

HOW TO CATCH TROUT.

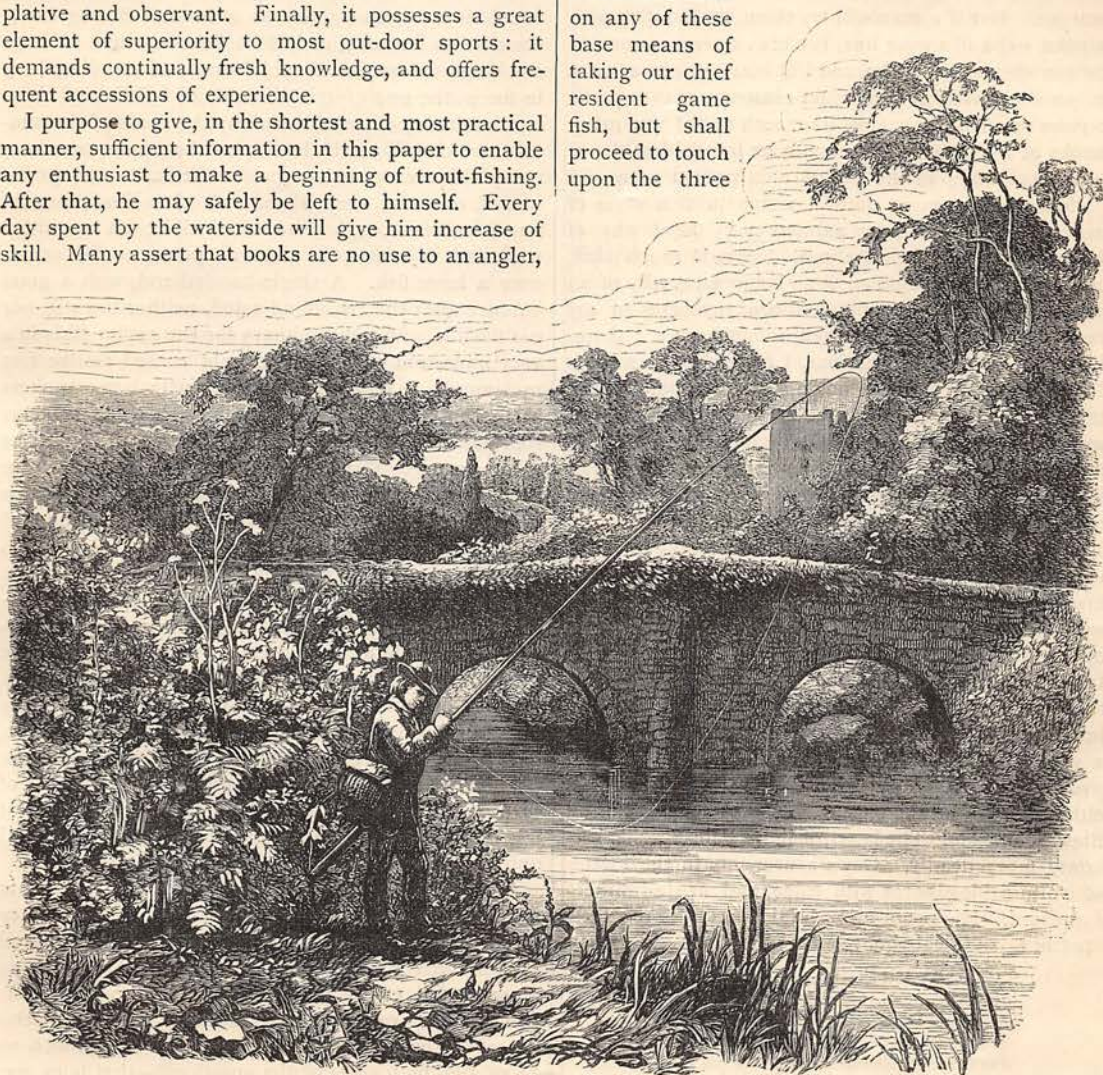
IN almost every English parish, and Scotch glen, there are rivers and brooks containing trout. At all events, would-be trout-fishers never have far to go in search of a stream. And trout-fishing is a sport which may be highly recommended to any one in want of an out-door hobby.

Unlike cricket or hunting, it is not an amusement to be given up as old age creeps on; on the contrary, it is then, as being quiet and demanding little muscular exertion, especially suited to solace the evening of life. It opens up so many new worlds, too, of entomology, botany, and weatherlore; it introduces us to so many birds and animals, which are not for the most part seen unless at the waterside, and brings us face to face with Nature in her sweetest and most idyllic aspects in so close a manner, that it has always been dear to the contemplative and observant. Finally, it possesses a great element of superiority to most out-door sports: it demands continually fresh knowledge, and offers frequent accessions of experience.

I purpose to give, in the shortest and most practical manner, sufficient information in this paper to enable any enthusiast to make a beginning of trout-fishing. After that, he may safely be left to himself. Every day spent by the waterside will give him increase of skill. Many assert that books are no use to an angler,

that the procedure must be learnt practically. Of course, a few lessons or hints from an old hand are invaluable to a novice, but he will even then gain much information, and thoroughly ground himself in the art and mystery of trout-fishing, by consulting the many admirable treatises now published on this subject.

Before settling the stream you will fish, make certain that there are trout in it. This is as necessary as the famous aphorism about catching your hare before you jug him. They probably exist in any neighbouring brook or river, unless pollutions, or the presence of pike, have exterminated them. But it is possible that their numbers are greatly thinned by poachers either tickling them, or using still more nefarious means for their capture. Some of these, such as the use of salmon-roe as a bait, have rightly been made illegal. I shall not enter on any of these base means of taking our chief resident game fish, but shall proceed to touch upon the three



lawful methods of catching trout—by the artificial fly, by worm, and by minnow.

Spinning a natural minnow is, perhaps, the most fatal legitimate mode of trout-fishing. Few trout can resist the attractions of a plump minnow, caused, by the use of a small swivel above the flight of hooks on which it is impaled, to revolve or spin vigorously as it passes through the water. But it is a cruel method of fishing, and—without in any way condemning the many fishers who are devoted to its use—is abhorrent to my mind, when there are other and painless modes of capture open to a man. Of course, this cruelty is obviated by the use of artificial minnows, which are now most cunningly made of glass, caoutchouc, ivory, brass, and many other substances. There is not, however, much art in spinning these baits, and therefore little satisfaction to be obtained from prowess with them. On most preserved waters, too, their use is proscribed until a late period in the season, because of their murderous qualities. I do not therefore recommend their use, save in exceptional localities and circumstances. But if a man will try them, let him fish with a stout rod and strong line, net his captive as soon as he can after striking him, and kill him outright as soon as possible. Whatever abstract reasoners may say, the torture to a fish of having its mouth full of the many hooks of a minnow-flight cannot be inconsiderable.

Worm-fishing in the hands of a patient man—for patience is the most needful virtue in this style of angling—is undoubtedly another very fatal way of killing trout. Its practice, too, demands much skill, so that I cannot look on it as being unworthy of an angler; but its concomitants are repulsive to my taste, and it does not require the highest art; therefore, save on special occasions, I have also given it up. It, too, is rightly enough not allowed on many rivers until late in the season, and on some (would that it were on more!) it is forbidden altogether. Drop a hook, baited with a worm, into a hole; and if you wait long enough, without showing yourself, you must (always provided there be one there) catch a fish. But here, again, the sufferings of the worm must be very great, although of course it is a creature much lower in the scale of life than man. It does not wriggle and convulse itself for nothing. Then think of the dirt out of which the unhappy creatures have to be dug, the handling and baiting with them, and their repugnance to being slowly drowned after being impaled. Ugh! I can never persuade a man to be a worm-fisher. Here again, however, if he will use worms he must judge for himself. The worm can either be fixed on the old-fashioned single hook or on Stewart's tackle. The latter, if more punishing, is certainly more deadly. Gay's sentiments in the matter of worm-fishing agree with mine, and are admirably expressed. His poem on "Rural Sports" is too little read in this critical age.

"Around the steel no tortured worm shall twine,
No blood of living insect stain my line;
Let me, less cruel, cast the feathered hook
With pliant rod athwart the pebbled brook;
Silent along the mazy margin stray,
And with the fur-wrought fly delude the prey."

Artificial fly-fishing is the only sportsmanlike lure on most rivers by which to take trout. On the Borders, indeed, worm-fishing is much practised in summer, and the art of using it brought to great perfection; but if a man cannot take fish with fly owing to the bright weather, instead of resorting to worm, he had better wait until he can. Occasionally the real fly is used by anglers, especially the May fly in its season. A common house-fly or, perhaps, two or three put on a hook, and placed under a bridge, is generally a certain mode of catching the hermit, which loves to lurk in such a position. But let us now seek the waterside, and I will describe the fisher's equipment as we go. For dress, any grey tweed, especially that which the Oxford statutes call "subfusk" colour, is advisable. The old books dwell with some particularity on the angler's attire, but an easy coat of any dull colour with plenty of pockets is all that is wanted. No one in his senses would wear a "stove-pipe" hat, remembering, though such head-gear would be useful to wrap fly-casts round, that anything conspicuous terrifies a trout, which is as keen-sighted as a hawk. Strong boots should also be worn, and, if he does not use wading-stockings, the angler should beware of standing long in the water, or sitting in wet things. Either of these bad habits lays up with certainty the seeds of rheumatism, which will surely develop as the years pass on.

Opinions vary with regard to rods. Some prefer a stiff, others a very pliant rod. I incline towards one which is stout, and not too flexible. A rod like a whip is a mistake; it gives no power to the angler over a large fish. A single-handed rod, with a good balance after the reel is adjusted, neither too stiff nor too flexible, and not too heavy for the angler (this is a very important point), should not exceed twelve feet in length. Indeed, the tendency with some makers at present is to make them much shorter. A short rod, however, does not command the water so well as a longer one. Cane, bamboo, lance-wood, &c., are used in rod-making. Green-heart has lately become very fashionable. A London maker has introduced rods composed of triangular sections of bamboo spliced together, which are marvellously strong. The fisherman, however, will soon be equipped with a suitable rod for his strength and taste at any good tackle-maker's. A light brass reel is next needed. The common ones can be turned into check-reels in a moment by twisting the line once or twice round the handle. Horse-hair lines were formerly much in vogue, but they twist too much. A line of silk and hair is the best material to obtain. Affix to it a gut trace of three yards in length, with the thinnest end furthest from the line; and then we are brought to the vexed point of flies. What artificial flies are to be put on?

Flies may be divided broadly into flies which imitate more or less closely the natural insects, and "fancy flies," as they are called—arbitrary flies of a hundred conventional types. English anglers are said to be more partial to the former, and Scotch to the latter. Our advice is much like Sir Roger de Coverley's celebrated dictum on the sign-board, "There is much to be said on both sides of the question"—that is to say,

use as a general rule close imitations of nature, but do not on occasion despise a fancy fly. The "Francis fly," the "professor," "Holland's fancy," and others ought to be in every angler's pocket-book. At the same time, those marvellous pocket-books containing every imaginary kind of artificial fly which are to be seen at the tackle-seller's are needless superfluities. A very few flies of three or four different varieties are amply sufficient for a good angler, on most streams, the whole year through. Flies are again divided into winged flies and hackles, which are supposed to represent hairy caterpillars, such as frequently fall into brooks from overhanging trees, and furnish delicious morsels for trout. Some anglers are devoted to hackles; I like them well in spring, but afterwards prefer a winged fly. These hackles are red, brown, and black, and of all intermediate shades, the rule being with them to use a dark hackle on a fine bright day, and a light one in dull weather. Izaak Walton says, "You are to note that there are twelve kinds of artificial made flies to angle with upon the top of the water," and after describing them fully (Part I., Chap. 5), adds: "Thus have you a jury of flies, likely to betray and condemn all the trouts in the river." His coadjutor, Cotton, is amusingly particular as to how the wool, hair, &c., of which flies are composed, is to be obtained—"from a smooth-coated, red-brown dog," from "the black spot of a hog's ear," by "combing the neck of a black greyhound with a tooth-comb," and the like. Kingsley divides all the trout flies into four great families—the "caperers," or stone-flies (*Phryganea*), of which nearly 200 species are known in Great Britain; the May flies (*Ephemera*); the black alder-flies (*Sialida*), and the "yellow-sally" (*Perlida*). Most lakes and rivers have a favourite fly which is known to the local fishermen. Failing this knowledge yourself, remember what Mr. C. St. John says: "I have always, when at a loss, had recourse to a red, white, or black palmer. Very few trout can withstand these flies when well made." I will mention a few never-failing flies for all waters, armed with which, and with the local fly of each river, no fisherman can fail to catch trout, provided he chooses a dull, windy day:—hackles, red, black, brown; March browns, made with a twist of gold; "coachmen," "professors," mallard winged flies, red spinners, and May flies, for the brief season of these insects. With a few of each of these varieties in his pocket he need not fear bad luck.

How is he to fasten these flies to his trace? The "tail-fly" is generally looped through the trace's loop. The other one or two "bob-flies" must be on short gut, not above three or four inches long; tie a knot on the end of each, and then with a similar knot affix it to the trace. The previous knot will prevent it from

running. This forms the simplest and least cumbersome fastening with which I am acquainted. Arrived at the riverside, take pains to get the wind behind you, so as to carry the flies; do not mind, then, whether you fish up or down-stream. Remember, the fish always lie with their heads up-stream, so if you fish down they can see you from a much greater distance than if you cautiously approach up-stream. Suffer the top joints to throw the fly by dexterous manipulation of the rod; do not fling from the whole power of the arm. Let your flies, and as little as possible of the line, fall on the water like drifted snow-flakes. The least splash is fatal. Do not flick your line and flies behind you when you make a fresh throw, else they will crack like a whip, and your flies will be flicked off every time, greatly to the profit of your tackle-seller. Should you get the line entangled in weeds or trees, be ready without loss of a moment to wade in or climb. Do not angrily tear it back, except as a last resource.

Fishing begins earlier in some waters than in others. In February the Devon streams can be fished. In March, Yorkshire or Scotch streams, if they are not in flood. "A man should not in honesty catch a trout until the middle of March," says Walton, and again he bids us go fishing "when the mulberry-tree buds."

Our disciple is now fully equipped, and his procedure pointed out to him. All that remains is to wish him good luck, and to inculcate above all things perseverance, when he *must* succeed. Troy was not built in a day, and no one becomes a trout-fisher in a year, ay, or in many years. I will conclude with a few golden rules, and then leave the tyro to his own skill and to the exercise of the most excellent of all human diversions.

1. Be careful always to have permission, or to be certain that the water is free, before you fish in it.
2. Be particular that no shadow from you, or your hat, or rod fall upon the water.
3. Above all, keep out of the fish's sight as much as possible. Hide behind banks, trees, bushes, &c.
4. Before leaving home, see that you have everything with you that you can possibly want—knife, twine, &c.
5. Be courteous and obliging to all you meet on the river-banks, so that you may become what our forefathers called "a well-governed angler," and use no ill words lest, as Walton says, the fishes should hear you.
6. Remember Walton's own rule, "However delightful angling may have been made to appear by the foregoing pages, it ceases to be innocent when used otherwise than as a mere recreation."

M. G. WATKINS, M.A.

