

THE MAY-FLY.

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THE FLY is up!" So runs the telegram the vicar has received while seated at his breakfast. In half an hour the trap is ready, fishing things are in, and off the parson goes, while wife and daughters watch him from the porch.

"'Tis very strange," says old Mrs. Lidless, as he passes her cottage, "but now our vicar's gone in just the same mad haste that the

plies that calling which his predecessors left of old.

When the trio reach the riverside, they find another angler waiting to begin. To this smooth water and these giant trout he is perhaps unaccustomed, so the parson, whose perpetual leave and frequent leisure give him wondrous skill, takes our friend in hand, while the other pair walk off together further up the stream. Stolid, but watchful, with a landing-net of abnormal dimensions on his



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doctor and the lawyer seemed to feel as they went off together; and I *know* they all had telegrams. What can it be? I hope the undertaker won't go next."

Never mind, old lady; be content. You will guess when pleasantly reminded by a brace of handsome trout.

In early June the anglers all go mad, like hares in March. Lawyers forsake their clients, doctors their patients, and the parson even leaves his flock till Sunday, while he

shoulder, stands the keeper. Orders for fishing are produced, and as they start, he follows, silent. Being questioned, he admits the fly *is* on, and "mortal powerful"; but "Lor," he says, "they fish won't take it yet!"

At that very moment, as they watch the gorgeous insects fluttering on the stream, up comes a trout and gives the man the lie.

"What a splendid fish!" bursts out our novice.

"A pretty trout," replies the cleric, "but undersized—at least, in May-fly time!"

The eager angler had already cast his fly within the ring just made, and with a rush

and flounce the trout had gobbled it. The fight was furious, for the lively fish seemed a trained acrobat, and flashed and leapt and dived and leapt again, till his captor trembled for the tackle. There was no occasion; May-fly tackle is in no danger from the antics of a trout like that. Coolly Velveteens, with a face as long as ever, scoops out the still unconquered beauty, and as coolly frees her from the hook and puts her back again!

Our friend is wisely silent. Had he spoken then the parson had been shocked. After a moment, gulping down the word that nearly passed his lips, he asked, with forced coolness, "What the dickens was that for?"

The keeper held his peace, as usual; but the other said, "I fear the man is right. Fifteen inches is the limit now."

The pool seemed much disturbed, but as the three were moving on, quite suddenly the rise began in earnest. From behind each waving weed the bulky forms of ancient

trout appear, and boldly dash at every May-fly as it drifts along. The surface of the pool is all in waves, as giant fish (which grub along the bottom in the spring) seem to forget their caution and pursue their prey without regard to man.

Once more the artificial flies are on the surface, and again the novice has a fish; but this time it is a fish indeed; and at last the stolid face of that old keeper shows a light. Not that he smiles, or speaks. His frown is less severe; and as he watches for the time to use his net one eye is seen to twinkle.

Alas! this wild excess of joy is premature. The frantic plunges of the heavy fish have torn the

slight hold which the hook had taken, and back the line comes in our hero's face!

Meanwhile the parson is not idle. A goodly fish is trying all it knows to wind his line around a bunch of weeds, or hang it on



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a snag. Vain are all its struggles, vain its leaps, for as it falls across the line (as doubtless it intended), the parson dips his rod, and the fish's ruse is fruitless.

"Don't hurry, John," he says, "the hold is good. Your help is wanted yonder."

And so it was; for the other man had once again formed an attachment with a lovely fish and didn't mean to be again divorced. Calmly the keeper scoops her out, and, saying "Sizable," returns to help his other master.

By this time the heavy fish was quite exhausted, and, floating on his golden side, showed all his grand proportions. Carefully the keeper stoops and very gently puts the net beneath that 4 lb. trout, and with a sigh that comes as near a chuckle as he ever gets, observes, "A tidy fish."

The flies still swarm, and many a splashing rise is heard and seen, but very few are felt, for the trout are rising "short," and all the afternoon there are but

three or four who make mistakes and take the fly they only meant to play with.

But three brace of trout like these ought to satisfy the keenest angler; and the parson never wishes to distress the river, though he gladly carries home his share of trout to line the larder and astonish his curious neighbour Mrs. Lidless.

The lawyer and the doctor, both old hands, have done still better, bringing home four brace, the best a 6 lb. cannibal ("better out than in"), besides returning a lot of "little 2 lb. fish" as they are pleased to call them. So ends that May-fly day. But better days are coming, for now and then the fish take really well, and indeed the legend runs that on one day in June, after the tenth 5-pounder had been landed, the keeper fairly smiled.

Till quite mid-June the rise will often linger, and all the "duffers' fortnight" is a sort of festival, to keep which all duties not of strict necessity are ruthlessly postponed.



THE KEEPER.

