days, the fly-fisherman rejoices in his "aftermath," and frequently meets with more success than the bottom-angler who casts his float upon summer waters.

CHAPTER IX.

The Milkmaid.

SHE stood before me in all the freshness of her clean, white print dress—the very picture of superb health and engaging innocence. As sweet and as happy as the summer morning itself looked she: her face was beautiful and glowed with a rich golden brown; her eyes were large, dark and lustrous; a sun-bonnet was set daintily upon her abundant silken tresses. Her arms, bare to the elbows, were as smooth and as deeply tinted as her face: they shone with that ripe, rich colour which distinguishes a skin that has been exposed to the fierce light of the summer sun. And in her small, shapely hands she held a three-legged wooden stool and a burnished milk-pail.

She stood before me like some bucolic goddess—a very rival of Cytherea herself—roaming through her domains of exquisite green fields and shady woodland bowers, which were watered and adorned by a glittering trout-stream: and I knew not whence she came.

“Have you caught many fish this morning, sir?” she asked, setting down her pail upon the verdant earth.

Her voice was in keeping with her appearance: clear-toned and sweet, ringing with the soft music of the streamlet and the brook.

Startled by the unexpected vision, a few seconds elapsed before I recovered sufficiently to lift the lid and show her the contents of my basket.

“Ah!” she said. “I see you’ve caught a few;” and, peeping again into my creel, she added: “But aren’t they rather small?”

I explained that owing to the nature of the stream and also of the country it drained, the trout did not attain a large size; and I told

her how difficult they were to hook and what rare fun they gave on the fly-rod.

"But I know where there is a *big* fish—oh! such a big one," she said, encouragingly, putting particular emphasis on the word "big." "I often see him when the water is low and clear. I call him *my* trout, but if you like you may try to catch him."

"Come!" she continued, before I had time to thank her, "and I will show you where he lies."

I followed my goddess across the fair, green pasture; a few lines of Gray's "Elegy" running through my mind, whilst, wrapt in admiration of her marvellous beauty, her elegant figure and the charming frankness of her manner, I followed whither she led. Sky-larks soared and sang to the wind and the hills; other songsters poured forth their melodies, making the valley re-echo with their joyful pæans. And overhead huge fleecy clouds sailed through the azure of infinite space.

"Is this trout *very* large?" at length I ventured to ask. "If he is, I fear he will not look at a fly."

"Oh! he often catches flies," was the ready rejoinder. "Sometimes I watch him jumping up at them for ever so long."

Presently we crossed the stream by a picturesque, rustic foot-bridge; and, turning sharply to the left, entered a meadow that skirted the water. Here a long line of willows overhung the stream, and we passed down by the side of these until we neared a small opening, when my guide stepped back a few yards into the meadow—motioning me to do likewise—and approached the bank again at a point above which she knew the trout would be lying.

"There!" she exclaimed. "There he is. There's *my* trout; isn't he a beauty?"

I looked, and, when my eyes became accustomed to peering through the water, I beheld a lusty trout—over three pounds I estimated his weight to be—basking in a somewhat awkward though not altogether impossible position beneath the willows. Although still doubting that he would rise to a fly, I quickly formulated a plan of operations, deciding it were better to retrace

our steps across the bridge and approach the fish from the other bank. No sooner had I thus determined than a small fly, with wings erect, floated down the stream and was instantly sucked under by the lordly trout.

"There!" cried the milkmaid, her eyes sparkling with delight. "He is rising now!"

In a favourable position on the opposite side I knelt upon one knee, drew out the necessary length of line and cast my fly upon the pool below which I knew the monster to be poised. The fly alighted gently and sailed unheeded along the surface of the water.

"Oh!" exclaimed the disappointed maiden. "Won't he take it?"

"I don't think he will," I replied, again casting into the same spot.

But he did take it this time. The rod bent double, and the reel "whirred," the fish dashing forward at full speed. Then, after his headlong rush, he turned and came back again into the pool. But soon he was away again, making, now, for a sunken root, and, had he succeeded in his effort, most surely would he have bidden me farewell. Miraculously, however, I saved the situation; and, with a terrific swirl, the fish bore across the stream out of the zone of danger. Fast and furiously the struggle continued. Too intently engrossed was I to observe precisely the antics of my bewitching guide; but I have a vague recollection of hearing hurled at me words of mingled instruction and praise.

In time the fish weakened, and at last I drew him towards me, his glistening sides flashing in the sunlight.

"You've got him! you've got him!" shouted the hilarious milkmaid, dancing up and down upon the bank, clapping her hands and otherwise expressing her great joy at my good luck.

"Isn't he big?" she said, when I lifted the fish from the net and took my artificial fly from his lip. "How much do you think he'll weigh?"

"Three and a half pounds! I should think he'll be quite that," I replied, holding up the trout that we might examine him the better.

“Three and a half pounds! How lovely!” she exclaimed, rapturously. “But he’s mine, you know. How shall we carry him home? He’s much too big to go into your little basket”

“I know!” cried she, suddenly seized with an idea. “Put him into my empty milk-pail. He won’t hurt it.”

I looked first longingly at my lusty captive, then at my fair enchantress. Half-grudgingly, half-sorrowfully, I meekly obeyed her command.

For a time we stood in silence, I with my head awhirl with confused thoughts, she with her large dark eyes regarding the noble fish reposing in her pail.

“Thank you ever so much for catching *my* trout,” presently she said; “it is so good of you.”

I did not answer: words had failed me.

“But you may have a little return for your trouble and kindness,” she continued, nestling gently against me and holding up her lovely face towards mine

All my confirmed and long-honoured conceptions of a maiden’s modesty and bashfulness—especially of a country maiden’s—were shattered and rendered illusive at once by so naive an invitation. But that beautiful face was upturned so gracefully, so pleadingly, and those full, shapely, ruby lips were so beseechingly placed in readiness, that my shock yielded to the inveiglements of temptation.

I stooped and—

CHAPTER X.

The Valley of Peace.

IT is not far to the Valley of Peace. In fact, only eight miles of roadway stretches between it and the city in which I dwell, whilst a short journey by rail leaves a forty minutes' brisk walk to the "haven of rest." In this valley, so pleasant and peaceful, I have spent, for a number of years, all the golden afternoons and evenings of summer on which I could contrive to escape from the noise and bustle of the city. And happy are the memories of those days in late June, in July, in August and in September. Those were sunshiny days when the air hummed with insect life, and the countryside, all leafy and gay with flowers, shimmered in the heat of the summer sun. Those were halcyon days indeed!

In the south, a range of hills falls obliquely into the valley, and its slope forms a patchwork of pasture lands and fields of wheat, oats and barley; whilst beyond the wide, fertile plain a similar ridge of hills lifts itself gradually aloft to the northern skies. And beneath the sweeping uplands, behind which the sun travels daily towards the west, there lies a dainty village in an enviable state of seclusion and tranquillity. So out-of-the-way is the village that, at some remote prehistoric time, a bucolic tribe loving loneliness might have migrated to that spot, and, unknown to the outside world, built its huts in a part of the valley whither no stranger would have cause to venture. Mention the name of the settlement to the dwellers in the city, and more likely than not they are unaware of its existence; but, alas! as the years pass by, the little settlement is becoming better known, and now many more fresh faces are to be seen there than of yore.

Although the members of a certain club are privileged to fish the river that winds through the valley, the waterside is not overrun with anglers, few of them caring to face the walk from the nearest station. Occasionally a small party of cyclists finds its way to the inn, but usually most people, whether motoring, driving, cycling or walking, pass along the upland road to the village beyond. Now and then a cricket team from the city goes down in the carrier's cart to try conclusions with the rustic eleven, and at odd times during the autumn and winter the hunt servants take the picturesque pack to the rendezvous in the village. Nevertheless, the spot still retains its comparative seclusion and tranquillity; and we, who hold in utmost secrecy the whereabouts of the little retreat, rejoice in our pardonable selfishness.

Of the sundry ways of approach to the Valley of Peace, there are two that are particularly pleasing. On a day in early summer, immediately following the opening of the coarse-fishing season, it is charming to stroll along the footpath that leads over the hills and past the spinney. The path from the second stile runs, for some distance, through an avenue of lofty trees, finally—still divided from the river by a broad belt of woodland—to emerge and wind by meadows resplendent with long lush grass and fields of young corn, across which each passing breeze sends ripples of brightest green. And next it borders hayfields all spangled with moon-daisies and meadow-sweet, clover and speedwell; until, at length, it rises over the highest portion of the hills and drops down abruptly into the valley, where nature seems to have come to herself again. The sheep are lying in the shade, the cuckoo calls with broken voice, many of the birds are singing the last joyous songs of spring; and the ragged robin, wild rose and numerous other flowers brighten and bedeck the hedgerow and wayside. And, through the tall, clustering trees, the river can be seen winding its course beneath the radiance of late June, and lingering awhile to seek shelter among the flickering shadows of some friendly wood. So through the fields the path continues, until, at last, it joins the road at the entrance to the village.

On leaving the station, it is charming, also, to follow the upland road that, after rising gradually for nearly two miles, thrusts out before the wayfarer a delightful view of the Valley of Peace. The scene is not one of impressive grandeur; it is only a simple picture of homely English country—a picture rendered pleasing by a sequence of dainty compositions. Here is obtained, too, a glimpse of the secluded and tranquil village amid its setting of hedge-intersected fields and umbrageous woods, its red-tiled cottage roofs contrasting greatly with the green trees and the various colours that glow in a landscape typical of the motherland.

The neighbourhood is rich in historical associations. The remains of an accomplished Earl repose in the little church; whilst a short distance away is the site of a Roman station. To-day the manor-house is graced by magnificent walnut trees that form a fitting background to the quaint spectacle presented by the squire and his wife in a donkey chaise driven by their young son; but where the manor now stands was situated a nobler house that was stormed and laid in ruins during the Civil War. These relics or happenings of the long-ago, however, appear to be of little interest to the villagers—is it because they are ignorant of these things, or is it because they prefer to speak of that period of the past they themselves and their fathers remember, or because the daring deeds of an eccentric and hard-riding squire they have “heard tell of” appeal to them more than the events chronicled by the historian? For the present, it is their boast that the surrounding country is shot over by a lord and an Indian prince!

My earliest recollections of the Valley of Peace bring with them memories of a small party of fly-fishers, who, in those days, gathered together at least once during the week. There were five of us and sometimes six. We would sit in the shade of the willows if the afternoon sun, by its power, rendered fishing useless and wearying—we would loll, and chat, and smoke. So the time passed pleasantly until we retired to the inn and made merry over a wholesome tea, after which we sauntered riverward in readiness for the evening rise. And the memories of many a “crowded

hour " with the dace at sundown, and of the displays of our united catches—if we retained our fish to distribute among the rustics—are memories that neither years will dim nor future experiences detract from their sweetness. But the various members of our party have since become scattered far and wide, and I alone frequent the old familiar spots.

Of late years I have had the company of old friend H., and happy are the times we have spent together by the riverside, and great are the comforts and attentions we have received at the cottage of the ex-'Varsity cricket coach, and at the little inn, with its spotless floors, its clean, white tables and its rows of shining tankards.

We watch the pageantry of the year rise to the height of its splendour, and fall towards the depth of its decay. We hear the weakened springtime chorus of the birds grew fainter and fainter, until it is a chorus no longer. The hay is cut, and "made," and gathered in. The wheat ripens to gold under the August sun. The reapers come; the fields are all studded with stooks; the wain rumbles home to the stackyard with its last load; and, in the gloaming, the partridge calls across the stubble. The days shorten and the nights become colder; the harvest moon waxes and wanes. Martins and swallows congregate and prepare to follow in the wake of the swifts; and lapwings and starlings gather in flocks.

So summer passes, and our halcyon days fade into pleasant memories.

CHAPTER XI.

In the Season of Mists.

○F the lines in which John Keats addresses autumn, the first possesses a subtle charm for many of us anglers. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," begins the poet; and straightway our thoughts are wafted to October, to the riverside, and the game, elusive grayling. The very spirit and splendour of October are suggested by those words: they open wide the floodgates of our memories. In our minds we picture the happy valley of the stream of our desires—we picture it in its autumnal glory, when Nature's master hand has wonderfully wrought upon the foliage of wood and hedgerow. This was the season when we were wont to marvel at the pageantry of flaming colour, and think of "fiery October" as indeed "the sunset of the year." Dour days there were, too, of course; but who remembers these?

We think of the grayling as the fickle creature we have always found her to be—"uncertain, coy, and hard to please," as ever was fair lady who drove fond lover to distraction. But her coquetry is irresistible; time and again, in spite of or because of her incalculable moods, we are magnetically drawn to her "bower," ardent to woo and win. Beautiful is she in every piscine way. How graceful is her lithe form! how lustrous her livery of silvery grey, her dark back shot with lilac, her whitish underpart, and her large dorsal fin spotted and splashed with purple. Eulogised in prose and verse—her name lending itself well to the purpose of the rhymester—she

has been imaginatively termed "The Flower of the Fishes," "The Queen of the Brook," and "Our Lady of the Streams."

Those of us who, in the season of mists, have angled for and have caught *Salmo thymallus*, "the tantaliser," honour and respect her as a fish yielding sport to hand and eye and gratification to the palate. We rejoice in the opportunity that she affords for our throwing a fly when the trout season is over. But, alas! to our intense sorrow, we find that among our fraternity she has made implacable enemies. With concern we have followed the heated controversy occasioned by her life-habits, involving the question whether her presence in the trout stream is desirable. Her sins have been so ruthlessly exposed and the views of her accusers and defenders promulgated so widely that there is no necessity to repeat them. Despite our affection for the grayling, however, we are opposed, well-nigh unanimously, to her protection, should this be undertaken at the expense of the noble trout; in fact, we hold that when the grayling thrives so much as to prove detrimental to the trout, steps at once should be taken to suppress her. In some cases we note that the grayling's enemies have been able to give practical effect to their views; but so far they have failed, fortunately for us, to instigate a general movement against this fine, sporting fish. So the grayling is still with us, and long may she remain! She has too many staunch admirers to allow her extermination to be nearly in sight, despite the fact that in some quarters she is so strongly denounced.

Surveying mentally the grayling's domain, we find that during the past fifty years its boundaries have been considerably extended. Nowadays she reigns from Berkshire, Hampshire, and Wiltshire to Herefordshire and Shropshire; to Derbyshire and Yorkshire; to Cumberland, Durham, and Northumberland into and beyond the border of Scotland, where, apparently, the grayling is regarded by many Scottish anglers as an intruder. Needless to say, this territory embraces much picturesque and varied scenery, and contains many delightful streams and rivers, each possessing its special characteristics and charms.

The Kennet, the Lambourn, the Itchen, and the Test are the first streams to arrest our attention, and on these is obtained the cream of the southern grayling-fishing. Then we pass on to the waters of the Welsh borders—the Wye, the Teme, the Lugg, and the Arrow—which are noted for their grayling and the charm of their peaceful valleys. Next we come to the classic rivers of romantic Derbyshire—the Derwent, the Wye, and the far-famed and almost incomparable Dove; also the Staffordshire stream, the Manifold. In imagination we traverse the broad acres of Yorkshire, where we find that “her ladyship” abounds in many a river, chief among which are the Wharfe, the Ure, the Swale, the Nidd, the Rye, and the Derwent. The pride of the Ure is its grayling-fishing; and we also recall other streams for this fish renowned, such as the Costa, the Pickering Beck, the Dove, and the Cover. Still further north, we turn, among other waters, to the Ribble, Eden, Tweed, Till, Glen, and Teviot. Over this kingdom of *Thymallus* our thoughts are carried so rapidly that there is no time for them to dwell upon the more remote and less famous haunts of the grayling, in Somersetshire and elsewhere.

Incidentally, however, we vainly seek reasons to account for the grayling’s absence from the Thames—a water seemingly most suitable for her, especially since she thrives in more than one of this great river’s tributaries. And—this is also by the way—we have heard of a veteran angler who, not so very many years ago, frequently brought home to breakfast a basket of Trent grayling. But it is obvious that pollution has driven “the flower of the fishes” from the river once termed by Michael Drayton “the crystal Trent.” However, it is interesting to note that, in November 1913, a remarkably fine grayling was landed in the neighbourhood of Gunthorpe, this being the second specimen of this fish caught in the vicinity during the last twenty years.

We have found the streams of the south to yield much larger grayling than those of either the Midlands or the North; a pounder or thereabouts from the latter waters is considered a good fish,

whereas fish of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb., $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and even 3lb. are frequently taken from the former streams. But the beauty and symmetry of the northern fish have compensated us, in some measure, for their lack of weight.

Then we ponder the improvements in tackle and methods which have been made during the years that trout and grayling have frequented the same streams, and we recall the fact that grayling are said to have been introduced from the Continent by monks. And, though some of us are sceptical of this tradition, we agree, nevertheless, that this association with the jovial monks of old adds a touch of picturesqueness, at least, to a branch of angling already sufficiently attractive.

The catalogue of flies that we have used at various times and on manifold streams surprises us by its length. Duns, Quills and Bumbles, Wickham's Fancy, Willow, Little Chap, Witch, Dazzler, Gem, Bradshaw's Fancy, Red Tag, Needle, and many others have we presented, successfully or otherwise, to "her ladyship."

We pause to recall the days upon which Thymallus showed herself in her most freakish moods—when by her fickleness she tantalised us to the extreme limit of our patience.

In the first place, we have ever found her to be a quicker riser than the trout. When feeding she lies low down in the water, from which position she is able, by means of her huge dorsal fin and large air-bladder, to ascend quickly to the surface. Her sudden dart from below occasionally results in her missing the fly; and the peculiar shape of her mouth, together with her curious way of rising, sometimes renders her difficult to hook securely. Hence, if she chances to escape ere we bring her to the net, is it not because, for reasons aforesaid, she has not been fairly and squarely hooked? Our forefathers believed that the grayling's tender mouth accounted for her so often parting company with the angler; but, at the present day, it is known that certain portions of her mouth only are tender, and our personal experience has proved that the difficulty of landing her has been somewhat exaggerated.

We have found, of course, that the grayling, unlike the trout, is gregarious; and also that she lacks one of the characteristics of

the latter fish—namely, a desire to reach the higher portions of the river—and that, accordingly, she makes no attempt to jump the weirs and other obstacles which the trout successfully confronts.

We have discovered, furthermore, that the grayling, despite her coyness, is not so easily “put down” as the trout; and that, so long as we kept well out of sight, and provided she had not felt the sharp sting of our hook, the same fish would rise at our fly again and again.

We admit that, during the season of mists, annoyance is frequently caused by leaves that have fallen into the stream adhering to our flies; but this inconvenience is more than counterbalanced by the glories of these October days.

Of the occasions on which we enjoyed moderate sport with the grayling, there is one, in particular, that lingers in our memory. That was a time when Nature was in her happiest mood, and the beauty of our surroundings aroused our unstinted admiration; when we refreshed ourselves on the hillside with a fair landscape spread out at our feet. How striking was the contrast—the rich brown soil of the ploughed fields opposed to the verdant pasture lands! whilst beyond the river the silent woods glowed with multifarious hues—russet, lemon, orange, purple and many others—and a wondrous carpet of fallen leaves already lay beneath the trees. We dallied over our frugal meal; and the poet of our party, in despair of finding words sufficiently eloquent of his own to describe the magnificence of the scene, had recourse to his memory, and poured forth that passage from Longfellow:—

*There is a beautiful spirit breathing now
Its mellow richness on the clustered trees,
And, from a beaker full of richest dyes,
Pouring new glory on the Autumn woods,
And dipping in warm light the pillared clouds.
Morn on the mountain, like a summer bird,
Lifts up her purple wing, and in the vales
The gentle wind, a sweet and passionate wooer,*

*Kisses the blushing leaf, and stirs up life
Within the solemn woods of ash deep-crimsoned,
And silver beech, and maple yellow-leafed,
Where Autumn, like a faint old man, sits down
By the wayside awcary. . . .*

Then there were the days when Thymallus took our flies boldly, and we could do nothing amiss. *Joie de vivre* filled us when, on those occasions, we landed grayling after grayling, and our creel hung heavily about our shoulders, what time the stream's perennial song sounded sweetly in our ears. But those were the days that were few and far between. . . .

Verily is the season of mists a great and glorious festival, and the "Lady of the Streams" its fitting deity.

CHAPTER XII.

Pike and Pike-Fishing.

BOUNDLESS is the romance of pike-fishing, and almost illimitable are the hopes that it awakens in the pike-angler's breast. When in quest of the "mighty Luce" the possibilities of landing a specimen of exceptional size are great in comparison with those begotten of the pursuit of fish, such as roach, dace, chub and barbel, whose limits of weight are somewhat restricted. Down in the mysterious depths of the river, lake, mere or pond to whose banks the angler resorts, may lurk pike of Dreadnought dimensions; and the expectation or hope of bringing to gaff a thirty or forty-pounder may be realised at any time. Therein lies the fascination of angling for *Esox lucius*. To these grand anticipatory joys add the pleasures of weathering the rigorous elements during a winter's day; and straightway the reason for the popularity of this branch of angling is obvious.

The lore and legends relating to pike and pike-fishing are such as fire the enthusiasm of the most unimaginative of anglers. Gesner's pike, which is reputed to have been more than 250 years old, and to have weighed over 3 cwt., is undoubtedly a mythical fish; and, even if Pliny's statements concerning the many huge pike captured in the Tiber are correct, it is said to be more than likely that those leviathans were not the *Esox* of modern ichthyology. The Salopshire fish of 170lb., from whose terrible jaws a certain parish clerk escaped so miraculously, and the 146-pounder from Lochaber, of which Colonel Thornton speaks, may also be regarded as fabulous. But, turning to authentic records, pike are known to have attained the enormous weight of 40lb., 50lb., 70lb., and over;

although Mr. Alfred Jardine's 37-pounder stands as the record English pike taken by fair rod and line angling.

The first mention of pike-fishing in this country appears to have been made in a book written some four hundred years ago by Dame Juliana Berners; though Ausonius wrote of "the wary luce" some time about A.D. 309. Highly esteemed as a table delicacy, pike were much in demand at most of the principal banquets and civic feasts held in days of yore, during the fifteenth century in particular. King Edward I. was passionately fond of the flesh of pike, which he proclaimed to be far tastier than that of any other fish from waters either fresh or salt. During the reign of this monarch, the pike, as a food, commanded a considerably higher price than even the noble salmon; from which fact it may be inferred that the "tiger of the stream" was then exceedingly scarce. And, incidentally, this deduction supports the theory, favoured by some authorities, that pike were not indigenous to our waters, but were introduced into the British Isles in some age uncertain and remote. In Lapland whilst pike are spawning, the natives capture these fish in thousands, and gut, dry and store them for future use.

Concerning the growth of pike, authorities are at variance; but one of the most famous of them considers that it "largely depends upon the nature of the water and supply of food, but that in open waters the growth seldom averages more than 1lb. a year during the first two years, and from 1½lb. to 2½lb. a year afterwards, decreasing again after eight or nine years to the original ratio."

The pike is known proverbially as a voracious fish, bold, cunning, and pugnacious; and, as Walton says, solitary in his habits, inasmuch as "he always swims or rests himself alone, and never in shoals or with company"—excepting, of course, in the early months of the year, when the male and female have mated.

During the summer and early autumn the pike haunts the vicinity of bulrushes and flags, concealing himself under the *Ranunculus aquaticus* and amongst other weeds that flourish profusely at this season. But later, when the subaqueous vegetation has died down, he repairs to deeper water, and also lurks beneath clay banks

and under those sides of river and mere whereon rush and sedge have been exuberant ; furthermore, he is to be found near the mouths of tributaries, in backwaters, and in the neighbourhood of sluice-gates and the piles of bridges. Franck, an old angling author, thus describes the habits of the pike—

“ He loves no streams, but hugs the silent deeps,
And eats all hours, and yet no house he keeps.”

Owing to the position of the eyes, the pike can better perceive what passes above his head than below it. He possesses no adipose fin, the dorsal fin being set far back over the anal fin. His tail, which is forked, is remarkably powerful ; and this enables him to dart with astonishing rapidity from his “ lair ” to seize upon his unsuspecting prey. Yet, withal, he is a lazy fellow, and well does he know that a sick or injured fish is more easily caught than one endowed to the full with health and vigour.

In the dim and distant past, so-called sportsmen obtained large catches of pike by the aid of a living goose. To one leg of the goose was tied a line with baited hook attached, and terrific was the struggle that ensued when a heavy pike seized the lure. In the course of time, this abominably cruel practice gave place to a less brutal method known as “ trimming,” a piece of wood or cork being substituted for the live bird ; but on most waters nowadays this mode is illegal, excepting those wherein the pike is regarded as vermin. Of course, the “ trimmer ” is still put to nefarious use by the poacher.

From October to February the pike is in prime condition. Bright, frosty weather conduces to good sport with this fish—at least, should the water be clear and ruffled by a strongish breeze ; but cold, cloudy, windy days are equally propitious. Also pike often feed well during wild, stormy weather. Good catches, too, are frequently effected on mild blustering days ; whilst changeable conditions, indicated, perhaps, by an unsteady barometer only, are generally inimical to successful sport. Viewed statistically, November and January appear to be the two best months, notwithstanding the fact that many splendid fish have been killed in February.

Omnivorous as a feeder, the pike preys upon fish and fishlings of all kinds, including even the younger members of his own family; neither does he show quarter to the perch, despite the latter's spinous dorsal fin, nor to the tench, which Walton styles "the physician of fishes."

"It is observed," remarks the "Father" of anglers, "that the tyrant pike will not be a wolf to his physician, but forbears to devour him though he be never so hungry." Nowadays, however, the pike apparently entertains not the slightest respect for the fish in question; for it has been satisfactorily proved that—at any rate when starvation is imminent—the "freshwater shark" will seize upon, and devour, even poor "doctor" tench.

Also included in the pike's lengthy *menu* are frogs, worms (have not large pike been caught on a bunch of lobs?), rats, voles and ducklings. Moreover, ducks, geese, swans and other aquatic birds are occasionally assailed by his insatiable majesty, who, it is said, has gone so far as to attack human beings, as witness the mauled hands and feet of men and boys he has caught bathing in his watery domains.

Although the pike is reputedly a *gourmand*, he does not, as it is natural to suppose, feed continuously from morning till night, day in, day out; but there are times when he is unaccountably dour, whilst his meal-times, at best, are tantalisingly irregular. It is no unusual occurrence for pike, especially the larger specimens, to remain "off the feed" for many hours, probably even days, together; and, though the cause, in most instances, is not apparent to the angler, there is reason to conclude that this abstinence on the part of the fish is frequently due, though not always, to their being positively glutted.

In connection with the incalculable feeding humours of the pike, the writer recalls certain experiences met with on the banks of a particular mill-dam, which for several years, during the winter months, he was privileged to fish. On every occasion sport was obtained during the morning, the pike feeding from nine until twelve, after which hour further attempts to lure a fish were in-

variably futile. One day, nevertheless, a pike *was* hooked during the afternoon—almost in the gloaming—and this was a heavy fish, which, however, was unfortunately lost.

The principal methods employed in the capture of *Esox lucius* are spinning and live-baiting, the former of which is both the more sporting and the more sportsmanlike. For spinning, the angler may use either artificial or natural baits—these latter inclusive of fish freshly killed, or dace, gudgeon and sprats preserved in formalin or other suitable preparation. The artificial lures are legion, as likewise are the “flights” used for mounting the natural fish.

Live-baiting, which is widely indulged in by men of the catholic school of anglers, is decidedly more effective than spinning, and is practised in three different ways—float-fishing, paternostering, and ledgering. Among the many tackles suitable for the orthodox style of float-fishing, there are the “snap,” the “saddle” and the “single lip-hook.” And the bait may be either a dace, roach, gudgeon, bleak, grayling, chublet, perch or gold-fish. The first four, however, are those most generally preferred. Paternostering is a very deadly mode, since it enables a thorough search to be made in the deep holes and secluded “abodes” wherein lie the larger fish. And ledgering is often successful when waters are high and discoloured by rain.

The “mighty Luce” abounds in many a river, lake, mere, pond and canal throughout the length and breadth of England; in some of the streams and lakes of Wales; in several of the lochs of Scotland, and in the rivers and loughs of Ireland. The Norfolk Broads offer enticing facilities to the pike-angler. Hickling Broad and Heigham Sounds are good waters; and Horsey Mere, Ormesby, Rollesby and Oulton Broads are favourite resorts. Much of the fishing is free, and in some cases permission is readily granted, whilst in others a small charge per day is made.

The waters of Lincolnshire—notably the Witham, the Forty-foot, the Glen—contain many pike, as also do parts of the Nene. The Thames, Stour, Medway, Arun, Hampshire Avon, Dorsetshire Frome, Great Ouse, Trent and some of the Yorkshire rivers hold

this fish in their various reaches. In Wales, pike are to be found in Bala and Llangorse lakes, whilst they abound in parts of the Dee and Severn ; and in the Wye from Builth downwards.

Conn, Cullen, Mask, and other Irish loughs have yielded some huge fish, and must contain others ; although, doubtless, they harbour none quite so large or so ancient as the famous Mannheim pike, previously mentioned, in whose gills a brass ring was discovered upon which was inscribed a Greek legend.

But it is impossible here to enumerate even one half of the waters—either good or indifferent—wherein dwells “ the fell tyrant of the wat’ry plain.” And, great as are the possibilities in the way of pike-fishing presented by England, far greater are offered by Ireland.

CHAPTER XIII.

Chub : and a Method of Chubbing.

I.

MAN is essentially a wandering animal. From his nomadic forefathers he has inherited an irrepressible inclination to rove. Safely may it be said that the nomadic instinct is native to every human being ; although in some individuals it is more highly developed than in others, and, in many instances, may appear almost latent.

Hence, in the opinion of many, fly-fishing is pre-eminent among systems of angling, inasmuch as it affords the greatest opportunity for satisfying this desire to wander, and thus bestows upon the fisherman that subtle sense of freedom which conduces so largely to his happiness. However, in the pursuit of game and coarse fish alike, there are several methods that possess, in a somewhat modified form, this essential attribute of the unique enjoyment engendered by the practice of fly-fishing. And this category includes a certain method known as "Roving for chub," whose peculiar attractions claim for it many votaries when the fly-rod has been laid aside for the winter months.

Never is *Cyprinus cephalus* in better condition than during the coldest season of the year ; never, at any time, more highly esteemed on account of its sport-yielding qualities ; and this despite the fact that sundry anglers both speak and write of the chub opprobriously. By adopting the method of roving from swim to swim, excellent baskets or bags of this fish may be obtained ; although, of course, much depends upon the climatic conditions and the state of the water.

In no way whatever does winter angling attract the "butterfly fisherman"; its appeal is solely to the hardest and most enthusiastic of sportsmen. Consequently, the men one meets on the river-bank at this season are, every one of them, keen anglers; and, incidentally, sincere admirers of Nature. For the *true* lover of Nature is he for whom the countryside has charms even when its trees are skeletons and its flowers have fallen and decayed.

II.

A noble fish—neither handsome nor ugly—distinguished by its powerful, headlong rush when first hooked; a fish with a broad back and head, big leathery mouth and large scales; a frequenter of waters that flow over sand and gravel; a lover of rapid streams, quieter eddies, and deep holes; a riser to the fly, though a taker of multifarious lures; cunning, keen-sighted, and timid—such is the chub.

Among the rivers in which this fish has its haunts, pride of place must be given to the Hampshire Avon, which steadily yields, season after season, chub of exceptional size. Other famous chub waters are the Thames, Kennet, Loddon, Colne, Lea, Great Ouse, Little Ouse, Herefordshire Wye, and the Trent. Some of the Yorkshire rivers contain many large chub, as also do portions of the Derbyshire Derwent—notably between Ambergate and Belper. This fish is also found in several of the streams of Scotland, whilst it thrives considerably in parts of Wales.

Concerning the most notable chub that have been captured on rod and line, mention might be made of specimens of 8lb. 4oz., 7lb. 6½oz., 7lb. 5oz., 7lb. 2oz., and 7lb. from the Hampshire Avon, the first of these being the record chub taken by fair angling. From the Thames have been taken monsters of 7lb. 4oz. and 7lb. 1oz.

Small chub are frequently mistaken for dace by the inexperienced angler. The former fish may be distinguished by its broader head, larger mouth, and the convexity of its anal fin; in the dace this fin, which is the one on the underpart nearest the tail, is concave, and lacks the reddish tint that is present in all fins of

the chub. Moreover, the general colouring of the bodies of the two fish is somewhat different, that of the dace being the more silvery.

The lures offered to the lusty "Chavender" are many, chief among them being flies of various sorts and sizes, natural and artificial; frogs, shrimps, worms, maggots, caddis-grubs, wasp-grubs, bullock's pith, greaves, cherries, blackberries, and pastes of different kinds. Also, occasionally, a spinning bait may be found effective.

The time, *par excellence*, for winter chubbing arrives when the rivers have cleared after floods, and when one or two frosts have sharpened the piscine appetite. Then it is that the numerous swims prove the most productive—those spots where, out of the rush and turmoil of the stream, the water glides and eddies beneath overhanging trees and bushes, past snags and roots and camp-sheddings and under hollow banks. When the temperature of the river becomes low, chub do not *always* seek the deeper holes, as is commonly supposed; but they may be discovered frequently in quite shallow streams. After the water has fined down, a very deadly bait is bullock's pith; whilst other winter lures are cheese-paste, greaves, lobworms, brandlings, and a large bunch of gentles. Often the use of a boat or punt is advantageous, sometimes even necessary; but, generally, there are swims that can be fished successfully from the bank.

III.

In the south-east the sun, like a dull ball of fire, hangs suspended in space above the line of gaunt, grim trees which crowns the ridge of low hills. And, anon, the feeble sunlight, gradually penetrating the morning mist, gives promise of a typical old-time winter's day. Across the fields the frosted grass-blades glisten and scintillate, crunching crisply beneath the angler's feet; and the air, so clear and keen, is delightfully invigorating.

"More propitious conditions for chubbing could not have been desired," soliloquises the angler, what time he observes that, as regards colour, height, and volume, the river is in perfect order.

Quickly he puts together his "Nottingham" rod, and threads

through its rings a stoutish, plaited silk line, which has been well vaselined to make it buoyant, and of which some fifty yards are wound upon a free and easy-running winch. Then, after the medium gut-cast with a No. 4 Crystal hook has been attached to the reel-line, and the swan-quill float, capable of carrying six or seven large split shot, has been carefully adjusted, everything is ready for action. Let it be noted that the rover's "kit" is as light as possible for he burdens himself with few accessories beyond those absolutely necessary.

Overnight, the bait, bullock's pith and brains, which, to those unversed in piscatorial matters, appear so extraordinary a lure, has been prepared with as much care as if intended for human consumption. The "pith" has been skinned, washed, and cut into pieces about an inch thick and $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long; for the "Cheven." dearly loves a good mouthful. And the "brains" have been cleaned and boiled, their purpose being to attract the fish.

Cautiously approaching a chosen swim, the angler despatches a consignment of the "brains" that, in a half cocoanut-shell or other convenient receptacle, have been chopped into fragments and thoroughly mixed with water. Then a portion of "pith" is selected and worked well up the shank of the hook. Presently the swan-quill float travels down stream along the boughs; but its initial journey is futile. Onward it goes again, until, on a sudden, it shoots under with that downward slant characteristic of a business-like "bite"; and the first chub is securely hooked. Only a brief struggle ensues, for the fish is small; nevertheless, this early success prognosticates a good day's sport. Again the float, which is skilfully held in check to allow the hook-bait to precede it, moves smoothly down the swim. Several further solicitous invitations prove of no avail, so fearing lest the spot has been disturbed, the angler is about to visit the next "hole," when down goes the float once more; the rod-top responds instantaneously, and the fish—this time a good one—fights lustily to the net.

Passing on, the angler catches a glimpse of a kingfisher that flashes by like a streak of gaudy colours. Yonder, a perky robin,

regardless of man's approach, sings cheerily ; whilst farther on a startled blackbird complains with mellow "clutterings," and a timid moorhen beats a hasty retreat.

During the next hour two more nice chub are landed, and a "monster" hooked and lost—a disaster necessitating a pause for slight repairs to tackle. Subsequently, a likely-looking spot is tried, where the stream curls round into a beautiful eddy, but it produces nothing but a fish unworthy of a place among those already killed. In another swim, of which the angler cherishes the fondest memories, and where the bank projects over the water, the float disappears almost immediately. With a powerful rush, a heavy fish dives for some submerged roots—no doubt its familiar "stonghold"—testing the skill and tackle of the angler to the utmost. Fortunately, however, a "smash" is averted ; and at length, after a desperate struggle, the fish is worn out and duly netted—a magnificent 5-pounder, which eventually proves to be the best fish of the day.

A return to several swims fished during the morning results in the capture of a leash of fine chub, but a subsequent half-hour's work brings nothing further to the net. And finally, when "twilight enfolds the old church tower," the angler, with shoulders bent beneath the weight of a heavy bag, wends his way homewards, rejoicing in the success that to-day has attended his efforts, but which, alas, he cannot hope frequently to repeat !

CHAPTER XIV.

Perch and Perch-Fishing.

OF the many different species of the *Percidæ* family which inhabit the waters of Europe, North America, Siberia, and Western Asia, the common European perch (*Perca fluviatilis*) is highly regarded by the angler. During the winter months this fish yields excellent sport on rod and line, being for its size far gamier than even the predatory pike.

Abounding throughout the greater part of Europe, including Scandinavia and Lapland, in which latter country it is known as the "abbor," the valiant perch is more or less plentiful in the various rivers, ponds and lakes of England, Ireland and Wales; but in Scotland it is confined chiefly to the lowlands, being found in certain waters of the North only, into which it has been introduced. In parts of Southern Europe there exists another species of this genus of fish—*Perca Italica*—which fish differs from the common European perch in that its form is shorter and deeper, whilst the dark cross-bands are absent from its back.

Perca fluviatilis is a remarkably handsome fish. Its sides, striped with dark green or blackish bars, are of a golden-brownish hue that passes into a yellowish colour on the under-part, the whole shaded with an iridescent sheen; its ventral and caudal fins are brilliant red; it carries the large, prickly dorsal fin characteristic of the acanthopterygious fish.

Although so beautiful to look upon when freshly caught, with its formidable spiky fin held erect in bold defiance, the perch in death soon loses the splendour of its gaudy "coat." In this connection, the writer recalls certain occasions when he has retained sundry specimens of the fish in question whose appearance several hours after capture was positively repulsive.

The true perch possesses two dorsal fins that are quite distinct from each other, the rays of the front one being spinous, those of the rear one flexible. Its scales are rough and rather large; its tongue smooth, and its gill-covers "bony, notched, and sharply serrated."

Like the carp, the perch is supposed to live for a considerable time out of water. And it is said that in some countries large consignments of live perch were despatched to markets, often fifty or sixty miles distant. The fish were packed in damp moss or straw; and in the event of their not being sold were returned to their native element, apparently quite unharmed by their long journey overland.

The perch is a most prolific fish; its fecundity is wonderful. Its ova, says Buckland, is "invested by a gelatinous envelope of a viscid nature, causing the eggs to stick together in masses. These masses take the form of long tube or net-shaped bands, which are deposited on, and adhere to, water-plants at the bottom of the stream."

Delicate, firm and tasty is the flesh of the perch when cooked; some fishermen consider it even more pleasing to the palate than the flesh of "lowland" trout. In "The Compleat Angler" Walton alludes to the praise bestowed upon this toothsome fish by Aldrovandus and Gesner; and quotes the German proverb—"more wholesome than a pearch of Rhine."

Perch, as a rule, spawn in April and May, afterwards seeking shallow water with a fastish current wherein to recuperate. Subsequently they repair to quieter, deeper water in the vicinity of old piles and bridges; also they lurk in sheltered corners where weeds or water-lilies are exuberant, and in streams flowing gently over a gravelly bed.

In September these fish become gregarious, swimming together in shoals; for, as old Izaak remarks, "they are not like the solitary pike, but love to accompany one another and march together in troops." However, in some lakes, perch *are* known to be "solitary of habit"; but these are generally the largest specimens—tritons among the minnows of their race.

From October to February perch are in prime condition ; the colours of their " coats " are more lustrous than at any other time ; they are strong, lively, bold, and, therefore, in excellent " fighting fettle." During this period of the year they are found chiefly under cavernous banks, around the sunken roots of trees, in the neighbourhood of camp-sheathing, locks and floodgates, and in quiet nooks beneath weirs.

During fine weather, and particularly after rain, when the water has been nicely tinged, perch will usually accept a bait quite readily ; also they are to be caught during spells of frost, or even when snow is on the ground. Nevertheless, like all other fish they are capricious feeders. And, at times, nothing will induce them to seize upon the angler's lure, be it cast before them never so temptingly.

Perch seldom attain a weight greater than 4lb. ; in fact, a pounder may be considered a good fish, and gives sport by no means to be despised. In " British Zoology " Pennant mentions a perch caught in the Serpentine which weighed about 9lb. ; whilst it is also recorded that a 6lb. specimen, taken in Virginia Water thirty-nine years ago, was forwarded to Windsor Castle ; also occasional fish of 4lb. and over have been killed in waters here and there—notably in Daventry Reservoir, in Broadland, and in the rivers Thames, Great Ouse, Severn, Wye and Firle.

Perch, varying considerably in size and numbers, inhabit certain reaches of the Ant, Avon (Hampshire), Kennet, Lea, Loddon, Medway, Severn, Stour, Thames, Wey, Wye and many other rivers. The Broads of Norfolk and the rivers and drains of Fenland contain a good stock of this fish ; as likewise do various ponds, meres, lakes and canals, too numerous to name. In Lake Windermere small perch literally swarm ; whilst in Wales larger fish are to be found in Lake Bala, Lake Llangorse, Llyn Arenig and elsewhere in the Principality.

Baits suitable for winter fishing are minnows, small gudgeon, tiny dace, a bunch of gentles, brandlings, marsh and red worms, and the tail-end or the whole of a well-scoired lob. Sometimes perch will take a spoon-bait, or a Phantom or Devon minnow.

The mention of baits for perch-fishing recalls the fact that the perch itself is occasionally substituted for other fish as a lure for the voracious pike. It may reasonably be supposed that the attractiveness of perch as a pike-bait was discovered very many years ago, even before Walton's time; and that, in certain waters, this fish has been used effectively ever since, though, doubtless, the majority of anglers have removed its spinous dorsal fin before mounting the perch upon their tackle. However, Mr. W. Carter Platts, whilst discussing pike-baits in the *Yorkshire Weekly Post*, says:—

“Although I have never personally tried it, I have a sneaking conviction that a small perch might be usefully employed as a live bait in some waters, such as lakes in which perch abound. It is a common fallacy that pike will not eat perch, it being speciously argued that the large and spiny dorsal fin of the latter fish would lacerate the gullet—and that the pike knows it. As the outcome of much observation, it is satisfactorily proved that the pike, like cannibalistic fish in general, invariably swallows its prey head first. Gulped down in this way, the spines of the perch fold back and cause the pike no inconvenience.”

In the next issue of the same paper, another angler states that when using perch (with dorsal fin intact) as bait he has killed hundreds of pike, chiefly in lakes where perch abound—in Derwent Water, Esthwaite Water, Grasmere, Rydal Mere, Windermere, and such-like waters.

Of the methods of perch-fishing the most popular and sporting one is that known as “paternostering,” which, perhaps, is also the most successful. When the three-hooked paternoster is used, the fish have three different kinds of bait to select from—namely, worm, gudgeon, and minnow, for instance. The angler roves from one spot to another and quietly drops his lures into the favourite “holts” of the perch. The line is held taut, with the plummet resting on the bottom of the river, and every now and then the lead is gently raised, so that the baits may be slowly moved this way or that; and a large extent of water is covered accordingly.

When a fish seizes a bait a few seconds' grace should be allowed before the hook is driven home. And, after being hooked, the fish should be played carefully, else other perch that are lurking around will most likely be scared.

Sometimes a float may be used advantageously when live-baiting for perch, and, should the water be high and discoloured, ledgering with a minnow or a worm often produces good results.

For spinning a natural bait, the "Archer," the "Bedford," the "Chapman," and the "Pennell" tackles can be strongly recommended; whilst among various artificial spinners the "Wagtail" is excellent, as also are those previously mentioned.

Float-fishing is another mode that is practised largely, and big "catches" are often effected by this method. A No. 6 or 7 Crystal hook would be suitable should worm be used as bait, whilst a small swan-quill or fairly large porcupine float answers the purpose admirably.

Thus, with so many different methods at his command, the angler with a "will" should be at no loss for a "way" in which to essay the capture of the handsome, sporting perch.

CHAPTER XV.

The Rise and Fall of a Despot.

HE was born far back in some unrecorded year. He sprang from a certain branch of the Esocidæ family ; and, although in his beginnings as tiny and defenceless as a minnow, was destined in fulness of time to exceed all his contemporaries, both in size and force. Gradually, almost insensibly, as his girth and weight increased, so did gross appetites and fierce desires replace his early innocence. Terrible as Herod's was the rule of his latter years ; but, whilst ruling like a tyrant, he met his death, at last, like a hero.

The waters that form the scene of this epical and tragic story are those of a certain mere from whose reed-fringed margin a sylvan park extends upwards towards the brow of the everlasting hills. And upon the rising ground that stretches, so it seems, betwixt sky and mere, is situated, amid luxuriant trees, a picturesque old-world hall. Centuries have mellowed and decayed its massive walls ; the glamour of its one-time magnificence has faded, and with it, too, has vanished all the pomp and circumstance of a chivalrous age. Nevertheless, the ancestral home stands as a fitting monument to the fame and generosity of a noble family. Baronet after baronet has stepped along the path of benevolence trodden by his predecessors ; each has contributed honourably to the country's welfare, and has been laid to rest in the churchyard over the hills.

In like manner, one piscine generation had succeeded another to its hereditary domain in the gloomy depth of the mere ; but, whereas Time had wrought many changes in the world beyond the

surface of those sullen waters, below things had altered but little with the fleeting years. And so, when one eventful day was born the pike whose history now concerns us, he entered upon life under precisely the same conditions as his forefathers had done from time beyond memory.

The first three months of his existence passed by serenely ; he indulged in daily frolics, rejoicing, as it were, in the wondrous powers of his broadening tail and delicate fins. Then, twice within a week, he nearly lost his life. Only by marvellous agility did he manage to evade the desperate attacks made upon him by two of his larger and more ferocious brethren. On the first occasion he escaped scratchless ; but the second affair was of a more serious nature. Miraculously, however, he regained his freedom ; but his body was somewhat badly mauled, and a considerable time elapsed ere he recovered his former sprightliness. Nevertheless, these two incidents served a purpose. They demonstrated to him that his existence in the mere was not to be entirely unchallenged, and that, if he wished to attain a ripe old age, caution and cunning must be the shields of his years of relative weakness and immaturity.

Subsequently, all went well with the jack ; and, since food was plentiful, he grew apace and waxed fat. On the sixth anniversary of his birthday, he had developed into quite a noble fish, lusty and of goodly proportions ; and had emerged victoriously from sundry desperate conflicts with his contemporaries. His appearance changed with the seasons ; the white, yellow and green of his summer livery gave place, in the autumn and winter, to hues of olive-brown and green. And, thus aided by Nature, he was able to conceal himself effectually, and ambush many an unsuspecting victim. Both of his jaws were armed with formidable teeth ; whilst other teeth, varying in size and pointing inwards towards the throat, were set upon his palatine and vomer bones. This last-mentioned phalanx formed a natural trap, which, whilst not obstructing the ingress of his prey, put almost unsurmountable obstacles in the way of its escape.

By-and-by, our pike, long since a terror to all the smaller fry, including the younger members of his own family, began to assert himself as supreme lord and tyrant of the mere.

Little opportunity, however, had he for gaining experience of the angler's wily ways, for it was seldom that a fisherman cast a bait into those gloomy waters. Nevertheless, he learned to discern the difference in the vibrations caused by the approach of a clumsy human being and that of a beast. Occasionally man had thrown stones at him what time he basked in the sunshine; but the horses, cattle and deer, which came daily to drink from the mere, gave no sign of enmity. From the former unapproachable demon he deemed it wise to flee; but oftentimes he would lie almost in the shadows of the quaffing brutes.

Incidents, trivial or momentous, gave interest to his life; faithfully he performed the duties of a piscine husband; fiercely he fought and bullied his relatives; proudly he asserted his power and displayed his lordly airs. Once, whilst he lay motionless amongst the weeds, a plump roach swam quietly past his lair, as such fish were wont to do. Darting out upon his prey, he seized it; but, to his great astonishment, his mouth was violently and sharply stung. Instinctively he darted for a stake that, fortunately for him, was near at hand, and around which he circled wildly. Then, setting up his back, he tugged with all his might. For several days afterwards, something or other, he knew not what, remained firmly fixed in his upper jaw, and defied all his efforts to remove it. Eventually, however, he succeeded in ridding himself of this curious and undesirable encumbrance.

Heavier and heavier he grew, and likewise increased in cunning and voracity. In solitary state he roamed his domain, poised statue-like in the weeds, and took a heavy toll of fair-sized fish. He lurked by the reedy margin of the mere; he chased the shoals of fry upon the shallows. He preyed upon his kith and kin; devoured water-rats and wrought havoc amongst the ducklings. Fearless of aught he reigned supreme, the unassailable tyrant of his dominion.

Still continuing to plunder unmercifully, *gourmand* that he was, he at length became the very picture of a magnificent pike ; over 30lb. in weight, dignified, arrogant and wily. But alas ! the day came for him to fall from his high estate.

Closing his massive jaws upon a fish that seemingly allowed itself to be an easy victim, he experienced an unusual and alarming shock. An extraordinary sensation passed through his ponderous body when doggedly he resisted a strain exerted upon him by some unknown power that strove to drag him whither he had no mind to go. With a defiant toss of his head and a graceful swirl of his forceful tail, he turned himself about, and, despite much opposition, slowly and stately moved away. He glided quietly for some distance through the silent waters ; then, hustled though he was, he stopped, stubborn and motionless. Anger arose within him when this invisible power relaxed not its hold upon him ; but, all confident in his own might, he again bestirred himself, this time with less speed and grace.

At last he became furious, for hitherto one and all had cowered before him ; yet here was a something challenging his, to him, infinite power. Savagely he shook his head ; his eyes gleamed maliciously ; then, mustering all his strength, he tugged and pulled, finally diving to the bottom of the mere. Feeling a slackening in the mysterious strain, he quickly sought the deeper water farther out, and, finding a place of sanctuary, there remained and sulked. But presently he was obliged to stir again, and was now beside himself with rage. Less agile than in years ago, he could perform no surprising acrobatic feat by which to shake himself free ; but, keeping low down in the water, he strove dauntlessly against this terrible unknown power. But, alas ! the struggle, so long-drawn-out, was telling upon his powers of endurance ; his energy was flagging, and he was being hauled gradually shoreward. Summoning up his failing strength for another bold bid for liberty, he hored down into a large bunch of rotting weeds ; but, immediately afterwards, he once more had to yield to the relentless strain.

Then again, pride welling up within him, he plunged wildly, and, with his huge tail, lashed the waters into foam. By this time he was thoroughly exhausted; something slipped beneath his gaping gills, and he was drawn unceremoniously from his native element. Then, following a heavy blow from a "priest," a tremor ran through his well-conditioned body, and his great mouth opened wide. Two human figures, warmly clad, stooped to admire the splendour of his monstrous form; whilst through the leafless trees the wind, as if in pity for the slain, crooned an epicede. And, in the fleeting light of the winter afternoon, amid the withered sedges by the mere, lay that mighty fish, vanquished at last.

