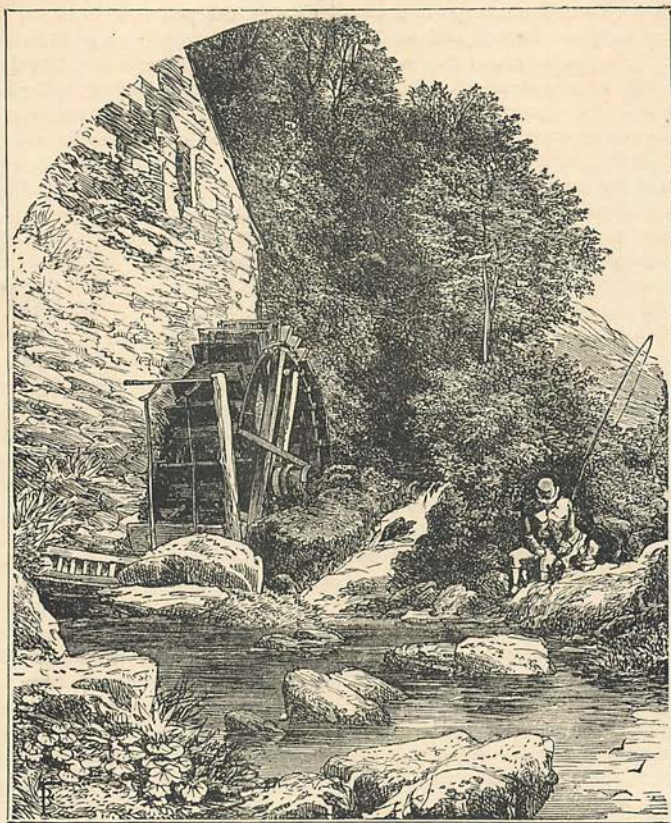


## TROUT.



“Turning here and there a mill.”

THE trout is, undoubtedly, one of our very best fresh-water fishes. It frequents most of the lakes of the British Isles and nearly all our rivers, except the very sluggish ones. The inland waters of North America are said to teem with it; in some of the Continental rivers it is to be met with in great abundance; and now that the science of pisciculture is beginning to be understood in this country, there is some hope that the trout-streams of Great Britain and Ireland may, in the course of a few years, once more abound with this fish; and it may be safely affirmed that, if taken ordinary care of, especially during the spawning season, and not captured when out

of condition, its increase would be limited only by the supplies of food to which it has access, and the number and destructive power of its enemies. Trout soon become few and far between when associated with pike; even the grayling, that beautiful fish of delicious flavour, is said gradually to thin its numbers when the two species are placed together in the same waters, and this is ascribed to the destruction of trout-spawn during the autumn and winter months by the grayling, which is then in prime condition. But why the trout should not return the compliment to its neighbour when the state of things is reversed in the spring, and the grayling propagating its species, has never

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been clearly explained, nor, indeed, the original charge against the grayling thoroughly established. Trout begin to spawn in some rivers as early as August, and we have occasionally captured gravid fish even in March; but, as a general rule, the three last months of the year are those during which the ova are deposited in the gravelly beds, where they remain till the spring, when the rays of the sun bring them to maturity. Climate and other circumstances regulate close time as well as the opening of the fishing season in our various rivers; but, as a general rule, April and May are the best months in the year for fly-fishing, for then trout are in prime condition after having recovered from the effects of spawning as well as from those of a short supply of food during the winter; and if the fisher can only manage his flies well on the water, he cannot fail, under favourable circumstances, of getting good sport at that season, on the suppositions that the fish are in the river and on the feed, and that their haunts are known to the follower of the gentle art.

The enthusiastic fisher (and the real one is always of this sort) feels a thrill of delight pervading both mind and body as he wends his way on an April morning, with a southerly wind and a cloudy sky, to try his skill on the neighbouring trout-stream, which, perhaps, has been refreshed and somewhat discoloured by a few showers of rain the night before. His imagination runs riot in calculating the number of brace he shall bag, and part of the pleasure connected with the practice of every branch of the art of capturing fish consists in anticipations of sport. The most expert fly-fishers whom we have ever known began as worm-fishers. This latter is a mode of fishing by no means to be despised, and a youth is singularly favoured who has had the good fortune to be brought up in the vicinity of a trout-stream. During the spring or summer it sometimes happens that a long drought reduces the quantity of water in a river to the appearance of a silvery thread in the valley as seen from the hills adjacent. The fish will not look at an artificial fly during the day, owing to the brightness of the sky and clearness of the water (an hour's fly-fishing in the evening may then be had); but on the approach of a flood, which comes sooner

or later, the bait-fisher sallies forth with a good supply of well-scoured worms of a tolerable size preserved in moss, and his success will probably exceed his expectations. Under circumstances like these, use a large hook such as would admit your little finger between the barb and shank, for trout have capacious mouths and a good swallow, and are very voracious, especially after a lengthened abstinence from this kind of food, and a bright, tough worm is an unusual treat to them after a long drought. Attach about a yard and a-half or so of strong round salmon-gut to the end of your reel-line; loop on to that another length, having the hook securely lapped to the end of it with red or scarlet silk thread, well waxed; take care to place two or three split shot on the line ten or twelve inches from the hook, and success is certain, especially if you allow the bait to float with the current, and also to insinuate itself into eddies where trout assemble at such a time on the look-out for food.

A trout seizes and gorges a worm very quickly, and should not be allowed more than half-a-minute at the furthest, otherwise it rejects the bait on being pricked, whereas if struck sharply it cannot escape. No float is necessary for this sort of fishing; let your shot touch the bottom, and the current will always keep your worm a few inches above the gravel, on or near which this fish awaits its prey. The finest trout in a river are on the alert during a flood, and the chief requisites for securing some of them are a stiff rod, strong tackle, big hook, plenty of well-scoured worms, a steady hand, prompt to strike, and an acquaintance with the places where the fish are to be found. It is, however, after the first rush of mud has left a river that bait-fishing proves successful, and it seldom lasts more than a few hours, as trout soon gorge themselves with the unusual feast. We know that this mode of fishing is prohibited on many trout-streams, and we cannot recommend it to experienced fly-fishers; but as a means of enabling the young angler to flesh his hook in a lusty trout, and also of making progress in the art, we can see no objections to it in rivers where it is not forbidden, care, of course, being taken that the water shall not be distressed. We shall suppose, then, that this

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kind of fishing has given the beginner some knowledge of the haunts and habits of the trout, and that he is anxious to try his hand at fly-fishing, which, most assuredly, he will, for rivers are not always in a condition most favourable for success with the worm, though we know that in skilful hands this lure is deadly even in the clearest water and with a bright sun overhead. In order to attain proficiency in fly-fishing, it is necessary to begin early in life. Bear in mind the importance of collecting various kinds of feathers, dubbing, and silk, for tying flies, which ought to be placed carefully in a box by themselves; and if this box be fitted with compartments and drawers for holding the different materials necessary to the fly-fisher in future years, so much the better for his own convenience; and it may not be out of place to mention that a few knobs of camphor laid among the feathers will effectually protect them, and all other materials, from the attacks of the moth, which, without some such preservative, may prove very destructive.

The most perfect rod is one in two pieces, which are lapped together on reaching the river side; but as this is one which it is not convenient to carry, either by road or rail, we recommend to the practical fisher one in three pieces with a hollow butt to contain a spare top, and the whole about eleven feet long.

A good rod should be sufficiently stiff, especially in the middle, to throw against a wind, and at the same time possess pliability enough to cast a fly gracefully on the water under any circumstances.

In choosing a reel have nothing to do with multipliers of any sort, as they are sure to get out of order sooner or later. Your line, made of silk and hair, should taper to the end in order to match with the casting-line, which should not be joined to the other by means of a loop, but thus:—knot a length of good strong round gut to the reel-line, and lap the ends of it carefully with waxed silk, and to this gut fasten your casting-line.

This plan continues the tapering throughout the whole line's length, and is adopted by all expert fly-fishers. Practice alone secures that skill in tying or dressing flies, as it is sometimes called, which commands success,

and we strongly advise the young fisher to learn to make his own flies, which, though they may be clumsy at first, will doubtless in the end, by perseverance, develop themselves into respectable imitations of insects. Two flies on the line are quite enough for any ordinary river, and the dropper or bob should be, at least, a yard and a-half from the stretcher or tail-fly. When commencing to fish, do not use india-rubber to straighten your gut, as it frays it, but simply run your finger and thumb along it a few times, which takes the curls out of it without destroying its roundness or injuring its skin. We need scarcely state that the casting-line itself, which need never exceed three yards in length, should taper from its junction with the end of the reel-line to the tail-fly and too much care cannot be used in selecting round gut for this purpose. Constant fishing gradually secures the desired facility in the knack of sweeping your flies from left to right over your head, and then projecting them by a slight jerk of the wrist (which in time becomes natural) to within an inch of the very spot about which a fish may be feeding.

Always recollect that trout see uncommonly well; that their eyes glance upwards as well as sideways, and even shadows strike terror into them and drive them away to their lurking-places; therefore keep as far off the river as you possibly can consistently with the effective management of your flies. Some people say that fish can hear, about which we offer no opinion, but we are perfectly certain that they are sensible to vibrations made by stamping on the banks, or other similar disturbances of the ground, which therefore ought to be avoided. Trout lie well up in the eye of a pool, and that part should be fished first, taking care, however, to humour your flies, not by flourishing them about in a fantastic manner, but by giving them a gentle quiver or shake occasionally, while the rapid carries them onwards, and enables you to finish the cast by a sort of cross sweep towards the bank.

When a fish, especially a heavy one, seizes the fly, in nine cases out of ten it hooks itself by the mere act of sinking in the water, but a slight tightening of the line by a movement of the hand, which must be executed at the proper moment and is soon

acquired by experience, will strike the barb home into the mouth of the fish, and then it is to be played and landed. If slightly hooked it will probably throw a somersault a yard high and fall right across the line with the view of disengaging the hook; in order to balk that movement lower the point of your rod, which slackens the line, then immediately afterwards tighten it, so as to keep the fish well in hand. A trout, however, securely hooked, for the most part takes to the bottom, where he bears heavily on the line, grinds his under jaw against the gravel, or tries to entangle your tackle under big stones, or among roots of trees, which dangers are to be guarded against by showing it the butt, and opposing to its movements just such an amount of resistance as shall prevent its getting you into trouble. Very often a trout when hooked will rush boldly across, up, or down a river, as the case may be, at a tremendous pace, making the reel whirl and the rod bend, and, perhaps, running out thirty or forty yards of line; and should it be checked at such a time—which, be it observed, is a moment of extreme anxiety and delight to the fisher—then the tackle goes at once and the prize escapes; but if the fish be allowed to shoot its bolt while a moderate strain is exerted over its pace, you will be able in a very short time to curb its impetuosity, to haul it towards you—always, if possible, down or across, but never up stream—and land it. Any attempts by violent efforts to lift a fish of any size out of the water the instant after being hooked will only end in the loss of both fish and tackle. When landing a fish avoid catching hold of your line. Shorten it according to circumstances, and let the elasticity of the rod regulate and modify the strain on the tackle. If you are provided with an attendant and a landing-net, he must be instructed to dip it into the water before the approach of the fish towards the bank, and the person who handles the rod can, by the exercise of a moderate amount of adroitness, guide the trout to a position right over the mouth of the net, when it is instantly secured if the other does his duty. As to flies, we think that very few are necessary. The red palmer, varying its size according to the state of the water, and always used as a stretcher, is a first-rate killer on every river in the three kingdoms. The blue and yellow duns cannot be surpassed for efficiency. The cow-dung is admirable on a

windy day, especially in the still deeps. The hare's ear and black gnat are not to be despised as the season advances. The May-fly is a regular slaughterer of heavy fish when the natural insect appears. The March brown is a good fly.

There are many other capital flies in use, especially on certain rivers, and local anglers always possess some cunning adaptation of wire, feathers, and dubbing which is deadly in their own locality. Do not despise hints from such quarters; they may be the results of experience. But pay no attention to persons who advise you to change your flies every hour or two of the day, in order to keep pace with the various coloured insects that appear on the water, or to those who recommend you to catch the prevailing fly of the moment, and sit down on the bank and tie one like it. Much valuable time may be lost in this way. You will soon get to know from practice the flies that are most common from April till August. But what we wish to guard the young angler against is the mistaken idea that a multiplicity of flies is absolutely requisite for success.

As a general rule, we have never heard of much good being done by going out very early in the morning to follow up this sport. Poachers and others, we know, with nets and night-lines baited with minnows and worms, commit sad havoc among the finny tribes at very unseasonable times; but the real fly-fisher will never imitate such disreputable conduct; and we think that, if you begin at eight o'clock, before which time the natural flies have hardly appeared in force on the water, you will have abundant opportunities between that hour and six o'clock in the evening for filling your basket and tiring yourself. It may happen, however, that when you commence operations the trout are not on the move, in which case you must not be disheartened, but, on the contrary, persevere in your labours, for there may be thunder and lightning in the distance, though you may not be aware of the existence of either, and these phenomena indicate a state of the atmosphere which induces the fish to lie close in their haunts; or they may be already full of flies, or reserving their appetites for a grand feast of grubs and worms; or they may simply be sulking; or rain may be approaching. But, whatever the cause of their inactivity in the morning, you may, in all probability, depend upon their being on the feed some time during the day, and, in order to avail yourself of that happy moment, you must, in the interval, continue to whip the water. This rule has been observed and verified by old anglers from time immemorial, and, generally speaking, with signal success.