



OLD-FASHIONED FISHING.

It puzzles me now, that I remember all these young impressions so, because I took no heed of them at the time whatever; and yet they come upon me bright, when nothing else is evident in the gray fog of experience.—*Lorna Doone.*

OF all the faculties of the human mind, memory is the one that is most easily led by the nose. It is through that humble wicket-gate, the sense of smell, that the most intimate and welcome recollections come to visit us.

If you could paint a picture of memory in the symbolical manner of "Quarles's Emblems," it should represent a man traveling the highway with a dusty pack upon his shoulders, and stooping to smell the small, deep-red, golden-hearted flowers of an old-fashioned rose-tree straggling through the fence of a neglected garden. Or perhaps, for a choice of emblems, you would better take even a more homely and familiar scent: the cool fragrance of lilacs drifting through the June morning from the old bush that stands between the kitchen door and the well; the warm layer of pungent, aromatic air that floats over the tansy-bed in a still July noon; the drowsy dew of odor that falls from the big balm-of-Gilead tree by the roadside as you are driving homeward through the twilight of August; or, best of all, the clean, spicy, unexpected, unmistakable smell of a bed of spearmint—that is the bed whereon memory loves to lie and dream!

Why not choose mint as the symbol of remembrance? It is the true spice-tree of our Northern clime, the myrrh and frankincense of the land of lingering snow. When its incense rises, the shrines of the past are unveiled, and memory begins her familiar rites.

I.

You are fishing down the Swiftwater in the month of May. In a shallow pool which the drought of summer will soon change into dry land you see the pale-green shoots of a little plant thrusting themselves up between the pebbles, and just beginning to overtop the fall-

ing water. You pluck a leaf of it as you turn out of the stream to find a comfortable place for lunch, and, rolling it between your fingers to see whether it smells like a good salad for your bread and cheese, you discover suddenly that it is new mint. For the rest of that day you are bewitched; you follow a stream that runs through the country of Auld Lang Syne, and fill your creel with the recollections of a boy and a rod.

And yet, strangely enough, you cannot recall the boy himself at all distinctly. There is only the faintest image of him on the endless roll of films that has been wound through your mental camera; and in the very spots where his small figure should appear it seems as if the pictures were always light-struck. Just a blur, and the dim outline of a new cap, or a well-beloved jacket with extra pockets, or a much-hated pair of copper-toed shoes—that is all you can see.

But the people that the boy saw, the companions who helped or hindered him in his adventures, the sublime and marvelous scenes among the Catskills and the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains, in the midst of which he lived and moved and had his summer holidays—all these stand out sharp and clear, as the "Bab Ballads" say,

Photographically lined
On the tablets of your mind.

And most vivid do these scenes and people become when the vague and irrecoverable boy who walks among them carries a rod over his shoulder, and you detect the soft bulginess of wet fish about his clothing, and perhaps the tail of a big one emerging from his pocket. Then it seems almost as if these were things that had really happened, and of which you yourself were a great part.

The rod was a reward, yet not exactly of merit. It was an instrument of education in the hand of a father less indiscriminate than Solomon, who chose to interpret the text in a new way, and preferred to educate his child by encouraging him in pursuits which were harmless and wholesome, rather than by chastising him for practices which would likely enough never have been thought of if they had not been forbidden. The boy enjoyed this kind of father at the time, and later he came to understand, with a grateful heart, that there is no richer inheritance in all the treasury of unearned blessings. For, after all, the love, the patience, the kindly wisdom of a grown man who can enter into the perplexities and turbulent impulses of a boy's heart, and give him cheerful companionship, and lead him on by free and joyful ways to know and choose the things that are pure and lovely and of good report, make as fair an image as we can find of that loving, patient wisdom which must be above us all if any good is to come out of our childish race.

Now this was the way in which the boy came into possession of his undreaded rod. He was by nature and heredity one of those predestined anglers whom Izaak Walton tersely describes as "born so." His earliest passion was fishing. His favorite passage in Holy Writ was that place where Simon Peter throws a line into the sea and pulls out a great fish at the first cast. But hitherto his passion had been indulged under difficulties — with improvised apparatus of cut poles, and flabby pieces of string, and bent pins, which always failed to hold the biggest fish; or perhaps with borrowed tackle, dangling a fat worm in vain before the noses of the staring, supercilious sunfish that poised themselves in the clear water around a certain hotel dock at Lake George; or, at best, on picnic parties across the lake, marred by the humiliating presence of nurses, and disturbed by the obstinate refusal of old Horace, the boatman, to believe that the boy could bait his own hook, but sometimes crowned with the delight of bringing home a whole basketful of yellow perch and goggle-eyes. Of nobler sport with game fish, like the vaulting salmon and the merry, pugnacious trout, as yet the boy had only dreamed. But he had heard that there were such fish in the streams that flowed down from the mountains around Lake George, and he was at the happy age when he could believe anything — if it was sufficiently interesting.

There was one brook, and only one, within his knowledge and the reach of his short legs. It was a tiny, lively rivulet that came out of the woods about half a mile away from the hotel, and ran down cater-cornered through

a sloping meadow, crossing the road, under a flat bridge of boards, just beyond the root-beer shop at the lower end of the village. It seemed large enough to the boy, and he had long had his eye upon it as a fitting theater for the beginning of a real angler's life. Those rapids, those falls, those deep, whirling pools with beautiful foam on them like soft, white custard, were they not such places as the trout loved to hide in?

You can see the long hotel piazza, with the gossipy groups of wooden chairs standing vacant in the early afternoon; for the grown-up people are dallying with the ultimate nuts and raisins of their midday dinner. A villainous clatter of innumerable little vegetable-dishes comes from the open windows of the pantry as the boy steals past the kitchen end of the house, with Horace's lightest bamboo pole over his shoulder, and a little brother in skirts and short white stockings tagging along behind him.

When they come to the five-rail fence where the brook runs out of the field, the question is, Over or under? The lowlier method seems safer for the little brother, as well as less conspicuous for persons who desire to avoid publicity until their enterprise has achieved success. So they crawl beneath a bend in the lowest rail, — only tearing one tiny three-cornered hole in a jacket, and making some juicy green stains on the white stockings, — and emerge with suppressed excitement in the field of the cloth of buttercups and daisies.

What an afternoon — how endless and yet how swift! What perilous efforts to leap across the foaming stream at its narrowest points; what escapes from quagmires and possible quicksands; what stealthy creeping through the grass to the edge of a likely pool, and cautious dropping of the line into an unseen depth, and patient waiting for a bite, until the restless little brother, prowling about below, discovers that the hook is not in the water at all, but lying on top of a dry stone, — thereby proving that patience is not the only virtue — or, at least, that it does a better business when it has a small vice of impatience in partnership with it!

How tired the adventurers grow as the day wears away; and as yet they have taken nothing! But their strength and courage return as if by magic when there comes a surprising twitch at the line in a shallow, unpromising rapid, and with a jerk of the pole a small, wiggling fish is whirled through the air and landed thirty feet back in the meadow.

"For pity's sake, don't lose him! There he is among the roots of the blue flag."

"How cold he is, how slippery, how pretty! Just like a piece of rainbow!"

"Do you see the red spots? Did you notice how gamy he was, little brother; how he

played? It is a trout, for sure; a real trout, almost as long as your hand."

So the two lads tramp along up the stream, chattering as if there were no rubric of silence in the angler's code. Presently another simple-minded troutling falls a victim to their unpremeditated art; and they begin already, being human, to wish for something larger. In the very last pool that they dare attempt—a dark hole under a steep bank, where the brook issues from the woods—the boy drags out the hoped-for prize, a splendid trout, longer than a new lead-pencil. But he feels sure that there must be another, even larger, in the same place. He swings his line out carefully over the water, and just as he is about to drop it in, little brother, perched on the sloping brink, slips on the smooth pine-needles, and goes sliding down into the pool, up to his waist. How he weeps with dismay, and how funnily his dress sticks to him as he crawls out! But his grief is soon assuaged by the privilege of carrying the trout strung on an alder twig; and it is a happy, muddy, proud pair of urchins that climb over the fence out of the field of triumph at the close of day.

What does the father say as he meets them in the road? Is he frowning or smiling under that big brown beard? You cannot be quite sure. But one thing is clear: he is as much elated over the capture of the real trout as any one. He is ready to deal mildly with a little irregularity for the sake of encouraging pluck and perseverance. Before the three comrades have reached the hotel the boy has promised faithfully never to take his little brother off again without asking leave; and the father has promised that the boy shall have a real jointed fishing-rod of his own, so that he will not need to borrow old Horace's pole any more.

At breakfast the next morning the family are to have a private dish: not an every-day affair of vulgar, bony fish that nurses can catch, but trout—three of them! But the boy looks up from the table and sees the adored of his soul, Annie V——, sitting at the other end of the room, and faring on the common food of mortals. Shall she eat the ordinary breakfast while he feasts on dainties? Do not other sportsmen send their spoils to the ladies whom they admire? The waiter must bring a hot plate, and take this largest trout to Miss V—— (Miss Annie, not her sister—make no mistake about it).

The face of Augustus is as solemn as an ebony idol while he plays his part of Cupid's messenger. The fair Annie affects surprise; she accepts the offering rather indifferently; her curls drop down over her cheeks to cover some small confusion. But for an instant the corner of her eye catches the boy's sidelong

glance, and she nods perceptibly, whereupon his mother very inconsiderately calls attention to the fact that yesterday's escapade has sunburned his face dreadfully.

Beautiful Annie V——, who, among all the unripened nymphs that played at hide-and-seek among the maples on the hotel lawn, or waded with white feet along the yellow beach beyond the point of pines, flying with merry shrieks into the woods when a boat-load of boys appeared suddenly around the corner, or danced the lancers in the big, bare parlors before the grown-up ball began—who in all that joyous, innocent bevy could be compared with you for charm or daring? How your dark eyes sparkled, and how the long brown ringlets tossed around your small head, when you stood up that evening, slim and straight, and taller by half a head than your companions, in the lamp-lit room where the children were playing forfeits, and said, "There is not one boy here that *dares* to kiss *me*!" Then you ran out on the dark porch, where the honeysuckle vines grew up the tall, inane Corinthian pillars.

Do you blame the boy for following? And were you very angry, indeed, about what happened, until you laughed at his cravat, which had slipped around behind his ear? That was the first time he ever noticed how much sweeter the honeysuckle smells at night than in the day. It was his entrance examination in the school of nature—human and otherwise. He felt that there was a whole continent of newly discovered poetry within him, and worshiped his Columbus disguised in curls. Your boy is your true idealist, after all, although (or perhaps because) he is still uncivilized.

II.

THE arrival of the rod, in four joints, with an extra tip, a brass reel, and the other luxuries for which a true angler would willingly exchange the necessities of life, marked a new epoch in the boy's career. At the uplifting of that wand, as if it had been in the hand of another Moses, the waters of infancy rolled back, and the way was open into the promised land, whither the tyrant nurses, with all their proud array of baby-chariots, could not follow. The way was open, but not by any means dry. One of the first events in the dispensation of the rod was the purchase of a pair of high rubber boots. Inserted in this armor of modern infantry, and transfigured with delight, the boy clumped through all the little rivers within a circuit of ten miles from Caldwell, and began to learn by parental example the yet unmastered art of complete angling.

But because some of the streams were deep and strong, and his legs were short and slen-

der, and his ambition was even taller than his boots, the father would sometimes take him up pick-a-back, and wade along carefully through the perilous places — which are often, in this world, the very places one longs to fish in. So, in your remembrance, you can see the little rubber boots sticking out under the father's arms, and the rod projecting over his head, and the bait dangling down unsteadily into the deep holes, and the delighted boy hooking and playing and basketing his trout high in the air. How many of our best catches in life are made from some one else's shoulders!

From this summer the whole earth became to the boy, as Temyson describes the lotus country, "a land of streams." In school-days and in town he acknowledged the sway of those mysterious and irresistible forces which produce tops at one season, and marbles at another, and kites at another, and bind all boyish hearts to play mumble-the-peg at the due time more certainly than the stars are bound to their orbits. But when vacation came, with its annual exodus from the city, there was only one sign in the zodiac, and that was Pisces.

No country seemed to him tolerable without trout, and no landscape beautiful unless enlivened by a young river. Among what delectable mountains did those watery guides lead his vagrant steps, and with what curious, mixed, and sometimes profitable company did they bring him acquainted!

There was one exquisite stream among the Alleghanies, called Lycoming Creek, beside which the family spent a summer in a decadent inn kept by a tremulous landlord who was always sitting on the steps of the porch, and whose most memorable remark was that he had "a misery in his stomach." This form of speech amused the boy, but he did not in the least comprehend it. It was the description of an unimaginable experience in a region which was as yet known to him only as the seat of pleasure. He did not understand how any one could be miserable when he could catch trout from his own dooryard.

The big creek, with its sharp turns from side to side of the valley, its hemlock-shaded falls in the gorge, and its long, still reaches in the "sugar-bottom," where the maple-trees grew as if in an orchard, and the superfluity of grasshoppers made the trout fat and dainty, was too wide to fit the boy. But nature keeps all sizes in her stock, and a smaller stream, called Rocky Run, came tumbling down opposite the inn, as if made to order for juvenile use.

How well you can follow it, through the old pasture overgrown with alders, and up past the broken-down mill-dam and the crumbling sluice, into the mountain-cleft from which it leaps laughing! The water, except just after

a rain-storm, is as transparent as glass — old-fashioned window-glass, I mean, in small panes, with just a tinge of green in it, like the air in a grove of young birches. Twelve feet down in the narrow chasm below the falls, where the water is full of tiny bubbles, you can see the trout poised, with their heads upstream, motionless, but quivering a little, as if they were strung on wires.

The bed of the stream has been scooped out of the solid rock. Here and there banks of sand have been deposited, and accumulations of loose stone disguise the real nature of the channel. Great boulders have been rolled down the alleyway and left where they chanced to stick; the stream must get around them or under them as best it may. But there are other places where everything has been swept clean; nothing remains but the primitive strata, and the flowing water merrily tickles the bare ribs of mother earth. Whirling stones, in the spring floods, have cut well-holes in the rock, as round and even as if they had been made with a drill, and sometimes you can see the very stone that sunk the well lying at the bottom. There are long, straight, sloping troughs through which the water runs like a mill-race. There are huge basins into which the water rumbles over a ledge, as if some one were pouring it very steadily out of a pitcher, and from which it glides away without a ripple, flowing over a smooth pavement of rock which shelves down from the shallow foot to the deep head of the pool.

The boy wonders how far he dare wade out along that slippery floor. The water is within an inch of his boot-tops now. But the slope seems very even, and just beyond his reach a good fish is rising. Only one step more, and then, like the wicked man in the psalm, his feet begin to slide. Slowly, and standing bolt upright, with the rod held high above his head, as if it must on no account get wet, he glides forward up to his neck in the ice-cold bath, gasping with amazement. There have been other and more serious situations in life into which, unless I am mistaken, you have made an equally unwilling and embarrassed entrance, and in which you have been surprised to find yourself not only up to your neck, but over — and you are a lucky man if you have had the presence of mind to stand still for a moment, before wading out, and make sure at least of the fish that tempted you into your predicament.

But Rocky Run, they say, exists no longer. It has been blasted by miners out of all resemblance to itself, and bewitched into a dingy water-power to turn wheels for the ugly giant Trade. It is only in the valleys of remembrance that its current still flows like liquid air; and

only in that country that you can still see the famous men who came and went along the banks of the Locoming when the boy was there.

There was Collins, who was a wondrous adept at "daping, dapping, or dibbling" with a grasshopper, and once brought in a string of trout which he laid out head to tail on the grass before the house in a line of beauty forty-seven feet long. A mighty bass voice had this Collins also, and could sing, "Larboard Watch, Ahoy!" "Down in a Coal-mine," and other profound ditties in a way to make all the glasses on the table jingle; but withal, as you now suspect, rather a fishy character, and undeserving of the unqualified respect which the boy had for him. And there was Dr. Romsen, lean, satirical, kindly, a skilful though reluctant physician who regarded it as a personal injury if any one in the party fell sick in—summer-time; and a passionately unsuccessful hunter, who would sit all night in the crotch of a tree beside an alleged deer-lick, and come home perfectly satisfied if he had heard a hedgehog grunt. It was he who called attention to the discrepancy between the boy's appetite and his size by saying loudly at a picnic, "I would n't grudge you what you eat, my boy, if I could only see that it did you any good,"—which remark was not forgiven until the doctor redeemed his reputation by pronouncing a serious medical opinion, before a council of mothers, to the effect that it did not really hurt a boy to get his feet wet. That was worthy of Galen in his most inspired moment. And there were the hearty, genial Paul Merit, whose mere company was an education in good manners, and who could eat eight hard-boiled eggs for supper without ruffling his equanimity; and the tall, grinning major, whom an angry Irish woman once described as "like a comb, all back and teeth"; and many more comrades of the boy's father, all of whom he admired (and followed when they would let him), but none so much as the father himself, because he was the wisest, kindest, and merriest of all that merry crew, now dispersed to the uttermost parts of the earth and beyond.

Other streams played a part in the education of that happy boy: the Kaaterskill, where there had been nothing but the ghosts of trout for the last thirty years, but where the absence of fish was almost forgotten in the joy of a first introduction to Dickens one very showery day, when dear old Ned Mason built a smoky fire in a cave below Haines's Falls, and, pulling "The Old Curiosity Shop" out of his pocket, read aloud about Little Nell until the tears ran down the cheeks of reader and listener—the smoke was so thick, you know: and the Never-sink, which flows through John Burroughs's country, and past one house in particular,

perched on a high bluff, where a very dreadful old woman comes out and throws stones at "city fellers fishin' through her land" (as if any one wanted to touch her land! It was the water that ran over it, you see, that carried the fish with it, and they were not hers at all): and the stream at Healing Springs, in the Virginia mountains, where the medicinal waters flow down into a lovely wild brook without injuring the health of the trout in the least, and where the only drawback to the angler's happiness is the abundance of rattlesnakes—but a boy does not mind such things as that; he feels as if he were immortal. Over all these streams memory skips lightly, and strikes a trail through the woods to the Adirondacks, where the boy made his first acquaintance with navigable rivers,—that is to say, rivers which are traversed by canoes and hunting-skiffs, but not yet defiled by steamboats,—and slept, or rather lay awake, for the first time on a bed of balsam-boughs in a tent.

III.

THE promotion from all-day picnics to a two weeks' camping-trip is like going from school to college. By this time a natural process of evolution has raised the first stiff rod to something lighter and more flexible—a fly-rod, so to speak, but not a bigoted one,—just a serviceable, unprejudiced article, not above using any kind of bait that may be necessary to catch the fish. The father has received the new title of "governor," indicating not less, but more authority, and has called in new instructors to carry on the boy's education: real Adirondack guides—old Sam Dunning and one-eyed Enos, the last and laziest of the Saranac Indians. Better men will be discovered for later trips, but none more amusing, and none whose woodcraft seems more wonderful than that of this queerly matched team, as they make the first camp in a pelting rain-storm on the shore of Big Clear Pond. The pitching of the tents is a lesson in architecture, the building of the camp-fire a victory over damp nature, and the supper of potatoes and bacon and fried trout a veritable triumph of culinary art.

The rain patters persistently on the canvas; the front flaps are closed and tied together; the lingering fire shines through them, and sends vague shadows wavering up and down; the governor is rolled up in his gray blankets, sound asleep. It is a very long night for the boy.

What is that rustling noise outside the tent? Probably some small creature, a squirrel or a rabbit. Rabbit stew would be good for breakfast. But it sounds louder now, almost loud enough to be a fox—there are no wolves left in the Adirondacks, or at least only a very few. That is certainly quite a heavy footstep prowling around the provision-box. Could it be a

panther,—they step very softly for their size, —or a bear perhaps? Sam Dunning told about catching one in a trap just below here. (Ah, my boy, you will soon learn that there is no spot in all the forests created by a bountiful Providence so poor as to be without its bear story.) Where was the rifle put? There it is, at the foot of the tent-pole. Wonder if it is loaded.

"Waugh-ho! Waugh-ho-o-o-o!"

The boy springs from his blankets like a cat, and peeps out between the tent-flaps. There sits Enos, in the shelter of a leaning tree by the fire, with his head thrown back and a bottle poised at his mouth. His lonely eye is cocked up at a great horned owl on the branch above him. Again the sudden voice breaks out:

"Whooh! whooh! whooh cooks for you all?"

Enos puts the bottle down, with a grunt, and creeps off to his tent.

"De debbil in dat owl," he mutters. "How he know I cook for dis camp? How he know 'bout dat bottle? Ugh!"

There are hundreds of pictures that flash into light as the boy goes on his course, year after year, through the woods. There is the luxurious camp on Tupper's Lake, with its log cabins in the spruce-grove, and its regiment of hungry men who ate almost a deer a day; and there is the little bark shelter on the side of Mount Marcy, where the governor and the boy, with baskets full of trout from the Opalescent River, are spending the night, with nothing but a fire to keep them warm. There is the North Bay at Moosehead, with Joe La Croix (one more Frenchman who thinks he looks like Napoleon) posing beside his canoe; and the old sawmill at Bartlett's, with the governor standing for his photograph in a new fishing-suit of brown canvas, singularly disreputable, and therefore his special delight. There is the small spring-hole beside the Saranac River, where Pliny Robbins and the boy caught twenty-three noble trout, weighing from one to three pounds apiece, in the middle of a

hot August afternoon, and hid themselves in the bushes whenever they heard a party coming down the river, because they did not care to attract company; and there are the Middle Falls, where the governor stood on a long spruce log, taking two-pound fish with the fly, and stepping out at every cast a little nearer to the end of the log, until it slowly tipped with him, and he settled down into the river.

Among such scenes as these the boy pursued his education, learning many things that are not taught in colleges: learning to take the weather as it comes, wet or dry, and fortune as it falls, good or bad; learning that a meal which is scanty fare for one becomes a banquet for two—provided the other is the right person; learning that there is some skill in everything, even in digging bait, and that what is called luck consists chiefly in having your tackle in good order; learning that a man can be just as happy in a log shanty as in a brownstone mansion, and that the very best pleasures are those that do not leave a bad taste in the mouth. And in all this the governor was his best teacher and his closest comrade.

Dear governor, you have gone out of the wilderness now, and your steps will be no more beside these remembered little rivers—no more, forever and forever. You will not come in sight around any bend of this clear Swiftwater stream where you made your last cast; your cheery voice will never again ring out through the deepening twilight where you are lingering for your disciple to catch up with you; he will never again hear you call: "Hallo, my boy! What luck? Time to go home!" But there is a river in the country where you have gone, is there not?—a river with trees growing all along it—evergreen trees; and somewhere by those shady banks, within sound of clear running waters, I think you will be dreaming and waiting for your boy, if he follows the trail that you have shown him even to the end.

Henry van Dyke.

