

## FISHING.

THE British people, as a whole, are a nation of sportsmen. Whether in riding to hounds, deer-stalking, lion-hunting in Africa, or shooting buffalo in North America, or elephants in Ceylon—in all or in any of these pastimes, or occupations, or by what name soever some persons choose to call them, the British have no superiors, and few, if any, equals. And these and similar sports have helped to form the national character. The man who can clear a "bullfinch" on his thorough-bred is not likely "to turn tail" when charging a French squadron on the plains of Belgium, or an army of Sepoys in Oude, as history testifies. And the Great Duke always preferred as his aide-de-camp one who had been accustomed to ride across country.

There are many reasons, then, in favour of the deer-stalker, lion-slayer, or sportsman in general being a person of energy, courage, and intelligence, and of his excelling in any ordinary business or profession. The bracing effects of fresh air, and the soundness of wind and limb induced by country sports (unless when a man comes to grief), are, doubtless, additional reasons why so many engage in them, not to mention the excitement which they create. But we are not going to give a dissertation on fox-hunting, deer-stalking, or lion-slaying. Our readers must consult Nimrod, Drayson, or Rice for all useful knowledge on these higher branches of sport. Ours is a more humble task; viz., to jot down a few running lines on fishing.

The passion for this amusement begins early in life, and the first efforts are generally made with a hazel or willow wand, to which are tied the usual thread and crooked pin. Gradually, however, as the boy grows, he gets beyond the mere elements of the art of angling, and, by the help of the village schoolmaster or carpenter, the former of whom, in the olden time, was always "a brother of the angle," becomes possessed of a spliced rod, thins the tails of all the grey stud-horses for miles round, and soon acquires from the old hands the art of twisting the hair into lengths, and making the water-knot which never slips. With tackle

like this we have known a boy of ten or twelve catch a good basketful of trout, especially at the beginning of a freshet, and it is astonishing what execution he will sometimes do among a shoal of perch. But he soon aspires to possess a proper rod and tackle, very often the gift of a good old aunt or uncle, and during his school holidays he makes the most of his opportunities by plying his art on all possible occasions. What magnificent visions of success dazzle the imagination of a young angler on the morning of a start for a fly-fishing expedition to some stream in the Scotch or Irish glens, or perhaps in the moors of Yorkshire or Devon! He cannot sleep the night before; he rises with the sun, and is feverish and excited. Having fleshed his hook in many a pounder in the same river on previous occasions, he longs to be on the spot once more, throwing his flies on the gurgling eddies, or over some cunning nook behind a big stone, or close to "a bank whereon the wild thyme grows," and where heavy trout most do congregate. An intense thrill of delight pervades his whole being, and the anticipations of sport constitute some of the most delicious moments of youth; and, though experience moderates this sort of enjoyment, it never altogether loses its zest throughout the whole of after life. He suddenly recollects before starting that he is short of red palmers (he has not less than a dozen in his fly-book), and he detains his companion at least twenty minutes for the purpose of tying one, which, when finished, resembles a beetle more than the insect for which it was meant. How eagerly he welcomes the first view of the silvery stream! It rushes through many a glen, leaping from rock to rock, and then glides into a purely pastoral district, where the shepherd's hut and his woolly charge scattered over the hillside are the chief evidences of the soil having an owner. With what satisfaction does he gaze on the swollen flood (for he has purposely gone to fish in his favourite haunt after a day's rain) as it dashes itself into foam among the huge boulders, or tumbles over the rocky ledge into the deep abyss below, keeping up a continuous *thud* like

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is made by a monster of the deep in his dying struggles! A mountain cataract never fails to cause the young fisher's heart to beat more rapidly, striking him with a certain degree of awe, and duly impressing his mind with a sense of the magnificence of nature.

But we have not space to follow our young friend throughout the whole of that day's sport. Many readers must know what it was. It is experience of this sort that gradually educates the fisher even up to the very highest point of efficiency; so that in process of time he is able to tie his own flies, make his own casting-lines, which is still simpler work, and undertake pilgrimages perhaps to Norway or Canada in search of the glorious salmon. It is an undoubted fact that fishing, more especially with fly, leads the mind not only to contemplative thought, as "Old Izaak" would express it, but also to admiration of the beautiful and sublime in nature. Paley elaborated many of the most striking illustrations of his "Natural Theology" while following his favourite pastime on the rivers Eden and Wear; and Sir Humphry Davy was not unmindful of his chemical pursuits while manœuvring his fly to capture salmon in the Scotch or Irish rivers.

What strange companions the fly-fisher meets with in his rambles by the banks of rivers! A churl will sometimes, when the angler approaches, fling a number of stones into a likely pool, from which he fears you are going to extract a number of fish; but, in general, farmers and others are very civil if spoken to in a proper manner, and will offer all sorts of hospitality, which, whether accepted or not, ought always to be acknowledged by a present of a brace or two of fish, for you really have been capturing their property, and politeness of this sort is not only never lost, but is rightfully due.

But as to the other characters in the piscatorial line to be met with, there are many. There is, for instance, your morose, selfish fisher, who will pass you with a scowl of contempt, and without a word of greeting, implying by his manner that all the river ought to belong to him, and that you are an intruder upon his domain for having been before him at the stream. Take no notice of him. Let him stride on to his heart's content, and after

half-an-hour's rest the fish will not be less likely to rise at your lure on account of the passing shadow of a curmudgeon who knows nothing of the pleasures of fishing, his main object being to grab fish by any means in order to fill his basket.

There is, again, your *swell* fisher, with coat of many colours and many pockets; fly-books the size of family Bibles, literally crammed with imitations of all manner of living and dead insects, but which, to borrow the criticism bestowed on a picture that once appeared at an exhibition of paintings in the metropolis, very often resemble nothing in heaven above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth! This person would not for a moment think of fishing the length of a field without mounting his fishing-boots and having his man-servant by his side to land his fish for him, and disentangle his line when it gets caught on snags or in branches of trees, for which purpose he will make him wade up to his middle in the water. His rod is ornamented with silver ferrules bearing representations of huge fish and cunning-looking flies, while the mountings for the reel would not be complete without his crest and motto, all which brilliancy has a tendency to scare the fish and make them hide their heads under stones and banks in double-quick time.

This sort of fisher has a theory which he sticks to religiously; viz., that trout feed by rule, and won't rise to any flies but those that naturalists set down in their books as the orthodox ones for every month; in fact, he fancies that the fish and the naturalists have a mutual understanding. The naturalists write that certain flies appear every month, and he thinks that trout are too gentlemanly to touch any insect out of season, just as he himself would shudder at the idea of eating salmon in December or cod at Midsummer. He has got hold of this theory, and it is a hobby which he rides along the banks of every river that he throws a fly on. Accordingly he possesses most intricate imitations of all the flies that appear on the waters month after month, his fly-book being, in fact, a perfect museum of insect-life, done up in wire, silk, tinsel, and feathers. He would no more think of throwing a fly out of its monthly course

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than he would think of fishing without gloves.

As a contrast to this fisher, one meets with the curate or with the schoolmaster of the parish, who both know every inch of the river on which they fish; and experience has taught them that, go to whatsoever stream they may, they need not waste their throws on the desert water, but rather concentrate them on those nooks, eddies, and other lurking-places of the finny tribe out of which piscatorial skill alone can hook and land them. Hence it follows that a man who knows a river has, *ceteris paribus*, an advantage over him who knows it not—that is, at first—but let the stranger whip the stream for a few days, and this disparity will cease.

There is also your humble peasant fisher, who seldom goes near a river except during a flood. As soon as the thick mud has run off he hauls out many a *spanker* by means of the most primitive tackle, especially at those places where the rapids rush into the deeps. Thither the monsters repair for grubs and worms, where they are caught. On the morning after a flood the fish are more or less gorged with heavy food, but are, nevertheless, by no means averse to a fly by way of variety, just as an alderman can manage his dessert and port after having fed on turtle and venison. The local peasant fisher is at the water the next morning succeeding a flood, and perhaps with a hair casting-line tied to the top of a primitive rod, and flies the size of bumble-bees, he will bag more and heavier fish than the man with the brilliant rod, elaborate fly-book, and gloves. The latter not unfrequently at the end of the day relieves the former of his entire take by way of exchange for a silver hook; and now solemn he looks when he returns home and has the result of his day's sport proudly exhibited before his friends at dessert!

The art of fly-fishing is not altogether free from a certain amount of charlatanism, especially among professionals and fishing-tackle makers, who sometimes insist on a compliance with so many preliminaries as

being absolutely necessary to success. 'bat the tyro is disheartened at the prospect, and hardly expects ever to catch a fish. Old hands who have learned the art on the rivers themselves merely laugh at their absurd regulations. And, speaking from experience, we advise every one who wishes to become a fisherman to begin early in life—say at ten or twelve years of age; and to those who are above this age, and so can't take this advice, we say, "Begin to-day, or the very first time you have a chance." Learn to tie your own flies, and also to make your own casting-lines, or *collars*, as they are called in the West of England; and then, should you live to be eighty, your hand will not altogether forget its cunning, nor your fingers their pliancy in handling hook and feathers.

Very few flies are really necessary in any river in the three kingdoms. With a red palmer, blue and yellow duns, the black gnat, March brown, and the May-fly, when on the water, we will engage to capture as many trout, any day and anywhere, as the man with a book filled with elaborate imitations of insects for every hour out of the twenty-four. The secrets of success are in knowing where the fish lie, keeping well out of sight, and being able to throw your flies gently and gracefully on the water; and experience alone will supply details as to the hooking, playing, and landing of fish.

Trout spawn in October and the following months. Trout-fishing begins on the 15th of February on the rivers in the West of England, but those in the North and in Scotland and Ireland are somewhat later. Last winter's mild weather was very favourable both for salmon and trout in all the rivers of the United Kingdom. We fully anticipate that, with the increasing love for sport, and the desire to preserve fish from the ignorance and cupidity hitherto predominant, a good time is coming for the disciples of "Old Izaak."

In following papers we will, from time to time, describe what we have ourselves learned during many years of trying to do our best to be not an unworthy broker of the rod.