

## BLACK BASS FISHING.

"A GLORIOUS morning for fishing!" said the Professor, as he stepped down from the broad veranda of a stately Kentucky mansion, and out upon the lawn, dashing the dew-drops from the newly sprung blue-grass as he leisurely strode along in his heavy wading boots.

Professor Silvanus was a man yet in the prime of life, with a full beard, dark gray eyes, and a tall, powerful frame. A well-informed naturalist, a capital shot, and an artistic angler, he had wooed Nature in her various moods, in all seasons, and in many lands. Facing the east, he now stood, clad in a quiet fishing suit of gray tweed, surmounted by a broad-brimmed hat of drab felt, the smoke from his briar-root pipe wreathing gracefully above his head like a halo before it was borne away on the early morning air.

Meanwhile, Ignatius, his companion and disciple, was busily engaged in bringing out to the veranda the rods, creels, tackle-cases, landing-nets, lunch-basket, and other necessities for a day's fishing.

"Luke is coming with the wagon, Professor," said he, as a well-groomed span of bays to a light wagonette came dashing around the corner of the house.

After depositing the various articles in the wagon, Ignatius took the reins, the Professor climbed up beside him with the rod-cases, while the colored man Luke, with a sigh, gave up the ribbons and took a back seat.

The sun was just topping the maples when the impatient team went dashing through the road-gate.

"The bass should rise well to-day," said the Professor.

"They are well through spawning, and if the water is right, everything else is propitious," replied Ignatius.

"Mighty perfishus for chan'l cats, too," put in Luke, "'sides yaller bass an' green bass an' black bass, too; any kind o' bass."

"Professor, how many kinds of black bass are there?" inquired Ignatius, as he lightly touched up the flank of the off-horse.

"There are but two species of black bass, and they are as much alike as that span of horses; but from the many different names used to designate them in different parts of the country one would be led to think there were many species."

"Local fishermen say there are three kinds

here, — black, yellow, and green bass," asserted Ignatius.

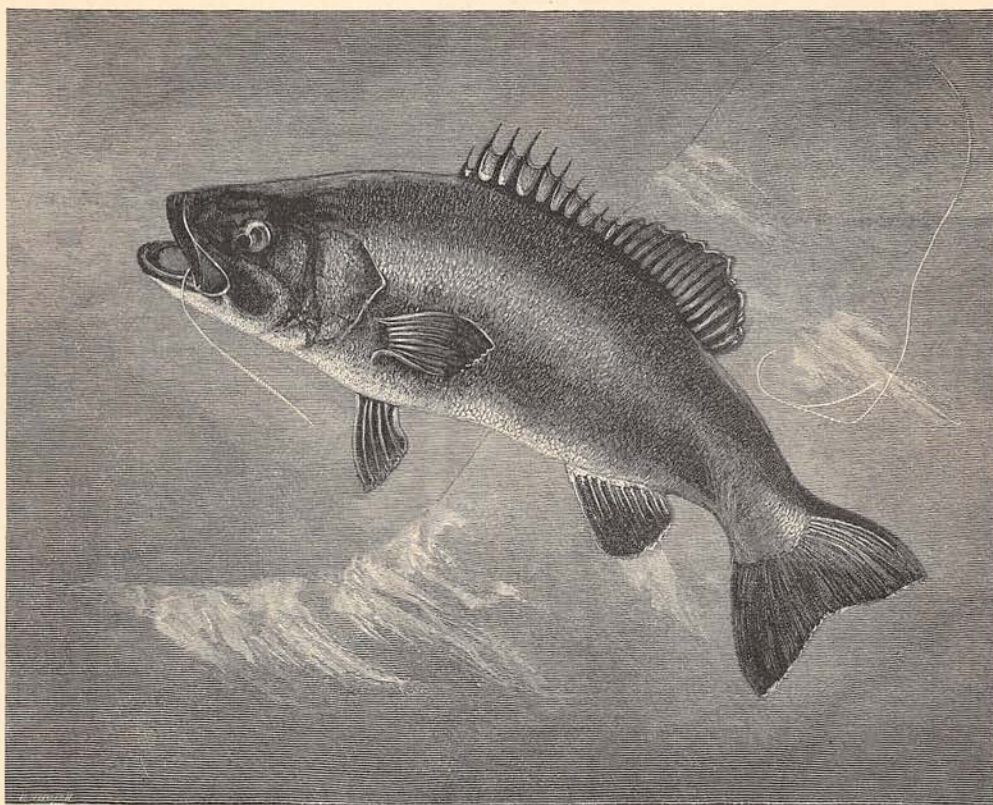
"There are but two well-defined species, the large-mouthed bass and the small-mouthed bass," continued the Professor, settling himself for a lecture. "There has been more confusion and uncertainty attending the scientific classification and nomenclature of the black bass than usually falls to the lot of fishes, some dozen generic appellations and nearly fifty specific titles having been bestowed upon the two species by naturalists since their first scientific descriptions by Count Lacépède in 1802. Nor has this polyonomous feature been confined to their scientific terminology, for their vernacular names have been as numerous and varied; thus they are known in different sections of our country as bass, perch, trout, chub, or salmon, with or without various qualifying adjectives descriptive of color or habits."

"Yes," assented Ignatius, "I have heard them called black perch, yellow perch, and jumping perch up the Rockcastle and Cumberland rivers, and white and black trout in Tennessee."

"Exactly," returned the Professor. "Much of the confusion attending the common names of the black bass arises from the coloration of the species, which varies greatly, even in the same waters; thus they are known as black, green, yellow, and spotted bass. Then they have received names somewhat descriptive of their habitat, as, lake, river, marsh, pond, slough, bayou, moss, grass, and Oswego bass. Other names have been conferred on account of their pugnacity or voracity, as, tiger, bull, sow, and buck bass. In the Southern States they are universally known as 'trout.' In portions of Virginia they are called chub, southern chub, or Roanoke chub. In North and South Carolina they are variously known as trout, trout-perch, or Welshman; indeed, the large-mouthed bass received its first scientific, specific name from a drawing and description of a Carolina bass sent to Lacépède under the local name of trout, or trout-perch, who accordingly named it *salmoides*, meaning trout-like, or salmon-like."

"How do you account for the ridiculous practice of applying such names as trout and salmon to a spiny-finned fish of the order of perches?" asked Ignatius.

"They were first given, I think, by the early English settlers of Virginia and the



"BROKE AWAY." (FROM THE PAINTING BY GURDON TRUMBULL, ESQ., BY PERMISSION OF KNOEDLER & CO.)

Carolinas, who, finding the bass a game fish of high degree, naturally gave it the names of those game fishes *par excellence* of England, when they found that neither the salmon nor the trout inhabited southern waters. In the same way the misnomers of quail, partridge, pheasant, and rabbit have been applied, there being no true species of any of these indigenous to America."

"Then, I should say the names are a virtual acknowledgment that they considered the black bass the peer of either the trout or salmon as a game fish," said Ignatius.

"As an old salmon and trout fisher," replied the Professor, "I consider the black bass, all things being equal, the gamiest fish that swims. Of course, I mean as compared to fish of equal weight, and when fished for with the same tackle, for it would be folly to compare a three-pound bass to a twenty-pound salmon."

"The long list of local names applied to the black bass," resumed the Professor, "is owing chiefly to its remarkably wide geographical range; for while it is peculiarly an American fish, the original habitat of one or other of its forms embraces the hydrographic

basins of the great lakes, the St. Lawrence Mississippi, and Rio Grande rivers, and the entire water-shed of the South Atlantic States from Virginia to Florida; or, in other words, portions of Canada and Mexico, and the whole United States east of the Rocky Mountains, except New England and the sea-board of the Middle States. Of late years it has been introduced into these latter States, into the Pacific slope, England, and Germany."

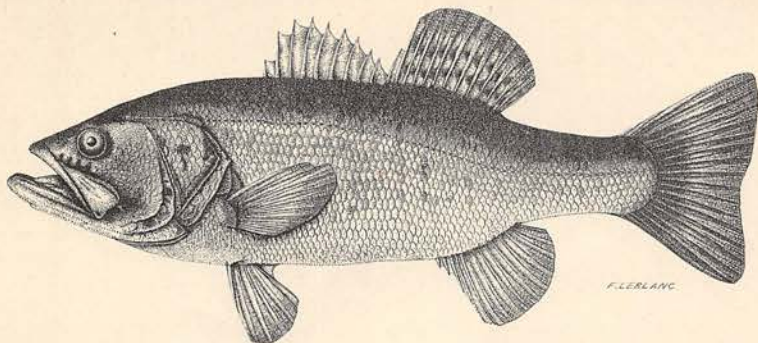
Reaching the summit of a hill after a long but gentle ascent, the river was disclosed to the view of the expectant anglers. At the foot of the descent was an old covered bridge which spanned a somewhat narrow but beautiful stream, winding in graceful curves among green hills and broad meadows. The ripples, or "riffles," sparkled and flashed as they reflected the rays of the bright morning sun, while the blue and white and gray of the sky and clouds were revealed in the still reaches and quiet pools as in a mirror. Driving through the time-worn and old-fashioned bridge with its quaint echoes, our friends left the turnpike and proceeded down a narrow road, following the course of the river to a small grove of gigantic elms, beeches,

and sycamores, where a merry little creek mingled its limpid waters with the larger, but more pellucid stream.

While Luke unharnessed the horses and

talkin' 'bout las' night; mebbe so I'll hang a big chan'l cat w'ile you're gone."

Ignatius, who was fastening the strap of a small, oblong, four-quart minnow-bucket to



LARGE-MOUTHED BLACK BASS—MICROPTERUS SALMOIDES. (LACÉPÈDE.)

halted them to the low limb of a beech, the Professor and Ignatius went up the creek, with the minnow-seine and bucket, and soon secured a supply of chubs and shiners for bait. The Professor then took from its case and put together a willowy and well made split bamboo fly-rod, eleven feet long, and weighing just eight ounces. Adjusting a light, German-silver click reel, holding thirty yards of waterproofed and polished fly-line of braided silk, to the reel-seat at the extreme butt of the rod, he rove the line through the guide-rings, and made fast to it a silk-worm-gut leader six feet in length, to the end of which he looped, for a stretch-er or tail-fly, what is known, technically, as the "polka," with scarlet body, red hackle, brown and white tail, and wings of the spotted feathers of the guinea-fowl; three feet above this, he looped on for dropper or bob-fly a "Lord Baltimore," with orange body, black wings, hackle and tail, and upper wings of jungle-cock, both very killing flies, and a cast admirably suited to the state of the water and atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Ignatius, who was a bait-fisher, jointed up an ash and lancewood rod of the same weight as the Professor's, but only eight and a quarter feet in length, and withal somewhat stiffer and more springy. He then affixed a fine multiplying reel, holding fifty yards of the smallest braided silk line, to which, after reeving through the rod-guides, he attached a sproat hook, No. 1½, with a gut snell eight inches long, but without swivel or sinker, for he intended fishing the "riffles," which is surface fishing, principally.

Slinging their creels and landing-nets, they were about to depart, when Luke spoke up:

"Mars' Nash, will you please, sah, gib me one ob dem sproach hooks I heerd you all

his belt, gave him several large-sized sproat hooks, saying:

"There, Luke, you will not fail to hook him with one of these, and the Professor will guarantee it to hold any fish in the river."

"Right," affirmed he; "the sproat is the hook beyond compare, the *ne plus ultra*, the perfection of fish-hooks in shank, bend, barb, and point."

While the Professor and Ignatius proceeded down the river, Luke rigged up a stout line the length of his big cane pole, a large red and green float, a heavy sinker, and one of the No. 3-0 sproat hooks. He then turned over the stones in the creek until he obtained a dozen large craw-fish, which were about to shed their outer cases, or shells, and which for this reason are called "shedders," or "peelers."

"Now, den," said he, "we'll see who'll ketch de mos' fish. Umph! I wunder wat de 'Fessor do if he hang a big chan'l cat wid dat little pole!"

He then baited his hook with a "soft craw," seated himself on a log at the edge of a deep pool, or "cat-hole," and began fishing.

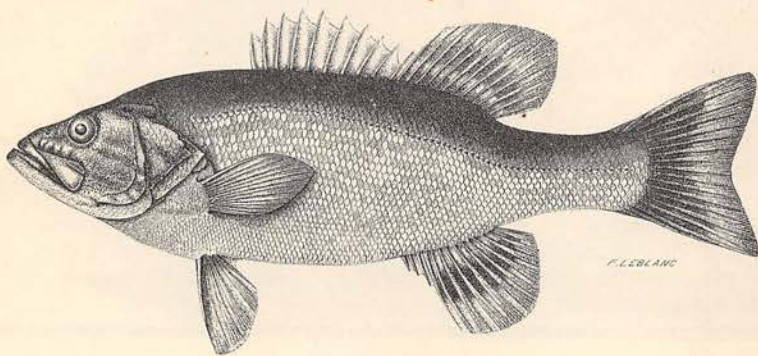
The Professor and Ignatius took their way down-stream a short distance to where a submerged ledge of rocks ran nearly across the river, some two feet below the surface and about ten feet in width. The line of rock was shelving, or hollow underneath on the up-river side, the water being some six feet deep just under and above it, but shoaling, gradually, up-stream. The ledge was surmounted on its lower edge by a line of loose rocks, which cropped up nearly to the surface, producing a rapid, or riffle. On the opposite side of the stream, the bank was quite high and steep, forming a rocky, wooded cliff, where the snowy dogwood blossoms and the

pink tassels of the redbud lit up the dark mass of foliage which was yet in shadow: for the sun was just peeping curiously over the top of the cliff, and shining full in their faces—for prudent anglers always fish toward the sun, so that their shadows are cast behind them.

"Now," said the Professor, as he waded out into the stream some fifty feet above the rocky ledge, "the bass have left the cool depths beside the rock and are on the riffle, or just below it, enjoying the welcome rays of the sun while waiting for a stray minnow or craw-fish for breakfast. I'll drop them a line."

So saying, he began casting, lengthening his line at each cast,—the line, leader, and flies following the impulse of the flexible rod in graceful curves, now projected forward, now unfolding behind him,—until the flies, almost touching the water full seventy feet in his rear, were, by a slight turn of the wrist and fore-arm and apparently without an effort, cast a like distance in front, where they dropped gently and without the least splash just on the lower edge of the rift. Immediately the swirl of a bass was seen near the dropper fly; the Professor struck lightly, but missed it, for he was taken somewhat un-

"No, no, my fine fellow, that will never do," said he, as he brought the full strain of the fish on the rod by turning the latter over his shoulder and advancing the butt toward the struggling bass, which had made a desperate and quick dash to get under the rock when he found himself in deep water. This "giving the butt," as it is technically termed, brought him to the surface again, when he instantly changed his tactics by springing two feet into the air, shaking his head violently in the endeavor to dislodge the hook, and as he fell back with a loud splash he dropped upon the line, by which maneuver he would have succeeded in tearing out the hook had the line still been taut; but the Professor was perfectly familiar with this trick, and had slackened the line by lowering the tip of the rod as the bass fell back, but instantly resumed its tension by again raising the tip when the fish regained his element. As the Professor slowly reeled the line, the bass dashed hither and yon at the end of his tether, but all the time working up-stream and toward the rod. Then he was suddenly seized by an impulse to make for the bottom, to hide under a rock, or mayhap dislodge the barb or foul the line by nosing against a stone or snag—but not to sulk; for be it



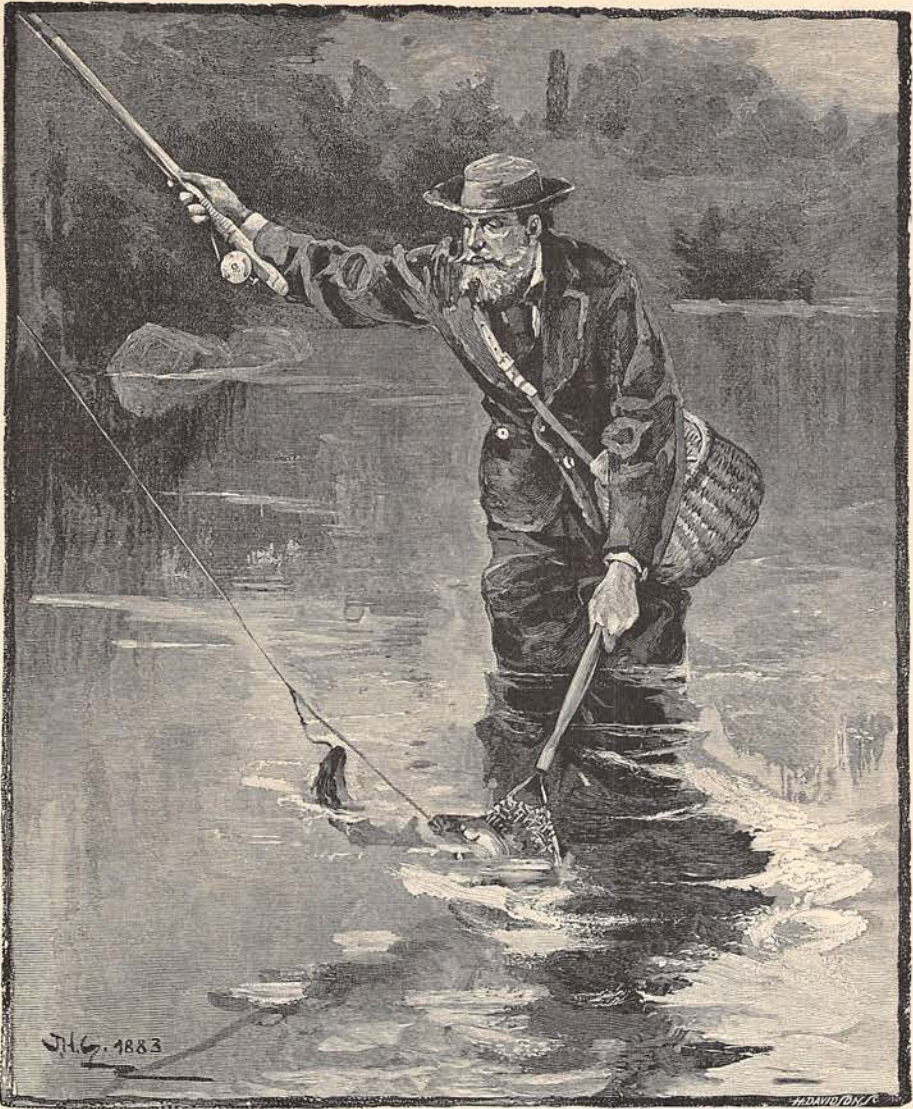
SMALL-MOUTHED BLACK BASS—MICROPTERUS DOLOMIEU. (LACÉPÈDE.)

aware and failed to strike quickly enough. Throwing his line behind him, he made another cast, the flies dropping, if possible, more lightly than before, and with a somewhat straighter and tighter line.

"I have him!" he exclaimed, as a bass rose and snapped the stretcher fly before it fully settled on the water. "He hooked himself that time, the line being perfectly taut. He's not a large one, though he gives good play," he continued, as he took the rod in his left hand and applied his right to the reel, the bass, in the meantime, having headed up-stream to the deeper water beside the rock.

known a black bass never sulks, as the salmon does, by settling motionless and stubbornly on the bottom when he finds his efforts to escape are foiled. The bass resists and struggles to the last gasp, unless he can wedge himself beneath a rock or among the weeds, where he will work the hook out at his leisure. The Professor, keeping the line constantly taut and the rod well up, thereby maintaining a springy arch, soon reeled the bass within a few feet, when he put the landing-net under him. Then addressing Ignatius, he said:

"The humane angler always kills his fish as soon as caught by severing the spinal



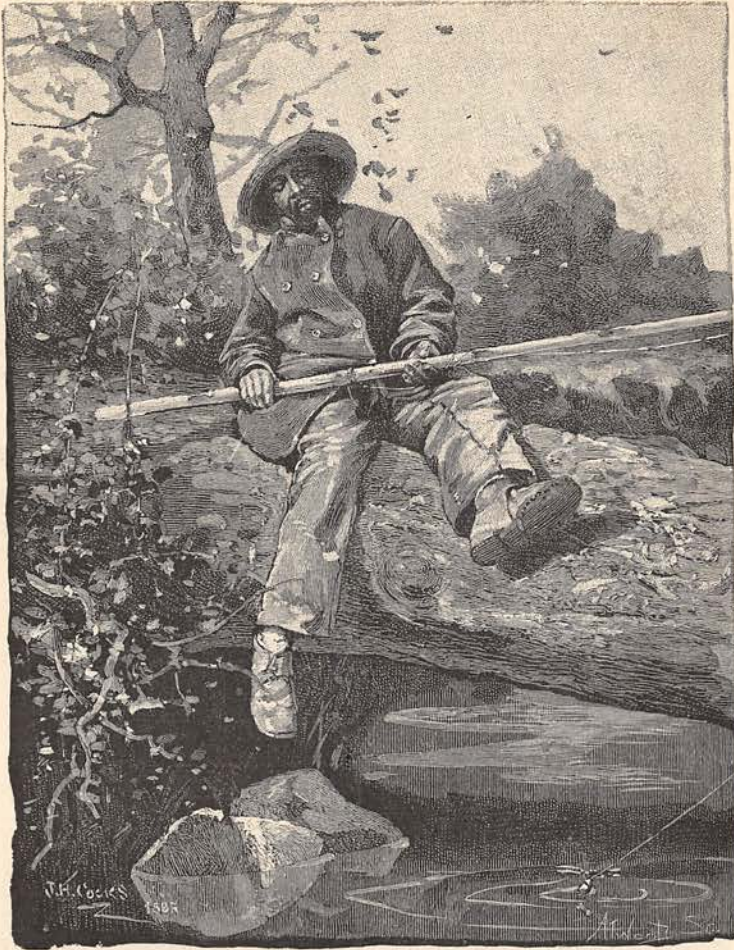
LANDING A DOUBLE.

cord at the neck with a sharp-pointed knife, by breaking the neck, or by a smart blow on the head. Then raising the gill-cover, he bleeds the fish by puncturing a large venous sinus, which shows as a dark space nearly opposite the pectoral fin. Killing and bleeding a fish is not only a merciful act, but it enhances its value for the table, rendering the flesh firmer, sweeter, and of better color; and suiting the action to the word, he killed and bled the fish and put it in his creel.

Ignatius was capable of admiring the Professor's humanity, but he was most attracted by his wonderful skill. His grace and deliberation, though natural and inborn to a certain degree, were chiefly the result of many years'

devotion to the rod and gun and the practical study of the habits of fish and game. There is more symmetry of form and natural grace of motion among the aboriginal races of the world, trained to the pursuit of animals on land and water from childhood, than among the civilized and enlightened; our brains are developed and fostered at the expense of our bodies; therefore, the nervous, jerky, impatient, and impetuous man will never make a truly successful angler nor a really good shot, though he may attain to a certain mediocrity in both sports.

At the next cast the Professor fastened a two-pound bass to the "polka," and while giving him play another bass of the same



AN IDEAL "STILL FISHER."

weight took the "Lord Baltimore." As these fish kept down-stream, the full force of the current was an additional factor of resistance to the rod, which seemed to Ignatius to bend nearly double, and caused him to say :

"You will have a hard time to land them both, Professor!"

"Not necessarily, for although the weight is greater, they, together, will not play much longer than a single fish, if so long; for they are pulling against each other. It only remains for me to hold them by the spring of the rod and let them fight it out."

His method of landing them was unique: Holding the net a few inches beneath the surface, he first drew in the bass on the stretcher-fly; then, as he turned up the lower or down-river half of the net-rim to the surface, he let the bass on the bob-fly drop back with the current into it, and lifted out both.

Ignatius proceeded farther out into the

stream, but parallel with the shelving rock. Then selecting a minnow four inches long, he passed the hook through the lower lip and out at the nostril. Reeling up his line to the snell of the hook, and with his thumb on the spool of the reel, he turned his left side to the riffle below; then swinging his rod to the right, the minnow nearly touching the water, he made a sweeping cast from right to left and from below upward, starting the minnow on its flight just before the tip of the rod reached its greatest elevation, by relaxing somewhat the pressure of his thumb on the spool, but still maintaining a certain light and uniform pressure to prevent the reel from back-lashing and the line from overrunning; the minnow was neatly cast, in this way, some seventy-five feet, and just beyond the riffle. Then he reeled slowly, keeping the minnow near the surface (there being no sinker), and just as it was passing through the broken water of the riffle, a bass

seized it on the run and continued his rush upstream toward deep water. Ignatius reeled his line rapidly until he felt the weight of the fish, which then gave a short tug or two, when he was allowed to take a few feet of line, though grudgingly and sparingly, so as to keep it taut. Ignatius then, feeling the bass pull steadily and strongly, drove in the steel by a simple turning over of the rod-hand, while drawing firmly on the line; this set the hook. It takes but a slight motion of the wrist to hook a fish with a taut line and pliant rod.

The bass continued his race by swimming rapidly between Ignatius and the shore and then up the river, describing a half circle, the line being the radius; for Ignatius held him firmly by the spring of the rod, yielding the line only inch by inch when forced to do so. The bass, finding his progress thus stayed, sprang clear of the water several times in quick succession; but Ignatius, instead of slackening the line, skillfully turned the bass over in the air by a slightly increased tension as it left the water, thus preventing, by another method, his falling across the taut line. This latter mode requires more adroitness than the plan used by the Professor, of lowering the tip of the rod to slacken the line as the fish falls back, but it can be more successfully and safely accomplished with the shorter and stiffer minnow-rod than with the fly-rod. The bass was sooner exhausted and brought to creel than if he had been down-stream, not having the strength of the current to aid him.

"That is the best fish yet taken, Ignatius," said the Professor; "he will scale fully three pounds, and you landed him in about two minutes. If he had remained down-stream, it would have taken a minute longer to kill him."

"One should hold hard and kill quick."

"With a qualification as to the rod, that is the true principle," returned the Professor. "With a properly made, light, and flexible rod, yes; with a bean-pole, no. With a well balanced, supple rod of eight ounces, a pound bass, even in swift water, can be easily killed in a minute, and one of five pounds in five minutes. With extremely light and willowy rods it takes much longer to kill a fair-sized fish than genuine sportsmanship will warrant."

The Professor and Ignatius, having each taken a dozen bass, reeled up their lines and retraced their steps toward the wagon for luncheon. Turning a bend in the river, they came in sight of Luke, still sitting on the log with a firm hold on the rod, but sound asleep.

"Behold the ideal still-fisher!" observed the Professor.

Suddenly the float disappeared, the point of the rod was violently pulled into the water, and Luke, awakening, took in the situation,

and with a savage jerk, that would have thrown a smaller fish over his head, struck a large fish which threatened to pull him from his perch. Indeed, he was forced to follow it into the water to save his tackle.

Luke, seeing them approaching, cried out appealingly:

"Wat I gwine to do wid dis fish?"

"Keep your pole up, and lead him out to the shallow water on your left."

Finally, after a few minutes more of great effort, and much floundering of the fish, and Luke's stumbling over the slippery rocks, he succeeded in getting the fish into shallow water, and drew it out on the shore, a channel cat-fish, weighing fully ten pounds.

"I got de boss green bass, too, Mars' Nash," said he, as he drew his fish-string out of the water and displayed a large-mouthed bass of four pounds.

"And the only large-mouthed bass caught this morning," said the Professor. "Now, Ignatius," he continued, "lay it side by side with your heaviest small-mouthed bass, and you will readily see the principal points of difference. In the first place, Luke's fish is more robust, or 'chunkier,' yours being more shapely and lengthy. Then Luke's bass has much the larger mouth, its angle reaching considerably beyond or behind the eye, while in yours it scarcely reaches the middle of the eye; thus it is they are called large and small-mouthed bass. Then the scales of Luke's fish are much larger than those of yours, for if you count them along the lateral line you will find only about sixty-five scales from the head to the minute scales at the base of the caudal fin, while there are about seventy-five on either of your small-mouthed bass. You also observe that the scales on the cheeks of Luke's fish are not much smaller than those on its sides, while on your fish the cheek scales are quite minute as compared with those on its body.

"As for Luke's big-mouthed bass," continued the Professor, "I've taken them in Florida weighing about fourteen pounds. I used a ten-ounce rod for those big fellows; all the same, I could have killed them with this little rod by taking more time and muscle, and uselessly prolonging the struggles of the fish, but I deem that unsportsmanlike."

"I've heard," said Ignatius, "that most of the Florida bass are taken with the hand-line and trolling-spoon."

"That is the way most Northern tourists usually take them, because they don't know how to handle a rod; and then, the necessary tackle for hand-trolling can be carried in the pocket. It is the simplest mode of angling, if it can be dignified by that name, for it is more suggestive of meat, or 'pot,' than sport.

The pseudo-angler sits in the stern of a boat with a stout line, nearly the size of an ordinary lead-pencil and about seventy-five yards long, to the end of which is attached a spoon-bait or trolling-spoon, with one or two small swivels. The boatman rows the boat slowly and quietly along the edges of the saw-grass, water-lettuce, bonnets, or other aquatic plants which border the fresh-water streams and lakes of Florida. The trolling-spoon, revolving swiftly beneath the surface at the end of fifty yards of line, glittering and flashing in the sunlight, is eagerly seized by the bass as it passes near his lair, when one or more of the hooks attached to the spoon are fixed in his jaws. The black bass has an irresistible impulse to snap at any brightly colored or shining object in motion, whether spoon-bait, bone squid, or other like lure; indeed, thousands are taken each winter in Florida waters by simply trolling with a hand-line and a bit of white or red rag affixed to a hook. While there is a certain amount of excitement in hauling in the struggling bass by 'main strength and stupidity,' as the mule pulls, there is not the faintest resemblance to sport, as the term is understood by the true angler, for there is no skill required in the manipulation of the line or bait or in handling the fish when hooked."

"Do the Floridians troll with the hand-line, too?" asked Ignatius.

"Not many of them; they use a long rod or pole for still-fishing, skittering, and bobbing."

"What are skittering and bobbing?"

"They are methods of fishing only adapted to the sluggish, weedy waters of the Gulf States, where they prove wonderfully successful. Bobbing has been practiced in Florida for more than a century, and is a very simple but remarkably "killing" method of fishing. The tackle consists of a long cane or wooden rod, two or three feet of stout line, and the 'bob,' which is formed by tying three hooks together, back to back, and covering their shanks with a portion of a deer's tail, somewhat on the order of a colossal hackle-fly; strips of red flannel or red feathers are sometimes added; altogether forming a kind of tassel, with the points of the hooks projecting at equal distances. The man using the bob is seated in the bow of a boat, which the boatman poles or paddles silently and slowly along the bor-

ders of the stream or lake, when the fisher, holding the long rod in front of him so that the bob is a few inches above the surface, allows it to dip or 'bob' at frequent intervals in the water, among the lily-pads, deer-tongue, and other aquatic plants that grow so luxuriantly in that sub-tropical region. The bass frequently jumps clear of the water to grab the bob, but usually takes it when it is dipped or trailed on the surface. Deer hair is, as you know, very buoyant, and the queer-looking bob seems like a huge, grotesque insect, flying or skimming along the clear, still waters.

"Skittering," continued the Professor, "is practiced with a strong line about the length of the rod, to which is affixed a small trolling-spoon, a minnow, or a piece of pork-rind cut in the rude semblance of a small fish. The boat is poled along, as in 'bobbing,' but farther out in the stream, when the angler, standing in the bow, 'skitters' or skips the spoon or bait over the surface just at the edge of the weeds. Skittering is a more legitimate method of angling than bobbing, for with the longer line the bass gives considerable play before he can be taken into the boat; and as this manner of fishing is usually done in shallow waters abounding in moss, grass, and weeds, the fish must be kept on the surface and landed quickly. It is, all things considered, pretty fair sport, which might be enhanced by occasionally hooking a small alligator, as I once saw done.

"Ignatius, you should become a fly-fisher," added the Professor. "Your style of bait-fishing is admirably suited to the Northern lakes and the deep rivers, where, indeed, it is much practiced, and is the favorite method with the best anglers, though a small swivel or sinker is necessary to keep the minnow beneath the surface. But on such a charming, rapid, and romantic river as this, the artificial fly alone should be used to lure the gamy bass. This afternoon, when the sun is low in the west, bass will again rise to the fly, and if you like we will try them again."

And now, while the Professor and Ignatius are talking of other matters over their pipes, we will conclude by wishing "good luck" to the entire fraternity of anglers, from him of the æsthetic fly to him of the humble worm, but with a mental reservation as to him of the hand-line and spoon.

*James A. Henshall.*