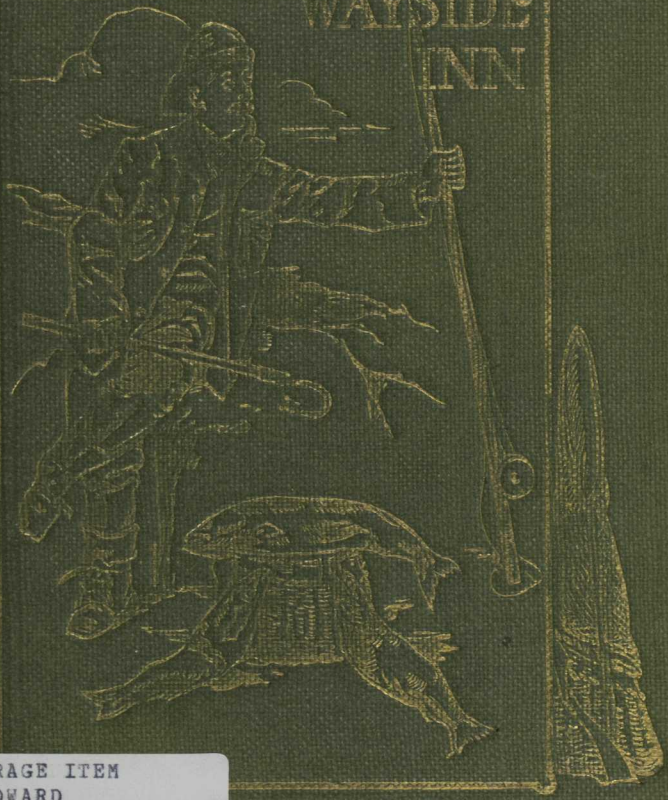
Angling Sketches

FROM A WAYSIDE INN



N FRASER.

UNIVERSITY OF B.C. LIBRARY
3 9424 06204 3275

STORAGE ITEM
WOODWARD
Wd1-L06E
U.B.C. LIBRARY

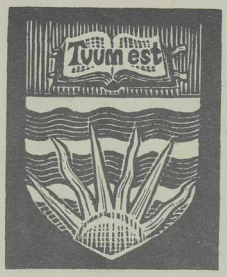
Pub @ 5/=
1911.

F/
C/S

Omnibus
Xmas 1932.

15/1

THE LIBRARY



THE UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

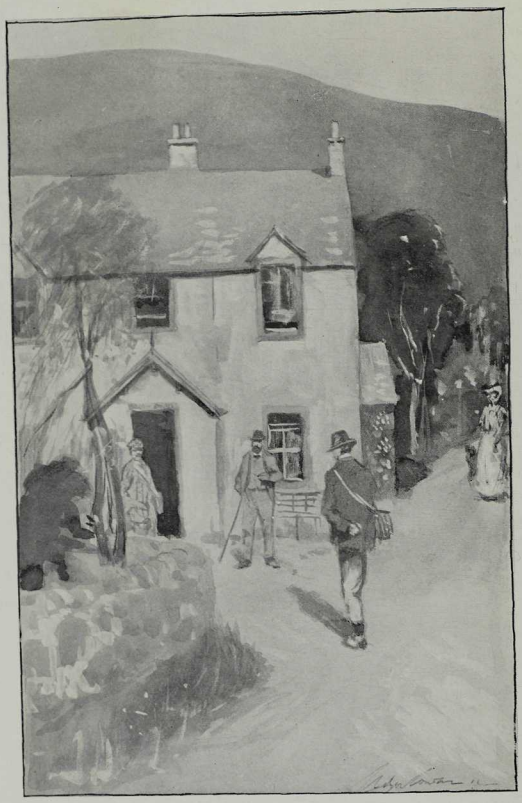
Harry Hawthorn Foundation
for the
Inculcation & Propagation
of the Principles & Ethics
of Fly-Fishing

Pus
1

ANGLING SKETCHES

FROM A WAYSIDE INN

Pu
1



THE WAYSIDE INN

ANGLING SKETCHES

FROM A WAYSIDE INN

BY

DUNCAN FRASER

AUTHOR OF "RIVERSIDE RAMBLES," "ANGLING SONGS FROM BORDER STREAMS," "THE PASSING OF THE PRECENTOR," ETC.

WITH EIGHT ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY
WILSON COWAN

EDINBURGH
ANDREW BAXENDINE
15 CHAMBERS STREET
1911

Dedicated

TO

ALEXANDER SATTERTHWAITE, ESQUIRE,

EX-MAYOR OF LANCASTER

A LOVER OF NATURE, AND A NOTABLE ANGLER

IN SOUTH OF SCOTLAND LOCHS AND STREAMS

NOTE

Nos. I. to VIII. of the following sketches appeared in *The Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, and are reproduced here by the kind permission of the proprietors of that paper. The Loch Skene sketch appears by the courtesy of the Editor of *Chambers's Journal*. "When the Wind went down" is from *The Union Magazine*. The sketch on cover is from one of the Red Lamp coterie, and two of the songs are from *The Scotsman*.

FOREWORD

It is difficult to defend the writing of another book on Angling save in the conviction that the heart of mankind is ever the same, and still beats responsive to the changing moods of nature, be they stern or pensive.

Achievements in the realms of science, art, commerce or the professions, of themselves do not satisfy human needs : the call of the wild is ever in our ear, and the continuance of our well-being depends upon occasional intervals of communion with nature in lonely valleys or far-off mountain tops.

Modern life assents to this more and more every day, and the cry for open spaces, garden cities and unenclosed commons is but the expression of the latent nomadic spirit that lies dormant in every breast.

In the great things of life, heart speaks to

heart; and, in a fainter degree, so does the lover of streams and glens and hills to his brethren of kindred spirit.

All those "who study to be quiet, and go a fishing" will know what is meant.

D. F.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	PROLOGUE	1
II.	THE FELLOWSHIP OF ROD AND CREEL	12
III.	SHADOWS ON THE WALL	21
IV.	VOICES OF THE PAST	32
V.	INTERLUDE	43
VI.	THE CALL OF THE HILLS	47
VII.	GOING BACK	58
VIII.	OLD-TIME INCIDENTS	68
IX.	GREAT EXPECTATIONS	78
X.	LOCHS OLD AND NEW—TALLA	88
XI.	LOCHS OLD AND NEW—SKENE	99
XII.	A SPRING FLOOD	114
XIII.	THE CHAMPION'S OTTER HUNT	119
XIV.	TROUT FISHING WITH THE PROFESSOR IN ULTIMA THULE	133
XV.	LIGHTS AND SHADOWS ON KILMORY	175
XVI.	THE CHARM OF THE BURN SIDE	193
XVII.	WHEN THE WIND WENT DOWN	204

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(*To face title*)

THE WAYSIDE INN . . . . . *Frontispiece*

SPORT ON LOCH AND RIVER HAD BEEN GOOD . . . . . *To face page* 34

THE PROFESSOR'S BLANK DAY . . „ „ 46

GOING BACK . . . . . „ „ 78

TALLA LOCH . . . . . „ „ 92

THE LAND OF HOODIE-CRAWS AND HERONS „ „ 132

LANDING FROM A SHETLAND LOCH . „ „ 160

WHEN THE WIND WENT DOWN . . „ „ 206

ANGLING SKETCHES

FROM A WAYSIDE INN

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

The Wayside Inn—Scotland's Trouting Future—An Ideal Fishers' Tryst—Burning the Water—An Overstocked Pastime — Extermination and Preservation — The Rallying Song

THE place where it stands shall be nameless. Nowadays, quiet nooks and resting-places are as rare as Iceland snakes, for no sooner does someone discover such a place, far from town and railway bustle, than he rushes into print about it, and soon the cyclist and motorist speed on in quest, and solitude knows it no more.

The house is only four walls square, with a rustic porch in the centre doorway; a few common flowers fringe the garden path, and far as the eye can see trees are scarce.

With all our love for the associations that cling around the old house, we often wish that the Scottish law which made it imperative that a few trees should be planted round every farmhouse had applied to inns, if only a few rowan-trees to scare the witches. But we take the place as we find it, bare and bleak though it appear at first sight; and you will journey many a mile ere you breathe an atmosphere so restful and reviving as that which surrounds this ancient hostel.

Standing in a cup-like hollow amongst hills where four roads meet, it is acquainted with every wind that blows. Far into spring, the mountains retain their snow caps, and in late autumn the neighbouring river floods the haughs; but these rough experiences make no difference to the old house; and when Easter approaches the fitful spring sun gilds it here and there, as if touching it up for the coming season.

It was round the host and hostess of the house, however, that the interest of the anglers chiefly gravitated. Ignoring conventional ways, they looked upon a visitor as being synonymous with a friend. Year after year their welcome was as

warm as when first they named you—" jist yin o' oorsels "—a term of adoption which opened both house an' ha' for its possessor through all the parish.

The camaraderie created amongst those who met from time to time under the roof of this fishers' tryst was one of the charms of the place. Friendships were made here that lasted a lifetime; and when men met in distant city or far-distant colony the discovery that you knew "the old place" was sufficient to break up reserve, even in the most reticent.

Often when some of us met on the busy street of the city the dulled eye would brighten and the ruffled brow would clear at the question—"Do you think they'll be rising in the brig pool to-day?" Ah, the fascination of the hills and streams played upon our heart-strings with skilful and thrilling touch, and braced us for the caprice of Fortune as few things else could.

Happy they who came under the spell of it in their youth, for the memories which it engendered clad them with armour of rectitude that made the commoner temptations of the world futile.

When the wind sighed round the tryst-house at the gloaming, after-dinner talk took on a certain air of dignity from our environment; and it was impossible for the veriest pot-hunter to have passed a day amongst the burns up in the hills without catching something finer even than trout.

Rare birds, rare plants, rare skies, crumbling towers, lonely cairns and remote cots; all in their turn set us a-thinking, and words only came at long intervals, or when the pipe went out.

Happily, no "Access to Mountains" Bill was needed in the district. From no class did the far-come fisher get a warmer greeting than from the shepherds and gamekeepers who knew the hills best, and it needed no gift of "shop-made flees" to elicit the information as to where the big trout were most likely to be found. The questions that disturb society when fishing is the theme had, so far, not ruffled town and country friendships in this quiet glen in the south; and the fact that the shootings on the moors and hills for miles around were in the hands of the lairds kept us free from those difficult problems which arise when strangers are in possession.

But we were not altogether innocents either. "Burning the water" was not unknown when November floods brought the "fish" up to the very door of many a cot, and though the shepherds might listen with child-like innocence when you spake of leisters, yet if you had followed these sons of Anak home, you might have found amongst the kitchen rafters one of these deadly weapons that had borne the brunt of many a tussle with far-travelled sea trout. But, what matter? The "fish" was food of a kind for wife and weans who were sorely in need of a change of diet; besides, not one in a hundred of these trout would have in the course of nature ever seen the sea again.

Looking back to this time, it cannot be said that we had any of the marvellous "record" baskets the accounts of which used to tickle our ears and excite our fancy in early youth. True, one of the noted local fishers in the glen used to tell us that, when he was a boy, his father and he often filled a twenty-four-pound basket twice a day! To this we would reply, "Then it's no wonder that we cannot get big takes now."

But a fishing "day" has always a mystery about it—especially to those who have never been at Lochleven—and may mean a stretch, with short intervals, of fourteen or sixteen hours.

Still, it was ideal angling life, and such as was enjoyed by hundreds of fishers in other glens than ours. But this arcadian simplicity was broken up very completely, and without noise or fuss; merely by the advent of the bicycle! We did not realise it at the time, but it was a portentous moment when we saw the first fisher-cyclist come speeding up the valley from a town twenty miles away. The old order truly was changing, giving place to the new; leisurely ease in mine inn, with a saunter amongst the streams at our own sweet will, was to be for ever dispelled by modern methods. "Big takes" were to be for the pushing man, and the dreamer and all those "who study to be quiet and go a-fishing" were to be rudely awakened.

So it has been all over Scotland. Bicycle and motor carry men to the sources of all the streams, and nowhere have the trout any sanctuary.

It is a truism to say that hundreds of people

fish to-day for tens who followed the pastime twenty years ago—and good luck to them all if they only fish fair—but the veriest tyro can see that this cannot go on without regulation.

Poachers and pot-hunters, driven from their old haunts by the increase of rivals, are going farther afield in search of plunder. Inns and hotels are asking the lairds for exclusive fishing rights, and here and there, even in remote places, trespass boards are beginning to disfigure the land and widen the breach of social union.

Surely it does not pass the wit of man to devise a remedy for the pass to which matters piscatorial have come.

Sir Herbert Maxwell's "Trout Close Time" Bill did much, but not enough. It never was passed that the professional fisher might have shoals of hungry trout upon which to exercise his vocation with salmon roe when the close time ended. More freedom of access to preserved waters will not mend matters. "Free fishing" will speedily spell "no fishing," and the attractions of it, as well as the means of sustenance for inns and quiet resting-places, will be gone for ever.

With all our nomadic leanings, we are driven to the conclusion that the only hope for the continuance of facilities for carrying on the health-giving pastime of angling is for the people to have an interest in the preservation of these privileges.

The saddest aspect of the present condition of things is that in many districts there is no healthy public sentiment on the subject. Poaching is connived at, and its nefarious products are bought by many of all classes—save, perhaps, the lairds.

The prospect is not very bright at present, and it is further obscured by the introduction of perplexing side issues. Still, if city angling clubs would encourage and support local associations in leasing the waters, we feel sure they would be met half-way by the proprietors of the lands through which the waters run.

Watchers, of course, would be needed; but fewer than we expect, for a common interest would make everyone a watcher.

Our whole attitude at present towards the trout-angling question is unscientific. It almost

looks as if angling clubs existed for the extermination of trout, instead of for their preservation.

Without limit as to size; without limit as to number; without hatcheries, save three or four in private hands; we go on our way slaying spawning fish, and allowing others to get so "sib" that in some districts they are even getting small as well as scarce; and in our extremity we call upon Jove to help us, instead of putting our own shoulder to the wheel.

Let us take warning in time if we do not wish to see our open streams taken out of our hands and "thirled" to a tourist hotel, or turned into "makeweights" on shooting estates, as has been the fate of so many grand streams in the Highlands.

But with the brighter horizon we would give up our exclusiveness, and gladly see our old inn of many memories become a veritable "Nest"; for, with the unchanged and unchanging scenery to give undying zest to the pastime, new generations would come and wander by the streams we have trod and climb the hills we have conquered; and,

the benign influence of nature stealing into their hearts, love of country and broad charity would more and more increase.

These reflections are the natural outcome of many years of angling experiences all over Scotland; but they are focussed in this wayside inn because here we had our keenest early angling joys, and here probably we shall have our last.

Notwithstanding this, each year finds us buoyant and hopeful as ever, ready to greet old friends with song and story, and happy if our circle is enlarged by the advent of new aspirants for the cheering fellowship of the sportsmen of the wayside inn.

"The time of the singing of birds has come.
There is green on the hedge, and rare tints on the moor;
Our very heart's-blood has set off with a run,
At thought of a sight of the old inn!
So, it's pack creels and go, my lads,
Pack creels and go;
The snow's left the hills, and the brown waters flow;
There are new nests round Altrive,
And black-cock fly low;
And each night dies in song at the old inn!
The west wind blows soft from the lake of St Mary's,
And Yarrow flows full near famed Dryhope's lone shore,

The piper's scaur grim, and the craig never varies,
  For all are bound up with the old inn!
So, it's pack creels and go, my lads,
        Pack creels and go;
The snow's left the hills, and the brown waters flow;
        There are new nests round Altrive,
        And black-cock fly low;
And each night dies in song at the old inn!"[12]

CHAPTER II

THE FELLOWSHIP OF ROD AND CREEL

Creel *versus* Bag and Pannier—Memories of Mishaps—Inanimate Friends—An Anglers' Paradise—A Weel-filled Creel

"O, there's naething half sae sweet in life
As a weel-filled creel!"

It is strange how these refrains haunt one even when serious thoughts perturb the mind, but in the present case it is easily accounted for.

Sitting somewhat dolefully, waiting for the spring that was promised two months ago, our eye has alighted upon the old creel, not yet taken down for the season, and a rush of memories have in a moment risen around it.

"They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."

There is that memorable day when we rejoined our friends at the loch foot with two broad tails of big sea trout hanging limp out of our creel, in spite of it being "the cauldest day that ever blew."

Then there is the time when, as we bent over the bank of a deep burn to dig out a root of primroses, we bent too far, and the creel gave a lurch over our shoulder, and emptied the whole of the forenoon's catch—besides the lunch—into the deep-running stream.

Or that other time when, at the close of a long day's fishing, we were crossing a stream in haste to catch the last train home, and slipping on a stone we fell splash into the deepest part, and lost a good number of trout and a favourite reel. The last-named article, however, was found for us some days afterwards by a young farmer to whom we described the place where we fell.

Then the days come back again—ah! so vividly—when certain little fellows, now big enough in all conscience, and far removed from the locality we picture, used to gird on that creel, four holes of the strap being taken up, and valiantly set out, weighed down by the never-to-be-forgotten, exciting and, alas! sometimes disappointing, honour of "carrying the basket."

How thankful we used to be on such occasions

when we really had a fair creelful, and so retained the faith of childhood in our possibilities.

An angler without a creel has always appeared to us to be an incomplete sportsman. We can picture an auctioneer without his hammer, a conductor without his baton; but not an angler without his creel.

A fishing-bag is a prosaic-holdall-gripsac bit of utility, lacking poetry and picturesqueness; and is of a piece with the fisher ignorant of the nomenclature of sport who counts his trout by the "brace," whereas the wicker creel lends itself to mystery and imagination. Who has not been surprised at the rare depths in an old creel?—hidden depths, indeed, from whence you turn out deep-shouldered, bright-spotted, graceful half-pounders, that make you for the moment—

"Ower a' the ills o' life victorious!"

We all know that salmon fishers use bags, but then their spoils would be wasted if crushed into even a big-sized creel, and surely there is nothing more disappointing to an angler's eye than to see fish crunkled up and bent out of

the natural grace and form which they, more than any other trophy of the sportsman's skill, always assume when still.

We never cared much for the French creels; the water generally made them rot away in a piece; but the open, Scottish wicker basket could, like the Irishman's gun, be renewed, "lock, stock and barrel," and yet enable you to hug the fancy that it was always the same old friend.

But, after all, one cannot dogmatise on taste in sporting impedimenta; creels, like many greater things in our philosophy, are just what their associations make them to us.

We remember a grand old Quaker who carried, in creel-fashion, a good-sized japanned tin box of the proper shape, perforated all over, to hold his trout, and a rare display he could make when he returned from his favourite haunts to the old inn at the gloaming.

But then, he was a shrewd old fellow, this fisher of few words, and he made his hard creel come in handy as a seat when he took his lunch by loch or river.

It is a strange phase of human nature that seeks

to endow certain tangible objects with something of our own personality. The book, the picture, the alpenstock, the golf clubs, the cricket bat and, in the present case, the fishing rod, are prized by us, not for their intrinsic value, but for the part they had in certain notable experiences.

There were no eye-witnesses, yet the old supple ash wand vibrated with the tremor that thrilled our whole body, when last season's grand new run "springer" made his lightning dash over the falls, and through the rapids in haste back to the sea.

Only a few sheep paused for a little on the hillside, to gaze with indifferent eyes at the great tussle with the big, brown trout, that had that morning so unwittingly come down out of the loch by way of the sluice-cut, to the deep haugh pool in the river—but the rod and reel stood true and, as we laid the erstwhile monarch of the river full length on the grassy bank, somehow the rod, creel and reel, as they lay alongside, gave a sense of comradeship to the scene, and helped to relieve the feeling of isolation which the reaction after a stern tussle always brings. Anglers are strange

creatures, and there is not a great distance betwixt their moods of depression and satiety. . . .

A trusty rod has the power of a wizard's wand. For instance, we don't know why it should be so, but at the present moment we are lifted from the pastoral surroundings of the old inn and in fancy are borne away to the most northern point of the British Isles. It is a glorious day in August, and the silver sand and blue waters of the Burra Firth in the lonely island of Unst flash in unrivalled beauty.

Giving up our fishing for a while, and with nothing but our rod and creel lying beside us on the bank beyond tide-mark, we take a mental picture of the scene.

For a mile on either hand towering cliffs run out to the sea, enclosing in the broad waters of the firth, one of the grandest bays on our coast. Above the cliffs is mountain land, receding inwards, having here and there a few straggling crofts, the homes of the islanders.

Overhead the gulls are screaming in hundreds, and profoundly wise puffins are seated on the shelving rocks; while far out in the bay are scores of

cormorants, busily fishing for, and unerringly catching, piltocks.

What, however, takes a fisherman's eye more than all these at the present moment is the extraordinary number of large sea trout that are leaping and gambolling all over the bay. Close to the shore, and far out, their silvery bodies gleam in the sun, and so large are some of them that, did we not know that there are no salmon in Shetland, we should have concluded that there were many such before us.

Of course, we tried a cast over them again and again, but they rolled about like porpoise, and scoffed at our flies; it was a sight to be remembered for a lifetime, but in a moment this phenomenal movement ceased as suddenly as it began. Not a movement, although the breeze was as soft, and the sky as serene as before. What could have happened? Ah, we were not long in doubt. On our right, nearly a quarter of a mile away, we saw a dark object, like a round bladder, bobbing here and there on the surface of the water. Mr Seal was looking for his dinner! How strange it was that, just as if at a given signal, every trout dis-

appeared, although in the case of many of them their enemy was a mile away.

After gathering some of the rare pebbles that have been ground into perfect shapes by the action of the tidal waves upon the silver sand of the beach, we lifted rod and creel and fished our way up the stream that flows from the Loch of Cliffe into the sea at this point.

It is a far cry from the old inn to the remotest island of the Shetlands, but—— "Oh, here are the fellows come from the smoking-room to see what's the matter," so, as the night always dies in song before we retire, there is a general chorus for the angling song which first saw the light here a few years ago.

"O, there's naething half sae sweet in life,
As a weel-filled creel!
'Tis a balm for woe, a foe to strife,
A weel-filled creel!
When roads are lang, and skies are grey,
And fair-day freens hae fled away,
O, there's still ae sicht cheers ilk dreich day—
A weel-filled creel!

O, the statesman flees frae care to win
A weel-filled creel!
And e'en the lawyers try to gain
A weel-filled creel:

While Dr S——, wi' youthful glee,
Steals aft where Tweed's wave wimples free,
And at gloaming he brings ower the lea—
A weel-filled creel!

O, 'tis lang, lang syne, since first we socht
A weel-filled creel,
But fell fortune's smiles and tears aft brocht
A puir-filled creel;
Noo time flees by wi' eydent pace,
And lither limbs tak' up the race,
Yet may each bring to life's trysting-place
A weel-filled creel,
O, may each bring to life's trysting-place,
A weel-filled creel!"

CHAPTER III

SHADOWS ON THE WALL

Firelight Musings—Many rare Fishers, and Meg Dods—A Bailie's Prowess—A fine Fly Stream—A French Smuggler—The Shetland Spy—The Loch Cliffe Boatman

ONE amongst the many advantages which dreaming by the firelight of the old inn brings is, that you have leisure to dwell upon things past and future.

In the whirl of city life events lose their true moral proportions; our vision is blurred, our perspective is lost, and our mental processes hurried and distorted by the exigencies of the hour; but here all the conditions tend to quiet contemplation, the vision is cleared, and the wave of memory, like an incoming tide, smoothes out and covers over all the sand castles that were raised at the cost of so much worry and care.

Thus it is that in our present mood, when the lights are low and the blood is still tingling from

the snell breezes that blew up the glens from the east all day, there comes over the senses a rush of memories—strains of long-forgotten melody—scenes of infancy—faces and voices of early friends—legends of the district—and angling lore, all so vivid as to exclude all other emotions whatsoever.

The fishing clubs of ancient days have always had a particular fascination for us, their quaint rules and quaint doings, even their quaint dress, all affect us now as a vignette of by-past days.

Sir Walter was a devoted angler, and in his novels again and again, as the story permitted, he puts rare bits of piscatorial incident into the construction. Grand old Izaak Walton never gave us anything more graphic than our novelist puts into the lips of the redoubtable Meg Dods, when speaking of a set of ancient brethren of the angle from Edinburgh, who visited St Ronans frequently in the spring and summer.

"They were," she said, "pawky auld carles, that kenned whilk side their bread was buttered upon. You never kenned of ony o' them ganging to the spring, as they behoved to ca' the stinking well yonder. Na, na; they were up in the morn-

ing—had their parritch, wi' maybe a thimbleful of brandy; and then awa' up into the hills—eat their bit cauld meat on the heather, and cam' hame at e'en wi' the creel full of caller trouts, and had their dinner, and their quiet coggie of ale, and their drap punch, and were set singing their catches and glees, as they ca'd them till ten o'clock, and then to bed wi' 'God bless ye'; and what for no?"

I am glad to think that this old inn has its memories of ancient days also. Many a rare fisher has made it his houff: and in what may be called modern times it has been our fortune to meet many brothers of the angle within its walls, whose deeds are not unknown to fame.

His recent departure from us may pardon our reference to one of the earliest we remember—David Lewis. He was one of the keenest sportsmen we ever met, either with rod or gun. All the streams round the old inn had paid tribute to his prowess, and on one occasion, that he told us of, the "take" was late of coming on, but when it did he was so absorbed that the time went past when he was to meet his trap, to be driven to the county

town eighteen miles away, and he had no alternative but to walk the distance. "But," he would add triumphantly, "I had my pockets full, as well as my creel!"

We were fishing with "the Bailie" one evening on Lochleven when he hooked a very large trout —"a fish" he called it; and as he was a tried salmon fisher his designation meant something beyond the common. The incident was so exciting that I wound up my line, so that undivided attention might be given to the play of the "four-pounder," as the boatman called it.

"Take care," we shouted; "you're giving too much line." "Not a bit of it! See how his fin cuts through the water! Why, man, this beats salmon fishing any day." But our friend's triumph was short-lived, for, giving plenty of line, as he said, there was a strange whir-r-r, and lo! the end of a new waterproof line, of sixty yards at least, went slipping through the rings of the rod! When putting on the line, he had been guilty of the mistake of forgetting to tie a knot after passing the end through the hole in the centre bar of the reel.

For a little we could see the coils of the dry line lying on the surface of the water, and, getting the boat off the drift, the boatmen followed after it with a will, but it gradually got wet through, and so fish and flies and sixty yards of line were lost to the Bailie for ever. . . .

"Eh, sirs, is not that awfu'?" was all he said after a pause in which no one said a word. We happened to have a small-sized spare rod with us. and in a few minutes our irrepressible friend was working his tireless left hand, as if nothing had happened; only from time to time he would mutter: "To think I should ever ha'e to fish wi' a thing oot of a toy shop!"

Of the Bailie's prowess with the gun many stories are told, but in this fitful firelight there comes to our mind an instance when he was baffled by a rifle. In our far-off Volunteer days we were in charge of a squad who were class-firing in the Hunter's Bog, Edinburgh, one evening when our friend came sauntering forward. Knowing his keenness for a shot, in a few minutes someone handed him a rifle sighted for the 200 yards at which we were firing. Shooting from his left

shoulder as usual, he lost little time in aiming at "the bull," but, strange to say, he missed the target altogether! Again and again he tried, with the same result, until, after his sixth shot, he gave up the rifle with the remark:

"My man, had it been a black-cock, you'd ha'e told a different story!"

No doubt about that. But it is not the first dead-shot with the sporting gun that we have seen baffled with the rifle. The eye that can follow the birds on the wing, and bring down six out of ten of them, often meets his Waterloo when faced with a fixed object.

Ah! the rod and gun of our old sporting friend are now hung up for ever; and—may we not say:

> "After life's fitful fever,
> He sleeps well!"

No. II. of these sketches was just about finished when the boys broke in with their clamour for "a weel-filled creel," and prevented us from taking the reader up the dark waters that flow into Burra Firth from the Loch of Cliffe. If it were only a mile or two longer, this burn would be an

ideal fly stream. Twelve feet broad, sandy, grass-grown banks deep at the turns, and its surface scarcely broken by a stone, it affords an easy passage, as well as a tempting resting-place, for trout going to or passing from the sea. Nor would we forget to speak of the rich heath that spreads out on either side of the stream. Many a sweet posy we gathered of yellow water-iris, ragged robin, and the beautiful wild violets that covered the heath in thousands.

Casting towards the far side of a deep run, our flies had scarcely touched the water when there was a heavy rise, followed by a fish leaping into the air, and then rushing with such force towards the shallows that it ran itself aground.

After getting several good yellow trout and nine finnocks, we became somewhat careless, and so missed a fine fish, when, at that moment, a voice exclaimed, "Ah, you've lost that one!" Startled, we looked up in the direction from whence the sound came, and saw an officer of police sitting on the top of a high sandbank watching our sport.

"I say, officer, have you dropped from the clouds?"

"Na, na; I've come from Uyeasound."

"How did you manage that?"

"On my bike."

It made us shudder to fancy a bike amongst the boulders at Haroldswick!

"Are you fishing?" we asked.

"Na, na, I'm just making a call at a house up yonder," pointing to the crofts in the direction of Flugga. After some further conversation, the chief point of which was that the sea-trout fishing was best over at Uyeasound, six miles away, he got his bike from a house near at hand and rode off.

From what we learned afterwards, there is such a flavour of old-world romance about the "call up at the cottage" that we may be pardoned for recording it as the shadows dance upon the wall.

Two Sundays previous to the day on which we fished Burra Firth, a French sloop was seen not far from shore, making mysterious signals. That they were not signals of distress might be gathered from the leisurely way in which a fishing boat was launched and—after some articles had been put on board—made for the signalling ship.

On reaching her side some words were exchanged between those in command, and after a short delay there was also an exchange of goods; thereafter, the fishing boat made all haste to the shore, while the smuggler—for that was the character of the French ship—sailed eastward.

As puffins and kittywakes were apparently the only living creatures that had witnessed the transaction, the fishermen might naturally have thought that there was an end of it; but, unfortunately, there was a witness they little dreamed of.

High on a hill to the east of Burra Firth a spy lay hid, but with keen eye he ever and anon kept searching the waters of the North Sea through a telescope. Whether he had an inkling or not of the smuggler being expected the shadows on the wall do not say, but he saw all that passed, and without loss of time he made for Baltasound to lodge his information at the Custom House.

The outcome of it all was a "call up at the cottage yonder," to leave a summons for the fishermen to appear at Lerwick—more than a hundred miles away by sea—to answer for their offence against the law.

Even as we dream, hundreds of miles from the scene, a sequel to this incident comes vividly to our mind. Some days after, being belated at the north end of Loch Cliffe with a heavy creelful and soaked waders, the prospect of a six-mile tramp home was the reverse of pleasant.

Just then a friend came in sight, who said there was a man mending a boat who was willing to give us a sail down to the south end of the loch. As this shortened our journey by more than three miles, we gladly took advantage of the offer.

As we sped down the middle of the loch, purpled by the evening sky, our angling friend took the tiller, while we held the sail-rope, and the boatman smoked the pipe of calm enjoyment, and talked incessantly. He was so communicative that, drawing a bow at a venture, we asked :

" How did the smuggled brandy taste the other day ? " Poor fellow, he shut up like an oyster, but after a short silence, in which he evidently settled in his own mind that we were not spies, however much appearances might be against us, he answered :

" Ah, it was poor stuff ; it was brünt."

"Burned, was it? Not much enjoyment in that, surely."

"Yes; nä taste, brünt, and smeekit."

And so it was for some hocus-pocus called French brandy that the hardy islanders had given away what were doubtless home products in the form of woollen goods that could ill be spared.

The boys have just heard the above yarn, and with the irrelevancy of youth they ask: "If you enjoyed the angling and the incidents of Shetland so much, why don't you go oftener?"

To which we answer: "We shall return with pleasure when they bridge the Moray Firth!"

CHAPTER IV

VOICES OF THE PAST

The Glory of the Hills—Reviving Nature—Sea Fishing—A Strange Catch—The Lost Four-pounder—The Spring Break-up—Ha, Ha, the Fishin' o't

How glorious are the hills in spring!

Winter has now lifted her mantle from off them, save here and there where some snow-white ribbons, deep set in the higher crevices, stream down to the brown scaurs. Through the tufted bent a faint show of greenery is pressing upwards with a persistency that will not be denied; and black patches of burned heather, and brown patches of budding heather, blend in striking contrasts.

Along the riverside the tassels of the larch delight the eye with their ripe clusters; the graceful birk charms the senses with its glistening silver stem that bends so graciously to the western breeze; while the plane-tree, the oak and the elm, with their chestnut-coloured husking buds, show up against the light with a tracery more subtle

and varied than the greatest limner ever designed.

But, besides all these, the gamut of the colouring is completed by the russet ferns, the whins in bloom, and the varied greens of the firs.

The sounds heard all around are in consonance with the scene. From the hedge-rows come the fresh notes of the linnet and the finch ; from bush and tree the blackbird and the mavis sing at early morn and sundown, to cheer their nest-bound mates ; and from the moors and hills is heard the song of the skylark, the cry of the curlew, the lapwing and the whir of grouse ; or the cluck-cluck of blackcock ; while redshank, snipe and the rarer oyster-catcher occasionally flit across the river.

But subconsciously, amid it all, is the buoyant thought, that this is but the beginning of days. The cheering oncome of spring is but the precursor of the glorious effulgence of summer, when,

> "... from heaven in the perfect time,
> Great summer sheddeth in her rosy prime
> Joy-tears of dew!"

We thank the old inn and its environment for

teaching us this, and for lifting the world, that is so much with us, from out our thoughts for a season.

Yes, only for a season, all too brief; for on the morrow the old place will miss the song and the bustle of the boys, as it has done more than once in bygone days. They will be back to their life's work, made all the keener to face their daily duty through contact with the sights and sounds of reviving nature.

To-night, however, there are great ongoings; the sport through the day on loch and river has been good, and, fortunately, each has had his share. Indeed, one of the party has got a sea trout in his creel, and even his natural modesty, when faced by our congratulations, is scarcely proof against that fact.

Settled round the fire, the cry is for a last symposium; and incidents are told thick and fast, while my Lady Nicotine holds her sway.

One tells how, when trying for trout, he had a never-to-be-forgotten tussle and defeat from a ten-pound salmon that had wantonly risen to his fly down at the scaurs; and he sings with feeling

SPORT ON LOCH AND RIVER HAD BEEN GOOD

born of experience the lines of Outram—how that—

> "There's a bend in the Tweed, ere
> It mingles with the Leader,
> Perhaps you may see there a wide
> O'er-spreading tree ;
> That's a part o' the river
> That I'll revisit never ;
> 'Twas there that scaly Buffer
> Lay lauchin' at me."

Another gives us all the " creeps " when describing his adventure as he returned from a famous mountain loch, ten miles from the old inn. How that the mist came down as he was leaving the loch, but, being confident that his sense of locality would lead him right, he held on, until a puff of wind came and shifted the mist, and he found himself within a few yards of the edge of one of the most precipitous cliffs in the south of Scotland.

Fishing stories are nothing if not erratic, and brought from far. So as the boys talk, and apropos of some passing reference to naval scares, and Rosyth Harbour—that is to be—we recalled a strange capture in which we once shared in Portsmouth Harbour.

Surely it is a far cry from the old inn to Nel-

son's grand old flagship, *Victory*; but it has been the lot of some of us to fish in strange waters, and creel strange fish.

Many years ago we had been spending some time in Hants, and naturally we were led to pass a few days with our old friend Captain Macdonald at his house that stood within the western gate of the high wall that shuts out the town of Portsmouth from the docks.

He was captain of the London Metropolitan Police, that in those days had charge of the docks, and it was a rare privilege to be escorted from place to place by such a man. Just across the strand from the house was a gangway, covered in with glass, and lined with numbers of vines, from which hung hundreds of clusters of dark-coloured grapes. This was the Queen's gangway to the royal yacht that sailed to and from the Isle of Wight.

The captain's "gig" lay moored at the foot of the gangway, and, with characteristic kindness, both it and its crew were placed at our disposal for cruising amongst the great warships, or pulling out to the "Spit." One morning the captain

said to his son and his guest, " Take rods and lines, boys, and see what luck you have amongst the pouts."

In those days no " two tellings " were needed to set us on edge for sport of this kind at any time or anywhere. Portsmouth Harbour or Gogar burn were alike so long as the nomadic spirit was stirred and gratified.

This great harbour is always memorable. Grand men-of-war and craft of all kinds and size —destroyer, torpedo, submarines—are all around, and this morning a large white-painted troopship passed us, bound for the Far East; the soldiers cheering to friends with all their might.

Ye Fifers, think of it in your visions of Rosyth; and tremble or rejoice as your temperament allows!

The crew of the gig on this occasion were two old salts in undress uniform of blue cloth, with leather-peaked caps set off by gold bands. They soon took us out to some clear water, where we speedily cast our lines for pouts, which resemble small whitings. It did not take us very long to catch from twenty to thirty of these little fish,

and we were just going to change our "swim," when suddenly young Mac startled us all by shouting: "A conger, a conger! Oh, I've got a conger!"

Sure enough he was hauling with all his might at something that gave most strenuous resistance. Quickly we pulled up our lines, and awaited developments with keen interest. "Do ye feel any life?" asked the skipper. "Yes, yes; it's heading downwards, and we'll lose him without a gaff!"

This was becoming exciting; we had seen congers from two to three feet long caught down at Arran, but this one must surely be a monster. We were really at our wits' end as to what we should do next, when the more ancient of the mariners quietly said: "Ay, ay, ye may tug, an' ye may tug, but it 'ill be a long time before ye land the cable of the *Victory*!" True enough, it was the cable of the *Victory* that Mac had been trying to land for the last quarter of an hour.

As we had no use for it, we cut the line, and rowed homewards, coaxing the sailors not to tell.

. . . . . .

"Well," said the Professor, "there is no doubt that fishers, both on sea and stream, behold strange

sights if they can use their eyes. Which teaches us——"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the Dominie, "but I'm in the mood of the boy who interrupted the minister at school, one day, as he began, 'Now the moral to be drawn is this——' 'Never mind the moral, minister, gie us anither story!'"

"Do you know of any disappointment in sport to compare with that of losing a large trout?" asked the enthusiast of the party, whose every spare minute was employed in making up "casts."

This query touched a tender spot, for all of us had passed through such a trial, and had felt the faintness that follows the severance of the tie that binds you to the monarch of the pool. General sympathy, therefore, was expressed as we told of a mishap we met with when fishing the Whitadder some seasons ago.

Down the river, at a part called "the mines," we hooked a fine trout in grand condition—so grand indeed that it leaped and dived as if it were a newly run salmon.

In its antics it messed up all the cast and hooked itself on all the flies as well. After rolling about

in the middle of the pool, far beyond the reach of the net, it, by a few jerks, broke the line and sank to the bottom of the water.

After a few minutes of stupefied meditation we put on another cast, and limply worked homewards.

In the inn that night there was great commiseration for our mishap, with just a shade of doubt in their acceptance of our estimate of the lost fish being a "four-pounder."

However, three days afterwards a copy of the local newspaper turned up at the inn, and under the heading "A Large Trout" a graphic account was given of the finding of a beautiful trout, weighing four pounds seven ounces, in the shallow water at the edge of "the mines." It was doubly mortifying to read that "it had evidently been hooked but a short time before by a novice, who by his clumsiness had allowed a new cast of gut and flies to get firmly wrapped round its gills." Insult to injury, with a vengeance!

"Never mind," shouted the Veteran, with the optimism of a man in the possession of a sea trout. "Let's toast our host, and wind up with a song."

Fortunately we had no neighbours, else the vigour with which we rang out the last two stanzas of the said song would have brought them upon us protesting:

"When ance mair the hills are gay—
Ha, ha, the fishing o't;
Then by loch and stream we'll stray—
Ha, ha, the fishin' o't;
Or beside a Border burn
List to sangs at lika turn,
While earth's meaner things we spurn—
Ha, ha, the fishin' o't!

Doctors speak o' change o' air,
Ha, ha, the fishin' o't;
What wi' Yarrow can compare?
Ha, ha, the fishin' o't,
When the lark has mounted hie,
And you've on a takin' flee,
Then ye ken life's ecstasy!
Ha, ha, the fishin' o't!"

. . . . . .

On the morrow we gathered at the porch to see the final break-up.

"When does the machine come for you?" we asked the skipper of the larger party.

"Oh, we've engaged a motor, and we'll soon cover the fifteen miles."

A motor! Just picture it, all ye who study to

be quiet, and go a-fishing. A motor! To wake resentful echoes, and for ever break the charm of our pensive solitude. Ah, well——

> "Take off your hats to Progress, gentlemen,
> . . . But heigh-ho!
> I should have lived a hundred years ago!"

CHAPTER V

INTERLUDE

The Professor's Blank Day—Anticipation—Realisation

THE Professor gave us a good deal of amusement one morning by the elaborate preparations he made for " a great day on the loch."

His rod was selected with difficulty, the choice lying between a twelve-foot, steel-cored split-cane of the newest pattern ; and a hickory and lance-wood veteran of many battles.

Reels also were fitted and weighed with unusual deliberation, the choice eventually falling upon a gun-metal, free-running, medium-sized, ratchet favourite.

But the flies caused most trouble. Book after book was ransacked and their treasures spread out on the table for the opinion and advice of every brother of the angle. Indecision sat upon the shoulders of him who, before a crowded class-room, was promptness personified.

But it is so easy to choke off inquisitive youth, and so difficult to decide between the claims of a "blue dun" and a "golden plover"!

However, at last he got under weigh, and our speculations ran high as to his success.

Late that night a figure was seen coming over the hill near the piper's scaur, evidently wayworn and weary. It was our genial friend the Professor.

There was a kind of unwritten law that no one need show his basket until after dinner, when Mary usually appeared with the ashets, upon which, with affected modesty, we deposited our spoils and told the incidents attendant upon their capture.

That night the Professor did not show up at the weighing, and it was about three hours after before he appeared in the circle gathered round the red lamp and handed the Veteran a folded paper.

"Am I to read it?"

"Yes, read it aloud. I'm done with it all for ever!"

Humming a few notes of the scale to get his voice properly attuned the Veteran declaimed the following verses :—

"We drifted ower the Capper bay,
We waded deep the meadow side ;
At noon we wended Kirk-burn way,
Where troot of ponderous size aft bide :
But neither fish or parr were seen,
By dour St Mary's Loch, I ween.

The Kirkstead banks in days bygane,
Aft tempted pounders to their side :
The hidden spring, the grim 'Tod stane,'
Mark where the new-run sea trout hide,
We tried them a', but cam nae speed,
St Mary's silver fins seemed deid !

We crossed the sluice to Boor'up side,
And marked whaur yon slee Border toun
The loch's bluid draws a' simmer tide,
And sends it Yarrow soomin' doun :
By 'Bogle hole' we plied the flee,
But neither troot nor perch did see.

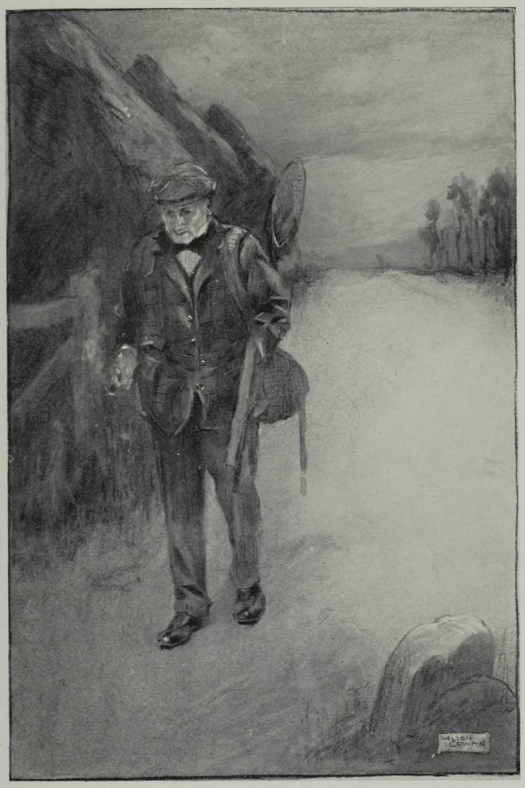
Syne past the farm, and roun' 'Cape Horn'
We staccered, sairly hudden doun
But no' wi' troots ! but just forlorn
To think oor loch had tint its croon :
For Shepherd Hogg, and Wilson graun'
Had roosed her fame thro' a' the lan' !

To Tibbie's howff we slipped in
  Wi' empty creel, but heavy heart;
'Mang tourist's laugh an' motors' din
  We mused, if noo we'd lost the airt
    To wile the bonnie glancin' troot,
    The wale o' a' their kind aboot.

And as we dreamed in yon auld room,
  That hauds the famous quaint box-beds,
A voice spake clear wi' doric croon,
  As if frae biggan ower our heads:
    'Thae motor cars are a' to blame
    That ye wi' empty creel gang hame.'

Preserve us a'; we see it noo!
  Oor 'lane St Mary's,' lane nae mair,
Is waukened ere the morning dew
  Has wi' the skylark ta'en the air,
    By tooting horn and creaking wheel,
    Enou' to mak' troot's senses reel.

For, hour by hour, and day by day,
  Strange motors dash along the shore,
Where gamesome troot were wont to play
  That noo are gliffed by oil and stoure:—
    Sae, far doon in the deep they dwell,
    Preferring pike, to motor smell!"



THE PROFESSOR'S BLANK DAY

CHAPTER VI

THE CALL OF THE HILLS

The Shepherd of the Borderland—Modern Creelfuls—Angling Deeds of Hogg and Stoddart—Thoughtless Slaughter—*Tempora Mutantur*—Dr Knox and the Last Trout

THE axiom that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives is in nothing more clearly shown than when one becomes acquainted with the life of the southland shepherd.

In the springtime, from dawn till dusk, he goes round his hirsel—generally three times a day—in snow and frost or wind and rain; and accompanied by his faithful collie he must be always on the alert, lest in a gully or a dyke some lambs may be hid and overlooked.

Off with the wet and on with the dry, after every round sometimes. Yet they never grumble, for well they know that their own and their master's interests and reputation are bound up with a good lambing season.

A sojourn in a pastoral district brings the angler into touch and sympathy with these men, and a wave of your hand as you ply the rod on loch or river, while they stride across the moor, establishes a bond of fellowship, although never a word be spoken.

Up the glens the shepherd's house is a true hospice to the angler when he happens to be caught in one of the thunderstorms so common to hilly districts at certain seasons of the year. In the district of which we speak hospitality is happily unspoiled, and to tender any acknowledgment for the shelter and refreshment you have enjoyed would be to spoil it all. A dozen of your trout, or "something" slipped into the hand of one of the bairns, is as far as you can go with safety.

Angling makes us acquainted with the physical features of the land, but it does more—it brings us in contact with the people; and this leads us to conclude that, after all, townsfolk might learn much from the dwellers in the lone sheiling at the burn foot.

Heaven forbid that the trail of the thoughtless tourist should ever be seen up here, playing

havoc with the independence of a self-reliant people!

Comparing notes is common to all sportsmen, and in our humble way, when the lamp is lit in the chief room of the inn, we recall and discuss the incidents of the day. Thus:—The Veteran when playing his biggest trout lost the entire cast; or Fly Busker, when he arrived at the loch-side found that he had forgotten his creel, and had to fill the pockets of his waterproof with the trout; or Hazel Wand had to grow sentimental over a dead sea-gull he found lying amongst the rocks near Goat-cleuch, but he was compensated by having seen the first swallow of the season, as well as the rare blackcap, the redshanks, and the oyster-catcher.

The Minnow Champion was also in rare form, and what proved to be the biggest trout of the season, so far, bore witness to his prowess.

All had good baskets, but someone remarked, "Ah, nothing to the good old days!"

"Do not be so sure of that," remarked the Veteran. "I have seen several minute-books of old angling clubs, and on their competition days,

at anyrate, their baskets were not better than those got by the clubs of the present day."

"What do you make of the red-letter days recorded by many writers on angling?" asked the Dominie.

"Well, such days were rarer than we fancy, as we said before; we have no record of their blank or poor days; and even an angler's 'day' was different from now, for we have known some famous fishers to count twelve, or even fifteen, hours as a fair day; and it must not be forgotten that many of their big baskets were got in October and November.

"Then," said the Dominie, "anglers' stories must be taken *cum grano salis*."

"Not always," said the Veteran. "If you wish to get a glimpse of past days and past deeds just listen to what Thomas Tod Stoddart says about a day's angling he had along with the Ettrick Shepherd.

"'The weather had now greatly improved; there was a glimpse of blue sky overhead, and one of the hills at a distance was covered with sun-gleams. It was milder and calmer. The day's creation of

flies was abroad, some of them skimming the air, and others, less secure, the margin of the pools.

" 'Nimbly and eagerly the trout rose, not in singleness, but by pairs, darting at our deceitful hooks without caution or forethought.' "

" Can trout think ? " asked Fly Busker. Not heeding the interruption, the narrator proceeded with his story:

" 'We hollo'd to each other on the capture of every fresh dozen, and frequently was our note of exultation repeated. The contents of our creels increased rapidly, and ere four in the afternoon there was mustered betwixt us above three stone weight ! ' "

" Prodigious ! " said Fly Busker.

" ' By this time we had angled over a considerable portion of Meggat water, and had reached almost in company with each other the dark, deep pools lying immediately above the kirk.

" 'These, we well knew, contained a number of prime and subtle fish—to be captured only when the water, as at that time, was of a dark porter colour.' "

" Quite true," said the Dominie, " we have

proved this over and over again in the same pools, even in these degenerate days."

"Wait a bit," said the narrator, who, continuing, said: "'Accordingly, we then threw off our somewhat worn and dismantled flies, exchanging them for others of a larger and brighter sort, and, tossing for the choice of pool, commenced carefully to rake the water surface. Almost at the same moment each of us happened upon a sturdy two-pounder. They fought like heroes, throwing themselves at full length out of the pool, pushing straight up the current. Now they relaxed a little and showed their sides. They gasped submission, and our bended wands brought them to the margin.

"'How lovely they looked, lying among the pebbles, not as if in agony—they felt none—but like a tribute-offering devoted to us—their conquerors; and in our creels lovelier still, curled up over the rest of their tribe, seemingly their monarchs or their patriarch sires!

"'These creels were full, crammed to the lid, ere we arrived at the Henderland rocks; but the Shepherd had a game-bag, and I an honestly huge

couple of coat pockets, so that we lacked betwixt us no store-room!' "

This graphic account of a fishing excursion fairly took our breath away; but there was more to follow in the same strain: "'. . . No ordinary take of trout had we on that occasion; in all, seven and twenty dozen—a couple of two- and nine one-pounders, fifty and more half the latter size, and the rest smaller, but not despicable fish.' "

"And that is why we lament the falling off in fishing results to-day," said the philosopher of our party. "In bygone years men had no thought of their sport ever becoming less; they fished, and killed, as if they were engaged in the laudable extermination of noxious pests, instead of feeling responsible for the conserving of a vivifying object of health-giving pastime."

"Ah, but it was not that alone that cause us to feel that trout are scarce to-day," said the Dominie. "After heavy rain the rivers ran full for a week fifty years ago; whereas now, owing to extensive drainage, even in moorland districts, the flood is off in a day."

"Ay," said Fly Busker, "and by improved means of travel, and the cycling angler's power of cutting down distance, there are at least twenty fishers to-day for one fifty years ago."

"Which all goes to prove," said the Veteran, "that anglers must be careful to replenish the streams their fathers depleted; and also set their face against inordinate baskets, illegal lures, and the poacher."

"And yet how many clubs give prize-money for the slaying of trout, which money would be far better spent in leasing and restocking lochs and streams."

These words by the Veteran turned the talk, and the call for a song from the optimist brought out the following:—

"What recks it, though they tell us times have changed,
That streams are waning, and sport's record light;
That in days bygone giants of the angle ranged
By loch and stream, all conquering with Trojan might?

What though their sport ne'er failed from morn till night,
Their streams ran ever full, their skies gleamed ever blue;

While breezes from the mountains played but soft and light,
And clouds had never shadows, and hearts beat ever true ?

Does Tweed not flow as silvery to the northern sea,
As in the days when troopers marshall'd on her shore ;
Does Clyde not wander 'mong her hills as free
As when brave Wallace wight the sword for freedom bore ?

. . . . . .

Have birks by lonely burnsides stunted grown,
And heather on the hills a' wede away ;
Has Yarrow lost her charm, and are for ever flown
The larks that at heaven's gate hailed opening day ? "

" 'Tis but a fancy ! . . ." The optimist would have gone on any length with the song to show that things were as good as ever they were, but as we had not caught up the tune he stopped abruptly.

" The most honest angling-book I ever came across," said the Veteran, " was one by Dr Knox, the celebrated Edinburgh anatomist. Cynical, a bit, but sincere and truthful on the face of it, in that he set down bad days as well as good days, and laid no gloss upon failures.

" Never a ' something ' in the air ? " asked Fly Busker.

"Never! But always a keen eye for nature and the various incidents that crop up in the pursuit of his favourite pastime."

"Although it is many years since we first read the book, we have never forgotten the impression made upon us by an incident he mentions as having occurred in one of his angling trips. Perhaps it was made the more memorable by our preconceived opinion of the writer."

"The Burke and Hare connection, I presume," said the Dominie.

"Exactly. Well, he was one day fishing a stream in a lonely southland glen, and on coming to a fine pool his sporting instincts were quickened by seeing it dimpled all over the surface by rising trout.

"Casting carefully, he soon hooked a nice fish of six ounces or so. He cast again and again, but got no response; and, like a flash, the thought crossed his mind. 'Can I have caught the only trout in the pool?'

"Hastily taking the fish out of his creel, he placed it in the water again where it soon revived, and he had the joy of seeing the pool

dimpled here and there once more by the gambols of its solitary tenant.

"Proceeding onwards, he moralises on the cruelty of men who would take the last trout out of its haunt."

"Well," said the Cynic, "anglers are just a compound of contradictory emotions."

"I don't know," said the Veteran. "We may settle that some other night, meantime; I know this——

"'The heart of man still yearns for deeper things,
And these the magic spell of our loved pastime brings.'"

CHAPTER VII

GOING BACK

Pack Creels and Go—Charm of Humble "Houffs"—A Royal Reception—Yetholm and its Gipsies—Trouting up the Bowmont

SURELY it cannot be twelve months since we penned some notes on our angling experiences from the old house hidden by the wayside amongst the hills? Never! It is just a device of the younger members of our fraternity who are conspiring to make us out a whole year older—"and look it!" from the time we revealed ourselves in holiday mood to the numerous angling readers of the south country.

And yet, after all, there are subtle suggestions knocking at the door of our consciousness which hint that they may be right. Well for us that reviving nature comes, with its songs and its flowers and its greenery, and covers over the intervening rifts and scaurs of time, and envelops us in its

new life, making us forgetful for a time of blizzards either in the moral or the natural world.

. . . "A telegram, sir." "Thanks." . . . "*Are you going back this Easter?*" Ha! this dispels the mood in which the foregoing sentences were penned. Are we going back, forsooth! We wonder what it was that upheld us through the drift and darg for months past but just the slumbering memory that there was such a place as the old inn, and that it was just possible that we once more might see it.

Are we going back? Ay, with all the more alacrity as the times when it may be possible for us to do so are getting fewer and fewer. Are we going back? Why, this hope of "going back" has somehow become part of the philosophy of humanity, and in various forms has entered into the lives of most men.

We passed a staid citizen yesterday whose whole aspect suggested "rubber." Yet away behind his calculating eye there was hidden, as on an undeveloped sensitive plate, a bright scene of a breezy golf-course, and the hope of "going back" there

some day made the growling of "bulls" and "bears" endurable.

Are we going back? Just listen to the chorus of the song we were singing less than an hour ago:

> "Then pack creels and go, my lads,
> Pack creels and go;
> The snow's left the hills,
> And the brown waters flow;
> There are nests in the hedge-rows
> And blackcock fly low,
> And the night dies in song at the old inn."

Yes, long before the days of Dr Samuel Johnson, men have joined in praising the welcome at mine inn. Nowhere do we see the equality of mankind better exemplified than in the way all are received at an inn—we do not write of hotels. The humble traveller is on equality with a duke, if both are unknown, and the first is charmed to find that he is taken to be somebody; while the other is equally charmed at being thought nobody in particular.

Mark you, we are not referring to the stately inns of the coaching days: but just to those humble "houffs," hidden by lonely waysides and deserted hamlets, where the landlord and his wife

welcome you with a kindly greeting that is in no way tinctured by self-interest—fishers are not such financial catches after all—but is simply prompted by the pleasure which returning to the old inn seems to be giving yourself.

We are sometimes caught in reverie over the lights and shadows of various angling receptions —farmhouse, shepherd's cot, school-house, kirk manse, gamekeeper's, etc., etc., all of them pleasant to recall when the local colour elsewhere is so sombre.

But, amid them all, an unexpected and unique reception when on an angling excursion a few years ago stands out most vividly at the present moment.

Yetholm is a quaint, world-forgotten village lying at the foot of the Cheviots on the southern edge of Roxburghshire. The Bowmont water flows through the valley and divides the village into two sections, called respectively Town-Yetholm and Kirk-Yetholm. The latter is plainly the older part, and is celebrated far and near as the home of the Faas, the well-known gipsies.

Many good streams flow near the Cheviots, and

it was while exploiting these a few summers ago that we found ourselves settled down one evening at the Border Inn of Kirk-Yetholm.

Anglers are not always fishing, although they get the credit for it. Nature in her many varied moods has an irresistible charm for the true followers of old Izaak, and, although they may lack his power of expressing what they feel, yet the wild flower's beauty, the mountain's rugged form, and the myriad sounds that come from earth and air, thrill them none the less that the voice to tell their rapture is denied.

Strolling on the evening in question up the path that leads from the village to a spur of the Cheviots, from whence you can get a glimpse of the Till, near Flodden, my eye was caught by a tidy little cottage set in a rather well-kept plot of grass edged round with sweet-smelling homely flowers.

An old man was on his knees weeding the path, and a fresh-looking elderly woman was plucking a few flowers from the porch plot near the gate. Giving them "Good evening"—a greeting which they most courteously returned—we passed by,

musing on those other flowers, even the "Flowers of the Forest," that graced this hillside so gallantly on the eve of Flodden's fateful field. On returning later we found the woman still working in the garden, although the man had disappeared, and as we stopped again to pass a word she most kindly asked us to come inside the gate and look around.

Accepting the invitation cordially, we crossed the path, and in doing so were startled to see over the doorway the somewhat awe-inspiring inscription, "The Palace." In a moment it dawned upon us that we had been holding intercourse in this familiar way with personages none other than Charlie Faa, the King of the Gipsies, and his illustrious Queen!

Not being very sure about Court etiquette in the circumstances, we waited for the lady to open the conversation, which she did with the most natural grace in the world by asking if we had met the King. We replied that we had spoken to him as he was weeding the garden when we passed earlier in the evening, but hoped to have a longer talk with him soon.

The Queen then began talking, and showed us several photographs, which recalled to our mind the fact that their coronation had taken place just two years before, so we turned the conversation back to that great event.

"Ah, well," she said, "you know that after the death of Queen Esther the folk were anxious to have us crowned, so we just gave them their will." And then, proceeding with her narrative, she gave us a minute account of the ceremony, how the people came from far and near until the village street was crowded; how she and the King were drawn to the platform, erected on the green, in a cart harnessed to six donkeys; and how the people cheered till they could cheer no more, as the brass band from Coldstream struck up, "Wha'll be King but Charlie!"

Our sympathetic attention evidently won the Queen's confidence, for she next proceeded to take down the crowns used at the coronation, and, as a special mark of royal favour, invited us to put them on.

The articles in question were in size and shape just like the kingly crowns used in the theatrical

performances given at village fairs—bright brass, with precious stones of ruby, yellow and blue coloured glass, and lined with crimson silk.

Pleased that we complied, and took the matter seriously, the Queen proceeded to display various articles for female adornment in bright textures such as Easterns love; but we fear the present writer is too benighted on such weighty matters to dare hazarding a guess at their value or purpose.

"Are there many of your race in Kirk-Yetholm?" we asked.

"Well," she replied, "there are lots of muggers, but the King and myself are the only real Egyptians."

Who "muggers" may be, we cannot positively say. At one time we thought the name was given to those gipsies who sold certain articles of tin or wickerwork throughout the country in summer, but now, from the indifferent tone in which the Queen spoke of them, we rather fancy that they are those gipsies whose coats-of-arms would have to bear the bar sinister for some reason or other.

As it is never wise to outstay one's welcome, especially at Court, we took an early opportunity

of saying good-night. The Queen would not let us go, however, until she had plucked a nice little posy of cottage-garden flowers—pansy, dusty miller, daisy, monthly rose and southernwood. These she gave with a hearty handshake, and the hope that we would meet the King before dark. As we went down the road musing on the interview just over we concluded that, however absurd and childish the coronation ceremony had been, when compared with a real gipsy function, yet the ridicule could not be laid upon the King and his consort; their unaffected simplicity and trust brought them out of the farce scathless.

Next morning at seven o'clock, as we were setting off to the river, we met King Charlie carrying a pitcher of milk, just as if he were an ordinary son of the village. He seemed disposed to talk, but "a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaimed a 'trouting' morn," so we had but few words.

Yet as we went along the road we thought of the Highland chief who, having shaken hands with Bonnie Prince Charlie in the '45, ever afterwards proffered his left hand to ordinary mortals;

and we wondered how we should greet our friends in future, after having shaken hands with both a King and a Queen!

The day was delightful and the sport good, so that before afternoon we had "avenged Flodden" to the extent of taking fully nine pounds' weight of English-reared trout from the chief tributary of the Till.

In the calm of the beautiful evening we drove over to Kelso, charged with pleasant memories of Yetholm and the Cheviots; and we may frankly say that, though the best trout in an angler's creel seem by some natural process always to work their way to the top, yet the place of honour on this occasion was given to the posy of a Queen!

CHAPTER VIII

OLD-TIME INCIDENTS

Sandy Welsh of Cardrona—Watching the Tweed—Stolen Pleasures—Poaching Bluff—"Fly only"—Coming Joys—"O Waken, Winds, Waken!"—Nature's Communion

BORDERERS are not greater sinners in the way of over-fishing than other men. If many of us had their temptations—rivers flowing past our door, days and weeks when outdoor work cannot be done and indoor work cannot be got—it is hard to say what we might be tempted to do.

It is true that, besides extraneous temptations, the Borderer has a strain of the raiding, roving, nomadic spirit of his forefathers still pulsing in his breast; and old Sandy Welsh, for many years stationmaster at Cardrona, was not far wrong when, answering a question, "Are there many poachers here?" he replied in his characteristic fashion, "We're a' poachers."

But Sandy was a bit of a pessimist in human

nature. He got this distrust instilled into him when he was a member of the county constabulary in the days when a part of their duty was to watch the Tweed and its tributaries for " smolt " fishers. It was a most reprehensible way of administering the law, but happily the watching is now done by special bailiffs appointed by the Tweed Commissioners.

Many a story was told by Sandy of how the fishers tried to outwit the watchers and " basket " the smolts. He, however, had one never-failing plan for finding these fish. When the creel had been examined, and it showed no sign by scales or otherwise of the presence of smolt, he invariably asked the fisher to " empty his waders " ! " And," he would triumphantly remark, " I never found it fail."

" By the by," said " Dry-fly Fisher," " is Sandy still to the fore ? "

" No, he joined the majority years ago, but many of us still possess fishing rods which he made in his leisure hours between trains, and sounder rods never came from the hands of the most famous makers.

"His tools were chiefly a saw, a knife, a file and sandpaper. Of course, his wood was carefully chosen, and it got thoroughly seasoned by lying in the station-house for years."

"Ah, well," said the Dominie, "Sandy deserves a place in our memory, for such men are getting scarce."

"You were saying," said our "Fly Busker," "that most men had a bit of the poacher in them. How do you prove that?"

"Well, did you never observe the gusto with which some most honourable men tell of how they took the chance of enjoying a cast on a bit of preserved water?"

"I distinctly recall an amusing instance of what you say," said the Veteran. "I have told you the circumstances before, but, as the parties concerned were sojourners in this district for many years, it is not inappropriate that I should tell it again."

"All right, fire away," said the Cynic. "It will likely be as true as most fishers' tales."

Making a mental note to have a word about that remark by-and-by the Veteran proceeded:

"Our friends A. and B. were fishing in a stream in the north of England which was partly preserved. On coming to one of the preserved places they hesitated a while before they could make up their minds to turn back, but the gleam of rippling water and a plunge by a feeding trout was too much for them, and in a moment they had crossed the dividing fence.

"All went well for about half-an-hour, when round a bend of the river, a short distance in front of them, they saw a keeper coming. He evidently got his eye upon them at the same moment, for he immediately quickened his pace. What was to be done?

"'Let's pretend we are deaf and dumb,' whispered A.

"No word further could be spoken; a nod of the head was all B. had time for, ere the keeper accosted them.

"'I say, sirs, did you not see the ticket down yonder?'

"A vacant stare, mutely interrogative, was all the answer vouchsafed by the culprits, who still kept casting away.

" ' I'm saying this water's preserved,' shouted the keeper, in a voice that might have been heard half-a-mile away.

" Still there was no reply, but A. pointed sadly to his lips, signifying their sore affliction. A light seemed to dawn upon the keeper at this point, and he muttered :

" ' Dummies baith, as I am a living man.'

" Meanwhile B. had moved out into deep water, and was casting far and fine to the other side.

" He was so far successful that in a cast or two he raised a fine fish, but in the circumstances it was no wonder that he failed to hook it. He was not long in raising another, the keeper meanwhile fuming impotently on the bank, for both of the anglers, though ' dumb ' for the time being, were stalwart men, and force was out of the question.

" Fish number two, however, also escaped.

" This was too much for B.'s patience, who, forgetting his dumbness, and even becoming for the moment oblivious of the keeper's presence, exclaimed :

" ' Confound it, A. I've missed him again ! ' "

"Well, what happened after that?" asked the Dry-flyer.

"Man, it spoils a good story if you round it off at the ends always. Can't you leave something for imagination to work on?"

"I suppose it would end after the manner of old Moneybags' adventure," said the Cynic.

"How was that?" we inquired.

"Oh, my old friend had got permission to fish a nice stretch of water on the condition that only fly was to be used."

"Quite right," said the Fly Champion.

"But," said the Cynic, "there was something wrong with the fish that day, and flies were 'off.' To make things worse, the river rose slightly from rain up in the hills, and 'M.,' eyeing his empty creel, felt desperate. At that moment his evil genius reminded him that he had a nice 'phantom' minnow with him that would do all that was required in the circumstances. Looking round guiltily, he hastily replaced his fly cast with a minnow trace and a gruesome 'phantom' of many hooks.

"He had made only two or three casts, however,

with this illegal fiend when his arm was roughly seized from behind, and he turned to confront an irate keeper."

"Ha! ha! In *flagrante delicto*," said the Dominie.

"Quite so; caught in the very act," said the narrator. "The keeper, holding up the spiky minnow by the trace, said, in a gruff, sarcastic voice: 'And you call this fly fishing, sir?'

"Poor old chap, what could he say for himself? As far as we could ever learn, he was speechless for a minute, then he broke out:

"'Oh—is it—nothing doing—trying for pike—I say—here's my flask!'"

"But, boys," said the Veteran, "how did sport run to-day?"

"The best day we have had," was the response.

"Better than that," said the Dominie. There was a feeling of springtime in the air; the clouds were high, and a voice seemed to be in the wind that whispered of coming joys that would make amends for a long, dragged-out winter.

"I saw snow ridges lying deep on the 'White Coomb,'" said the Cynic.

"And so you may until June is past, but it only makes our summer scents and flowers the sweeter."

"Look here," said the Minnow Champion, "we go home to-morrow; let us hear again the song you sang by the loch-side to-day when the wind went down."

Oh, that was one by Tom Tod Stoddart, whose wonderful angling with James Hogg made some stir here a few nights ago—but here goes:

"O waken, winds, waken! the waters are still,
And silence and sunlight recline on the hill;
The angler is watching, beside the green springs,
For the low, welcome sound of your wandering wings.

His rod is unwielded, his tackle's unfreed,
And the withe-woven pannier lies flung on the mead;
He looks to the lake, through its fane of green trees,
And sighs for the curl of the cool, summer breeze.

Calm-bound is the form of the water-bird fair,
And the spear of the rush stands erect in the air;
And the dragon-fly roams o'er the lily-bed gay,
Where basks the bold pike in a sun-smitten bay.

O waken, winds, waken! wherever asleep,
On cloud or dark mountain, or down in the deep:
The angler is watching, beside the green springs,
For the low welcome sound of your wandering wings."

"Yes," said the Veteran, "if an angler is not an observer of nature he has mistaken his calling, being no better than the sweltering scorcher whose aim it is to cover distance, and who cannot lift his eyes to heaven any more than the Man with the Muck Rake."

"Many of our own fraternity are no better," said the Cynic.

"You refer to the pot-hunters, I suppose?"

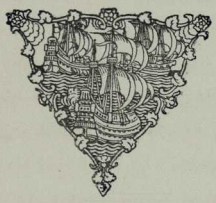
"Yes; your grumblers at less than ten pounds a day."

"Well, the time for that is past and the sooner we recognise the fact the better for our peace of mind. I would rather go home from a day on Tweed, or Clyde, or Whitadder with but five pounds of trout fairly caught in my six hours' angling, and with the scenes and sounds of hill and vale impressed upon eye and ear, than with ten pounds gained by the loss of nature's communion.

"But, boys, I'm not going to preach on this our last night at the old inn. Somehow our lives get interwoven with places we love; and our adieux would be unbearable if they did

not somehow mysteriously merge into *Au Revoirs.*"

"Thus fancy brighter thoughts can borrow
From every echo in the glen;
And anglers bear the parting sorrow
Assured that springtime comes again!"



CHAPTER IX

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Freedom—The Old Destination—The Philosophy of Jones—An Eighty-pound Salmon—A Great Storm—A Battle of the Gods—Imprisoned—"Raise we our Song once again"

FEW things bewilder one more than the sudden change from town to country. The contrast is so vivid and so striking that the mind at first fails to grasp it. The noise of the city—and the silences of the vales; the towering, man-made sky-scraper—and the majesty of the hills; the shrieks of engines and motors—and the mating-cry of the moorland birds; the bustling crowd—and the silent expanses—all these, by their sudden inrush, numb the brain and make us unable to grasp the fact that we are free!

Like the prisoners of the Bastille, who, when they got their freedom, did not know what to do with it; so the anglers of last season, wending their way to the old inn once more

GOING BACK

behind a pair of spanking bays ("Motors? Never, no more!"), looked at each other with the questioning gaze of men just waking to the fact that the hopes of months past are at last realised.

A West Indian veteran showed the same bewilderment when travelling this hill-road with us many years ago.

"Look here," he said, "what is that?"

"A heron," we replied.

Shortly afterwards he grasped our arm: "Is that a raven?"

"A carrion crow, common enough here about."

"Is it possible?" he said. "Two hours ago I was in the city of Edinburgh, and now I am in the land of hoodie-crows and herons!"

As we steadily mounted the hill the eyes of all were taking indelible impressions of each dent on the moor and bend of the road; and casual remarks on the full condition of the burns we passed showed clearly what was uppermost in the thoughts of all.

One of the party, who had journeyed the road

oftener than he cared to recall, was heard crooning in his corner :

> "As the mountain pass we view,
> Old mem'ries we renew,
> Of rare fishing days in years gone by
> With friends aye keen and true ;
> When the long, long, stiff Scots mile
> With our songs we would beguile
> As we hied to the streams in the morning !
> O, a Border burn for me, where the waters wander free ! "——

His crooning was brought to an abrupt conclusion, however, by a bend in the road disclosing the house of our destination nestling snugly down in the valley, with the blue smoke of welcome issuing from half-a-dozen of its chimneys.

What a bustle and babble and cheerful greeting arose when we at last drew up at the well-known porch ! Short time was lost ere we gathered round the table to do ample justice to the good things provided, as only the old inn can provide them ; thereafter, the table cleared and the rays of the red lamp throwing its cheerful glow on roof and walls, we drew our chairs together as of yore, and tried to persuade each other that it was

not possible we could be a year older since last we met in similar crcumstances.

Anticipations were high for the morrow, for had not one of the party taken Time by the forelock, and been a day on the water already, and did not an ashetful of yellow beauties, displayed for our delectation, bear witness that, in spite of civic worries, his right hand had not lost its cunning? We grudged him nothing!

How differently we have felt when, on other occasions, we have reached our favourite part of the river, and found that Brown and his friend had been whipping it all day! Or, how inadequate is language to express our feelings when advised to cross a couple of hills at the head of the glen to fish a loch we had never heard of, but "full of fish," and found, after a long walk and stiff climb, that two years before our visit it was drained dry!

In modern days men like their pleasures made easy, and it is not every angler who has the philosophy of Dr Jones, as shown in one of Leech's inimitable sketches. Time, five A.M. The worthy doctor is seen perched upon a wooden fence over-

hanging a flooded river; the rain falling in torrents; and the poor boy-buttons standing shivering on the banks with the bait-can in his hand.

"There now, Thomas, see the advantage of early rising. I'll be bound to say that not a member of our club is out of his bed yet!"

In angling, like in many greater things, it is the unexpected that often happens:

> "I've seen Tweed's silvery stream
> Glittering in the sunny beam,
> Grow drumlie and dark,
> As it rolled on its way."

Our philosopher with the pipe rose to this fly, and spake thus: "In nothing does one see the futility of great expectations more strikingly exemplified than in the results of many 'let' salmon fishings.

"General A. had taken a much advertised water, and after a month's pursuit of the king of fishes he happened to meet the parish minister one day, and said to him:

"'By the by, Doctor, did you ever see an eighty-pound salmon?'

"'I never in my life heard of one that weight.'

"'Well, if you'll come to dinner with me to-night I'll show you an eighty-pound salmon.'

"The minister, nothing loth, accepted the invitation, and in due time a nice salmon of about twelve pounds' weight led off the first course.

"'Now, Doctor,' said the host, 'there you behold an eighty-pound salmon!'

"The guest stared with amazement.

"'Yes,' said the General, 'the rent of the water is eighty pounds a month, and that fish is all I have got for my money!'"

Drifting, as such fitful talk ever does, with intervals of silence devoted to the pipe of peace, it was even pleasant to hear the sound of a gathering storm, as the wind broke against the gable of the house, and the rain beat upon the windows.

As expressing our thoughts, the fly-maker lifted his head, and asked the Veteran: "Have you seen many great storms here?"

"Yes," answered the Veteran, "but probably the most memorable was one in August 1884, when a thunderstorm occurred as remarkable in its intensity as it was protracted in its duration."

Then he proceeded in a kind of monologue:

"Travelled sportsmen, who knew what storms of every degree of intensity were, both at home and abroad, have told us that on the day of which I speak, the dwellers in the cool climate of Scotland had experience of a storm that would have done no discredit to the tropics."

"A grand day for fishing surely?"

Not paying any attention to the interruption, the Veteran proceeded: "Two friends were to join me in fishing the river near the 'Cleuch of the Goats,' about five miles from the old inn, and when we set out the sun shone brightly, and everything looked favourable, but just as we reached the stream there was heard a distant rumble of thunder and up the glen there was banked a dense dark haze, against which even the wings of the curlews and the lapwings seemed to flash white as they flew across the line of sight."

"Well, but what of your sport?"

"Sir, we felt awed by the ominous stillness, for every sound of nature seemed hushed by common consent. Still, we were foolhardy enough to think of fishing, but just as we were beginning there came a vivid flash of lightning followed

almost immediately by a peal of thunder that stunned us for the moment. The hills caught up the sound and tossed the echoes from glen to glen in incessant reverberations.

"These had not ceased when there was another loud peal almost overhead, followed closely by a third, until the valley became a very arena for a battle of the gods. The wind soon joined the conflict, allied with the most drenching rain we have ever been exposed to.

"There was nothing for it but to flee to a little sheepcot near at hand. There was no window, but we did not need one, for the lightning was so frequent and so bright that the place was almost constantly lit up. By this light we could see dozens of birds cowering on the rafters, and even while we looked others came flying in at the door, so tamed or so terrified by the storm that they not only perched upon our shoulders but allowed us to catch them in our hands."

"How long did the storm last?"

"In most places eight hours, but we were imprisoned in the cot for four hours, when, seeing the coach that was to convey us home coming

rapidly round the hill end, we faced the elements, and made a bee-line for it across the meadows.

"'Ca' cannie, lads, there's nae hurry; d'ye want to shuggle a' the troot rinnin' that wye?' Such was Bob the driver's greeting.'"

"And had you any trout?" asked the Dominie.

"Trout! the river was a yellow lake spreading over the moors."

We wonder did you ever compute the moral courage required to enable you to climb up to your seat on a tourist coach with nothing in your creel? "To smile as thou were wont to smile" when a jesting idiot asks, "if you would oblige the lady on the box seat with a sight of a basket of Goat Cleuch trout," requires as much fortitude as would leave an ordinary martyr with a surplus.

The hour was late, but no one thought of retiring until the strains of their annual song had made the rafters dirl.

"Raise we our song once again,
To the lochs and the streams gleaming bright,
To the burns dashing free
From the hills to the sea,
Filling each angler's soul with delight!

Raise we our song once again,
As we think of the bright days in store ;
When, with care thrown aside,
Wand'ring where loved streams glide,
We taste angling joys as of yore !

Raise we our song once again,
To all who love Nature's glad call,
Who by glen and lone hill
Hear the voices, ne'er still,
That hold the true-hearted in thrall !

Raise we our song once again,
To each of the 'old guard' so leal,
May the days yet to be,
Glow with sport, mirth and glee,
Nor may care e'er find room in his creel!"

CHAPTER X

LOCHS OLD AND NEW—TALLA

An Autumn Symposium—Border Lochs—Fishing Talla—A Motor Run—Tweed's Well—Sunset in Annandale—Patriotic Scotsmen—The Auld Scots Tongue

> "September, and the sun was low,
> The tender greens were flecked with yellow."

MOST of the foregoing sketches were written when the friends had gathered at this wayside inn for the spring fishing, but the scene is changed in this one, for the tryst was held in September, when the mood is autumnal, and the deeds are retrospective.

The heather had come, and already its bloom is almost gone. The brackens are taking on the variegated colours that frost alone can paint, and, save the robin, the song-birds are piping in feeble and listless tones. The flocks on the hills have been sadly thinned by Lammas sales, and the grouse and black-cock live a scared life, giving a wide berth to the butts on the hillside. The nuts in the hazel wood are filling, but the rowans

have nearly all disappeared, victims to the hungry attacks of birds too improvident to think of storing anything for the oncoming winter.

The rivers and mountain streams alone seem to be alive and merry; and, flowing full and fresh from the effects of the Lammas floods, they amply reward those who know the hidden nooks and willow-fringed banks where big trout hide.

The angling reports from all parts are full of doughty deeds; and, amongst the lochs in the north especially, sea trout and ferox are being caught up to a large size.

Gathered in the room of the red lamp once more. "It is remarkable," said Fly Busker, "how few lochs are to be met with in the south of Scotland."

"Ah!" said the Veteran—"but we are adding to them. Have you seen the newly made loch at Talla water?"

"That's only a pond," said the Cynic.

"Not at all; just picture to yourself a valley four miles long, hitherto good for nothing but as a haunt for snipe and peewit: now banked up three miles from the top, and enclosing a

splendid sheet of sparkling water, sixty feet deep at some places."

"I cannot abide interference with nature," said the Dominie.

"In this instance it is no interference, but a distinct enhancement," said the Veteran. "For example," he continued, "I may be pardoned for giving a personal experience, last August an esteemed friend from the south, having heard that I had got hold of a permit to fish Talla Loch, offered to motor a party of us there and back."

"Ho!" said the Cynic. "I thought motors were to be for ever debarred."

"Well," said the Veteran, "you will admit that there is a difference in the situation when you become the mud-spatterer instead of the mud-spattered. At anyrate, the Mayor, his wife and son, with the narrator and his consort, duly set out one autumn morning for Talla.

"You all know," he continued, "that there is a short route from the Cleuch of the Goats to Talla, by going up the Valley of Meggat, and, after reaching the watershed, descending by the Linns; but the Mayor would not hear of

that, proposing rather that we should make a day of it by facing a circular run of eighty miles."

"Not much time left for fishing after that," said Fly Busker, "but how did you manage?"

"Thus," continued the Veteran. "The first stage consisted of a glorious run down Yarrow, over the paddock slacks, past Traquair, with its lonely kirk and kirkyard, on through Innerleithen, up Tweedside, through Peebles, on to Lyne, Stobo, Dawick, Drummelzier, Rachan, then up Tweedsmuir to the Crook Inn, where we lunched."

"What a panorama!" said the Cynic.

"Quite so," said Fly Busker impatiently, "but what of the fishing?"

"The Crook is a cosy bield, but we could not spare time to enjoy it, for three miles farther on lay Talla Loch, and already it was one hour past noon; so once more the girn of the motor sped us on our way."

"Interference with nature," the Veteran continued. "I wish you could have seen Talla under the influence of a south-west wind, with the white-crested waves breaking joyously on the northern and eastern shores."

"And the midges biting like furies," said Cynic.

"Any boats?" inquired the Minnow Champion.

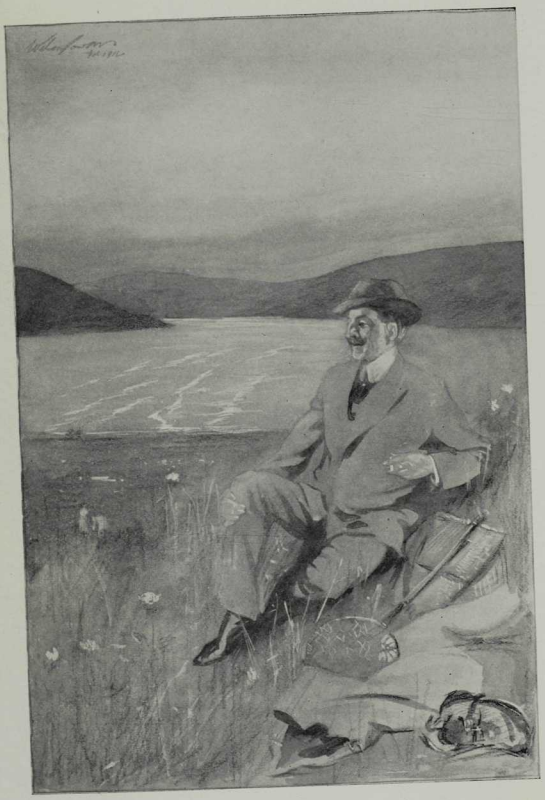
"Three or four, but in strong wind you are better to fish from the side; besides, in new lochs the trout haunt the shallower water. Well, we chose the west side, even though our worthy friend, the Laird of Menzion, had placed his private boat at our disposal."

"What did the ladies do meantime," inquired a voice, the owner of which was hidden by a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Oh! they sauntered on the hillside amongst the bracken and heather, or listened to the murmur of the streams that falls so peacefully into the loch; from time to time they passed from fisher to fisher reporting progress, always warmly protesting that they 'did not find it dull a bit.'"

"And had they any progress to report?" asked the voice.

"Just eight trout in all for the three hours we fished, yet they were beautiful specimens of the *Levenensis*, two of them were over a pound each,



TALLA LOCH

and the others averaged twelve ounces; they certainly, for gameness and beauty, were all our fancy painted them; but, lads, what were they, after all, compared with our surroundings?"

"Far up the south end of the valley in which the loch lies were to be seen the picturesque linns of old Talla Stream falling from ledge to ledge from an altitude of several hundred feet above the loch. East and west we were shut in by the grass-ribbed, lofty hills of Meggathead and Gameshope, while northward, in the blue distance, were seen the sentinel hills of Tweed.

"Yes," he continued, "we have known this valley when it was little better than a swamp, and now, say what you will, we consider the loch has added another jewel to the crown of lovely Tweedside, and, in a sense, even to that of Dunedin itself."

"Oh yes," said Cynic, "it is always the 'scenery,' or 'the poetry of the place.' Give me the poetry of a weel-filled creel and you may have the gift of all the rest."

"Well, what about your return?" asked Fly Busker.

"Oh, we returned to the Crook for tea; and then off to the Cleuch of the Goats by Tweed's Well, Devil's Beef Tub, Moffat and Birkhill. We may be pardoned for a bit of rhapsody, but who that has seen the view of Annandale from the summit at Tweed's Well can ever forget it?

"At your feet lies the fertile strath stretching away down to Birrenswark near the Solway; and broken up by the silver river gliding through its yellow fields and verdant woods. Overhead, a rainbow-tinted sky, fading with the setting sun, and all around the scent of heath and fragrant wayside flowers.

"Believe me," the Veteran continued: "it is living through days like that of our trip to Talla that makes all anglers prize their memories. One of our party, the youngest, is now dwelling near the Orange River; yet, amid all the excitement of his new environment, ofttimes his thoughts will hark back to the green glens and hills, and the sparkling burns and streams of Tweed and Moffatdale as he saw them on that memorable autumn day."

"Ay," said the Minnow Champion; "it's a

bonnie country Scotland—especially," he added, with native caution, "if you get it in fair weather."

"Fair or foul, we stand up for the land of the mountain and the flood; and the more we see of her, the better we love her!"

"Yes," said the Dominie, "it's a real patriotic work that has been done of late by the issue of such excellent histories of Scotland for school use. No one can say now that we have to read Scottish history through English spectacles."

"Why don't you get them done in braid Scots?" asked the Cynic.

"Because the auld Scots tongue has been so neglected that it is now almost unknown to you and your class."

"Fancy speaking of the vernacular of our country as a 'dialect,' as a very superior professor in our 'tounis college' did lately."

"As a kind of pigeon-English espoused by nigger minstrelsy," put in Fly Busker.

"Well," said Cynic, "you are multiplying societies and clubs of every kind; why don't

you start a club where nothing but braid Scots is spoken ? "

"We are doing all we can to preserve our national melodies," replied Veteran ; "and I don't think it would be an absurd idea to do as much for our language. There is a copious and expressive vocabulary of Scots that might well be incorporated into the English tongue much to its enrichment."

"Quite so," said the Dominie. "I would rather say or sing, 'Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,' than 'Beautiful little creature, gentle little creature' ; and words like 'gowan,' 'mavis,' 'lintie' get round our hearts and tongues quicker than 'daisy,' 'thrush' or 'linnet.' "

"The sentiments of thousands of Scots all the world over," said Veteran. "But, oh ! we are sair hudden doun by fashion. "By the by," he continued, "did you ever see our answer to the Scottish Text Society anent this very subject ? "

"Oh, fire away," said Cynic. "We might have known what was coming."

Not deigning a reply, Veteran began to chant in a minor key:

"Ah! is it true, what some folk say,
That Scotia's tongue is wede away
Like snaw-drift meltin' on the brae
'Fore risin' sun?
That Rymour lore o' Ercildoune
Maun co'er afore the Southron loon,
An' ballants, a' the warld abune,
Their day ha'e run?

That Barbour's 'Bruce,' King James's 'Quair,'
An' Minstrel Henry's 'Wallace' rare,
Wi' muckle mair o' makkar lear,
Are tint for aye?
An' that the sang o' Otterburne,
Whaur Douglas did bold Percy spurn,
Has slipped awa', nor sigh nor mourn
Are heard to-day?

An' wha daur sing o' Flodden field,
Whaur valiant Scots stood like a shield
Roun' gallant King, an' nane wad yield
Save wi' his life;
When mountaineer, an' Border lad,
Ae shroud fand 'neath the Highland plaid,
An' by the banks o' Till were laid
At close o' strife?

What tongue should sing the Charlie days,
When chief an' clan frae Scotia's braes
Did Stuart standard ance mair raise
Free to the wind?

The Doric tongue, an' that alane,
Can tune the thocht to days by-gane,
An' mak' us a' brave deeds fu' fain
Bring back to mind!

An' when we dream o' pastoral days,
By Southland glen or Highland braes,
Wha wad forget bauld Allan's lays
Sae true an' sweet?
Or bards of eld, wha's names are lost;
They roamed the land, a tunefu' host,
An' made auld Scotia's name a boast
Where Scotsmen meet!

An' when for freedom's sangs man yearns,
To Scotia's Bard supreme he turns,
An' in the accents grand o' Burns
He finds his quest;
For there, like mine o' gowden ore,
Is treasured up a nation's store
O' Doric wit an' ancient lore,
Auld Scotia's best!

Then wha wad venture to rehearse
Sir Walter's gifts in prose or verse,
Save in the tongue that through the Merse
Still hauds its ain?
His fervour sent a fiery cross
O' patriot zeal o'er hill an' moss,
Till Scots waked up to fend the loss
O' Scotland's name!"[12]

CHAPTER XI

LOCHS OLD AND NEW—SKENE

The Veteran becomes reminiscent—Dreary Solitudes—Hill Climbing—The Trout of Loch Skene—Sun and Shadow—Strange Phenomena—The Cynic—Fascination of Angling in Strange Places

AFTER a period for refreshment according to their different tastes, and a somewhat animated discussion anent the merits of dry-fly and wet-fly fishing, with a critical examination of some of Fly Busker's home-made "killers" for the former purpose, "By the by," said the Naturalist, "have we not heard you recount an adventure you had at a hill loch not far from the head of Moffat water?"

"Oh," said the Veteran, "you refer to a visit I paid a few years ago to Loch Skene at the base of the White Coombe."

Suggesting that they might need "nightcaps" before he finished, but not saying whether these

were literal or figurative articles, our friend proceeded in monologue style:

"Hid away at the converging points of Dumfriesshire, Selkirkshire and Peeblesshire, Skene is as difficult of access as the most fastidious of modern pedestrians can reasonably desire. Personally, we like to approach the loch from the north by way of Winterhope Burn. In doing so you leave the Meggat valley at the 'knowes,' and after fishing upstream for two or three miles, take to the hill on your right, a mile or so past the shepherd's house, when, after a thirty minutes' gradual ascent, you come in sight of the loch. That, however, is not quite the same as being at the lochside. Before you stretches a wide expanse of peaty moorland rent into dark cliff-like hags, and interspersed here and there with swampy bogs and treacherous 'well-e'es.' Happy for you if, possessing the sportsman's instinct, you are able to ferret out the one safe path, which, winding among clumps of heather and cliffs of peat, brings you at length to the firmer ground of the lochside."

"I always said these protuberances on your

cranium meant 'locality,'" said the Cynic: "but for all that, there will be a search party out for you one of these days."

Not heeding the interruption, the Veteran continued:

"Most people, however, avoid the dreary solitudes of Winterhope and seek Loch Skene by Birkhill, at the head of Moffat water. Rising in front of the cottage bearing this name is a massive hill which stretches north-west until it terminates in the base of the White Coombe. Were you to follow the hill westward you would be brought to a standstill by the striking gorge known as Dobb's Linn; but as the path is pretty distinct at the beginning of your journey, there is no excuse for losing the trail just yet. Soon the track gets lost, or intersected by other tracks, and you have just to fix your eye upon a distant peat-cliff or a clump of bracken, and make for it through every obstacle. This may take you through a gully hemmed in on both sides by cliffs of peat, or up a sloping bank spread with sturdy heather; but, setting 'a stout heart to a stey brae,' you ere long reach the ridge

from whence you get your first glimpse of Loch Skene."

"It's grand to be young and supple," said the Minnow Champion. "For my part all the hills seem a good deal steeper than they were twenty years ago."

"It is a trite saying," continued the narrator, "that the influence of historic scenes upon us depends largely upon the knowledge, sympathy or imagination we bring to them. Much of our Border scenery requires to be viewed by eyes touched by the magician's wand ere it is seen to be enchanted ground; and those who expect to find Loch Skene a miniature Loch Lomond will be mightily disappointed. Viewed from a distance it generally seems smaller than you expected: a mile long by a third of a mile broad; but if you fish along the south shore from whence the chief outflow is, to where the little burn flows in at the Coombe Craig bay, you will find it a good deal longer than the proverbial Scotch mile—which, as everybody knows, is 'a mile and a bittock.'

"In viewing the loch from the distant heights, you are prevented by intervening hillocks and

an elevated grassy border near the margin of the moor from catching the chief effect of the scene —namely, the boulder-strewn shore, the lonely barren islets, and the mysteriously dark waters in which they are set. Then the recesses of the Coombe Craig into which the water flows at the north end of the loch are so suggestive of a huge extinct crater that the mind is thrown in upon the imagination; and this, working on the desolate aspect of the scene, soon covers the hills and lake with imagery which can never be separated from them in your mind as long as you live.

"To an angler, the gameness as well as the beauty of the Loch Skene trout is not the least of its attractions. The view from the White Coombe, two thousand seven hundred feet high, is glorious, and the awe-inspiring crags can never be forgotten; but we confess that these alone would never have drawn us ''mang moors an' mosses mony, O,' for a dozen times at least, had there not also been the hope of encreeling some of the dark-spotted beauties that tenant the mysterious loch. But oh, they are fickle, fickle! Doubtless it is the singular atmospheric con-

ditions, with their sudden and frequent changes, that cause this fickleness. Happy is the angler who goes to Loch Skene expecting little, for he is rarely disappointed."

(Here the narrator was interrupted by Cynic's pipe dropping on the floor, the monologue having failed to keep him awake for the last quarter of an hour. Muttering something about "the strong air," he composed himself somewhat too ostentatiously to listen while his friend proceeded.)

"Last year we took a friend from London over the Birkhill path to the loch. He was very anxious to see the place in one of its dark moods, and the threatening appearance of the morning gave full promise that he would not be disappointed. When we reached the loch, lo! the wind had fallen, the sun shone gloriously in an unclouded sky, and the placid water, instead of being black, was blue! The very trout seemed mocking us as they swam through the calm loch, with their back-fins out of the water and their tails switching now and then in derision at the flies we tempted them with in vain. However, fine tackle, small flies well sunk, and a plentiful

stock of patience and perseverance eventually accounted for the possession of some nice trout; although, truly, it was a day of small things. Previous to this my friend had remarked that, instead of being the 'dark Loch Skene' of Sir Walter, it seemed rather a choice spot to bring ladies to for a picnic, when, lo! against the sky-line three figures appeared, dressed with sailor hats, white blouses and dark cycling skirts. 'Ladies, by all that's unexpected!' 'Yes, and with fishing rods.' It just needed such a vision to make our expectation of hair-breadth escapes and stirring adventures among the slime-covered water-holes and treacherous bogs of Loch Skene a sunlight fiasco."

"Are these water-holes so very deep as you suggest?" asked the Dominie.

"We have often when crossing the hills with the rod up, plunged it into the grass-bordered well-e'e, and could not touch bottom," replied the Veteran.

"Very gruesome and mysterious," muttered the Cynic, arousing himself opportunely.

"Very different was the scene that Mr B. of Kirkstead and the narrator witnessed in the second

week of last August. Everyone will remember what a glorious summer we had: how for weeks not a drop of rain fell in the southern counties, and how in consequence the waters fell far below their normal level and the pastures became bare and sickly. Well, it was just when these conditions were about to change that the day set for our visit to Loch Skene drew near. This outing had been arranged for at the close of the previous season, and—as these prospective though far-off pleasures will do—had sometimes crossed our mind even while the dark days of winter ran their weary course.

"Ah, the solace of memory and the joy of anticipation during the dark days! Many an angler and nature-lover is a veritable 'prisoner of Hope' even while he paces the city streets busy with the avocations of a man diligent in business. Yet he has a hidden source of joy, for pictures fill his mind of distant scenes, and before his vision there rise hill and valley, loch and stream, wrapped in the glory of alternate sunshine and shadow. Even the sensations aroused by the moan of the wind through the mountain gorge,

or the piping of the wild birds on moor and hill thrill him as if they were falling on his ear at the moment, instead of being echoes from the caves of memory.

"'Varra true, sir, varra true,' as the immortal shepherd would have said," interposed the Naturalist. "It's a graund facultee is the memory, especially when egged on by the imagination."

Not staying to analyse this equivocal speech, the narrator proceeded:

"Our approach to Loch Skene on the occasion under consideration was by way of a fence that divides Chapelhope from Birkhill; and although it leads sheer up the face of the hill for a considerable distance, yet the stiff climb is compensated for by the fact that you are less likely to lose your way; and, further, it has the distinction of being the route always taken and recommended by 'Wullie' Richardson, the son of Tibbie Shiels. As we have indicated, the weather had been saving up for a big break; and, as luck would have it, the day of our outing saw its commencement. Bad weather, however, matters little to the angler, and we truly believe if his

holidays were all sunshine and blue sky he would be the most unhappy of mortals.

"Picture us, then, leaving our respective abodes, with an east wind charged with drizzling rain blowing about our ears, and with a dense grey mist drifting over hill and moor, and now and then closing in overhead and shutting out every prospect but what lay within a few hundred yards from our feet.

"Had our destination been Ettrick or Talla, or any other of the desirable streams within easy reach, doubtless we should have deferred our visit till a more favourable day; but the spell of Loch Skene was upon us, and even a return journey of twenty miles was nothing when our honour was at stake to see the day through.

"It is always interesting to observe how the dwellers in the district look upon such erratic proceedings. The half-tolerant pity in, 'Ye're no' gaun to the loch the day?' has its counterpart in the canny caution of the weather-sage: 'Oh, it micht keep up if it disna come waur.' Well, it came 'waur' with a vengeance; and before we reached the loch it was quite immaterial

whether we had waterproofs or even waders. The mist had not settled down upon the loch as we once saw it—the wind and the rain prevented that; but the surrounding hills were enshrouded to within two hundred feet or so of their base, while the waves kept dashing against the islets and boulders of the south-west shore in a manner destructive of the idea of any fly less than a dragon-fly being seen even by the most keen-eyed trout. Still, at the east end of the loch the wind was kept from striking the water with such violence through it being sheltered by the Coombe Craig, so here we made our first cast, having previously chosen opposite sides and agreed upon a whistling signal to intimate when a trout was landed."

"Strange to say, at first we met with rare sport; and had the conditions of wind and rain kept the same, we are confident that a record 'take' would have been the result. But—ah! that 'but'—the wind fell and the rain almost ceased; and then the mist—that fell destroyer of an angler's hopes, which had only been biding its time—at length got its innings. It was a memor-

able phenomenon that followed. Gradually the dull grey vapour crept down the hill and rolled over loch and moor, bringing darkness and chill in its progress until the sombre, leaden-coloured water ceased to break, but simply rose and fell like a vast lake of molten metal, suggesting vividly a picture of the time, ages ago, when in reality the crater near us burst with the surging lava that seethed and bubbled at this very spot.

"The deepening gloom made the silence oppressive, and one felt startled when a stone was dislodged by some creature up the heights, or when the eerie cry of a bird came from over the moor. You felt that, somehow, man had no place there. This was brought home to us by the significant behaviour of a weasel that ran out from some stones in the bank near by, and coolly took a drink at the place where we were wading. After refreshing himself at his leisure he returned to his den, and, facing about, with nothing but his head and neck protruding from the hole, he steadily stared us out of countenance with his bright but wicked eyes.

"The horror of thick darkness that was gathering round us made such incidents trivial; and on lifting our eyes we were spellbound by the sight that met them. The great cavity at the north end of the loch was being slowly banked up by a dense black mist that crept down from the heights and covered every object as with a funeral pall. Had this great formless mass been suddenly rent by lightning, or had its approach been heralded by wild thunder peals, it would only have seemed that such accessories were fitting and natural; but the silence grew more oppressive, and, singularly enough, there fell on the ear at long intervals the hoarse croak of a raven.

"Looking back upon the scene thus described, with the recollection of the great thunderstorm that visited the south of Scotland four days later, little imagination is required to fancy that it was within the awful black curtain which hid the Coombe Craig that the spirits of the air were convened to plan the storms which eventually broke up our glorious summer."

(The company were startled at this point by

the Cynic asking drowsily, "Is that not someone knocking?"

All listened intently, but nothing was heard save the familiar moaning of the wind of September as it broke on the east gable of the inn. Half suspecting that the Cynic's interruption was prompted by a spirit of mischief, someone quieted him for a while with the aid of a sofa cushion, and the narrator proceeded.)

"Continuing to wade along the lochside, we soon felt the water grow much colder; but we paid little heed to that, as our attention was taken up by the singular antics of the shoals of trout that swam hither and thither all over the loch. They seemed under the influence of some unusual atmospheric phenomenon, and, quite regardless of our presence, would come swimming with back-fin out of the water almost to our feet. However, they had no intention of feeding; they were too disturbed for that. So the day wore on, and sadly few were the whistling signals that hailed my friend far up the other side of the loch.

"We recall one very striking incident that happened just as the sky lightened away in the west

towards evening. On a hillock where the burn flows from the loch that eventually makes the beautiful and picturesque waterfall known as the Grey Mare's Tail, the figure of a man suddenly appeared, bold and distinct against the western sky; but he as suddenly disappeared, and was seen no more.

"'The e'enin' brings a' hame,' and as we wended our way across the moor it was found that my friend's experiences that day had been much the same as our own. Yet, in spite of light creels and soaking garments, we both agreed that it were better to live one such day than a hundred of the common type and when last we met he was keen for another day."

"The old, old story," said the Dominie. "Hope springs eternal in the 'fisher's' breast!"

CHAPTER XII

A SPRING FLOOD

(*which was responsible for two unexpected sketches*)

A Gale and Flood—Imprisoned all Day—Idle Contrivances—Scouting by Champion and Busker—Ending in an Otter Hunt by the Champion

It was a morning never to be forgotten. The wind had howled and moaned about the gables of the old house all night, and when we cautiously drew back the blind of our room the scene that met our gaze sent us shivering back to bed again with the desponding expectation of staying there all day. The floodgates of the clouds seemed to have burst, and with a strong west wind blowing down the valley, the rain fell in slanting torrents that completely obscured the forms of the opposite hills.

Already the river was in high flood, and the turbid yellow water could be seen here and there breaking the banks, and winding like a sinuous creature over the adjoining haughs. Every-

thing was drip, drip, drip! and not a living creature to be seen.

Yesterday, the hills were spotted with young lambs, and the air was vocal with the songs of birds. Now, neither lamb nor bird was seen or heard, and we seemed to have taken a step back to midwinter. . . .

After a while someone seemed to be stirring. Tap, tap, tap! on several doors in succession. Ah, it is the Veteran, who usually acts as "knocker up" for the party, and who, truth to tell, usually gets anything but thanks for his trouble. Judging by the sounds that are greeting his visits this morning, he seems to be getting less gratitude than ever. However, anglers on holiday are not lie-a-beds, so it was but half-an-hour after our usual breakfast-time when we all gathered in the public room to talk over our plans for the day.

Fox hunters during a frost are not to be compared to anglers in a flood. The irony of the plight of the latter is, that they are mastered by the element they delight in! Do what we might, and try how it looked from every window in turn,

there was but one conclusion: "O, the dreary, dreary moorland!"

A voice was heard striving to give a humorous turn to the situation: "O, to-morrow will be Friday, and we'll catch no fish to-day. O, to-mor——" But a well-aimed slipper brought the song to an abrupt ending.

Various were the devices tried to pass the time. Fly Busker was seen seated by the window, with feather and hook in hand, making irresistible "killers"; Minnow Champion had produced some "tackle," as he called it, consisting of spiky little fishes of most malevolent appearance; Naturalist had got hold of the petal of a wild violet, and with a magnifying lens was enjoying exciting sport; Dominie was busy with correspondence long in arrear; Professor dozing over a book; while, from a distant room, Veteran was heard engaged—as Cynic put it—in "torturing the piano"!

Anglers may be patient at the riverside, but they are the most impatient of mortals when forced to stay indoors. Bridge, bagatelle, carpet bowls were each tried in turn; but they nearly

drove the Cynic out to face the storm when he mildly suggested a nice little game at "ping pong"!

At last someone suggested that volunteers might be called for to go out and report; and at once the Minnow Champion and Fly Busker offered their services as scouts.

Clad in waders and waterproofs they made a valiant show, but in less than half-an-hour they were back like half-drowned rabbits, with little to report, save that the river was running from bank to brae, no longer water—but liquid mud.

But optimism won't daunt.

"It will be grand for minnow for a week to come," said the Champion gleefully.

"Ay, but what about dry-fly fishing?" asked the Busker dolefully.

"Oh, never mind, you'll maybe bag some drowned rabbits and hares," said Champion. "I saw two or three carried past amongst other flotsam and jetsam."

"Hares!" replied F.B. "I tell you the creature we saw down by the scaurs was an otter."

"My dear fellow, I know otters in all circumstances, and have hunted them again and again in the far south."

"Oho!" joined in the voice of the Cynic, "let us hear the Champion's adventures when otter hunting."

"Agreed, agreed," we all shouted. Our modest friend demurred at first, but finally it was settled that if there was no hope of getting out of doors after dinner we should hear an account of the Champion's last otter hunt.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHAMPION'S OTTER HUNT

The Meet—Features peculiar to such Gatherings—The Hunters—The Chase—Grand Dogs—An Unexpected Kill

QUITE an unusual stir was made in the county town of Dumfries one August morning, when the news went round that the Carlisle otter hounds were coming for a day's hunt on the Nith.

Up to this time I had never seen an otter hunt; my earliest impressions in connection with that sport being a picture of a Highlander (clan something or another) poising an animal coloured green on a long spear coloured red, as if the ordinary way to capture otters was to leister them like salmon, and the ordinary dress of the sportsman—kilts.

There was quite a crowd at the station awaiting the arrival of the hounds, and an air of excitement pervaded all as the time drew near when the train should be due.

On the platform were representatives of all classes in the district, including a considerable number of ladies. Many of those intending to take part in the hunt carried long sticks like alpenstocks, and some of the ladies even had costumes made up for such occasions, dark blue serge being the favourite material.

As the train steamed into the station we were greeted with a deep, growling chorus from the hounds, which were enclosed in a van specially constructed for their conveyance. The place at which the hunt was to begin was Auldgirth, a few miles farther up the river, so, without further delay, the crowd entered the train and proceeded on their journey. On our arrival, the first to alight were two huntsmen in gay dress of scarlet coat and peaked velvet caps, who at once proceeded to get the dogs safely detrained and into the road that led to the river.

The scene at this point was a stirring one—bright sunshine, refreshing foliage arching overhead; a bracing breeze; in the foreground a pack of forty dogs eagerly baying to be set to work, and now and then giving tongue in a dismal,

howl—the hunstmen busy directing all with whip and bugle. Behind came the crowd, and here some striking features, peculiar to such gatherings, came prominently into view.

First was to be seen the old sportsman, long past his threescore years and ten, but erect and lithe as a youth, and grasping his long crook as firmly as his forefather might have done his spear at raid or foray. Accompanying him were two young ladies carrying alpenstocks, and chatting and laughing gaily in anticipation of the run by the river.

A cluster of county gentlemen were pretty well to the front, and following them, without much thought of precedence, came the mixed lot that the love of a rare and exciting sport never fails to bring together from far and near.

My attention was specially taken up by two or three men who seemed too absorbed in the anticipation of what was coming to heed anyone. They were on the fringe of the crowd nearest to the dogs, and seemed to have an unauthorised but tolerated function to discharge in the hunt.

Such men are to be met in connection with all

kinds of sport, but somehow their characteristics are seen most conspicuously in all matters that pertain to dogs and horses. They reminded me of the half-witted man of whom the story is told that, from following every fox hunt in the county, hunting became a mania with him, and he greeted every person he met with the all-important question: "Confess ye saw him, Confess ye saw him"!

In spite of, or perhaps because of, a distinct nomadic look about the men I speak of, my sympathies were enlisted on their behalf, and I was not surprised to learn that no hunt is considered complete without them. Now and then they volunteered a remark with becoming deference to the huntsmen; but usually their language was limited to exhortations of a more or less explosive character addressed to any dog lagging behind the pack.

On coming to Auldgirth Bridge it was agreed to hunt up the river, so the dogs swam to the south bank, while the crowd, with the exception of the huntsmen, followed on the north side. What a howling set up! And at what a pace the dogs

ran along the riverside. If anyone on our side of the river had the impression that otter hunting was a sport for dandies, they very soon got that notion knocked out of them: for stumbling into hidden holes, and tripping over tree roots, with an occasional plunge into a sedgy burn, made one sigh for his fishing waders and shabbiest coat.

A gentleman in a tall hat, who had evidently simply come to see the start, was so carried away by the prevailing excitement that he began trotting along the bank of the river with the rest of us. Soon, however, he was missed, and on looking back I saw him standing in a little clearing amongst the trees, ruefully gazing at something in his hand, which turned out to be the remnant of the aforementioned hat, crushed out of all shape by an underhanging branch of a tree.

The working of the dogs was quite a revelation to me, and their individual characteristics were seen in ways both interesting and peculiar. For instance, the younger ones kept pressing on impatiently and even impetuously, while the old stagers nosed along deliberately and with caution. One veteran in particular would frequently stop,

and, sitting on his haunches, give utterance to a most blood-curdling howl, as if for long he had had something on his mind but now the moment had come when he must make a clean breast of it.

There were two or three little terriers that worked hardest of all. These creatures are not of the otter-hound breed, but, as in this case, of the common Scotch or Skye species. They are required for attacking the otter in his holt beneath rocks or tree roots, and right gamely do they face up their fierce and dangerous foe.

To a novice the fussiness of these terriers was most amusing. Not a hole where only a rabbit might enter but they had their nose in it; not a tree root or bank of decaying leaves but they searched them in passing with an air of importance and knowingness that was only saved from being extremely ludicrous by their purpose-like method and ceaseless activity.

Meanwhile, we on the north bank were getting warmed to the work too, all the more so as it was evident that the scent was strong. Presently we came to a broad pool, deep and brown —for there had been rain up the country two

days before—where grew some very large beech-trees with their roots spreading laterally along the bank, and even out into the river.

Some of the dogs passed on, but two or three of the knowing ones swam up and down the pool in a manner that showed their prey was near.

We were now all aroused to a high pitch of excitement, and several men, and even two or three of the ladies, actually jumped into the water and began prodding underneath the banks with their sticks and alpenstocks.

The huntsmen held a brief consultation, and then called up a little Skye terrier, directing it underneath the thick roots of a tree that spread octopus-like over a deep part of the pool.

We could hear the game little fellow yelping and barking as if attacking something, and soon, after we had passed two or three minutes of suspense, he came out with his nose all torn and bleeding, but gamer than ever, judging by his movements.

The noise grew louder after this, and the whole colour of the scene was intensified by a fine silvery salmon leaping sheer out of the water, as

if endeavouring to escape from some foe. It was evident that the otter had been dislodged from his holt under the roots of the beech-tree, and was swimming for his life.

We now realised the force of the complaint about the river being too heavy and too dark for successful otter hunting. Had it been of normal level we should have seen every movement, both of otter and of dogs, but now all concerned had to work by instinct and not by sight.

Still, it was evident that the scent was strong, and as the dogs swam up the river from pool to pool, and the enthusiasts on the banks and in the river kept splashing the water amid a babel of voices, it was impossible for even the most phlegmatic not to catch something of the prevailing excitement.

Shortly after this we came to a place where a half-dry ditch broke the line of the north bank, and here the dogs seemed somewhat checked, for some ran inland, while others kept to the main stream. The younger huntsman favoured the idea that the otter had gone inland, while

the older one gave it as his opinion that the ditch was an old scent, and that the otter might have been along it in the morning to a pretty big pond that lay fully half-a-mile away.

"But try your joogement," he said to his mate, "try your joogement"; and so the latter sped away with most of the hounds, after what proved to be a cold scent.

On the return of these skirmishers a consultation was held, and as no trace of the otter was to be found anywhere, owing to the discoloured condition of the water having favoured his escape, it was determined to proceed down the river to the place where we first started.

This accordingly we did, though not without the dogs breaking away after a false or a cold scent.

On our arrival at Auldgirth Bridge most of the company seemed to have had enough of the sport for a day, and so they broke off and went their several ways. Still, a few of us held by the hounds, and were rewarded by finding that even in otter hunting it is the unexpected that often happens, for at a time when we were trotting

along the bank, and thinking how ridiculous we should appear if seen by any of our city friends, just at this moment we were startled by the hounds giving tongue in unmistakable music, and before some of us could get up to the spot where the sound was loudest, we saw the chief huntsman rescue the body of a somewhat measly-looking young otter from the jaws of the hounds.

Evidently the creature had been caught napping, for it was seized in the wood at a considerable distance from the river.

The day was now nearly done, so the hounds were called off and taken back to the road which led to the station. The huntsman went in front in triumph, with our fourteen-pound cub hung over his shoulders as a lady might wear a collarette. The others of us fell into something of the same order that we observed in the morning, and so ended our first otter hunt.

. . . . . .

At the close of this contribution from our own Champion there were cordial but ironical congratulations from the knights of the red

lamp that he had come out of such a perilous adventure unscathed.

"Have you no song ready to chronicle such doughty deeds?" inquired the diligent Fly Busker of the Veteran.

"You don't think we carry such productions about in a wallet, like a ballad singer?" replied our balladist. "But did you ever see any of the songs of Foster of Coldstream, the close friend of the Ettrick Shepherd?"

"Not one," said Fly Busker in a somewhat crestfallen tone.

"Ah, well, make haste to become acquainted with his songs of sport, sell your golf clubs and buy the modest book in which they are enclosed, for the longest winter night would be all too short if in fancy you roamed the southland streams in the company of genial Foster of Coldstream."

"Well," said the Dominie, "lilt us a stave or two, just in keeping with the Champion's new ploy of 'A-hunting we will go.'"

After some demur about "mists" and "step-

ping into a moss-covered spring," the Veteran began:

"When the grey morning mist in the glen lies at rest,
And the bright summer sun in full splendour is dress'd,
While each far mountain top in his ray seems to be
An island of gold on a silvery sea.
Hark! the hunters already are down from the hill,
With their otter-dogs tracking each streamlet and rill;
And the voice of each echo replies to the sound
Of the musical bay of the bold Otter-hound.

The 'vents' grow more frequent, the music more deep,
And scarce from the surface the otter can keep;
While gallant and staunch the whole pack make a rush,
As his form from the pool stirs the wild willow-bush.
The battle now rages, the game brought to bay,
The wounded dogs yelling and limping away;
But the point of a spear pins him fast to the ground,
And his blood is the spoil of the water-bred hound!

Still like spells of romance o'er my spirit is cast,
The sports that I loved and the scenes that are past—
When with hound at my heel, or my angle in hand,
I wandered the wilds of my own border land;
And shared my repast at the streamlet or spring.
With stalwart Will Faa, the brave old Gipsy King;
And heard him recite to the sportsmen around,
The feats of his youth with the brave Water-hound.[32]

"You may sing as blithely as you please about otters and dogs, but I consider the pastime cruel and barbarous." This from the Professor, who seemed to have been dozing all the time that the

Champion and the Veteran had been holding the ear of the house.

"May the otter not have as much fun out of the chase as it is said the fox has?" queried Fly Busker.

"They both take a strange way of showing it," said Cynic.

"Well, I should not like to see the varmint exterminated," said the Champion, "but he's a villain amongst the fish."

We remember fishing a stream in Arran, and meeting with an interesting islander, who pointed to a flat stone standing a few inches above the water.

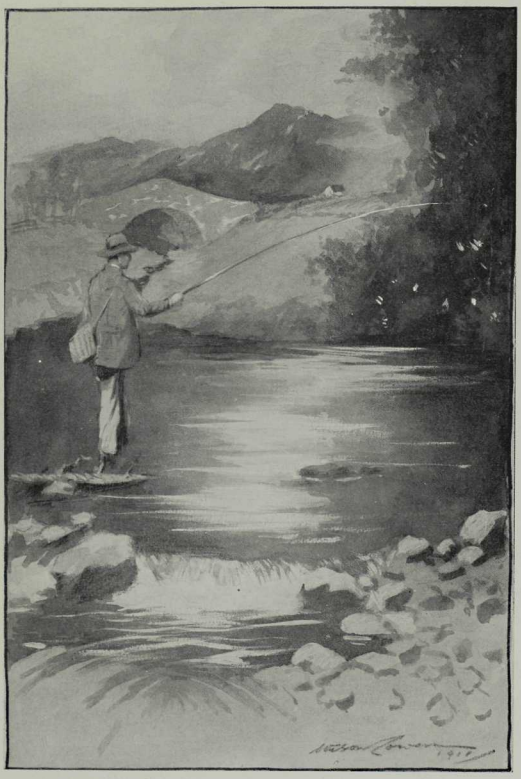
"Mony a time do I get my breakfast there," he said, "for when I look oot of a morning, again, and again div I see a graund saummon lying on the tap o' that stane, wi' only an otter's bite oot o' the shouther!"

"I think the Professor should contribute something from his own wallet to atone for his cold reception of the otter hunt," said Champion, as he tried one of his famous "break-downs" to restore circulation.

"Well, the wind of to-day has somehow sent my thoughts back to the storms I have encountered in the northern isles when the equinox was at its height. If I were accustomed to your *vivâ voce* style of narration I might venture to supplement the notes on Shetland given some time ago by my friend the Veteran."

"Oh, come away," said the Cynic, "*noblesse oblige*; besides," he muttered under his breath, "in such a day we'll stand anything!"

"The most villainous, rat-trap-looking animal destroyer I ever saw was set for otters amongst the rocks of Burra Firth," said the Veteran. "But pardon me, Professor, I delay your contribution."



THE LAND OF HOODIE-CRAWS AND HERONS

CHAPTER XIV

TROUT FISHING WITH THE PROFESSOR IN ULTIMA THULE

The Fascination of Shetland—Wild Seas to be crossed—Grand Sporting Traditions—Lonely Voes and Rocky Coasts—Sea Trout on the Run—Picturesque Bits in Unst—Splendid Sport amongst Brown Trout—A Great Fishing Future for Shetland

"It is a far cry" from the metropolis of Scotland to the most northern isle of the British dominions, in quest of sport, and yet when we consider the congested state of the free rivers in the south, and the spirit of exclusiveness which is creeping over the rivers and lochs of the north, the wonder is, that anglers have not discovered the resources of *Ultima Thule* long ago.

Lying amid two great oceans the Shetland archipelago has always been considered the natural haunt of the brave and beautiful sea trout, the *salmo trutta* of the naturalist. And little wonder. The great voes which run for miles

into the land—the broad, sheltered bays, and the rocky shores—are simply ideal resorts for such a rover.

Nor are the inland attractions for the angler a shade less than those of the coast. True, the white trout is not to be met with excepting in the early autumn season; but the brown lochs and the dark, sluggish burns are well stocked with the common trout (*salmo fario*), which for gameness and quality are all that a sportsman could desire.

Anglers are proverbially ruminating creatures, and should at any time the "take" be "off," they will find an ample recompense if they turn their thoughts for a while to the romantic and deeply fascinating history of the land in which they sojourn. The late Dr Corrie's able work on "Shetland" gives ample food for reflection. But before we can either ply the rod or exercise the memory on Norseman or Dutchman, Viking or Jarl, we must first get through Sumburgh Roost, the very mention of which recalls sensations that make the sound of the dinner bell almost as dismal as that of a foghorn.

Mark you, it is the "Roost" we refer to, and not Sumburgh "Head," which has quite other associations.

Who does not remember the time when first they read "The Pirate," and made acquaintance for life with the grand old Udaller, Magnus Troil, and his winsome daughters, Minna and Brenda ?

It may be that Mordaunt and Cleveland scarcely came up to our ideal as lovers for such rare maidens of Thule ; but our thrill of excitement at every appearance on the scene of Norna of Fitful Head more than made up for their shortcoming.

Well, it was with these memories flitting through my mind that our stout ship swept up the roost in the grey morning light ; the famous headland frowning upon us amid drenching rain.

Lerwick and its splendid bay were reached about six A.M., and as our boat for Unst did not start until three hours later there was ample time for a stroll along the quaint streets of the chief town of Shetland.

The impressions made upon our mind by this old-world, self-contained, wind-blown place were distinctly kindly; and although there was "an ancient and fish-like smell" about the boats that were so much at home as actually to nestle in some cases beneath the very windows, yet you accepted it all as a part of the natural order of things, and would have been disappointed had it been less unconventional.

The trout-fishing of the "Mainland," as the island upon which Lerwick stands is called, includes resorts such as Clusta, Spiggie and Brouster, the latter a chain of lochs which are connected by the only stream of any size in the whole of Shetland's hundred isles.

The Rev. John Russell, in his book, "Three Years in Shetland," remarks: "Sea trout ascend almost every stream in the country to spawn. . . . They generally ascend in autumn when the brooks are swollen with rains, but they are to be had all the year round in the sea near the shore. In many spots a hang net used to be set and only removed for repair.

". . . With the rod the best fishing is to be got,

not in the fresh-water lochs or running streams, which indeed are often little larger than ditches, but in the sea itself, at the mouths of the fresh water. In such places there are often deep pools left by the receding tide. In these the fish lie, and in such places 'takes' have been made which seem fabulous. I have heard of half a hundredweight of sea trout or even more taken in an hour or two."

This description by our reverend author has no need to be "nail'd wi' scriptur'," for from many sources, as well as from our own observation, and, to some extent, experience, we can corroborate it in every particular.

The Brouster is now, and has been for several years, a favourite resort for anglers, the late Dr Guthrie being one of its earliest and most regular frequenters. It is to the credit of the gentleman above quoted that this district's angling attractions became known in the south, and I should like to quote the recorded experience which led to this. Mr Russell says:

". . . I set out one morning to fish without any fixed idea where to begin except that I would try

the Brouster. The public road crosses the stream near the sea, and when I reached this place by the road, as the tide was out, I thought of taking a cast in the salt water. I had two flies. No sooner had the line touched the water than both hooks were seized, and two sea trout were fast. One immediately broke off, and the other ran off with the line for a considerable distance; and then when I began to tighten the line, the fish sprang repeatedly into the air in the liveliest manner imaginable; but as the tackle was good, the fish gradually became exhausted, and I wound up the reel until coming near the side, when I was able to secure a beautiful trout of nearly three pounds' weight."

He goes on to say further that in about two hours he had eleven sea trout, weighing between two and three pounds each, lying on the gravel behind him.

Such an experience was bound to be noised abroad, and the action of "a sma' laird" in taking large hauls of trout with the net brought further notoriety.

Should the angling of Shetland ever attain the

popularity it deserves, there will require to be certain fishery restrictions enacted in the interests of fair sport.

It is a ten hours' sail from Lerwick to Unst, but as the Mainland, as well as several of the other islands, though wide apart, overlap at certain parts of the sea, the force of the Atlantic in an easterly gale is considerably lessened.

What a splendid sight was presented by the glorious coast scenery !—great cliffs of rock towering out of the sea, all ribbed and caverned by the ceaseless action of the waves, that even in their calmest moments seemed capable of suddenly dashing to the summit of the barrier and sending the spindrift flying for hundreds of yards over the land.

The " stacks " which were seen along the coast, wherever there was a promontory of any size, were features that caught the eye at once. These stacks are isolated rocks that have been severed from the land by the action of the sea, and now stand mute and lonesome, bearing the first brunt of every storm.

These are busy waters that seethe and foam

amid the Shetland isles. Fishing boats in twos and threes, heavy with their last night's catch, are scudding before the wind that they may secure their precious cargo in good condition; for, though in the east and west of Scotland the herring harvest was practically over at the time of which we write, yet, in these northern waters a second harvest had set in that even eclipsed the first.

It was interesting to hear some of the knowing ones amongst the passengers estimating the catch by the boat's depth in the water. "Sixty crans if there's a basketful," one voice would say. In another case it was, "Thirty crans," while in a third instance it was even computed there might be "seventy crans."

In a short time you even began to guess at the various catches for yourself, and were quite flattered when your estimates were verified by the knowing ones.

In addition to these decked boats that carry six of a crew, there would be seen on the horizon the dark hull of a piratical-looking trawler, and occasionally a swift-going steamer, laden with

barrels of fish, making for the Baltic for all she was worth. Dutch boats still frequent these waters, and, as of old, there is no love lost between them and the native crews.

But all invading boats are aliens to the true Shetlander; and the "K" upon the side of a Kirkwall smack, or the "A," "P" or "F" upon the Aberdeen, Peterhead or Fraserburgh boats respectively, serves the purpose of a "red rag" as effectively as any Dutch boat ever did.

To hear a Shetlander in certain circumstances speak of a "Scotch" boat, gives you some idea of the remarkable copiousness and strength of his vocabulary.

As we have said, it was a grand fishing, and one hoped that even the fisherman might have something left over from it to lay aside for the proverbial rainy day that comes in his calendar more frequently than to most toilers of the deep. But we fear the hope was a vain one, for there are social and economic problems in most seafaring communities that easily explain how it is that fisher-folk seldom get rich.

The seagulls that follow a steamer in the

Shetland waters are another revelation to a landsman. True, as you leave the land behind, their numbers diminish; but there is always a considerable number who can be counted on never to leave your track until the last revolution of the screw leaves the ship at rest.

The sharp, bright-eyed cormorants also were swimming around in hundreds, and their antics were of unfailing interest. They seemed to be, as far as we could observe, not only the most expert of divers, but the most saucy of birds. Glancing fearlessly at you one moment, the next saw it disappear with an easy "dook," to rise in the space of twenty-five seconds about forty yards away, with a fish in its mouth, but, in any case, as cool as ever.

The cormorants feed chiefly on sillocks, a young fish about four inches long, but larger fish never come amiss. We saw one dive and come up with a piltock in its mouth. This is a fish of nearly half-a-pound's weight, and the manner in which its captor sat on the waves with the tail of the fish protruding from its mouth, and surrounded by a group of admiring friends, was

very comical, except from the fish's point of view.

In our schooldays the Shetland story of a child having been carried off by an eagle had always a certain fascination for us, but the non-observance of the Wild Birds Protection Act makes you look in vain for the Shetland eagle nowadays.

We have seen it mentioned somewhere that fifty years ago twelve eagles' nests were known of in the Shetland isles; but what is more remarkable is the fact that, whichever one you might wish to see, your guide was ready to give his solemn word that it, in particular, was the home of the veritable eagle that carried off the child!

But while the pleasures of memory are both pleasing and suggestive when anticipations of sport dominate the angler's outlook, yet we must confess that the imposing, wave-worn rocky cliffs that formed the barriers to the sad-looking, treeless, lonely islands amid which we were sailing had the greatest charm for us.

For one thing, your ceaseless motion only served to bring out their seeming immutability; your feverish, crowded life only drew your eye

with intenser longing to the lonely havens under the cliffs, where never foot of man had trod, nor craft had been moored.

Then the memory of the wooded glades of the south of Scotland, and the pine-clad hills of the north, would insist upon placing themselves alongside of the seemingly sterile, faded islands through which you were speeding.

No wonder that the land seems "dowie"! Lying in the same latitude as Cape Farewell in Greenland (60°), if it were not for the influence of the Gulf Stream it might well be icebound for a great part of the year instead of having a temperature only two degrees less than that of Edinburgh.

Still, the air is humid, and, from its variableness, is in many places felt to be enervating. Regarding the absence of trees in the Shetland isles Dr Edmonstone, in his interesting book on the "Flora of Shetland," gives it as his opinion that trees do not grow, "not so much because of the general severity of the climate, nor because of the salt spray which is carried by the wind for miles over the land in winter; but, because of

the shortness of the summer, and the speedy oncoming of the autumn frosts."

But these reflections are dispelled by the sight of little lonely coves glistening with golden sand, beside which, behind a jutting rock, you get a glimpse of a dismantled boat or two, and of a few children playing on the beach. This again sets your mind to weave modern romances in which these children play the part of Enoch Arden and Annie Lee, and so your heart becomes more sympathetic and expectant than ever.

In this mood we passed Fetlar, famous for its ponies; gave a wide berth to the restless Blue Mull Sound at Mid Yell; and got our first touch of Unst, when we reached the bright-looking bay of Uyeasound. Coasting along the island, and passing the ruins of the ancient castle of Muness, we soon reach the island of Balta, which lies protecting the entrance to the "sound" of that name.

The bay extends inland for more than a mile, and is lined on either side by erections of various sorts and sizes necessary for the carrying on of a great fishing industry.

Ships and boats of various nationalities throng the bay, and altogether give you a sense of life and trade which, to us at anyrate, was totally unexpected in such a remote island as Unst.

This being our destination, our steamer was soon besieged by boats on the outlook for passengers—for it must be remembered that there are no piers at any of the islands where a big ship may land passengers, excepting Lerwick—then followed the landing, which took place, not at the pier, for the tide was low, but at slippery rocks covered with weed and tangle, from whence we had to scramble ashore. After having been travelling for fully forty hours, it was with a sigh of thankfulness that we caught sight of the cosy porch of the Queen's Hotel.

The island of Unst is twelve miles long and nearly four miles broad. It is remarkably hilly for Shetland, one range running almost the entire length of the island and culminating in Saxaforth, one thousand feet high. Indeed, Shetland generally is more hilly than is commonly supposed, although the highest of all—viz. Roeness Hill, on

the mainland—is only one thousand four hundred and fifty feet.

There must have been a large number of small crofts in Unst at one time of its history, and even now the high rough-stone dykes that divide the small fields from the common ground give an arid appearance to the landscape, which is increased by the "scalped" or turf-stripped condition of some of the high ground.

This, of course, is only how it strikes a stranger, for of all the islands, Unst is the one that has oftenest been besung. Dr Saxby, in his "Birds of Shetland," and Dr Edmonstone, in his "Flora of Shetland," have put it on record that, for both bird and plant life, this, of all the islands, is the most interesting. The "Home of a Naturalist," by Mrs Saxby and Rev. Biot Edmonston, corroborates this statement, and in addition gives some graphic pictures of Unst life fifty years ago.

The rivers of Shetland are as rare as the snakes of Iceland, but its fresh-water lochs are innumerable. In Unst, besides a dozen of small lochans, there are three lochs of considerable size.

In the north end, near to Burra Firth, is Loch

Cliff, a splendid sheet of dark brown water, about three miles long and a third of a mile in breadth. Less than two miles south from Cliff, and lying in the centre of a heathery valley, is Loch Watley, a much clearer sheet of water than the one first mentioned, but smaller, being little more than a mile long. At the north end of Watley, separated from it by a belt of moorland, is a dark and deep nameless loch about a mile in circumference, where several times we caught some good-sized yellow trout as we made our way to Watley.

Three miles southward the Loch of Belmont lies facing Mid Yell and the seething Blue Mull Sound. This water is also about a mile long, and although it does not contain so many trout as the others, it has several of a large size.

Reverting to Cliff, we should say that angling can be carried on either by boat or by wading from the shore. We preferred the latter style, although we were well warned that it was somewhat dangerous. True, there are certainly some gruesomely deep places near the edge here and there, but no man in his senses would ever

dream of wading them: besides, you do not require to go so very deep after all, for the dark water allowed the trout to feed near the shore without being scared.

They are the freest risers of all the trout we ever caught. No coming short as if they had simply risen to look at the weather, and given a snap at you in the bygoing; no pook, pooking, like venturesome troutlets in a pool; but a firm break in the water, and the swirl of a strong brown back gave intimation that there was business on hand requiring all the skill you were master of.

We generally fished about six hours daily, and it was seldom that the basket did not show at least thirty nice trout from Loch Cliff. Our best take was forty brown trout, and two sea trout of one pound each.

In a new country every day is a new experience, brimful of incident and creative of memories. Thus, wading slowly in and out of the bays that give character to the shores of Cliff, we were oft-times oppressed by the great loneliness of the place. Save for the fitful screaming of a flock

of seagulls that hovered over the north end of the loch, there were few sounds to break the stillness. Human beings you saw at rare intervals, and these, from shyness or politeness—probably a mixture of both—gave you a wide berth. The men were mostly at sea, and the solitary figures you saw from time to time were women, engaged in driving the cattle home from the pasture ground, or "flitting" the peats across the lochs in a boat frail enough to give an onlooker some anxiety.

But if signs of human life were few, signs of human habitations were abundant. Many of the old crofts upon which families subsisted have been merged into small farms, but the old houses have been left standing, until time and storm have made them nothing but roofless shells. Oh, it was pitiful to see the landscape dotted all over with such significant vestiges of former days! It really required very little imagination to hear voices calling from the heart of the ruins as the evening shadows fell upon them; or to fancy you saw the faces of former tenants looking out of the empty window sockets. Ruined

castles and ancient towers are highly suggestive features in any landscape, and even help to keep a nation's history alive. Ruined cottages and deserted homesteads blight a land, and should be obliterated without delay.

We sometimes asked why these buildings were allowed to cover the land, as the daily sight of them was bound to have a depressing effect upon the people. "Oh," the reply was, "to shelter the beasts."

Ah, well, evictions may be a stern necessity in certain conditions of society, but their fruits are sad to see.

Whir-r-r, and our reflections speedily come to an end as a silvery finnock leaps again and again into the air. The small "Zülu" at the end of the cast had proved too much for finnock curiosity, and so the blue waters of Burra Firth, from whence he came only yesterday, shall see him no more. Happily, he is not the only trout on the move, and for half-an-hour the excitement is at boiling point, for when a Cliff trout takes a fancy to your flies he means business.

During our visit we used very few varieties of

flies, and these all of a small size. "Zülus," "Governors" and "Cock-a-bundha" of the ordinary kind, varying from Nos. 2 to 3, were our mainstays. Some gentlemen whom we met on the island used much larger flies, but though they occasionally got a good fish the small flies captured two for one in the long run.

The native Shetlander looks upon the mild enthusiast who crosses the sea to fish for trout as an individual to be tolerated and humoured, it may be, but not to be taken seriously. His tackle and appurtenances are of a piece with the character they assign him. We remember half-a-dozen small boys drawing their frail boat ashore a little above the spot where we were fishing, and after they had looked on for a few minutes the leader gave expression to their thoughts by asking in a somewhat superior tone: "And that's what you fush wi'?" We felt extremely apologetic, but before we got time to explain we happened to strike a good fish and safely land him, whereupon the boys squatted round to have a look at our fly-hook. To the question of how *they* fished they were not very responsive, one of

them remarking: "Oh, we fush anuther wey"—which doubtless is true, if not very lucid. From "information received," a long stiff pole, with line and worm attached, and worked on the surface of the water as in minnow fishing, is one "wey"; but set lines and hang nets serve the purpose better, besides requiring less exertion.

Loch Watley had a strong attraction for us, because of its surroundings. Lying in a deep valley on the right, as you wend your way along the cart track between Baltasound and Uyeasound, at first sight it has all the appearance of a Highland loch. This arises from the hills on either side being covered with short heather, plentifully interspersed with crimson heath and wild harebell. There were also bright green spots in the valley marking hidden springs, a plentiful crop of brackens, and a little burn with a picturesque waterfall. The latter kept up a friendly song to greet the stranger that was none the less welcome because it was unexpected.

The extensive moors round the loch seemed the favourite haunts of droves of native ponies. When one was a boy a favourite dream was:

"Oh, to be in Shetland, where hundreds of ponies run wild, and where you have only to catch one by the mane, jump on its back, and gallop and gallop away." Well, here at last was a dream fulfilled; the ponies, old and young, were actually clustering round, and, with tossing head, even disputing the path with you, and yet somehow there was no thrill of wild desire to play the part of Mazeppa.

Though ungroomed, and in many cases sadly in need of a farrier, these "shelties" seemed brave, hardy animals, and one could not but feel sorry that the destiny of most of them was to pass their days in a coal pit.

It was curious to spy the tiny bits of variously coloured ribbon tied in the manes, or in the tails, that served, like the "lug marking" of the sheep, to determine to whom they belonged.

Watley was even lonelier than Cliff, for there were no boats on it, nor did you hear the far-off sound of the waves breaking against the rocks of Burra Firth. Yet the hush brought a delightful sense of rest and an increased power of fancy which idealised common things, and quickened

your optimism. It was like fishing in dreamland.

Before leaving home we had been out for a day on the Clyde, and had seen at least twenty fishers " dumped down " at every station between Carstairs and Elvanfoot, until it looked as if there would not be room to swing a line lest you should catch a fisher. Here we were alone, and could fish, or sing, or dream as the fancy took us, conscious that no one would be startled save the ponies and the peewits.

Besides, the trout rose so freely in almost any condition of weather that your day's darg of two or three dozen fish of from six to twelve ounces each was soon made up, and unless you were a mere pot-hunter, you had no alternative but to become an impressionist.

On the slope of the hill to the east of Watley there stood a solitary house, from the vicinity of which there came on two or three different days a train of ponies, with baskets made of plaited straw, hung pannier-fashion across their backs. These baskets are made by the islanders in winter and are called " kishies." When woven

tight they carry fish, when slack, they serve for peat bags.

The ponies on this occasion were a perfect picture of docility, going leisurely along, obedient to every word of the woman who guided them, and winding among moss holes and swampy ground over the moor and up the hill to the peat moss, from whence they "flitted" the peats home to be stacked for winter.

The good dame in charge, like all Shetland women on weekdays, had no covering on her head, save a woollen shawl, folded across and tied under the chin. We noticed that at first the cavalcade gave us a wide berth; but after we had haunted the lochside on two or three different days, it came a little nearer, till one day it passed quite close, the woman smiling and saying: "And it's fishin' you are?" Not much in the words, certainly; but what a beautiful voice! The dress was poor, the face storm-beaten and prematurely old, though contented and placid, but the softly inflected musical tones of the voice might have been coveted by the fairest West End leader of fashion. There was a flavour

of inborn courtesy about the voice that with a bound bridged years and brought to mind the time when words and tones really meant what they seemed to imply. This greeting also revealed to us, in a way we had never realised before, how Wordsworth should have been so moved by the Highland woman's greeting: "What, you are stepping westward?"

Some days after, we were fishing by the side of the deep loch at the head of Watley, when the train of ponies again made their appearance, accompanied this time, however, by a man, who, without any ado, began:

"And it's a stranger you are?"

"Yes," we ventured to reply.

"And might it be England or Scotland you come from?"

"It is a place called Edinburgh."

This seemed a poser, but after looking round for a bit, he said:

"What are these?" pointing to our cast.

"These are flies."

"And do you fish with them?" he asked dubiously.

"Yes, I try it."

"Have you any more?"

"Yes, a bookful."

"Gi' me one."

After we had given him a few gaudy ones tied on a cast ready for use he proceeded to question further by pointing to our waders and asking if they were "dear," and so on, till he had our full money value at his command.

The ponies meanwhile had been quietly cropping the grass, and straying from the track while they did so. This brought our conversation to an end, and at a word they fell into line, and again began to follow their leader.

We have sometimes wondered since if our questioner was really as simple as he appeared to be.

It has been already said that Watley lay on the right of the track that leads to Uyeasound. Well, continuing your journey in that direction for two miles farther, you come to a road branching off to the west, which in less than ten minutes brings you to Loch Bentley. This road has the charm of unexpectedness about it, and is really one of the most striking passes in Unst. With

its configuration it only needs a few rowan and birk trees, with an undergrowth of bracken and heather, to make it a genuine bit of the Trossachs.

There are some grand trout in Bentley, but we only fished it once, owing to its distance from our headquarters. On that occasion, amongst some other nice trout, we had a beautiful fish of nearly two pounds' weight. This was the largest yellow trout we caught in Unst, although we hooked a larger one on Cliff one afternoon. This latter rose almost at our feet as we were drawing in the line for another cast, and, as trout that hook themselves always do, he made such a frantic fuss about it that it was impossible to bring any strain to bear upon him. Taking advantage of this, he gave two or three porpoise-like wallops, and we were left lamenting.

Two weeks after our return south we got a letter telling that a yellow trout, eight pounds' weight, had been caught near to the spot of our misadventure!

Speaking to a boatman on Cliff one day regarding large trout, he told us that the previous

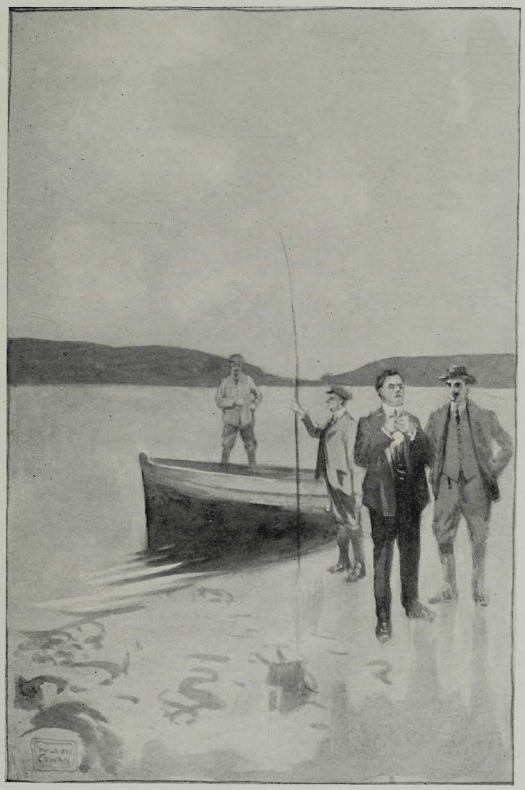
November he had caught a brown trout over two feet long, with a set line.

Doubtless there are some very large trout in the Unst lochs; although it is also true that many of the big fish caught there are not brown trout at all, but sea trout that have been prevented from returning to their native element.

We shall never forget the view from Bentley, looking across the Blue Mull Sound to the island of Yell. The tide of this sound is as remarkable in its way as Sumburgh Roost, for on the calmest day it flows like a mill race, and from a distance appears to be seething and bubbling like a cauldron.

On the day we speak of, the sky was unclouded, and the sombre distances of Yell were chastened by a dreamy mist rising from the sea; the pasture-ground round Bentley smiled in the sunshine, and even the sailing packet that goes between the islands was flying across the mile of seaway that separates them at this point like a glad sea bird.

How different it was last week, and how different it may be to-morrow! Sometimes this same packet may be unable to cross for a week,



LANDING FROM A SHETLAND LOCH

owing to the state of the sea. At such a time, when men who are travelling "overland" from Unst to Lerwick grow impatient they get a crew of brave men to take them by a wide detour of several miles to the opposite island, and then continue their journey by quaking bog, and voe, and sound, until at last they reach the mainland, thirty miles from Lerwick. Yes, truly brave men! We were not impressed with the crofters as farmers; but set these same men in a boat when wind and wave might cause the boldest to fear, and they are heroes. This is no marvel. Their bright blue eyes and yellow hair show the Norseman blood; why should they not also have some of the Viking spirit? They certainly begin early. We have watched the children again and again on loch and voe, cruising about in old boats, and showing a fearlessness and resource that was truly wonderful.

We never could look at them without thinking of Bret Harte's "Greyport Legend," which tells of the children at play on an old hulk being drifted away through the mist, and never more seen or traced; save that to-day, when a fog

settles down on that coast, the anxious mariners, hearing the sound of children's happy voices ringing through the gloom, hail it as a message from heaven and take heart once more.

Ah! there is many a Shetland legend awaiting its Bret Harte!

One evening when we returned with a fellow-angler to our hotel, after a pretty successful day with the brown trout, the landlord beckoned to us to come and look in at the door of an outhouse, where truly our eyes were almost dazzled by the display set before us. Lying on a rough slab were eight sea trout, the smallest weighing about two pounds, while the largest touched seven pounds. An Unst acquaintance of the landlord had been fishing from a boat on Burra Firth that day, and this was his catch. Needless to say, we felt our eight-pound baskets to be of small account when compared with this keyshie load.

Next day we started for Burra Firth. Two reasons had prevented us from trying the coast angling before this time; the first was that the season had been one of the driest experienced in

Unst for many years, and the burns that run from the lochs to the sea were not flowing at all; hence the sea trout had no inducement to make their way inland. The second was that the sea trout fishing does not usually begin until near the end of August, unless the summer has been a wet one.

We admit, however, that we should have tried the sea fishing before this time, had we not been so attracted by the sport of the lochs.

Burra Firth lies six miles north of Baltasound. On subsequent visits we went over the Saxaforth hills, that being considered a shorter route; but the first time, we went by road. It is a most interesting walk, but we advise the angler to carry his waders, rather than walk in them, otherwise the homeward journey, even with a well-filled creel, will appear double the distance.

The sea lies on your right going north, and he is blind indeed who does not find endless variety in its lights and shadows, its misty distances, its shadowy ships, and its wave-worn cliffs. Half way you come to Haroldswick, which for historic interest and picturesque appearance has

no equal in the island. It was here that Harold Harfager landed in the ninth century, and after subduing the Scandinavian chiefs, who had previously subdued the Picts, he annexed the whole of the Shetland and Orkney islands to Norway. The subsequent pledging of these islands to Scotland in 1468, on the marriage of Princess Margaret of Denmark to James III., is a sore point with the Shetland-Norwegian even to this day.

Haroldswick enables you to realise more than any other place in the island your remoteness from the busy world. There is a lonesome look about the grey houses perched on the northern point of the bay, that blends naturally with the jagged cliffs and bleak boulder-strewn shore. The place might be a pirate's lair, protected by a stormy sea, a sea that seldom allows a year to pass without dashing some ill-fated ship to pieces against the cruel rocks for behoof of its subjects.

The road beyond this bay would have driven MacAdam frantic. Where it is not strewn with rocks it is full of holes, which in their turn are full of water.

Two miles of this delectable ground brought us

to the pasture of a fair-sized farm which looked cosier and better kept than any we had yet seen in the north of the island. Here the path merged, by a gradual ascent, into a broad natural embankment which checks the waves of Burra Firth from cutting right through the island and joining the sea at Uyeasound.

Loch Cliff lay on our left, and from its northern end there issued a broad sluggish stream which worked its way through the bank referred to, and, after winding slowly through sandy links for the third of a mile, was at last sucked into the sea.

The waves of the firth were heard long before we saw them, and truly a booming, rumbling sound they made, suggestive of the "trows" of the scalds, at work in some subterranean cave. Words very inadequately describe the impressive grandeur of what the people are fond of calling "the most northern point of the British dominions."

Treating the scene with the pencil of an impressionist, we should say that the sea has cut its way into the land for nearly a mile, leaving on

either side high columnar cliffs, ribbed and caverned by the storms of ages. These cliffs are the home of myriads of birds, resident as well as migratory, while the caves are the haunts of numerous seals and otters.

On the east side of the firth, up on the grassy slopes at the top of the Cliff, are two or three fishermen's houses, that look like nests, set upon the most inaccessible spot. On the west side, up towards the summit, are a few better-looking houses inhabited by the families of the men who watch the famous lighthouse of Flagga.

This marvellous triumph of engineering skill was built by Stevenson in 1858, and stands upon a conical "stack" out in the North Sea about a mile from the shore. Few sights are more fitted to inspire one with awe than to watch the waves dashing up this stack, as if they were furious to make an end of the beacon that so often deprives them of their prey.

A little to the west of Flagga is Herma Ness, said to be one of the few remaining breeding places of the great skua. We did not see any of these rare birds, but we saw a good number of

puffins: the solemn "Tammy Norie" of the sailors. Indeed, one day as we were fishing in the firth a full-plumaged puffin was washed to our feet, justifying to some extent the common belief that they cannot rise from the sea when it is calm.

The beach of Burra Firth is composed of white glistening sand, plentifully mixed with various crystalline pebbles of the most perfectly smooth and rare form. The glistening of the sand is caused by the pounding of the waves for ages against the gneiss rocks of the bay, which contain, in a large degree, quartz, mica and felspar; and the beautifully rounded stones get their shape and attractive appearance from being rolled back and forward amongst the sand of the beach at every tide. The fame of this spot is great, and we never left the hotel without getting more commissions for sand and crystal pebbles than we could well execute.

We should mention further, the great ferny and palm-shaped tangles that were thrown up by the waves one moment and then sucked back into the deep the next.

The place for fishing this firth most successfully is at, or near to, the spot where the burn from the loch joins the sea. If the fish are "running," dozens pass up this burn every tide. If the water is too low, or if the season is still too early, for the fish to run, they gather near the fresh water every tide, and lie nosing and feeding amongst the stirred-up soil, until the ebb begins, when they become more active, and move hither and thither in search of food.

Then is the angler's opportunity!

From the discoloured appearance of the burn mouth we thought it advisable to try a minnow first, so we put on a good-sized "phantom" and spun it at the meeting of the waters, again and again, without any immediate result. We noticed, however, that when the minnow came into the clear water it was followed by five or six dark objects, like tadpoles, that instantly vanished when it was drawn in for another cast. This spinning we kept up for more than half-an-hour, but never touched a fish, although out in the deep water of the bay sea trout were leaping and plunging in the most tantalising fashion. After a few

sillocks had hooked themselves on to our lure—which was almost as large as themselves—we thought it high time to try something else. The next venture was with an ordinary-sized sea trout fly, composed of mallard wing, body of green wool with gold twist, brown hackle and red tip.

The tide was ebbing fast, and our minnow experiment had lost some precious time, for it is literally "when taken at the flood," and the turn, that estuary fishing "leads on to fortune" in the angling world. The water was now almost transparent, and the refraction from the white sand made every object marvellously distinct. At our first cast we again saw the tadpoles following the fly, but, pausing a moment, we allowed it to sink, when it was instantly seized, and after half-a-minute's play a silvery finnock of nearly a pound weight was landed.

We repeated the action of sinking the fly several times, with a similar result, until in less than two hours nine fish were lying in a cosy nest of seaweed on the beach.

By this time we had cleared up the mystery of

the tadpoles, which was nothing else than the black snouts of the sea trout showing against the white sand, which neutralised the colour of their bodies.

The friend who accompanied us on this occasion had been getting fair sport too, but with a different bait than ours. He had been coached by some fisherman in the art of angling for sea trout with a piece of fresh herring, or a big earth-worm, and was now working according to instructions with all his might, but without attaining the result he had been led to expect, for it is said, locally, that these baits are irresistible.

We never used them, but the mode of preparation and of working is simple enough. Thus, a small piece is cut off the side of the herring and a good-sized bait-hook passed through; it is then cast into the water, and, with a swivel on the line, worked as in minnow fishing. The worm is baited on a Stewart hook, and not allowed to sink, but jerked across the surface of the water.

That this is a successful mode of taking trout

was shown on our second visit to the firth, when my friend got several good fish with these baits; one weighing fully three pounds. We never used anything but fly, finding it more than sufficient for the attainment of good sport.

After this lecture on lures, we return to our beat down at the mouth of Cliff burn, where the nine sea trout were lying. The tide was now far out, and it was of no use to follow it, for if you don't catch fish just when the tide is full, or on the turn, you are not likely to get them at all. And yet no one would have thought so, had they seen how the fish were going on.

We sat down, the better to watch their antics, but could not keep our eyes upon any particular spot for a moment. Sea trout to right of you, sea trout to left of you, sea trout in front of you, leaped, plunged and gambolled, until it seemed more like a freak of the imagination than a palpable reality.

Some of the trout were very large; indeed, had we not known that there are no salmon rivers in Shetland, we should have declared them to be salmon or grilse. The whole scene was memorable.

On one side of the voe the deep green water kept lapping against the base of the great Cliff as if challenging exploration of its mysterious depth. On the other side the sun was decking the crest of the waves with scintillating jewels, as they rushed joyously past caves and creeks to their goal on the beach, while, like intelligent creatures of a realm in fairyland, the silvery fish kept plunging about in a manner suggestive of the keenest enjoyment.

After a while we encreeled our fish and moved up the burn towards Loch Cliff, fishing as we went.

There were several other delightful outings by voe and loch, until the summons to return south arrived. It was tantalising that just at the same time, the running of the sea trout began in earnest; but even this belated action on the part of these capricious rovers could not arouse a pang of discontent within our breast. We had enjoyed an ideal angling holiday and could wish no better for any "who study to be quiet and go a-fishing."

We firmly believe that there is a bright future in

store for the Shetland islands as holiday resorts, and we would fain hope that the increase of money, which the advent of anglers and tourists implies, should do something towards making the lives of the deserving islanders happier and brighter.

. . . . . .

During the Professor's monologue the lamps had been lit and the blinds drawn, and most of us found pipe and coffee no hindrance to our enjoyment.

"Bravo!" we all exclaimed when he had finished.

"You must have many such experiences in your wallet," said the Veteran. "But when are you going back to your angling paradise?"

"Well," answered the Professor, "when you told us of your love for a holiday in Shetland you rather damped the ardour of the younger ones here by saying that your next visit would be when they bridged the Moray Firth."

"Well?"

"Oh, just this, I'll not wait so long. I am going when they start a service of æroplanes!"

. . . . . .

After Fly Busker had reported that the storm was over and the stars were out we broke up for the night, in high hopes of new adventures on the morrow: and ere long many of us were dreaming of those fascinating isles

> "Where rocks are rudely heaped and rent,
> As by a spirit turbulent:
> Where sights are rough and sounds are wild
> And everything unreconciled."

CHAPTER XV

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS ON KILMORY

Sailing Westward—Attractions of Arran—Rivers after the "Fair" Holidays—Yellow and Sea Trout—The Glen Ree—A Discovery—Hand-fishing—Till Death we'll lo'e the Borders

SOME of the party had been over at Ettrick water all day. The sport had been good; and some interest was given to the outing by the arrangement made that each was to take his favourite stream, and the loser was penalised in a contribution to the next symposium.

Fly Busker chose Rankle Burn, the Veteran chose Tima, and the Dominie preferred Ettrick below Tushielaw. Our worthy friend lost, however, and amid frequent interruptions he related the following account of a trip westward to Arran:—

Unless it be the Isle of Wight, or the Isle of Man, it is safe to say that there is no island near the British coast so popular or so frequented as

Arran, Alexander Smith's "Summer in Skye" notwithstanding.

In early spring, when the west wind blows up the Clyde, bringing odours not entirely suggestive of the Broomielaw, the good folk of Glasgow begin to think once more of restful week-ends, and dream of halcyon days "doon the watter," where the clang of the steam-hammer is silent, and "Dixson's Blazes" no longer give nightmare to the fitful sleeper.

By the month of April the Arran season is pretty active, increasingly so in the two months that follow; and prodigiously so in July. Thereafter the island is spoken of as being "full," but it is not until towards the end of September, and during October, that the belated stranger has a chance of seeing Dun Fion without a picnic-party, and Whiting Bay without a fleet of amateur lythe fishers.

Assuming that its somewhat humid atmosphere suits you, Arran has many and varied attractions for all sorts and conditions of people.

Inland, mountain and valley, stream and wood are picturesque and inspiring in the first degree.

Round the coast, Brodick, Loch Ranza, Corrie, Holy Isle and Benan Head are names to conjure with; while seaward, Argyllshire, Ayrshire, Bute and the Cumbraes keep the eye constantly in motion. Ailsa Craig and the Mull of Cantyre are near; while in the distance Loch Ryan and the north-west coast of Ireland tempt to twelve-hour trips, which the steamers that pass daily can easily make accomplished experiences.

Arran is the happy hunting ground of geologists and botanists. Stone circles and ancient burial-places give increasing interest to the investigations of the antiquarian, while noble Goat Fell, with its numerous peaks, begets a spirit of activity and enterprise in the feeblest of mountaineers.

But best of all are its skies at sunrise and sunset, its lights and shadows on bays and islands. The artist who would depict these truly would need to dip his brush in the colours of the rainbow,, and be heedless of conventionalities.

Yet Arran sadly lacks a history. Of all the larger islands round the British coast, its career has been the most uneventful; and it may truly be said that, since the days when King Robert

the Bruce watched from the shore for the signal fires from the Ayrshire coast, that called upon him to strike a blow for the crown, no event of importance happened equal to the visit of the late King Edward and Queen Alexandra to the island in their memorable cruise round the west coast.

Having an uneventful history, Arran, as a matter of course, has little or no literature. Given an area of sixty miles in circumference, which is that of this island, what wealth of song and story would an equal radius in any part of Scotland produce? What tales of dule and sorrow, what traditions of love and glamourie! But then it is the people who make history, and, only in a secondary degree, history that influences the people; and Arran people have, from causes other than geographical ones, been singularly isolated and cut off from the current of life and thought that flows in the outer world.

They are a courteous but a distinctly separate race, and the visitors who crowd them out of house and cot in the season see quite a different side of their character from that which they

present to one another. They are keen on Church affairs. Indeed, no phase of national life touches them with anything like the same force as the doings of the churches, or rather the doings of the Church, which of course means *their* church.

On lonely road, and by rugged coast, as well as in shop and market, neighbours will pass each other without a word because they have differed on some question of Church government so minute and abstract that it would be almost impossible for a stranger to comprehend it.

The economic side of Arran life is singular, but it would be outside the purpose of a fishing sketch to speak of it.

Arran, where cultivated, is rich and fertile, and the pasture land supports cattle and sheep that it would be difficult to beat even in the best counties "in the adjacent island of Scotland."

Although it covers such a wide area, Arran has only two parishes: Kilbride and Kilmory. The latter lies in the south-west of the island, and as it is least frequented we desire to give it the chief place in these impressions.

For many and obvious reasons, our mind first reverts to the angling facilities of the district. The streams are fairly large, and fairly numerous; indeed Kilmory, Sliddery, Blackwater and Macarie would cheer the heart of any lover of trouting; and as only the last-named one is preserved it may at once be admitted that the liberty given is fair and generous. In many parts of their course, however, these streams are most difficult to fish, and there are long stretches that, from the banks, cannot be fished at all. If you wish to angle in comfort, therefore, and have any chance of sport, you must wade, and be prepared to wade deep, for the rocky pools are black and gurly.

In the course of ages the action of the water has channelled the beds of the rivers wider and deeper than can very well be imagined. The soil has been washed away down to the rock, leaving high scaurs and banks on either side, covered with a profuse growth of brier, bracken, foxglove and honeysuckle, and topped by rows of birk, larch and ash trees. Thus, for hundreds of yards here and there, the banks are impenetrable, and if

they happen to be wet the scent of honeysuckle and mint is almost stifling.

The trout of these streams, though numerous, are very small. When remarking on this, we more than once got the answer:

"What can ye expec' efter the Glasca' holidays? Yon fishers tak' everything."

Well, there may be some force in this, but from observation we should be inclined to say that the cause lay nearer home. We used to go to the sources of the rivers when wanting pleasant fishing; there the streams ran through moor and heather, and the old familiar cry of the whaup and the peewit fell on our ears, undisturbed by the swish of the waves or the scream of the sea-gull. There also were to be found the hillside altitudes from whence you got the finest views. What a relief it was to throw oneself upon the heather and watch the white sail of a coasting ship tacking round Cantyre, or listen to the almost inaudible throb of a swiftly passing steamer! Sometimes this mood was broken by the appearance of a graceful deer that had evidently strayed from the herd; more frequently it was disturbed by the

discovery that you had thrown yourself down close beside an attractive, but a somewhat restless, adder.

There is no question about these creatures being very numerous in the island. More than once, after climbing up a steep bank from the river, have we seen an adder crawl forth from beneath the brackens that we had been clutching in our efforts to get a footing.

One afternoon a few of us, with some young folk, went to picnic by the banks of a picturesque burn that fell into the Kilmory water.

A nice spot, carpeted with heather and fern, was selected, and while the water in our camp kettle was a-boiling we all posed in a group for a snapshot photo.

"What's this pretty creature?" a young voice chirruped.

"There now! you've spoiled the picture!" exclaimed our artist, with pardonable irritation.

"Oh!" another voice cried, "here's a big eel crawling over my boot."

We all looked and, true enough, a beautiful adder was leisurely crossing the little boot that obstructed its way.

There was a general stampede for a heathery knoll twenty yards away, where we all stood, like shipwrecked mariners stranded on a rock, waiting events.

Meantime, the artistic youth of our party had been busy.

> "Four had he hurt,
> And five had slain,"

ere the universal voice of the stranded ones called him off. We had literally walked into an adders' den.

Sheep, when feeding, sometimes get bitten by these creatures, but we don't remember of hearing of any instance where man was the victim. Indeed, our impression is that they don't attack unless trodden upon, and in every instance where we have come across adders, on moor or hill, they have always shown a strong desire to avoid us. It may be reprehensible, but we never yet had the heart to kill one.

The grand runs and pools of the Sliddery and the Lagg rivers recall days on similar streams elsewhere, where sea trout were numerous; and had fortune led us to Arran in September we

might have been able to speak from personal experience regarding the sport offered to sea trout anglers; but as the white fish run up somewhat late at this part of the coast we got only five during the last week of August.

The storm wind here is from the south-west, and, as most of the rivers in Kilmory enter the sea in the face of it, the migratory fish have little inducement to cross the rough wave where the currents meet, for a run up into fresh water, until their instinct compels them. Local experts, however, give enticing accounts of what is sometimes done by the rod in a favourable season, and from the close proximity of some of the finest pools to the sea we should think that they have good grounds for their statements.

The coast of Kilmory is much exposed, and there are few havens, and no piers, farther west than Whiting Bay. Benan Head is the most southerly point on the island, and between it and Blackwater Foot there are many dykes and dangerous reefs not even covered at high water.

One afternoon, when fishing in the sea off Lagg Mouth, a local gentleman who accompanied us

pointed out a short stretch of coast where no fewer than five wrecks lay under water. On this occasion we very nearly made a sixth, for while we were speaking, and watching our reels, the leader of a school of large porpoise rose just at the side of our boat, causing us to make a spurt that would have done credit to an Oxford crew.

Fifteen of these creatures followed their leader in a cruise round the island, and as we saw them almost every day afterwards it was evident that they must have taken a strong fancy for their new quarters.

It is worth noting that, after their appearance, the sea fishing declined.

One of the most interesting and picturesque spots in the south west of Arran is the Lagg (literally, the "hollow"), a deep valley near where the River Kilmory runs into the sea. The slopes for a considerable distance are densely wooded, and have an almost impenetrable undergrowth of bramble and fern, besides many trailing plants and wild flowers.

Here and there, from a path on the left of the wood, you catch glimpses, and hear the sound

of the river dashing over its rocky bed below; and, if you feel as we did when first we saw it, the impression will suggest something like a combination of the Esk at Hawthornden and Horatio Muculloch's "Lowland River."

Many people drive from Whiting Bay—a distance of nine miles—or even from Lamlash, by Glen Ree, a much greater distance—for the purpose of spending a day at this charming spot. And really, the first glimpse of the hamlet, with its quiet inn, and its old bridge with the water eddying below, as well as the surrounding woods, with their fragrant pines, amply repay you for the inconvenience of one of the most up-and-down roads it may ever have been your lot to travel.

Bicycles are seldom seen on a Kilmory road, as a switchback does not make the most desirable track.

Arran, all over, is chiefly pedestrian ground; and, as such, is ideal.

Some of the least-known glens and backwaters in Kilmory are very beautiful; all the more so if you unexpectedly discover them for yourself.

We came upon Glen Ree, up Sliddery, that way, and had quite a Robinson Crusoe pride about it for a long time after.

Were we to sketch it, you would see a dark stream falling in rapid cascades by the side of a small cottage, the Sliddery being crossed at this point by a stone bridge partly covered with ivy. A few yards down this stream a ruined mill, with its broken wheel, stands out picturesquely amid tangled sweetbrier and honeysuckle — a rare scene for a painter made intolerable by the midges.

We could not resist the inclination to explore the ground beyond the cascades, so rod in hand we set out on our quest. It was a rare scene that opened up to view as we reached the level. Stretching far as the eye could see was a sylvan glen with a bright stream running through it. On either side, with open spaces between, were dwarf trees in rich foliage, and standing knee-deep in a dark pool were several long-horned Highland cattle.

Giving these gentry a wide berth, we made for a point higher up the glen, where the stream

made a bend round a grassy knoll and offered a tempting cast for the chance of a well-fed trout. True enough, no sooner had our flies alighted on the water than there was a welcome swirl, and we were fast to a fine trout that sprang into the air at once, and then, diving deep, made for his den under a tree root; but it was all in vain; the line held true, and soon our first half-pounder that day was lying at our feet amongst the grass and the gowans.

From the way in which the trout rose, we concluded that the stream seldom had angling visitors, and it was almost with a feeling of compunction that we creeled trout after trout, that seemed unable to resist the wiles of a small cock-a-bunda. It was pleasant to throw oneself upon the green slopes from time to time and catch glimpses through the trees of the blue sea and the white-sailed craft beating round the Mull of Cantyre. At other times, so sylvan and shut in were your surroundings, it required no violent stretch of imagination to fancy yourself in a pastoral glen amongst the Cheviots.

Having got as many bonnie yellow tenants of

the stream as we wished for, and after having had a startling experience of a large fish—sea trout evidently—making a violent lunge at our fly in a short but deep pool, we climbed a hill and returned to the bridge over the Sliddery by the road.

An elderly woman was at the door of the cottage by the bridge, who, seeing our heated appearance, courteously invited us to step inside and be refreshed by a glass of milk. Gladly accepting the invitation, we were soon deep in a friendly chat.

"And did ye catch a' that troot wi' your hands?" she asked.

"Why do you ask that?" we replied, in Scotch fashion.

"Oh, maist folk that come up here in dry weather use their hands for gripping the troot."

Having solemnly assured her that, since we had attained the stage of manhood, we had discarded childish things, we ventured to say:

"But your voice seems different from that of the Arran folk—are you not a Highlander?"

"Na, na," she replied. "We're frae Moffat water."

Amazed, we inquired: "And how did you get here?"

"Aweel, ye see, it was this wey. When the maister we were wi' ower by in Dumfriesshire took this ferm, he gat the guidman to come alang wi' him, as he was weel acquaint wi' the stock. I thocht it wad only hae been for a year or twa; but it's twa an' thritty years syne."

"You must feel quite at home now?"

"Na, sir, na; the folk dinna like huz, for being strangers—and, to tell the truth, we dinna like them."

"Borderers for ever!"

Finding out in our talk that her visitor knew all the places and most of the people in Moffat water (she had a south-country paper every week), the good woman became quite excited, and declared she "hadna sic a day for years."

However, we had a four-mile walk before us, and it was now past gloaming time, so we promised to come and fish Glen Ree some other day, and finish our crack. This we did, with both profit and pleasure.

. . . . . .

Next day we had an opportunity of seeing how some folk can catch fish without a fishing rod, as the good woman had said.

The water of Lagg was low, and near the mouth where it enters the sea were many large stones and boulders in the bed of the stream.

Wading up this part were three youths, whom we knew as visitors from the north of Ireland, who were absorbed in prodding underneath the stones with sticks, and from time to time inserting their hands and pulling out trout of various sizes

One of the fellows had a band round his waist, from which were suspended two good-sized sea trout, and several yellow ones.

"Hullo!" we shouted, "where's your rod?"

"Augh!" he replied, "who bothers with a rod? This is the way we fish at home."

. . . . . .

"Yes," said the Dominie, "Arran, we admit, is not a Shetland for a fishing club; but truly it has many and varied attractions peculiar to itself."

"Numerous adders included," muttered the Cynic.

Soon the rafters of the old inn were dirling to the chorus:

> "Then mount the tackle and the reel,
> Is now the fisher's song,
> For Brigham Dub and Carham Wheel
> Hold many a salmon strong."[1]

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHARM OF THE BURN SIDE

Spring's Delights—A Border Burn—An Ayrshire Burn—The Love of the Open—Art by the Burn Side—The Plight of Brown

Is there anything more thrilling than the first day of the season spent by a burn side ?

The crunkled grasses of last season crackle beneath your feet crisply and suggestively ; the furtive primrose peeps shyly from behind sunny knolls and sunken rocks, and the pungent smell of whin and bracken give a new sense to your being.

Birds flit to and fro, house building or house heating ; water wagtails bob on mossy stones, and lapwings scream overhead in fear that you should clumsily put your foot on the bonnie speckled eggs that lie exposed in a slight indentation upon the ground.

The stream flows on with a song and a purpose all its own, as if it had never known frost or snow

wreaths in the heights, or had chanted dirges when the birk leaves were falling last season.

Now the song is one of cheer, and the sun glints on the pools make them shine like amber. It is too early for burn-fishing, which should never be tried until June, but we can look and listen for all that, and hug ourselves with the thought that all in good time we shall retrace our steps rod in hand.

> "When, from 'neath the birk shade cool,
> Darts the monarch of the pool
> To thrill us with delight in the morning."

"One of the best apostrophes in nature poetry I have seen for some time," said the Professor, "is to be found in a poem by my gifted friend, the late J. B. Selkirk. Out of the love I bear him, you will have patience with me while I repeat it."

The Cynic was going to say something, but on second thoughts he remained silent; and the Professor began:

> "Ah, Tam! gie me a Border burn
> That canna rin without a turn,
> And wi' its bonnie babble fills
> The glens amang oor native hills.
> . . . . .

I see't this moment, plain as day
As it comes bickerin' o'er the brae,
Atween the clumps o' purple heather,
Glistenin' in the summer weather ;
Syne divin' in below the grun'
Where hidden frae the sicht and sun,
It gibbers like a deid man's ghost
That clamours for the licht it's lost,
Till oot again the loupin' limmer
Comes dancin' doon through shine and shimmer,
At headlang pace, till wi' a jaw
It jumps the rocky waterfa'
And cuts sic cantrips in the air
The picture-pentin' man's despair ;
A rountree bus' oot ower the tap o't,
A glassy pule to kep the lap o't,
While on the brink the blue harebell
Keeks ower to see its bonnie sel',
And sittin' chirpin' a' its lane
A water-waggy on a stane."

. . . . . .

"Well done, sir, up to time," said the Cynic, as the Professor stopped.

"It is remarkable," said the Veteran, "how largely, though maybe unconsciously, burn-side scenery has entered into our Scottish literature."

"That has been well shown in Professor Veitch's 'The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry,' but what I specially refer to is scenery as viewed more exclusively by the angler."

"It is always so amongst a pastoral people," said the Professor. "Look what an important place the quiet waters hold in Hebrew poetry, and amongst the thoughts of mountaineers generally."

"But not in poetry alone," replied the Veteran. "I was reading some Reminiscences by that G. O. M. of Cumnock, A. B. Todd, and unexpectedly came across a passage bearing upon our present talk."

"I think the wind is in the east again, and we should make an early start for the loch to morrow"—this from the Cynic, who, however, subsided when told to go to bed if he was tired.

True enough, however, the east wind was rising, and round the gable of the inn was weirdly moaning, suggestive of spirits in the air passing up the valley.

This made our indoor comfort all the more marked, and lent a double charm to the gleam of the red lamp and the glow of the peat fire.

"The words I quote," said the Veteran, "are connected with the impressions made upon an

observant boy by the surroundings of his early home."

". . . 'A sweeter spot to wander in down by the brink of the burn, or in the opening glades, was nowhere to be found in all the west.

"'The waters of the stream, drawn from the little rills which came wandering down from the moorlands on the east, pure and unpolluted by any public work, with its din and clang of labour, pass on until, joining the large brook, they go singing along with a face as clear and bright as the moon and stars by night, which glimmer and look coyly down into its many peaceful pools.

"'In its way to join the Irvine water, however, some two miles farther on, it goes leaping away over a number of picturesque waterfalls, and down through several whirling, foaming rapids; and nowhere are the shy little wrens so numerous as in the mossy brows and hazelly banks, which rise on either side of the stream, in which one is almost ready to believe that the fairies still come to bathe and wash their tiny forms in the glassy pools which whirl and linger here before the waters which forms them sweeps onward to the

more open valley below; and that in the short but glorious summer night they deck themselves with the wild roses, before they sail away once more upon the silver beams of the moon, ere the dawn of the morning breaks. . . .'

"And much more in the same strain does this writer, though not a fisher, describe, as he recalls the charm of the burn side he knew best in his youth."

"It is always so," replied the Professor. "Once a fisher always a fisher; once an observer of nature always a learner from nature; half of the joy of life comes from being able to see and reflect! This writer, you say, is now an old man, yet see the wealth he has in store, by drawing from the treasury of memory."

"If I were an artist I would paint burn sides exclusively"—this from Fly Busker.

"If you were an artist, you would have more sense," said the Veteran. "Still," he continued, "I yield to no one in my admiration for the unexpected beauty that is to be found in these hidden nooks. Some time ago I wrote about a charming burn I had come upon in my wander-

ings amongst the hills ; and the following autumn two artists visited it at different times to sketch its marvellous scenery."

"They had better luck than my friend, Brown," said the Cynic.

"How so ?"

"Well, when staying here some years ago he was always complaining that the scenery of our valley needed too big a canvas. So one day I persuaded him to come with me when I went to fish a burn you know all very well, about three miles from where we sit."

"I think I can guess which one it was," said Fly Busker.

"I am sorry for the fishes if you do," was the retort.

"However, when we got about two miles up the burn, Brown set up his easel near to a very nice painty bit—you know the kind of thing: waterfall with pool and runs in the foreground; water-waggy on a stone; saugh bush bending over the bank; bracken and heather on the brae; a tree here and there on the slope, and two or three birks on the hill ridge breaking the sky-line."

"Not at all bad," said the Veteran, who was inclined to pose sometimes as an art critic.

Cynic gave him a somewhat "lordly" glance of pity, and proceeded:

"I worked my way up to where the burn forked within a mile of the top, and had cheering sport all the time. The water was in ideal order—two days after a flood—and the trout seemed keen to try the flavour of our friend E. M. Tod's 'favourite,' so that ere long the strap of my creel was just a little bit too much in evidence for the comfort of my shoulder.

"Retracing my steps, I found Brown set up a little way down the burn from where he began, and looking somewhat crestfallen.

"'Hullo!' I shouted, 'what luck?'

"'How can there be any luck,' he replied, 'in the midst of barbarians?'

"'Have the midges been so bad? You should try——'

"'What are you raving about? I refer to the cottagers up yonder.'

"'Really, I have always found them very civil and obliging.'

"'Let's go home,' he said.

"Nothing loth, for the midges were rampant, we took our way down the glen to the inn."

"And what was the cause of his irritation?" asked the Veteran.

"Well, it was not until late that night, when we were enjoying the pipe of peace, that I was able to piece together the causes of his annoyance.

"It seemed that he had been working at his subject for nearly an hour, and making good progress, when from the cottage up the hillside a small boy emerged. He was grotesquely clad with a pair of pants foreshortened so as not to trip him up, and folded across his waist so as to keep them on. He had no jacket, but on his head was a tam-o'-shanter, with more than one hole in it, through which his red locks asserted themselves.

'Spying Brown by the burn, he began to descend by a zigzag path that led from the cottage to the well. Having reached our artist, he walked round and round him peering at his work from every point of view.

"Brown said nothing, but worked away, awaiting developments. Presently they came.

"From the cottage door a woman came out, evidently in search for her hopeful; seeing how he was engaged, she also made preparations as if to descend and join the group.

"As she was in the act of untying her apron Brown was startled by a shrill voice, crying: 'Dinna come doon!'

"The woman paused for a moment, and put her hand to her ear the better to hear.

"'Am saying, "Dinna come doon!"'

"There was a moment's pause, and then the fell stroke came: 'It's no worth it!'"

"And what happened after that?" asked Fly Busker.

"Oh, you unimaginative, matter-of-fact partridge spider; why will we always have to point the moral for you?"

"He reminds me of a story told by James Payn in one of his novels. An artist had painted a lovely garden scene; the flowers were all aglow, brilliant in the sunshine.

"The critics were captious, however. 'See

how faulty the sky is,' one said. 'See how out of drawing the sundial is,' said another. 'And see,' said a third, 'he has even tried to paint a fly in the heart of this rose. Phew!' The fly flew away, it was a real one!"

. . . . . .

"Now for a stave before we go," said the Dominie. And soon the walls were ringing with:

> "Sune the sun will gae to rest,
> Let's awa' th'gether;
> Company is aye the best
> Crossing ower the heather.
> Song will cheer. . . ."

(*Diminuendo et ritardando,* until the last candle disappears.)

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THE WIND WENT DOWN

Yarrow and St Mary's—Idle Fishing—Bowerhope Law—Sir Walter's Description of the Old Road—Tibbie Shiels' Daughter—Cappercleuch—Rodono Forest—Robert Chambers and the Cottage—Edward Irving—Changing Moods—"The Comin' o' the Troot"

[*Most of the incidents of the following rhapsody were discussed in common round the red lamp of the room where the brethren were wont to gather; but it seems better that they should be narrated here unbroken, as they include a large part of the district from whence the sketches have beeen drawn.*]

THE wind, which all forenoon had been fitful, now died down altogether, and left the unbroken waves to lip the shore in leisurely undulations. Far up the loch, where the enclosing hills were split by little glens, arrow-like shafts could be seen shooting across the surface of the water, giving the hope that the breeze might yet rise and steal our way: but the hope, like the breeze, was evanescent, and the loch soon became a mirror in which shadows looked as substantial as realities.

Now is the artist's opportunity: but the angler has no choice save to wade ashore and betake himself to the hillside, where, seated amongst the heather, he has leisure to enjoy the contemplative side of his pastime. Happy the man who at such a time can fall back upon the local traditions and folk-lore of bygone years—for it is "in scenes like these that most we prize our memory"!

In the stillness, how distinctly the sound of the river as it flows out of the loch falls upon the ear. There is a singular, lone, seashore plaintiveness in it, which, doubtless, can be easily accounted for by natural phenomena; but to those who hear it in the silence of noonday, amid mountain solitudes, it is accepted as the characteristic yearning wail of Yarrow.

The soft musical cadences of "J. B. Selkirk's" immortal "Song" fit it well:

> "No sound, no word, by field or ford,
> Nor breath of wind to float a feather;
> While Yarrow's murmuring waters poured
> A lonely music through the heather."

Well might another "J. B." ask, in his charming

"Minchmoor," ". . . What stream was ever so besung? at first we wonder at it, but the more we gaze, the less we wonder." Yes, truly, the message of Yarrow has ever held those spell-bound who come with hearts open to receive it.

Almost in line from where we sit, just a mile away, there shoots up from a little "hope" or cleuch, the spire of a tiny church. This building was opened by Dr Chalmers in 1845, as an out-post of the Free Kirk at Yarrow feus, seven miles down the valley: and we have met with old people who spake in glowing terms of the sermon, and of the crowds that came from distant town or hamlet to fill the church as it has never been filled since.

It is of this occasion that the story is told about a worthy old woman who was known far and near for her dislike to innovations.

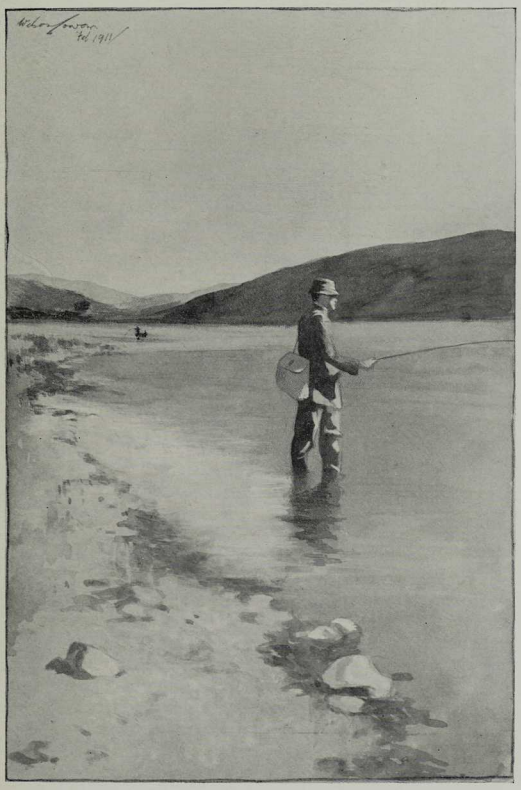
"Well, Nell, how did you like the doctor?"

"Oh, brawly, jist perfectly gran' a' th'gether."

"But, Nell, I thought you did not like read sermons?"

"Ah, but, sir, yon was fell readin'!"

Although in musing mood, my eye kept roam-



WHEN THE WIND WENT DOWN

ing over the loch in search of the breeze that would not come, and it was tantalising in the extreme to see the water dimpled all over with the circles made by rising trout, and to know that any effort made to cast a line would instantly cause their gambols to cease.

Spring lags slowly here, but when it does come, how cheering are its sights and sounds, even though the snow still lies deep on the summits of Broad Law and the White Coombe. In a rivulet near the moss-grown stone on which we sit, there is a glint of pale primroses with their crunkled leaves; the common fern abounds, and is succulent with fresh spiral fronds of marvellous shape and beauty; the mosses too are rich in varied colours, and the heather buds, though tight, are pregnant with the ever-welcome blooms that bide their time modestly, until the flaunting flowers are gone.

The air is musical with singing birds, for this is the undisturbed home of the skylark. Overhead the lapwing and curlew have been doing their utmost for the last half-hour to scare us from their nesting ground: the swallows have

just arrived, and skim the loch like merry wantons, while from Kirkstead is heard at intervals the uncorroded note of the cuckoo, due from the south only yesterday.

The configuration of the land hereabout amply warrants the early name given to the lake—"the loch among the hills." The present designation recalls pre-Reformation days, when St Mary's Chapel stood where the quiet kirkyard on the slope of the northern hill now lies deserted; and when Chapel-hope at the head of the Loch of the Lowes was also a place of worship.

> "O lone Saint Mary of the waves,
> In ruin lies thine ancient aisle:
> While o'er thy green and lowly graves
> The moorcocks cry, and plovers wail."

The balladists knew this district well, and have done more to preserve its traditions than the historians. The whole scenery is lit up by their genius, so that slumberous hill and sombre glen glow under the spell of romance and song. All that we see around deepens this conviction: for, from Riskenhope in the south to Black-Andro in the east, there is unfolded a map of places so

oft besung, that merely to mention their names were to indicate the arena where some of the most notable events in the family and clan life of the south of Scotland occurred.

One spot, not far from where we sit, has always had a peculiar fascination for us: it is the lonely mound called "Binram's Corse"—

> "That wizard priest, whose bones are thrust
> From company of holy dust. . . ."

The grave lies more than a hundred yards from the sanctuary of St Mary's Chapel; with rough, unhewn stones at the four corners—weird in itself, weird in its legend of never being shone on by the sun. Like many another seer and thinker, doubtless the poor outcast suffered for simply seeing farther than his fellows, and from not having enough of worldly policy to be silent about it.

Ah! that was a rare glint of sunshine on Bowerhope Law, just a mile across the loch; revealing much snow still lying up the glen. We have often seen the snow drifting deep up there, and blotting out every feature of the land; but

the old farmer who lived there, a hundred years bygone, knew more about snowdrifts than most people; for he once passed twenty-four hours in the heart of one, and was only rescued through the faithfulness of his collie, who attracted attention by refusing to leave the spot. It is of this old worthy we are told, that once, with reference to something Dr Russell of Yarrow had been saying, he replied:

"Aweel, doctor, ye may speak o' heaven as ye like, but gie me Boorup', I could take a tack o't to a' eternity!"

Some folk when telling the story add the words: "at a sma' rent," but this is just the sort of libel that comes stealing across the Border from time to time, in proof of Scotch caution even in generous moments!

No sign yet of the breeze rising, although nearly an hour has passed. The only break in the silence came from some friends, who hailed us as they went trolling down the loch in a vain quest.

In old coach days, the road near where we sit used often to puzzle the tourist. Sir Walter

in his introduction to Canto II. of "Marmion" says:

> "Abrupt and sheer, the mountains sink
> At once upon the level brink;
> And just a trace of silver sand
> Marks where the waters meet the land."

Now, the present road on the north side of the loch does not fulfil the requirements of abruptness and sheerness in the mountains at all; and we have seen tourists on coach days sitting with the poem in their hands, and charging the writer with topographical error.

We mentioned this difficulty some time ago to the late Mrs Mitchell of Corsecleuch, the worthy daughter of Tibbie Shiels, and she, out of the fulness of her local knowledge, cleared it away in a moment.

"Ye see, in the Shirra's time, the present road wasna' made ava; and sae, when folk rade up Yarrow, they had to cross the river at the east end o' the loch, near Dryhope haugh, and syne ride alang the south side, past Boorup', until they cam' to my mother's house, whaur they crossed the brig between the lochs, and wan to

the Moffat road again, on the north side o' the Lowes."

And so Sir Walter's description of the old bridle-path on the south side of St Mary's is left correct in every detail!

Looking westward a short distance, the delta of the River Meggat can be seen stretching across the loch, and making, with the island of the swans, the picturesque "capper" bay.

Most people are fond of old place-names. They not only carry with them a "sough" of bygone days, and bygone ways that we would not willingly let die; but they are also historically invaluable, and helpful to the recorder of national events. Overhanging the capper bay is a little cottage bearing the pretentious and Arizona-like name of "Copper-Cleuch Post Office." When the dwellers round the loch first saw this name they were indignant, and sent a memorial to London giving their reasons for retaining the old name to the authorities. But his Highness the clerk thought that once more he was to be annoyed by the uncouth dialect of these Scots; and so, with a stroke of his pen he changed

" capper " to " copper," ignorant of the fact that in so doing he was depriving future generations of a link to the fact that here, on this heathery brae, and up this rocky cleuch, that beautiful bird, the capercailzie, used to make its home in " forest " days !

Round a bend of the hill at this point, the broad valley of Meggat is disclosed : and westward from the bridge which crosses the river of that name, the dark pines of Rodono meet the eye. This was the ancient hunting-ground of Scotland's kings, and many notable gatherings were held here in bygone days, resulting in spoils that fill us with wonder.

'Twere easy to picture the gay cavalcade sweeping through Meggat Vale, while many a brave stag took to the loch and compelled its pursuers to tail off by Corsecleuch or Dryhope : nor did it rest until, the dogs outdistanced, and beaters and spearmen run to a dead stand, it found sanctuary within the wilds of Ettrick.

But nothing is left to us of these days save certain suggestive place-names. Such terms as " Hart-leap," " Hart-fell," " See-hart," " Boar's

Cleuch," "Wolf-den," give life and colour to the land, and are significant of notable incidents and legends that supplied the Border minstrels with themes of dare-and-do for many generations.

While we think about these days, some of the marvellously concrete word-painting in the old ballads connected with this district takes vivid shape. Thus, in the "Sang of the Outlaw Murray:"

> "Ettricke foreste is a fair foreste,
> In it grows monie a semilie tree;
> There's hinde and hare, and dae and rae,
> O' a' wilde beastis great plentie."

Then, the marvellous contrast which the same district presents when described by Wordsworth four hundred years later:

> "Meek loveliness is round thee spread,
> A softness still and holy;
> The grace of forest charms decayed,
> And pastoral melancholy"

Word-painting indeed! But our thoughts were brought to a sudden close by the welcome sight of a strong ripple on the loch coming round the point at Kirkburn foot. No time was lost in

reaching the spot and wading deep into the water, and for the next hour our attention was wholly taken up in the fairly successful endeavour to encreel trout.

Ere we gained the cathedral rock, however, the wind again fell completely away, and left a strong glare upon the water, that made the shelter of the "pulpit" amongst the rocks most inviting. Fortunately for our mood, it was just in line for the eye to rest upon the cosy beild at the head of the loch, which, amongst cottages, is probably one of the most interesting in our land. Ere we enter Tibbie's cottage, we must raise our cap in spirit to the memory of James Hogg, whose statue beams upon the passer-by from its verdant pedestal on the magin of the Ox-cleuch burn. "He taught the wandering winds to sing," and the time is coming when he will have a larger audience amongst his own countrymen than has been the case hitherto. But if you wish to hear more about Hogg and his contemporaries, let us enter Tibbie's in spirit, and hear what my old friend, her daughter, with the wonderful memory, has to say. No! not the new building,

the auld house; and the broad Doric of the rich voice will sound more natural.

"Ay, a ken his sangs weel. Jamie used aften to sing them to huz himsel', ye understan'; he was awfu' prood o' his singing, an' his favourite ane was, 'When the Kye come Hame.'"

As we were seldom without our rod and creel in those days, it seemed only natural that we should inquire about Hogg's skill as an angler.

"He was a gey guid fisher: no' maybe to be compared wi' Maister Wilson, or Maister Tom Tod Stoddart, wha aften cam' aboot oor house, but a vara guid fisher for a' that."

The mentioning of "Maister Wilson's" name one day led us to speak about Christopher North or, rather, Professor Wilson, for his sporting name was not familiar to our old friend.

"Oh, but he was a droll man sometimes, was the professor. He wud aften step into my mother's without ony warning ava, efter fishin' a' the wey up Yarrow frae Selkirk; and d'ye ken, he was aye as wat as he could be, for he just waded in the watter wi' the claithes he had on."

This led us to speak of the "Noctes" and of some imaginary scenes described there.

"Ay, nae doot they are vara droll; though Jamie Hogg's freens were na' ower weel pleased at the wey his name was used."

Another day when we were speaking about "the cottage" as described by Wilson in the apostrophe beginning: "Tibbie's is like a wren's nest," Mrs Mitchell said: "Ah, but it wasna' Maister Wilson wha first made my mother's house sae weel kent."

Seeing that we expressed some surprise at this statement, she replied: "Yes, it was ane Maister Chambers—doctor, I think he was ca'd later on—wha first wrote aboot the cottage being a nice place for spendin' a holiday." We felt interested enough to turn to Vol. I. of "Pictures of Scotland" by Robert Chambers, published in 1827, by Tait of Edinburgh, and there found the following:—"'. . . there has lately been erected at the head of the loch, a small, neat house, kept by a decent shepherd's widow, who lets her spare room for any length of time, at a small rent,' etc., etc. . . . Dreaming again! How strange it is that these old talks should come to us so vividly,

as we lie in the howe of a rock on a grey hillside in early spring. They seem set to music, for the cry of the black-cock and the whir of the grouse blend quite pleasantly with the rich undertones of the narrator's voice as we recall it.

"There was Maister Russell o' *The Scotsman*, wha aften cam' for a while just to be oot o' the bustle. He was a graun' fisher, an' he liked the place weel, had it no been for his letters. Ye see, in thae days we haud nae post office, and it was the carrier wha brocht the letters on frae Moffat: whiles he didna bring them a', an' whiles he brocht newspapers an' left the letters a'th'gither; sae Maister Russell, puir man, was keepit aye on edge."

Many such incidents fell from the lips of our old friend, all having their centre in that little cottage almost hidden amongst the trees at the head of the loch. How glibly came the name of men, the foremost in their time in science and literature, who resorted thither, and won rest and fresh inspiration, by the buoyant sense of freedom engendered by their unconventional life and beautiful surroundings.

One other conversation we recall, but it would need a Paul Chalmers to give all its lights and shadows.

"Ae nicht as we sat by the fire—we had nae cannal, ye ken, there cam' a loud chap, chap! at the door. My mother went to open it, an' huz bairns a' followed her, huddin' on by the skirts o' her goon.

"'Wha's there?' she asked.

"'It's a stranger, friend, sent to pass the night at your house.'

"'But wha sent ye?'

"'Open, please, and you shall know.'

"Sae my mother opened the door: an' oh, what a fricht I gat! By the licht o' the fire I could see, stannin' in oor spence, ane o' the tallest men I ever clapped e'en on. He was dressed a' in black, an' his lang beaver hat had hingers on, that cam' doun ower his shouthers; he had weepers roun' his coat cuffs, an' a broad, white neckcloth on. But you sud hae seen his een! I never saw the like o' them in a' ma born days. Then ma mother spak' up an' says:

"'Ye can see for yersel' that we hae nae room:

it wud be far better for ye to gang on to a ferm toun.'

"'No, no, my friend,' says he; 'I have walked from Moffat, and the Spirit has sent me here.'

"'Weel,' says my mother, 'a wilfu' man maun hae his wey, but ye'll need to rest in the airm-chair a' nicht.'

"An' sae he did. But i' the mornin', afore he gaed awa', he stood up an' prayed for a blessin' on oor house, an' the lanely widow, an' faitherless bairns. Mair than that: he ca'd huz bairns to his side ane by ane, an' put his han's on oor heid; an' invoked a blessin' on us by name. Losh, div ye ken, I feel a gruezin' a' through me when I think o't; an' even yet I can feel his han's on ma heid."

"And had you any idea who your strange visitor was?"

"O ay, we fand oot efter that he was a minister o' the Kirk o' Scotland, Edward Irving he was ca'd. He had been at the funeral o' his son doon by at Moffat, an' was walkin' on to Selkirk."

Can this be the occasion when Carlyle made

his only visit to Yarrow, by Traquair, to meet Irving at Mount Benger ?

While these thoughts were passing through our mind we were conscious of a change being effected all around. The grey clouds above Summerhope heights had become deep purple, indicating wind, but from a new quarter. We had also seen a herd of wild goats coming round the nutwood hill, and it is well known that when these creatures leave the uplands of Meggat for the low ground, stormy weather is not far off.

Nature seemed to be keenly sensitive of her own fickleness, for all her voices suddenly became weird and intense. . . . The wind had come at last ! . . . From the east end of the loch, the waves that are swept over the brink into the Yarrow seemed to utter the despairing cry of doomed spirits driven from their favourite haunts ; and the shadows that creep up the hill-side fitly enough express the termination of a mood.

In autumn these changes would have sent us homeward, sombre and silent ; but the paling of the sunshine of an early spring day carries no such emotions.

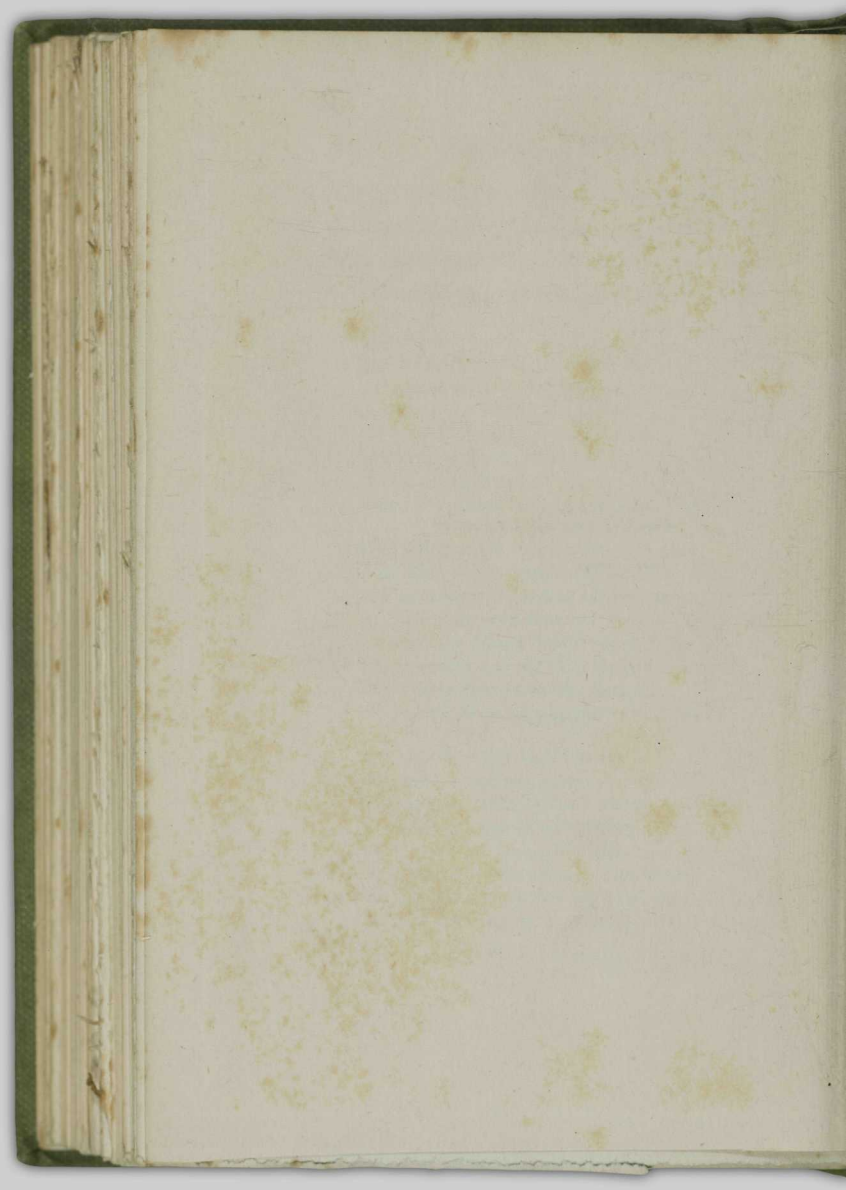
It is with the hopeful gladness engendered by the thought that "the best is yet to be," that we enter the ruffled loch, and seek to make up for the time that was lost when the wind went down.

"The westlin' win's begin to blaw,
And linties jouk frae bush and tree:
The primrose glints by holm an' shaw,
And lambkins frolic ower the lea;
All nature wakes from winter's sleep,
Well-e'es amang the hills bell free;
O wha would in the city keep,
When frae graun' streams rise sangs o' glee.

Last autumn-tide, when hairst had gane,
And rifted wuds tossed cauld an' bare;
The south-gaun birds fled hill an' plain,
As if their cry we'd hear nae mair—
E'en keenest fishers shun'd the streams
Wha's charms sae aft their souls had moved,
Tho' still in fancy's blissfu' dreams,
They plied the rod mang scenes they loved.

But noo, the lark's hie i' the sky,
The streams send oot a welcome ca',
Frae hill, and muir, is heard the cry
O' blackcock, whaup, an' peewits a';
Nae langer i' the toun we'll bide,
Great nature's voice entranced we hear.
The loch, the stream, the gay burn side,
Proclaim that angling joys are near!"

THE RIVERSIDE PRESS LIMITED, EDINBURGH.



University of British Columbia Library

DUE DATE

FORM 310

R, D. ANGLING SKETCHES FROM <

WOODWARD
RY