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A TROUT ROD IN NATAL

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FISHIING FOR THE COMPLETE BEGINNER . . . . AND OTHERS.

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HELEN B. HILLIARD

PUBLISHED BY THE CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY.

THE AUTHORESS

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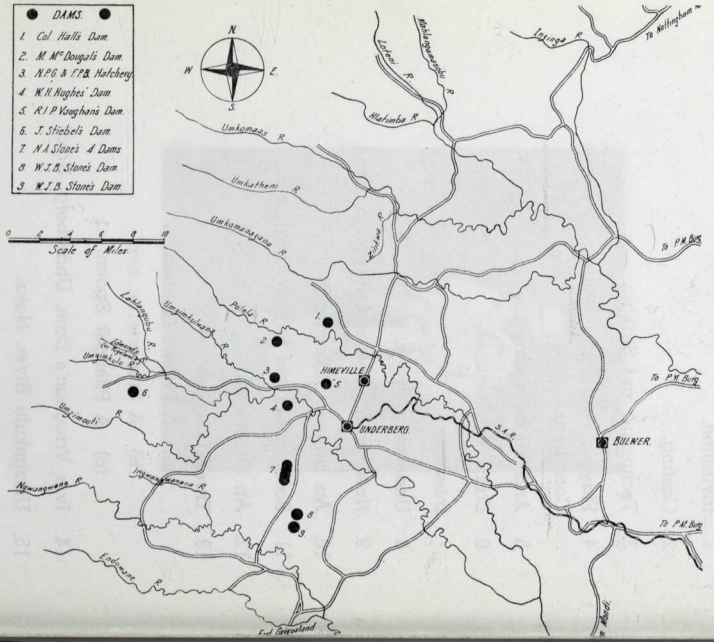
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To P.M. Burg
To P.M. Burg
HIMEVILLE.
UNDERBERG.
BULWER.
S.A.R.
East Griqualand

To the memory of my sister, Flora Scott, and of my brother, Donald L. McNaughtan, my fishing companions of early days, this book is dedicated.

FOREWORD

It is by request that this little book on trout fishing has been written, and I look upon it as an ABC for the complete beginner. Everything is easy to the man who knows how, but far from easy for the one who is not familiar even with the general terms one uses in connection with trout fishing. I have, therefore, tried to explain simply, and I hope clearly, the way to learn. I know I have repeated myself over and over again, but this is done in order to press the points home; for it is only by repetition that one remembers.

HELEN B. HILLIARD.

Underberg.

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INVITATION

CHAPTER ONE

"Quietly, quietly—take it quietly!" So spoke my friend.

"Take it quietly?" I replied. "I can't!"

"But why all this hurry?"

"Hurry—well simply because I can't get there quick enough."

"There? Where?"

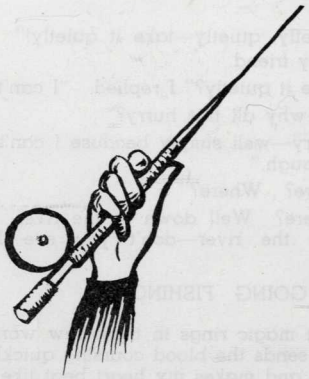
"Where? Well down to the river, of course, down to the river—don't you see—I'm going fishing?"

I'M GOING FISHING!

What magic rings in those few words! What is it that sends the blood coursing quickly through my veins and makes my heart beat like a sledge-hammer? What is this secret that causes such a thrill of delight? If you have never experienced it, then do not delay—it is not too late, never too late. It is never too late to taste the incomparable pleasures of a day's fishing on the river with all its countless joys. It is never too late to begin, so begin now, waste no more time, but begin. And if you would do so, then come with me. Follow me a little while and I will try to help you to acquire the gentle art of angling that will bring great pleasure into your life, peace to your mind, beauty to the eye and solace to the lonely heart, so come, come with me. But first read the following few chapters, written for the "complete beginner." Practise casting on the lawn, and when you feel you have mastered the technique, then away to the river! It is there, if you are keen and observant, where you will learn more than any book can teach.

CASTING

CHAPTER TWO



CASTING For Complete Beginners

GRIP, Two Methods:—

1. Where the thumb wraps round the rod.
2. Where the thumb is in a straight line up the rod.

I prefer the latter, but select the one which comes more naturally to you and in which you feel you have most control of the rod.

CONTROL AND TIMING are the two most important factors in casting. Both difficult to understand, but I hope by simple explanations to make this clear.

CASTING

THREE MOVEMENTS IN CASTING.

1. **Up.** When the rod brings the line from off the water and flicks it behind in the air.
2. Is not a movement at all—but a long **pause** to enable line to straighten out behind.
3. **Forward** when the rod flicks, or casts the line back on to the water.

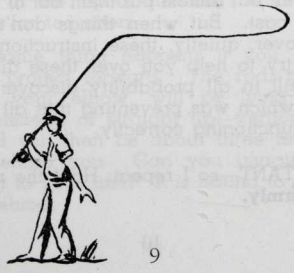
The result of your cast depends on the **back cast.** That cannot be repeated too often.

The back cast is when the line is whipped back behind your head prior to bringing it forward on the water.

CORRECT POSITION OF ROD IN CASTING

It helps considerably, if you would visualise a clock—or a watch. Your position is in a straight line with twelve. When drawing the line off the water, or lawn, when you are practising, and your rod reaches TEN you are ready to flick the line back behind you with an accelerated motion, keeping the line up in the air. When the rod tip reaches ONE O'CLOCK it must go no further, here you pause for the line to straighten out behind, before bringing it forward to drop lightly on the water.

Therefore visualise a clock and memorise the positions of TEN O'CLOCK the beginning, and ONE O'CLOCK the end of the swing of the rod backwards.



CASTING

The result of your cast **depends** on the back cast. I find that in learning if one can see what actually happens difficulties are easier to overcome; therefore watch your back cast—it is quite simple to turn your head and shoulder round sufficiently to see the line in flight. By this method you will learn to send the back cast high up in the air behind you, which is of inestimable value in river fishing. At this stage do not bother yourself about the forward cast. Once you learn—**and control**—the back cast, the forward cast is easy.

Start with a **short** line and continue until you have mastered the back cast sufficiently to place it in whatever position you want. Of course, first of all you will be satisfied to cast it just straight behind you—but don't let it drop—**keep it well up in the air,** your fly has only to be flicked on a stone for the barb to be broken off. There is no need to make a difficulty of it—treat the whole matter naturally and with ease. There is no need to get cramp in all your muscles through unconsciously holding yourself rigid—nor your brain paralysed by trying to absorb all at once, the foregoing remarks. By the time I have come to the end of my suggestions I shall probably advise you not to try and think of them, but almost put them out of your mind —and just cast. But when things don't go right, then read over, quietly, these instructions—written entirely to try to help you over these difficulties—and you will in all probability discover a simple little thing which was preventing that all important back cast functioning correctly.

IMPORTANT—so I repeat: Hold the rod easily, naturally, **firmly.**

CASTING

1. On the **count** of ONE, fling, decisively, the line behind you—keeping it well up in the air.
2. Pause in that position whilst you count a prolonged TWO.
3. Then bring the line forward decisively.

AND THAT'S ALL!

The pause is the most important part of the cast

1. To acquire this, keep the tip of the rod **upright.**
2. Your hand gripping your rod should be almost level with your chin—naturally, nine or twelve inches to the side.
3. To begin with, treat elbow, wrist and rod as one piece.
4. Keep elbow well into your side, try holding a newspaper under your arm whilst practising. This forces you into the correct use of the forearm. Use a short line.

Master this method before bringing any wrist action into play. If a beginner uses his wrist, **invariably** he will—on the backward swing—drop the point of his rod, till the rod is lying in almost a horizontal position across his shoulder. Therefore, never let the wrist bend backward **at any time,** especially at the top of the cast. A very common fault, seen far too often.

The same thing happens if you allow your elbow to project forward. The rod, naturally in line with your elbow, will be lying over your shoulder instead of straight up—vertical. The tip of the rod will then be about three feet from the ground behind you. Can you imagine what is happening to your line? It is bound to drop on the ground behind.

This is all very elementary, but I warned you that I was starting from the beginning.

Do not **press** the elbow against your side. The upper arm must hang free and relaxed—no strain anywhere.

The whole movement is one of **Rhythm.** So on the pause on the backward cast do not stop the swing of the rod with a jerk—for fear of letting it drop too low behind your shoulder. Let the rod tip travel slowly whilst the line behind is straightening out, in a slight, almost imperceptible, movement as though it were, in your mind's eye, following the flight of the line.

FORWARD CAST

After the long pause of the count of TWO, the rod is then brought forward, flinging the line in front.

The aim of the caster is to be able, not only to place his fly just where he wants but also that the line and gut cast should alight on the water without a trace of a spash. The fly touching the water first.

Therefore

Never let the tip of the rod **come down** on to the water. Cast over an imaginary high wall—keeping the tip of the rod up. This allows time for the line to straighten out its full length when it will drop on the water gently.

Visualise the **clock** again, and on the forward cast **stop at** TEN O'CLOCK, and as the line straightens follow it gently with the tip of the rod. Don't hurry.

Get into the habit of holding the line under the first or second—or both—fingers of the hand gripping the rod. This is the first rule to learn in the control of the line.

CASTING

BACK-HAND CAST

No difficulty in acquiring this. If you are a tennis player, it should come as easily as the back-hand stroke.

Instead of flicking the line over the right shoulder, you just flick it over the left—in this case, the hand holding your rod is directly in front of your chin and your palm facing the direction where you wish to place your cast.

Back-hand volley in tennis.

Back-hand stroke in fishing very similar.

TIMING is simply the pause you allow on the back cast for the line to straighten out. This, naturally, varies with the length of line you are using, and you will only arrive at correct timing through practice. I again repeat, it is the most important part of the whole cast.

If the cast is not pleasing you, in all probability the timing is at fault. Don't try to put it right on chance. **Watch** your back cast a few times. You will then find out that you are not pausing long enough.

ONE—up, TWO—**pause,** THREE—forward.

One of the most difficult things to do in casting is to send a straight line—it rarely travels straight, but you need not, at this stage, strain after such perfection. Treating the forearm, wrist and rod as one will help you best to acquire it.

SHOOTING OUT LINE

Every fisherman should learn to shoot slack line through the guides on the forward cast. To shorten the line, prior to re-casting, draw it in with the left

hand, only draw in three or four feet to begin with until you become proficient. The extra line shoots out as the forward cast is made. To do this successfully the line must be held tight in the left hand during the backward cast—**this is vital.** The moment the rod is flicked forward and you feel a drag on the line let go your hold on the line and it will rush forward; the impetus of the cast in flight carries the extra line along.

If on the forward swing the line which you are holding sags the slightest bit, the force of the impetus is lost and the line will not shoot out.

CONTROL. KEEP THE LINE TAUT. DON'T LET IT SAG.

Therefore the great point to remember is to **hold the line tight** from the commencement of the backward cast and only let go on the forward cast.

You may not, at first, succeed in shooting out all the slack line, this comes with practice; but as soon as the cast is completed, quickly get control of the line with your left hand, automatically placing it under the fingers of the right hand, as previously described—and continue fishing.

Never attempt to lift a long line from off the water until you have shortened it by the method already explained and until you are certain that the line is on the surface and not submerged. If you attempt to recast without paying attention to this, you may severely damage the tip of the rod.

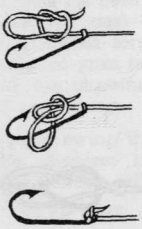
When you have perfected this method of casting, and not before, you can then begin to relax the wrist slightly, both on the backward and forward casts; but I do not advise this until you have learned to control your cast.

TYING OF KNOTS

KNOTS

For some people the tying of knots is a never-ending source of trouble, therefore stick to the simplest method combined with efficiency. The enclosed sketches are recommended for nylon, and will meet all the requirements of a beginner. For attaching the cast on to the line make a loop on the end of both, pass the nylon loop over the line loop and thread the cast through and pull tight. As nylon is inclined to slip, to avoid such a contretempts, make a small ordinary knot on the end of the nylon before making the loop, then pull the knot of the latter close up against the wee knot, which prevents any slipping. As you become more proficient you will dispense with the loop on the line and will tie a figure eight round the loop on the cast.

TYING OF KNOTS



To attach the fly to the cast as the sketch shows, thread the hook and let it run up the cast out of your way, then make a slip knot (as sketch), not forgetting the wee knot on the nylon to prevent slipping—pass the hook through this loop and pull tight on to the lower part of the hook just above the ring.

CHAPTER THREE

TECHNIQUE

1. You will not catch trout simply because you know how to cast.

2. Having learned to cast, you must learn to control the line.

3. You must also learn something of rivercraft, such as the type of water where you are most likely to find trout, where they lie, where they feed. This one acquires by experience and observation, and is a subject sufficiently fascinating as to permit a man to sit for hours quietly on the river bank, in contemplative mood, just watching.

4. (a) **Sometimes** the fly is taken on the surface as soon as it alights on the water.

(b) **Sometimes** a few inches below the surface.

(c) **Sometimes** deeper.

5. You must know something of the habits of trout, both brown and rainbow. And here I would recommend you to read "Swift Trout," by Towner Coston. You will learn a lot from that delightful book. You will come across little things that you have never thought of, but the knowledge of which will add much to your pleasure when fishing.

6. The **selection of your fly is important.** I use only one when fishing for rainbow, but here you will be guided by the advice—always willingly given—of other more experienced fishermen knowing local conditions, until you learn to select and to

decide for yourself. And remember if you do not like the fly suggested and have no confidence in it —then change it! I derive great pleasure in selecting my fly, but again, I am very particular, perhaps due to my innate attention to detail. I like to see the colour of the water before deciding. A general rule is a bright day, a bright fly and vice versa. I change my fly frequently. My experience is that trout will rise to a certain fly one day and not look at it the next day, though conditions appear the same. But there is another reason why I never hesitate to change. By doing so, the fly is tied on to fresh gut and so you eliminate that part of the cast that has had to bear the greatest strain. How often, before changing, have I jerked the fly to find it come away in my hand, the gut having snapped close to the hook. Well, the same thing would have happened if a trout had taken that fly, and not only should I lose my trout, but, much worse, I should be guilty of something I abhor— letting a trout get away with a hook in its mouth. Therefore—another detail—if you do not change your fly frequently, then get into the habit of testing it by pulling on it—never allow yourself to lose a fish through want of this little attention. What I am stating now is very elementary, but it is important you should know it.

Also get into the habit of occasionally running your hand over your cast to be quite sure there is no knot in it. This occurs through a bad cast, or through the wind causing it to turn over on itself when casting. This knot must be removed immediately, and it is advisable to carry a pin with you for that purpose, because it is at that knot where the cast will break if you get into a fish. It is no use pulling it tight so that it is almost imperceptible —it will break there just the same.

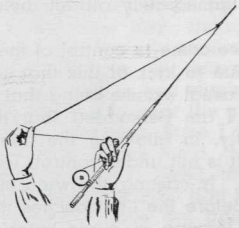
6. **Remember** that trout live facing up-stream. That their eyesight is far keener than yours. That although it is a debatable point whether they actually hear, it is an undisputed fact that they are acutely sensitive to vibration. I cannot over-emphasize this too much. So avoid a heavy foot-fall on the bank or being too conspicuously dressed, which would immediately attract their attention.

7. Now we come to control of the line. In my opinion it is due to lack of this that so many trout are lost. The usual excuse being that the trout are rising short! I am persuaded that the fault lies, more frequently, in allowing the line to sag and consequently it is not under control. Try to visualise what happens. In casting, the wind may cause the line to sag. Before the line touches the water it is blown back, leaving a curve over which, temporarily, you have no control. If, at this moment, a trout rises to your fly, a hundred to one you will lose him, because it will have touched and let go before you have time to straighten your line. In others word, you were not in control.

8. **Learn Control.** Keep your line taut, so that when anything touches the fly, which is at the far end of your cast, you instantly feel it. Never let the line sag!

9. **Remove sag** by drawing in the line with the left hand, still holding it under the finger or fingers of the casting hand. If you get into the habit of holding the line in your left hand direct from the guides, without also holding it under the right hand, you will experience difficulty in getting control and

probably lose your fish. (See sketch.) After striking (your fish) the line will probably go slack owing to the trout darting towards you quicker than



you can reel up. This is a favourite trick. Gain control of the line by quickly pulling it in with the left hand, as described above. When all slack is removed and the fish is pulling on the line straight from the tip of the rod, then grasp the rod in the left hand, never for a moment relaxing the grip on the line until your right hand has reeled up all loose line, which is probably dangling somewhere at your feet. Once this is achieved, and the rapidity with which you succeed can only be acquired by practice, you are then in a position to play the fish correctly direct off the reel.

I never attempt to coil the slack line in the palm of my left hand when drawing it in, which is the correct method—I just draw it in and let it

dangle at my feet. If I coil it in my hand it gets into a crumpled mass, but left dangling—either on the bank or in the water—it remains straight and I find runs out easier on re-casting.

Beginners must understand that you not only control the line when fishing, but you also control your trout when playing him—that comes only with experience. But the point is that you can never succeed in this if you allow the line to go slack.

Regarding slack line. Later on I will have more to say on the play and control of a trout which may be of some interest to the more experienced fisherman.

Strike. What exactly is meant by this? Well, it is the word we use meaning "ram the hook home." In the excitement caused by the fact that a trout has taken your fly one has difficulty in controlling one's reflexes and one "strikes" too hard, with the result that the hook is pulled out of the trout's mouth. You can even jerk the fish, if it is a small one, out of the water. So when you feel a trout take your fly, or see the line tighten, if you are in control of your line—as you should be—all you need do is strike with a **slight** though decisive movement of the wrist backwards and **hold firm.**

Now comes the real test—the playing of your fish!

CHAPTER FOUR

Playing Your Fish

This is where the real sport comes in. You are fishing with fine tackle, and any rough handling, any sudden jerk, may spell disaster. Your adversary is up to every conceivable trick possible to get free —you with delicate handling will counter every move. Your pulse beats quicker as the excitement grows. Every fisherman will play his fish according to the tactics adopted by the trout and his own method, learned from long experience. But you—beginners—with little or no experience behind you, need some rules to asist and guide you.

So we will continue from where I described the striking of the fish and **holding firm.** I hope you understand that by holding firm I do not mean pulling on your fish. I simply mean don't let your line go slack—hold firm **without pulling.** As long as you hold firm you are in control. I could not possibly attempt to describe all the tactics required in the art of playing a trout, because nearly every one needs different handling, and every fisherman adopts methods suitable to his own individual temperament—but this is one of the great pleasures of this sport. Therefore don't pull. Let the trout have his head, particularly when tugging, exert a little pressure when you feel him giving way.

There is one rule and a very important rule that you must obey, and that is

HOLD YOUR ROD UP

There is always a tendency, a very natural one because the fish pulls it, to let the rod drop over the water. Never allow this. Hold the rod up, so

that the fish is played off the rod; let it feel its weight. The bigger the fish the more important is this rule. If you feel you cannot hold the rod in the one hand to prevent it being pulled forward, then rest the butt lightly against your chest—as I do—you will have full control then.

A few tips. Don't pull too hard on your fish. Give him his head when he bolts, letting him take the line freely off the reel. The second he stops his rush, hold firm, without pulling. If he tugs violently, release the pressure slightly, the tugging will then cease, but the moment he takes a breather, or a bit of a rest, then, that is the time to exert pressure. Reel up, if you feel him giving way, but always be ready for another burst of energy on his part—and let him take it. Again, I repeat, apply pressure when you feel him tiring.

Often a trout, after its first wild rush, will leap out of the water in its effort to free itself. Now when this happens you have got a very definite thing to do. The trout is hoping that the sudden jerk will dislodge the hook—it often does. Your only chance to counter this move is to take all the strain off your line, so as to minimise the drag or jerk by which the hook will be torn out. So **drop the point** of your rod, facing it at the leaping fish, and take off all pressure, letting the line run free, thereby reducing the chance of a jerk on your line. Rapidity of action is imperative, because this must be done before the fish strikes the water on its downward course. On this manoeuvre proving successful, you immediately control the line and hold the **rod up.** If it is not successful—well, better luck next time!

When a trout, after playing, comes to the surface and turns belly up then you may be excused for thinking that he is yours, but experience will teach you first to get him safely in the net before counting on him.

PLAYING YOUR FISH

NETTING A FISH

Many a good fish is lost at the crucial moment —when about to land it. So a few remarks here may be useful. It is understood that when about to land your fish the latter has fought itself to a finish, and it comes up to the top of the water, "belly-up," showing the white flag of surrender. It is then a simple matter to hold the net deep in the water—not half in half out—and bring your fish with a quiet, steady pull over the net, making no attempt to lift the net until the trout is well over the centre of it. But not many trout come to the net in such a docile manner. The moment they see you —or the net—they will renew their struggle to escape. At this moment do not pull on your fish, hold him firm and let him bolt if he wants to, but— **and this is important**—at no time now must you let him have slack line, if you do, you will probably lose him. At this stage the hook has most likely worn a hole in his jaw, and if the line is slack it will fall out.

Where the current is strong, endeavour to get below your fish. Once you turn his head down stream he has not a chance. He can no longer breathe. This is by no means easy, and you will have many a fight before you wear him down sufficiently to get him where **you** want him. Never be in too great a hurry, and when your two-pounder is approaching your net, control your nerves.

When he is well over the net, reduce the tension on your line a little so as to allow him to fall more readily into the net as the latter is being lifted out of the water.

PLAYING YOUR FISH

WEATHER CONDITIONS

It has been suggested to me that it would help beginners if I made a few remarks on weather conditions and what constitutes a favourable or unfavourable fishing day. Now this I find rather difficult, as there can be no hard and fast rule where trout are concerned. But, when do trout rise? One does not use the word "bite" to a trout that "rises" to the fly. Are they affected by weather vagaries, such as the direction of the wind, a sultry day, thunder and extremes of temperature? To this, I reply, "Yes they are," but I dare not be dogmatic and lay down definite rules because I do not think trout are guided by "rules". So I can only generalize.

The majority of fishermen often come away for only a short holiday, and they will fish every day and all day, no matter what the weather is like, and they do right! The only thing that will prevent them and when it would be useless to try—on rivers where only a fly is permitted—is when rivers are in flood and very discoloured. When this occurs, and it can quite frequently, one simply has to wait until the waters subside. But as the river clears and loses its muddy colour, it is quite worth while trying, even though the river is running fast. When one can see the rocks a foot below the surface of the water it is considered fishable. Many a nice trout has been caught lying close up to the bank, where they take refuge from the turbulent stream.

On such conditions, to be successful, I advise fishing upstream. Use a short line and a large fly, size four or six; then cast the fly upstream, dropping it as close to the bank as you can. I emphasise the short line so as to enable you to control it as the

current sweeps it down. By fishing upstream, the fly will drop lower in the water than by fishing the opposite way and more likely to be seen by a trout sheltering in deep water in the lea of the bank.

Beginners will find this rather difficult and fatiguing, as it means constant concentration in order to keep the line taut. As the river clears and you are able to see the fly in the water, though it is still running fast, cast your line into the stream, watch the current take it down and follow the line with the tip of the rod in order to bring it nearer the bank. As the gut cast becomes extended, you will see the fly swerve quickly round towards the bank, a manoeuvre which few trout can resist.

Rainbow trout are not so easily upset by weather conditions as the brown trout. When a thunderstorm is brewing, the Brownies do not like it and seldom rise, but it does not seem to affect the rainbow, only under certain conditions, unaccountable, and which are learnt by experience. I have caught many a good bag of rainbow during a dry thunderstorm, provided the lightning is not too near to be unpleasant. During a wet storm I prefer shelter! I have caught during a steady rain, hoping the rain would cease, and when the rain did stop so did the trout!

Therefore, one never knows what conditions will constitute a good day, and this surely is part of the fascination of fishing.

How often have I gone out with the fixed determination of catching the limit. Full of hope, expectation and enthusiasm, I cast over every likely spot, but it seemed that nothing would attract them,

so as the day passes, I decide in my mind that I should be satisfied with a bag of three, and as the time still goes on, and still with no success, I reduce this number until I think I would be content if I only could catch one! But to every fisherman, I say, go and try! I do not like a uniformly grey day, unless there are definite breaks in the overall greyness. I enjoy best and prefer a bright day, not too hot, but with a gentle breeze and some cloud floating about, when the river sparkles and sings to you in a caressing manner, and when all the world seems happy and at peace. So one cannot be dogmatic. But there is one exception, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter. When the river turns leaden, you cannot mistake what I mean. When it turns the colour of slate, looks sullen and lifeless, then, in my opinion, and from long experience you might as well pack up and go home, because the trout will not move.

• • •

CHAPTER FIVE

And This on Manners

" Do unto others as you would they should do unto you."

I always felt that of all sportsmen anglers led the way in courtesy and consideration, but, alas, I have been compelled, very reluctantly, to alter this opinion. Discourtesy may arise through ignorance and therefore be unintentional, but when it is a deliberate act of selfishness, then it is unpardonable. This is a sport requiring skill, keenness of perception; delicate handling of rod, line and fly, and one is usually keyed up to a certain high pitch of tension. Any unpleasant incident throws one temporarily out of one's natural poise and one's fishing suffers in consequence. A trout rises, you will be a fraction late on the strike and miss it, and so become a little more disturbed. None of this should arise through the bad manners of others. When you are approaching a favuorite spot, which you may have been looking forward to all day, it is exasperating to find that some one has rushed along and forestalled you. Not to become thoroughly unpopular, it is as well to remember a few things. So **do not** walk on the edge of a river bank when you are not fishing that stretch, knowing that another man is following who will—reason, trout are very sensitive to vibration, and if they are frightened, the fishing is spoilt for the man following.

Do not flick the water with your fly as you walk along to your allotted place on the river unless you are sure no other fisherman is following, but in any case it is a stupid thing to do; fish it properly or not at all.

AND THIS ON MANNERS

Do not come down to the river and start fishing within casting distance of the man who is already there.

When fishing a pool no other man should fish the run into it without first ascertaining that you do not intend to return and re-fish it—as I frequently do. Not until you have vacated that pool entirely should any one else come along and fish either just above or below you—unless by arrangement. A courteous request is usually met with a courteous reply; but as a rule one does not like to feel crowded, and sometimes one more is a crowd. So if there is plenty of water, pass on. Do not delude yourself into thinking that the only fish in the river is just where the other man is fishing. You are out for a day's enjoyment, so do not let the sight of another fisherman spoil your day. And should you see one coming behind you, then **please,** don't rush ahead in order to get in the first cast over fresh water before he comes along. Be a sport and remember that he is probably just as keen as you are and that he will appreciate a give-and-take attitude. Taking it all round, we are all out to help each other as much as possible, and one must avoid petty jealousy, which I feel is often responsible for a display of bad manners.

Trout fishing differs from all other types of angling because one does not rely on the actual catching of trout for a day's pleasure. Admitted that it helps, and helps considerably; nevertheless the size of the bag should never be taken as a criterion of the skill of the fisherman.

Until I came to this country I was of the opinion that a fisherman wading in the river would not trespass on to the other side, and fish, even though he never left the water, unless permission had been

granted by the owner. There is an unwritten law dividing the centre of the river by an imaginary line beyond which the fisherman would not wade. And I am of the firm opinion that that unwritten law should hold good in every part of the world. Unfortunately in the Underberg district this does not appear to be the case. Once a man is in the water he seems to think he is entitled to wade wherever he can. I am persuaded this does not apply in England and it should not apply here. I look upon it as an act of discourtesy. I am not suggesting that one should not cast beyond this imaginary line, that is a different matter, but what one should not do is to wade beyond it.

But, by now, you must be itching to get to the rivers, and I trust you have done so long before this. The preceding chapters have been written to help and guide you. The following, describing my own technique and a few of my experiences, are written with a view to assisting you in perfecting your skill, benefiting from my failures and I hope emulating my successes.

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CHAPTER SIX

Early Recollections

Just at what age I started fishing it would be difficult to say. I do not remember the time when I did not hold a rod, of some sort, in my hand. My earliest recollection was being taken down to the shore on Lake Windermere in company with my younger sister and brother; he not much more than a babe, a nurse in charge, each of us armed with a sapling cut from a hazel tree, a bit of string for a line and on the end of that a bent pin. We fished for minnows. Nurse would take her sewing, knowing full well that we three would not move from that spot until marshalled home for lunch. Our bait was a bit of bread around which the minnows would swarm in a seething, black mass. This simple method of fishing taught us a great deal: patience, observation, action. It required some little skill for small hands to jerk the pin home and prevent the minow from wriggling off when landing it. Besides, we were, in our own estimation, very important little people, were we not catching minnows for Father, who later in the evening, when fly fishing was off, would use them as bait for trolling—so all the minnows were kept alive, and as their number increased in the can so did our excitement. We learnt to observe and we learnt to act quickly. On looking back, I feel sure that this training, simple as it was, was of the greatest importance in developing a sense which, as regards the art of angling, can only be acquired in one's youth and which becomes a second nature. Today I will do things without thinking, and without giving any reason, but they will be the correct things, all due to this early training. As soon as we could

handle a trout rod we were all rigged out with the complete outfit, not expensive, of course—but good enough to make us feel that we now belonged to that exclusive band of real trout fishers. No doubt we also felt that we had nothing more to learn—such is the mentality of children. All this happened many years ago, and since then, all through these years I have never stopped learning. I never remember being taught to cast. To our family of generations of trout and salmon fishers it seemed an understood thing that we should—well—just go and fish! We learnt in a difficult school, where the shadow of the rod would send the trout scuttling. They were not easy to catch. We learnt to cast so that our line fell lightly on the water like a thread of gossamer and just where we wanted it to fall. We fished out of a boat, often two of us together. We made no sound. We would drift with the wind, side on in and out of the bays. A favourite place for the trout to lie would be just where the bottom of the lake started to shelve into deeper water. Each of us would cast over the outer shoulder so that the line was flicked across the stern at one end and over the bow at the other

To keep the boat on an even keel one of us would occasionally dip the oars gently in the water, making neither sound nor splash. We rarely spoke. How dreadfully dull, you might think. Dull? We never thought so. We were intent. We were fishing. We dare not distract our attention for a moment from what we were doing—nor did we want to. We were watching the dropper on our casts. We fished with three small flies. We knew to an inch where the tail fly should be, usually out of sight just below the surface; but we were watching as we played the dropper lightly on top of the water, ready to strike the moment we saw the flash

of a fish as it darted towards the fly or as it broke surface. To the dropper they would frequently leap out of the water and then turn down on to it. This would give us our biggest thrill, and in our excitement we would often strike too quickly and drag the fly away, so missing it. Our disappointment was tragic; but we were then not much more than children. We used to be filled with envy when we heard that the local boatmen had caught some beautiful trout. My young brother would immediately rush down to the lake to enquire what flies they had used. But these old boatmen would never give their secrets away, and back my brother would come disconsolate. As time went on, and as we grew older and became more expert, it was then the boatmen's turn to ask us what flies the trout were taking. My brother, who never forgot the treatment meted out to him as a child, would smilingly reply in the local vernacular, "Ee now, nowt but 'ooks wid fedders (feathers) on!"

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INTERLUDE

CHAPTER SEVEN

Interlude

I am now going to pass over a number of years, because during this period the little fishing I did was very spasmodic. Do not think because I had not the opportunity of indulging in my favourite sport that these years were without interest. On the contrary, with my husband, we spent his annual month's holiday in Switzerland, chiefly in the Bernese Oberland. From 1908 we never missed a winter, excepting when war intervened. We went for the ski-ing and the sunshine. We became experienced ski-ers. Only in Europe will you find ski pronounced with a hard "k". That is the French pronunciation. In Norway—the home of ski-ing—it is pronounced like "she" and the English adopt that pronunciation. The sound of the word is exactly the sound produced by one's skis as one slides them over the crisp, scintillating snow. I must not digress too much to describe this wonderful sport. The clear air, the exhiliration, like the effect of champagne, as one climbed higher and higher till one reached the summit. The ever-changing scene as peak after peak, dazzling in their whiteness, unfolded themselves to one's view. The brilliance of the blue sky. Then the almost terrifying moment as one faced the steep descent and felt one's skis gliding from under one, gaining impetus every moment. You must lean forward and go with them, or fall on your back buried beneath an avalanche of snow. We learnt in a hard school —but how fit we felt! Today everything is made easy. You are taken to the top in funiculars and there are "pros" to teach you and even guides to bring you down the whole way, holding you up! In the summer we would go tramping. With our knapsacks on our backs, we wandered all over Switzerland, traversed the mountain ranges in

INTERLUDE

France, the Dolomites in the Tyrol, and round the base of Mont Blanc, starting from Geneva, into France, Italy and back again into Switzerland. We rarely touched the main roads, maybe only to cross them to get on to the mountain tracks again. Up at 4.30 in the morning, breakfasting off rolls, butter, honey and coffee, often not rolls but the coarse bread of the peasants. We would shoulder our packs and off we would go again. We often slept in mountain refuges, sometimes at an altitude of 8,000 ft., this not from choice; the cold was intense. We were compensated by the beauty of the sunrise as its rays lit up each mountain peak. Then the alpine flowers, vast stretches of mauve and white crocuses just where the snows had melted—one feared to tread. As we descended we would see in the distance masses of colour—the famous Alpine meadows. For sheer beauty, fragrance and variety these would be difficult to equal, certainly not surpass. After describing some of these "wonder days," a little lady wrote and gave me the following:

BECAUSE YOU LOVE BEAUTY

You have seen the scarlet flowers of sunset glowing
On everlasting snows;
You have seen a thousand blue-eyed gentians growing
By rocks and icy floes;
You have seen the moon its silver light bestowing
On still waters desolate;
You have seen the flooding cataracts go flowing
Down the hills in roaring spate;
You have seen the death-pale hand of sunset sowing
A million stars upon the sky;
You have seen the golden starlight, fading, going
Where no flowers fade or die;
You have seen the storm-winds rise and gather, blowing
Where no foot of man has trod.
You have seen the white clouds slowly drift, not knowing
Whither; and in these things you saw God.

ELEANOR BRINKS.

INTERLUDE

In 1940 we were in France. We heard on the wireless the capitulation of that unfortunate country. It was an impossibility to try to get back to England —no means for this were available. We could only escape from Europe via Lisbon, sailing on a Portuguese ship to Lourenco Marques, and from there we came to this wonderful country, South Africa.

Having escaped from war-stricken Europe, South Africa seemed to belong to another world. It was difficult to believe we were in the old world. We were struck with the beautiful climate, the almost cloudless skies and perpetual sunshine. The Berea, Durban, with attractive houses set in lovely gardens, ablaze with colour and the blue of the Indian Ocean beyond, reminded us very much of many parts of the French Riviera and created in me an acute nostalgia. Our hearts were still sore for those unfortunate people, as we knew them, hard-working, proud, now having to submit to and live under the heel of the Nazis—their most hated enemy. The French have two great obsessions—one, quite rightly, "Ma Patrie," the other, equally justified, their hatred of the Boche! As we were having our dinner, our last dinner together in France, on the eve of our departure from a country where we had spent many happy years, the proprietress of the small hotel where we had been fortunate in finding a room for the night on the frontier (of Spain) had said to us: "Surely the good God won't let those **sales Bosches** (German hordes) overrun our beautiful country!" The words still ring in my ears. We little knew how very close it was to being a **fait accompli.**

INTERLUDE

The plight of Europe was alarming. "We shall never return," my husband said. "Europe can never be the same in our lives. "At the end of the war it will be a shambles!"

I cannot expect you in this country, so far away from the war area, to be able to understand how much we were affected in mind and spirit at the thought of such devastation. The magnificent cathedrals, monuments erected by man to the glory of God, now blitzed and bombed beyond repair, the beauty of which can never be replaced. The craftsmanship no longer exists—nor the money to pay, though the irony of it is that there is much greater wealth in the world today.

A few months passed and I knew that neither of us could be happy, even in this delightful country, just idling our time away. I must here mention that we were both over-age to be employed on war work. I was therefore not surprised when my husband suggested that we should go trout fishing. What did surprise him, though, was my lack of enthusiasm. It was September, 1940. England was going through the tightest corner she had ever been in. The whole world was holding its breath. Could she survive? I felt that we dare not spend the little amount of money that we had been able to bring with us from France, as any moment our income from England might cease. That is one of the reasons why I hesitated. On my husband expressing astonishment at my indifference and asking the reason, I stated that my rods and all my gear were in England, that under present conditions it would be foolish to spend money on anything unessential, and that, well, I did not fancy fishing with cheap things! To which he quietly replied: "That sounds very like swank!" Now, I

dislike the word "swank" and all that it implies equally as I dislike the word "cheap." So the matter dropped. But at the end of a week the persistent Irishman again broached the subject and simply announced that we should go into town and see what could be got in the way of equipment. At one of the principal sports shops we were shown a light three-piece American rod complete with spare tip. Price one guinea. We bought two rods! Two lines, not tapered, these would have cost too much. We selected two reels, one costing six shillings, the other fourteen—a concession to me. We got some jay-gut casts, about a dozen flies, and each a landing net which screwed on to a light bamboo stick. The whole rig-out cost us less than forty-five shillings each. I never thought it could be done.

I am giving these details because I want to impress upon you that, although one is pleased at possessing a Hardy or any of the rods of the well-known makers, it is not necessary to spend a small fortune in order to trout-fish, and therefore this wonderful sport comes within the reach of almost everyone.

By the time I had finished handling these rods and buying the minimum that was necessary, I was all agog with excitement: what had been latent for so long was re-awakening. A spark was rekindling a flame into a fire of enthusiasm that I hope to carry with me to the end of my life. In this spirit did I board the train that took us to Underberg.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Underberg

It was in October, 1940, that we paid our first visit to Underberg, and it is there where I have spent most of my time ever since, becoming more and more attached to the place and its people. At an altitude of over 5,000 ft. the climate is difficult to beat. As the dawn breaks in a cloudless sky, the whole range of hills reflects in a majestic beauty the sun's golden rays. As the run rises the golden sky fades to a pale yellow, which takes on a greenish tint before turning blue, and this intensifies in colour until the whole sky—the vault of heaven—is one unbroken mass of deep blue. And so begins the day in this part of South Africa. It is good to be alive!

On just such a morning is there anything to equal going off for the whole day with your rod? Granted a slight breeze and odd clouds might mean a bigger catch, but for pure enjoyment give me a bright day.

Underberg is truly an attractive spot for the trout-fisher. Within a radius of twenty miles there are a variety of rivers, all stocked with trout, some with rainbow, others with brown. First favourite, for the former, must be the Umzimkulu (meaning large river). Under normal conditions a magnificent stream yielding trout up to—well, the biggest has not been caught yet! But I know where some eight-pounders lie, two and three-pounders are by no means rare, though the average and the best fighter is a three-quarter pounder. This river has several tributaries all fishable—with the permission

of the riparian owner, usually very generously given or for a small fee from the Natal Fishery Officer. The Ngwangwana is another very attractive river, and big fish have been taken from it. The Polela, also, can give you a pleasant day.

From Underberg, passing through Himeville—a favourite resort for fishermen—you come to the Umkomozana and the Umkomaas—these are brown trout rivers. Further on is the Loteni, amongst mountain scenery of great beauty. It would be difficult to find a place so uniquely situated as to provide one with such a choice. But it is on the Umzimkulu and the Ngwangwana where I have had my best sport. I have been lucky in being able to spend so many years in this delectable land, and many days on the river-banks, not always fishing, but hardly ever without my rod. I enjoy walking along the edge of the river—just watching the water, observing the river-bed, where the pools suddenly shelve into deep water, the possible lie of trout. I watch the different flies—watch them alight on the water—and marvel why no trout rises to them, they look so attractive, succulent. It was on such an occasion that I decided to tie my own fly to my own pattern, and which is now known all over the district as "Hilliard Special."

I felt that the trout, as well as myself, were tired of always having the conventional type of fly as purchased from the shops, presented to them, particularly the Connemara Black and Invicta, prime favourites in the Underberg district. In spite of pulling these flies about, reducing the breadth of the wings, etc., I was not satisfied, so, some years back now, I evolved something more streamlined. Using the Alexandra Red colourings, I set to, and with much difficulty—and awkwardness—tied a fly with the feather extending well beyond the hook and lying flat up against it. At that time it was

something different, in fact, it possessed a "new look." But today the streamline dressing has become very popular. However, to say that I was pleased with my first attempt would be far from being truthful. It was clumsy, and the head, instead of being neatly finished, resembled a good-sized pea. Nothing daunted, I went fishing and lost two trout in succession through not striking, as I was so astonished at getting a rise! Encouraged, I quickly improved on my original and must admit that the improved model has been amazingly successful. I think, to the trout, it must resemble a dragonfly nymph. I have caught trout on this fly as soon as it has alighted on the water, but it is more successful fished submerged. As I use a light-weight hook, to prevent it rising too quickly to the surface when drawing in the line, I attach a small split shot fixed on the gut close up to the head of the hook. I make no apology for doing this. I state it quite openly. With a 7 or 8 lightly dressed hook it needs a little weight to keep it under the water—where I want it to be—and prevents it rising too quickly to the surface when drawing in. I aim at keeping it nine inches to a foot below the surface. There are great objections to fishing with a shot from the true angler's point of view—and I was brought up as one! It makes casting difficult. The pause on the backward swing has to be more controlled and it is difficult to avoid splashing. But if you are not an impatient fisher you can dispense with the shot and wait for the fly to sink by its own weight—this takes times according to the size of the hook you are fishing with—but the result is not the same, and from my experience not nearly so deadly. With the aid of a shot your fly will be as low in the water as you intend it to be at that very important moment, viz., when the line is extended and the cast swings round in the current to straighten. It was the splash

that troubled me, having been brought up in a school where anything of that kind was "taboo."

My first season in this district I had an experience which rather upset all my previous views on what I might term refinement in casting. Fishing with a No. 6—which then appeared to me to be enormous—I cast and the fly made a splash on striking the water. Annoyed at my lack of skill, I was about to whip the fly from off the water in order to re-cast and reassure myself that I did know how to let my line alight on the water gently —but before I could do so a fish had taken my fly and I landed a three-quarter pound trout. I was amazed. I was "new" to rainbow, and at that time did not know how much bolder they are than brown trout. After carefully putting him in my bag, I continued fishing and I again splashed. Vexed, quick as I was in trying to whip off my line to recast, a trout was quicker, and I was in to another nice fish. Having now got a brace—quite undeserved as I thought—I continued fishing, again splashing. Exactly the same thing happened; only this time I felt an unpleasant jerk and my cast broke. Obviously a good-sized fish. After this experience all I could think of was, "Query, must I go on splashing?" Well, of cuorse not. But I was informed by one of the well-known fishermen in the district that, provided the fly touched the water first, the splash did not matter so much. And so it seemed. But I need hardly mention that that clumsy method of fishing did not appeal to me. One learns to drop a large fly on to the water with the minimum of displacement. It is done by checking, slightly, the tip of the rod on the forward cast as the line is extended when it is about a couple of feet above the water. The line thus checked causes the fly to drop almost vertically, alighting on the water

first and thus causing a slight displacement only. There is no difficulty in acquiring this little trick—it is done by a slight sharp backward movement of the wrist.

In tying my particular fly, I do not keep rigidly to one colour or size. I vary it according to the type of water I am going to fish, lightly, medium or heavily dressed—but all are streamlined. I consider it adds 100 per cent. to your enjoyment if you tie your own flies.

So for the rainbow trout, with my streamlined fly, I developed a different technique. I realised that for every rise I had to the fly on the surface I had many more when the fly was submerged. As the summer advances and the water gets warm, it is only natural that the trout should seek the colder water at the bottom. If you watch carefully, as I have done, you will see trout dart up to your fly but turn away quickly long before reaching it—they have struck the warmer water and don't like it. They will turn away from your fly for other reasons, of course, but if not deterred by the temperature they will go right up to it before deciding it is not to their liking. The finest fishing, and that which gives you the greatest thrill, is when the trout breaks surface to take your fly, and for this the brown trout is pre-eminent, but the habits of the rainbow are different. Do not misunderstand me when I suggest letting the fly submerge. I do not advocate on the river what I would call "deep sea fishing." But owing to the conditions generally existing in South Africa, due chiefly to the rays from the hot sun, then I do recommend playing your fly nine inches to a foot below the surface. It does not stay there, of course, as you draw in your line; it is rising steadily till you are in a position to re-cast.

CHAPTER NINE

NOTES ON ANGLING

Attention to Detail

Since being in this country I have been accused of possessing an "uncanny" sense of where the trout lie. I cannot admit this. Granted I was brought up in an environment where I had greater opportunities than most in becoming familiar with their haunts, yet I must protest against this suggestion. There is nothing uncanny in the whole of my composition, and what I have acquired is within the power of every angler. I am convinced that the main reason of my success is simply **attention to detail.** I cannot stress this point too much. How many of you start your day's fishing with your line, cast and fly just as you left off the day, maybe the week, before? How many of you ever think of drying your line after using it? I understand that this is not necessary when using a nylon line, but of this I have had no expreience. It is very simple just to roll off the reel as much line as you used that day and leave it exposed to the air all night. How many of you ever think of first seeing the condition of the water before deciding on the fly you would use. Oh no, you have got on your favourite fly, and no matter what the water looks like you are going to fish with it. Well, "á chacun son gout." I have my favourite flies also, but I never decide what I am going to fish with until I have seen the condition of the water. How many of you have ever noticed how the river can vary from day to day, sometimes hour by hour, though there is no apparent reason. Some days the water is sparkling, gurgling away, you

could imagine it was singing to you through sheer joy—then use your favourite fly, no matter what! Other times it will do nothing but growl at you and look sullen, almost menacing; then I think it is well to select a fly more in keeping with its mood. When the water turns leaden looking, as though there were no real life in it at all, then you might as well reel up and return home. Trout do not move readily, if at all, under such conditions. Having decided on my fly, examined my line that gets most frequently used, tested my cast—this a very important detail—tied my fly on to it, examined the barb—many fish are lost through this being broken unnoticed—most anglers would think I was now ready—well, I am not! I now proceed to some quiet backwater or shallow spot to see if I have tied on the fly correctly and that it rides straight in the water—both up-stream and down. I give trout the benefit of being far too wily to take an artificial fly that is floating upside down. A drowned fly being carried down stream by the current may look like anything, but when playing your fly up-stream, as I do, then it must look as though it were alive and ride in an upright position in the water. This also is a detail, but a very important one.

Being satisfied on that point, I now proceed to the bank of the river. Here I might add that I consider myself a bank fisher. I prefer to be on **terra firma** to floundering about on slippery stones on the bed of a stream. I cast better and I have more control in playing my fish, particularly a big one. Also I catch many trout lying close to and under the banks, particularly when the waters have subsided and cleared after flood. Remember that there are just as many trout lying near and under your bank as under the bank opposite, and if you fail to catch them it is probably because you have

frightened them. So you need to approach the bank cautiously and not wear clothes likely to attract attention. Trout lie in the river facing upstream, their vision is far keener than yours. I think it is a debatable point how much, if at all, a trout can hear, but there is no doubt whatsoever at their possessing an acute sensitiveness to vibration. I have read that their whole life is actuated by **fear,** therefore anything unusual, such as earth falling from the bank through the weight of your tread, a frog suddenly jumping into the water, cigarette end carelessly thrown in, a sudden movement on the part of the fisher, such or similar things will send the trout into their bolt holes in terror and from which they won't budge. So to catch the wary trout lying near or under the bank, approach quietly and several yards back flick your fly so that it drops lightly on the water, close to the bank, whilst you are well out of sight. If a fish is feeding, you will, most certainly, get it. So be on the alert. Also remember, the moment your fly touches the water you are **fishing,** even though you are only preparing your length of line to send the perfect cast. If a trout is attracted it is not going to wait for you to decide when you are ready—so be prepared for a trout to rise to your fly the moment it drops on the water. How many fish have you lost through being taken unawares? I usually count on having that one safely in my creel. Now cautiously fish the bank down stream. Do not attempt to send a long line. What you are doing is just making sure that no trout are lying there before you actually come into view. This is always worth while trying, and remember that if you are walking down stream the fish are lying in the water facing you. Having taken that precaution, proceed then to fish the river systematically, in other words, cover the water. My experience is that if a fish is going to take your fly

it will do so immediately, so don't flog the same spot over and over again. My custom is to cast a small length of line, increasing the length with each cast until I get it across the run, usually in the centre of the river, starting at the top end of the pool. Now here, whilst admitting that more big fish will be caught casting up-stream, for the majority of fishermen I do not advocate this unless they are very proficient in the control of the line—and if they are then they will not be reading this! Therefore my advice is fish down-stream. Cast out in front of you and let the current carry your line down-stream.

As you are fishing for rainbow, I assume you are fishing with one fly—the most usual fly being a No. 6. As your cast alights on the water your fly will disappear from sight as it becomes submerged with the current, but in your mind's eye follow it down. You will soon see that your line will travel down-stream quicker than the cast, because your line will be where the water flows fastest—your cast having gone beyond—when the line is extended straight down-stream in the current the cast then swings round, usually submerged, and it is frequently at that moment a trout will take the fly. Therefore I consider it very important to try to follow the course of your fly so that you are ready to strike—namely, hold firm—when you feel a bump. It entirely rests with yourself how long you choose to leave your fly in the water after your line is extended. I, personally, am an impatient fisher, so that when I feel my fly has travelled downstream as far as it will go, I, almost immediately begin to play it up, drawing in the line, if the cast has been a long one, with the left hand, as already explained in a previous chapter, at the same time moving with little jerks the tip of my rod so as to make my fly look more life-like coming up-stream.

POOL FISHING

In pool fishing the technique is different. Certainly fish the banks, as I have already described, but here, with no current to aid you, you rely entirely on the proficiency of your cast. The lighter your fly falls on the water the better your chances. To attain this, as I have already described in the chapter on casting, cast your line forward, well up in the air, so that it has plenty of room to straighten out before alighting on the water. This is most important. If the line is cast correctly, the fly should alight on the water first and the line drop so as to cause the minimum amount of displacement; but when throwing a very long line the latter frequently strikes the water, to be followed by the cast, which catapults its full length over the water, without touching it, for the fly still to alight first. If this is done with any degree of efficiency, it is a very effective cast, enabling one to send a long line. But for the beginner he should first learn to fish well with a short line. I cannot over-emphasise this point. I adopt the same method fishing a pool as I do a run, covering well the water. After several casts, I take one or two steps forward. I prefer to go back and re-fish the pool from the beginning rather than stay in one place too long. The feeding habits of the rainbow is a foot to a foot and a half below the surface of the water; therefore in retrieving your fly do not draw it up on top of the water hurriedly, but bring it up slowly so that it will be a few inches—I like about nine—under the surface.

Brown trout, when rising to the fly, break the surface much more readily than rainbow. Therefore for the former it is your eyesight that is of inestimable value, for the latter a sensitive touch, as they frequently take the fly submerged. If you are observing carefully, and every successful fisher will

never take his eyes from off the spot where he knows his flies, or fly, should be, you will frequently see the flash of the fish in the water before it touches the fly. If you are a beginner, in your excitement you will snatch your line from off the water—to the astonishment of the trout—and the annoyance of yourself, but we all have done it. You have probably scared the trout, definitely a brown one, but the rainbow is bolder, so if you can collect your nerves sufficiently so as to enable you to re-cast, you may still get him. Now here do I advise you never to cast immediately over the spot where you saw the trout. It matters little whether —in a pool—you cast above or below him, in a run you would cast above, but give him room. He is cruising about and will more readily go for the fly again if he spots it coming from another direction.

> *"Fishing was not worthy of a man who was well born or well brought up, as it demanded more of ruse and address than force."*—PLATO.

Although not entirely agreeing with the above quotation, I must admit that as far as women anglers are concerned it is applicable through the very nature of their complex character; but for the unkind word "ruse" I would substitute "subtle," and this I definitely consider an asset.

On one occasion I was out with a couple of fishermen. I had been dropped at the lower boundary of the stretch, the arrangement being that I should walk up-stream until I joined them—they motoring up to fish the higher reaches. The day was gorgeous, not a cloud in the sky, not a good day for fishing. It was hot and the river was low and gin clear. Every stone was visible. I felt it was

hopeless. As I have already stated, I enjoy walking along the bank—watching. I never saw a movement, there might not have been a fish in the river. I had tried several likely places, but with no luck, so I reeled up. It was too hot and the trout were not venturing forth from their hides, where they were sheltered from the sun's rays. So I walked quietly along, and as I did so a nice-sized trout darted from under the bank into mid-stream. Interesting, because it was a good eight yards away from where I was—and yet I thought I had been walking quietly. I must have done something, set up some vibration that made it "sense" danger. Knowing that in the still, clear, shallow water my tapered line was even too heavy, I sat down and proceeded to make a long cast of nylon—they were, at that time only obtainable in 40 in. lengths. I tied one about 20 ft. long and to this attached a very small yellow fly of the Mayfly type. Armed with this, I proceeded cautiously to walk up-stream, well back from the river edge. I lightly dropped my fly upstream, close to the bank, allowing the slight current to float it gently down as it rested on top of the water. It was not long before I was rewarded. I heard a slight splash, felt a drag on my cast as my fly was taken and I saw a pound trout rush for mid-stream. Always a little nervous of nylon knots —and there were many—I played the fish gently, giving way whenever it started jerking, until it tired. As it came to the surface the water was too warm for it to give any more fight, so it came quietly into the net. Soon afterwards I joined my friends and we knocked off for the day. It was the only trout caught. I mention this because of the tactics I employed that enabled me to catch it, and also to emphasise the fact that it is not always necessary to cast a long line to be successful.

NOTES ON ANGLING

One morning I was sitting by the river bank resting and watching the water. I always watch! The day was warm and very still and no trout had stirred, although I had fished most of the morning. At that I was not surprised, even so, to me, the enjoyment is so great that I cannot refrain from trying my skill for a wily trout, even under adverse conditions. So I just sat and watched. How beautiful it was! Not a breath of wind to ruffle the surface, nothing to disturb one, nothing but sheer loveliness all round, so I just sat and watched the river. My attention was drawn to a peculiar little crinkle that ruffled, momentarily, the surface of the water in the centre of the stream where the swirl of the run had quietened down—a slight tremor of about two feet long—that was all. It looked as though a little breeze had suddenly sprung up and lightly touched that spot, but there was no breeze, not a breath stirred, it was dead calm. After a few moments the crinkle faded away and all was still again. What could it be? So, alert, I watched. After a short interval it occurred again, but slightly further downstream. This time I had no doubt. I grabbed my rod and very quickly whipped out my line as I cautiously walked nearer the bank. Gently I cast over the centre of the stream, but well above where I had seen this movement. My third cast proved irresistible, my fly was eagerly taken and I landed a beautiful trout of 1½ lbs.

I delight in the story of the fisherman whose friend was catching and he not. Not possessing the fly that was successful, he scrounged around until he found some odd feathers and thereupon sat down by the bank and tied a fly as nearly resembling, as possible, the one his friend was fishing with, and then he proceeded to catch!

Also do I admire the man whose favourite fly was a Jock Scott, and in order to see the effect it had in the water submerged himself in his bath to

view it, held in the water above him. These are fishermen I delight to meet, whose keenness and enjoyment fill one with the same enthusiasm for this "finest of all sports." And surely one must congratulate the young couple, who, interested in fishing, yet knowing nothing about it, but anxious to learn, accompanied me one morning to watch "how it was done." They were interested in my fly. Incidentally I had touched a big fish, lost it, and told them so. As I left the district that night, they went down to the same spot the following morning. Anxious to simulate my tactics, she tried to tie a fly to resemble mine with some odd feathers picked up on the veld. She knew it had red on somewhere, but having nothing red, she just covered the shank of the hook with lipstick and landed a 2½ lb. trout! I imagine that both got the thrill of their lives—but it isn't always quite so easy as that. Nor would there be any sport in it if it were.

TIMING THE STRIKE

One often reads about timing the strike after the trout has taken the fly, even counting up to ten before doing so. The fishing that I have done has never called for this method, my experience being that one could hardly strike quickly enough, as most trout eject the artificial fly with a rapidity which is often far quicker than that attained by the fisherman's reaction to striking. But I have never seen it suggested that you should strike, as I often do, **before** the trout touches your fly. I have been very successful in adopting such tactics. When a trout, and here I mean a big one, anything over a pound and a half, suddenly darts at my fly, I do not wait for it to take it; when it is a couple of feet away—I strike! **I strike hard,** particularly if I have a good length of line out. Believe me, this takes some courage, but I have never yet lost a fish by this method—I have lost many by waiting. It is an

interesting thing to do and one gets a tremendous thrill out of it. To achieve this one must be standing on a bank high above the water and when visibility is good. It stands to reason, in such a position, there is a certain amount of sag in the line, and by striking when I do I straighten the line at the psychological moment as the trout grabs the fly, so the hook gets rammed home. I marvel at the speed with which a trout can travel when wishing to take a choice morsel, the "likes" of which it may not have seen before; the extra spurt given to the fly makes it all the more determined not to miss it.

CHAPTER TEN

UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE

I had an interesting and an exciting experience a short while ago. By request I was fishing a small private stream—a tributary of the Ngwangwana (Underberg). My hostess particularly hoped I would take back some trout, as she had a house party, and it would be a considerable help towards the commissariat department if I did. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to catch trout for the riparian owners. They are usually too occupied with their farms to give up time to spend on their own stretches. So with enhanced zeal I set off. I had not fished this stream before, but had been warned by my friends that they would not vouch for any trout being in it. I had other ideas, as I had been informed that a two-pounder had been caught in the upper reaches. Owing to a prolonged drought, the stream was low, sluggish and slightly discoloured, this latter due to a short, sharp storm of the previous day. I was delighted to find that it opened up into very good-sized pools, sufficiently large to make me feel very hopeful that they would not be devoid of fish, though in many places it narrowed to only a few yards wide. Walking down to the stream, I came on to one such pool and started fishing. After a few casts I saw a trout—

about half-a-pound—dart at my fly, turn over, and as quickly dart back again. It obviously did not like my fly. I was fishing with the one I tie myself, commonly known as "Hilliard Special." I changed my fly, but I could not entice the trout again. However, the sight of a trout was encouraging, though I hoped for something bigger than a half-pounder. I fished for about an hour without a touch when I came to a long, straight stretch about 25 feet wide. Isolated clumps of reeds against the banks encouraged me to think that trout would be lying there. Remembering my friend's hope that I would take back some trout, I carefully covered this stretch, to be rewarded by my fly being taken with a rush. Without a pause, the trout leapt well out of the water, sideways, and to my consternation it landed high and dry on the bank at least three feet from the edge of the water, where it immediately began to flap its way back to the river. My little Native boy, who acts as ghillie (incidentally quite the worst I have ever had) was away downstream as was his usual custom. I yelled for him and I started running towards the trout, which was now very near to the water's edge. I have no idea what I did with my precious rod and line, because I had only one thought and that was to get the trout. It was now about only a foot from the river, so I pounced, with both hands, on this beautiful fish, for it to slip through my fingers much easier than butter! I have a smallish hand, so could not grip the trout, and I was powerless to stop it—it slid into the water. Fortunately for me, there was a small clump of reeds, about a foot high in its direct line, and into this it rushed and buried itself in the mud that it had stirred up at the roots. By this time my ghillie had arrived with the landing net, and I signed to him to put the net in front of the small clump of reeds so that should the trout make a further dash forward it would go into the net. The boy thereupon placed the net on top of

its back and the trout wriggled in further. I grabbed the net and flung it to one side, and all the time I was trying to get hold of the trout, which again started to flap. In desperation, and perfectly aware that it was the most stupid thing I could do, I got hold of the gut and held on to it—that was the only purchase I had on the trout. The inevitable happened, of course, the trout gave a bigger flap, broke my cast, and again darted into the water and disappeared. In despair I flung up my arms in the air and said "Gone!" But the eyes of my little ghillie were much sharper than mine. He saw that the trout had again buried itself amongst the roots of the reeds—but this time only part of its tail was visible—which had escaped my vision. The little ghillie quickly grabbed the net, and this time placed it upright in front of the reeds. He and I then proceeded to push the trout with our hands forward and into the net it went. I was wet and muddy up to the elbows, my knees were the same, and my "behind," because I had slipped and sat down "quick." But we had retrieved the trout and that was all that I cared about. I hardly ever remember feeling so excited as when trying to grab hold of it and not having a ghost of a chance to grip hold of anything! I sent my ghillie away from the edge of the bank with the trout in the net, whilst I, rather disconsolately, searched for my precious fly, which I felt sure the trout had got rid of when it broke my cast. I could not find it. Then as I approached the lad I saw that he was fumbling with the net, which seemed to be entangled on a button of his coat; he twiddled about for a bit, and then without a word, not a muscle of his face moving, he just handed me the fly!

The trout—a streak of silver—weighed 2 lbs. 1 oz.! I am afraid I cannot take any credit for this fishing exploit from an angler's point of view, but I certainly had as many thrills as ever I have had playing one in its correct environment.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It happened to be a magnificent day when nothing went wrong. I had read an article by Negley Farson in which he related having a discussion with three other fishermen as to what flies they would select to fish with in any part of the world, if only allowed four. I cannot remember the four, but a March Brown, a Salmon Butcher and a Silver Doctor were chosen by all, the latter taking pride of place. I have never liked the Silver Doctor. There may be different dressings, but the one I know has stiff grey wings and bright blue hackle, and a scarlet antennae—and this combination has never appealed to me. Influenced by Negley Farson, I decided this day to fish, using two of his choice, namely, Salmon Butcher and Silver Doctor. I must add I pulled the latter about a bit before fishing. The day was not pleasant, overcast and a blustery wind which was driving against me, causing my line to be blown back in a curve at every cast. This necessitated some adroit left-hand work to draw up this slack—or alternatively, as I frequently do, take a few quick steps either up or down the bank, as the lie of the cast required, and "straighten" in that way so as to have the line more rapidly under control. The result of the day's fishing was a bag of eight, total weight 11 lbs. Five weighed 1½ lbs. each, beautiful, symmetrical fish—a joy to behold. Though I caught on the Silver Doctor, the Salmon Butcher accounted for most of them. One experience was a delight. It was a cold day—cold for Natal—so all of the fish fought briskly and well, as there were no sun's hot rays pouring down on the water to sap their energy. This trout in particular fought like a tiger, a beautiful fish, it leapt out of the water six times. I had never experienced such determination to smash the cast either before or since. It was game to the end, and I was almost sorry when I felt it giving ground, with

no more energy left to struggle further; it had put up a gallant fight. As it came up to the surface it turned on its side, exhausted.

As I reeled it slowly towards the net, I was in the river standing on a shelf of flat rocks which ended abruptly and sheer, down into deep water, mid-stream, and my little Native ghillie was standing beside me holding the net well under the surface of the water; he had been trained not to move until I had guided the fish over the net, and then at a word from me he would lift it up quickly. This, unfortunately, has its limitations, but I have found that to adopt any other method with a Native boy is fatal, because if the fish gives a final struggle at the last, as they so frequently do on seeing the net or the fisherman, the boy will invariably strike at it with the net and the result you can readily imagine. The trout, of course, is delighted, as the cast breaks, but the angler's reactions are quite different. So, the lad stood there with the net extended as I drew the fish up to it, but on approaching the net and within two inches of it, it turned over on its side and I saw the fly drop out of its mouth! The fish lay there, ignorant of the fact that it was free. It lay there some seconds. My well-trained ghillie, also unaware of what had happened, never moved, though the fish was lying not two inches from the net. I, alone, knew the position and my anguish was indescribable. I had not sufficient knowledge of the Zulu language to tell the boy what had happened, and even if I had, he could not have moved the net further without falling in, neither had I time to grab the net out of his hand when the trout realised there was nothing holding it. No fish could have been more astonished. It turned as quick as lightning and bolted. After a magnificent fight, after each mad leap, after each drop of the tip of the rod by me to let the line run free as the trout fell with a thud and a splash back in to the water in

its mighty effort to escape, the nervous tension, the thrill, the momentary doubt in my mind after each jump as to whether ti was still on—another rush, another leap!—and so on to the end when I thought it was mine and then eventually to lose it was one of my most thriling experiences. I had to admit that "the better man had won," and I wouldn't have had it otherwise. After that I knocked off for the day—a memorable day—well content.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AN EXPERIMENT

And Quite Unorthodox

A few years ago my opinion was sought on "What would be the effect in the playing of a trout if one allowed a completely slack line." As this was contrary to one's idea of the correct method of fishing, I hesitated. I could visualise quite a lot of extraordinary things happening if one permitted the trout to do what it liked. The speaker continued by remarking: "I feel sure you won't agree," and then he advanced the theory that once a hook is rammed home, no amount of shaking will dislodge it—the only reason it is dislodged is due to the tight line enabling the hook to wear a hole in the cheek, or, otherwise, dragging it out of its mouth. All this sounded reasonable. He then said, "If you ram a hook into your finger past the barb, no amount of shaking will dislodge that hook." This I had recently experienced personally. On one occasion, when throwing a long line, I had cause to jerk it back quickly to prevent it falling on some snag or other, and in doing so the wind caught it and sent the line around my own head, the hook, size 4, penetrating the lobe of my ear. I have proof positive that no amount of shaking of the head would have ever dislodged that hook, but I could readily imagine that if a drag, and a persistent one, came on it a hole could be made out of which the

hook might fall. But I was not prepared to experiment on myself; so I asked him if he had tried this suggestion himself, and if not why not? His reply was typical. "No, he had not," and then he nonchalantly added: "But as you have caught so many this season you would not mind losing a few in putting the experiment to the test?" This reply made me smile, but as I was interested, I agreed to try. The chance came next day when I hooked a nice little trout of about half-a-pound. It promptly darted down-stream as my reel ran easily, and when it stopped for a breather it started, as they nearly all do, to tug at the line. At this I instantly dropped the top of my rod, allowing the line to fall slack in the river. The result was interesting. The trout then just quietly swam about, as though it were unconscious of the hook in its mouth. I left it to itself, and after a little while it then swam upstream. I was wading, and, quite unfrightened, it swam across my feet. I never stirred. Naturally I had reeled up all loose line, though taking care not to put any pressure on the trout. After several minutes had elapsed I tightened, and it immediately began to struggle. I at once slackened and the struggling ceased. But even so it was obviously tiring, though it had only had the weight of the line in the water to contend with. When I finally reeled up it had no fight left and I landed it, in my net, exhausted. As it had been the means of an interesting experiment, I decided to give it its liberty. Holding it in my wet hand, I extracted the hook and it made no effort to move. I wondered if it would surivive, so I held it gently in the water, with its little head up-stream; gradually the gills began to work and bit by bit it recovered. As I slowly opened the palm of my hand on which it had been quietly lying, it just as slowly swam away, turning and passing between my feet. So that was that. I had enjoyed this little play and wondered if I

dare put it to a greater test and do the same with a big fish? That same day I met the riparian owner, and he told me that under some bushes overhanging the water at the foot of the kranze a big trout was lying. It had previously been hooked and lost because the fisherman could not get down to land it. I replied that I never fished where I could not land my trout, even if lucky enough to hook one. He then told me that the trout could be landed if, by my walking down-stream 30 or 40 yards to a small stream that cascaded over rocks into the river, I got down on to the bed of the stream. So off I went. I am not prepared to say that I hooked the trout he was alluding to, all I know was that a big fish darted from the side of the kranze and took my fly. With the speed of a rocket it shot right across the river, which at this point was fairly wide. One would call the Umzimkulu a big river. The water was gin clear and I could watch every movement. Now, was I to put this slack line theory to a real test? It was a big trout and I was very loathe to run any risk of losing it. I decided to try it. The moment it stopped after its initial spurt I gave it its head by slackening the line, thus taking off all pressure. It promptly stopped tugging—those terrifying jerks which so often drag the hook from its hold—and quietly proceeded to swim up and down. I watched it, not without some trepidation, putting no pressure whatsoever on the line as I wondered how long this game would continue. The trout did not appear at all scared, but I knew that sooner or later I should have to put some pressure on it. However, having to walk down-stream some little distance on top of this cliff before I could reach the "spruit" down which I had to scramble before I could attempt to land the trout, I started my walk whilst it was content to swim about midstream. If it would only stay like that I could easily negotiate the projecting obstacles, trees and bushes, which

could be so very awkward if the trout chose to rush towards the bank; this it never attempted to do, provided I did not pull but gave it its head. It was now tiring, due, not to any pressure from me, but simply from the weight of the line in the water. Quietly and carefully I negotiated all the obstacles en route and then quietly and gently I guided the trout down-stream without alarming it, and I slid down the bank on to the bed of the spruit, where I had been advised I could reach the river to land it. Now this small stream, I discovered, finally cascaded into the big one over a series of rocks covered with green slime—a very treacherous foothold. But I was determined to land my trout, even if I sat down on the rocks in the water to do so. I preferred that method to feeling my heels shoot from under me. All this time the fish had been swimming about. I had not timed myself, but I think it would be about six or eight minutes. Now it was time, and I was ready to pull the trout into the small creek of the stream. The instant I tightened the line the struggle began. It fought, but not vigorously, as seemingly it was already tired. Still it made several dashes away from me, and these I treated very carefully, as I was now keyed-up and anxious to capture the trout. At my first attempt to land it, I got it half into the net when it slipped out —an act which every fisherman hates to see happening—but my position was perilous and my collapsible landing net was rather short, which partly occunted for my clumsiness. Nervously I gave the trout its head and let it run, but no slack line this time. Then I hauled it in again, and at the second attempt I landed it. A beautiful hen fish, it was just under two pounds. So far so good—the slack-line theory had worked.

I then trudged a good mile up-stream, where I knew a nice fish lived. I had already once hooked and lost it owing to its clever tactics. It was also a big trout, and on this occasion as I struck it, it made one mad, wild bolt right across the river; nothing but the opposite bank prevented it from going further. I held firm, hoping for the best, but fearing the worst, as at that distance it was completely out of control. Then it came to the top of the water, flapped violently and—got off! So I hoped that now I would meet the same fellow again and apply this new "treatment." On approaching the spot, I cast and saw the silver flash of a nice trout turn over on my fly, but it did not take it. When this occurs I never, immediately, cast over the same spot, but come back to it after a minute or two. This I did, but with no success.

Meanwhile higher upstream another trout had risen, but I followed this up, with again no success. I therefore changed my fly and returned to the place where my big one was. This time there was no mistake—bump, bang, the reel screeched, as with a wild rush the trout sped right across the river. Same old trout, I thought, and employing the same old tactics. My excitement was intense. I had a pain in my throat and my knees shook like two jellies. The trout came to the surface and started to flap on top of the water. Determined to try the slack-line method, though hating the idea, I promptly slackened line and took off all pressure. With no pull now on its mouth, the trout immediately stopped violent struggles and went down deep in the water where I wanted it to go. I need not repeat the story—the play was similar to that which I have already described. The trout fast tired itself out, and when I slowly reeled up, always giving way the moment it struggled, it came quietly

into the net: a pound and three-quarter fish. That evening I had the great satisfaction of telling my friend how well his suggestion had worked.

I had additional experience the following day. I landed two trout, slack-line method; one was 2 oz. short of two lbs., the other over a pound and three-quarters, both out of the same run and in very fast water. When playing the first one I realised I was in a most difficult position to land him. I had, unknowingly, cast over a submerged tree and had clambered out on to a rock and was in rather a precarious position. I wondered what I should or could do. I realised that somehow I would have to go from boulder to boulder, with raging water between, until I was on safer ground. I gave the trout its head. I really had no alternative. It shot down-stream, halted. I gave line and the trout shot further down-stream and then for a moment showed itself on top of the water. It was an incredible distance away; in fact, I wondered whether it was my fish or another, as during this time I was not sure that it was still "on." During this peregrination on the part of the trout I was crawling from rock to rock. I managed to get in a safer position from where I could master the trout—if it was still on. I reeled up slowly, and as the line tightened I felt its weight—it was there right enough. I never allowed it to jerk or pull at the line, I gave way the moment it tried, and it tired itself. Not until it saw the landing net—and probably me—did it show fight, and then I at once gave way, and after three or four similar attempts I got him safely into the net. Within five minutes, same place, I got the second trout. With these trout to carry, I realised I had best make my way back to the car, a distance of probably two miles. But—of course, there is always a "but"—I had to fish another likely run on my way back. I promptly struck another trout. I tried the same slack-line method—and promptly lost it!

AN EXPERIMENT

I must not forget to mention an important item. The first big trout of the two was hooked so lightly on the roof of its mouth that the fly came away in my hand with the gentlest of pressure. I feel sure that if it had shaken its head violently it could have dislodged the hook. I also feel sure that if I had held that trout tightly I never should have landed him. It needs courage, in face of one's training, always to keep a tight line, to let it slacken, particularly with a 2 lb. trout at the other end. Needless to say, I do not advise beginners to try this method. The experienced fisherman knows when and how to apply it—which makes all the difference.

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THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(A)

A PERFECT GENTLEMAN

I had permission to fish, whenever I liked, the lower reaches of a very fine stretch of river. This, to me, was a great joy. It allowed me to "go along" for a couple of hours or so, which often is just as much as I want. As the riparian owner farms his land—and is therefore a busy man—and as he lives some little distance from his river, he rarely came down to this, the lower end.

One day I had gone there and had thoroughly enjoyed fishing a couple of lovely pools. I had landed a fine trout of 1½ lbs. Suddenly from out of the long grass a dog approached. I recognised this dog as belonging to my friend, the riparian owner. If the dog were there, I thought, then his master could not be far away. As I looked up I saw, a little distance away, the tip of a rod coming towards my direction, and I was very disturbed, for here was one of the rare occasions when the owner was coming down to fish these lower pools—and I had just fished them! So I reeled in as quickly as I could in order to go and meet him. But he was over the brow and down to where I was before I had time to scramble up the bank. In his usual charming manner he gave me a cheery greeting, asking me if I had had any luck? Always delighted to see him, I looked up to reply and noticed that he had no rod in his hand. Knowing that I should be upset at having taken the water that he was coming to fish, but not aware that I had already seen his rod in the distance, he had carefully hidden it.

I have met many great kindnesses from fishermen and the riparian owners, but for a most considerate and courteous gesture this one could not be surpassed. It was the act of a "perfect gentleman."

A SCARE

(B)

A SCARE

On my arrival in this country I was scared of lots of things. First of all I had a horror of having to tread where I could not see, and I felt that the long, thick grass held many perils. The thought of snakes terrified me, but now I just do not think about them, as I feel safe in my strong boots and gaiters up to the knee; besides, snakes do not want to be trodden on any more than you want to tread on them, so usually they get out of your way. The thick undergrowth of some mealie fields, at first, bothered me—I hated walking through them. These mealie fields often would be planted by the Natives close to the river bank, and, of course, always where one wanted to fish. It was difficult having to cast over the tops of the growing mealies until one learned to send the back-cast high in the air.

One day, during my first year here, nervous of all things unseen and also of what might be, I was attempting to fish over some mealies and found it very difficult, as I am not very tall. Nothing daunted, trying to forget any dreadful things that, in my mind, might be lurking at my feet (but which, really, hardly exist at all), I kicked something on the ground in front of me. I could not see what it was, but I was alarmed, and very bravely I groped with my foot. Nothing moved, however, and I concluded that it was a large stone and I proceeded to stand on it. This action on my part now raised me about nine inches, an elevation which was of considerable assistance to me in casting. I fished happily for a few moments, and then, to my horror, I felt the thing under my feet heave up and roll over! My feet rolled with it, but I kept my balance until I touched solid ground—and then I took to my heels and fled from the spot for all I was worth—terrified!

I had no idea what it was, indeed, I did not wait to look—I just fled until I reached open ground, where I felt safe.

Later in the day I was curious to know what it was that I had disturbed, so with a good deal of trepidation I plucked up courage to make my way quietly and cautiously back to the place where the thing had happened; but I was ready to run for my life, should it be necessary. With my heart beating fast, but determined to "find out," I approached the spot. Nothing happened, however, nothing moved. Well, it could not move very well, because the "thing" that I had stood on and which had rolled over was a large pumpkin!

(C)

A PFLEUGER SPOON

To fish with anything but a fly in the Underberg district is illegal, but sometimes this is more honoured in the breach than the observance. Fishing a pool one day, I was anxious to try to fish over the ground that shelved into deep water. I knew that a submerged reef of rock ran part of the way down the centre, and this I wanted to avoid, but owing to a stiff breeze rippling the water I could not locate it. After a few casts, however, I touched it, and then I moved on, hoping to find the deeper water. Unfortunately, this time I got hooked up "good and proper." To try to get free, I struck hard on the line with the rod—not an advisable thing to do, I know—but to my delight it was successful: the hook came free and, with the line, shot up into the air behind me. As it passed my vision, I noticed a piece of loose gut hanging from the end of my fly. When I reeled in I was amazed and amused to find that my fly had caught on to a tiny pfleuger spoon, which

apparently had been hooked up on the same reef. It was like polished gold, a beautiful little thing not more than an inch in length. It could not have been in the water long. The extraordinary feature about this story is that my fly had not got entangled on to the wee ring to which the spoon was attcahed, but actually into the hole made in the spoon for the ring. It seemed incredible and almost an impossibility. It also seemed strange that on the whole of the river bed I should cast over the identical spot where that spoon lay and hook it up in that manner. On taking it back to the hotel, I gave it to the proprietor, relating how I came by it and I got chaffed unmercifully! "Now we know how you get your fish!"

There is an interesting sequel. This spoon was naturally the topic of much speculation in the bar of the hotel amongst the fishermen and locals, and it was frequently handed round for inspection. One day I asked for it, but was informed by the proprietor that it had disappeared. He told me, one evening, that he was busy in the bar and the spoon was being inspected, and from that evening it was never seen again. No one knew who took it. It may have reached its rightful owner, but that we shall never know !

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IVOR VAUGHAN'S DAM

Old "fisherman" that I am, my enthusiasm never wanes. I have already stated that I do things without being able to tell you why, and I think most would agree that there is nothing of the "psychic" in me—but there are occasions when I feel a tremendous urge to go fishing. I have never tried to analyse this; nevertheless, this almost overpowering desire to fish is strong enough to make me drop, suddenly, whatever I am doing, don my fishing togs, grab my rod—and go.

On one such occasion the day was wet, a steady, gentle rain was falling and the sky was uniformly grey—no sign of a break. Experience told me that the water would be leaden, and therefore useless. It kept it up all morning. After lunch, with a book, I sat down to rest—and fell asleep. I awoke suddenly and I turned my head quickly to look out of the window. It had stopped raining, but the sky was still overcast, only there were a few streaks of a lighter grey, as though the clouds might break. With one bound, I was up and into my fishing clothes. I sent for my little ghillie, and by two o'clock was on the shore of a very attractive piece of water which I, coming from the Lake District in England, would call a tarn, but here it is given the prosaic name of "dam." As I approached the water, not three yards from the bank, a broad back heaved over, breaking the surface. My heart started to thump! I had come down to this spot at the psychological moment when a big chap was feeding. I had been on the point of whipping out my line prior to casting, my rod indeed was up in the air, but from that position I never stirred. The slightest movement on my part might attract the attention of the trout; should it see me then my

chances were gone, and this was one in a thousand! I knew it was a big trout, and motionless I remained, poised in what appeared a ridiculous position for what seemed an eternity. At last, satisfied that it was no longer feeding close to the shore, I started to whip out my line and, as I invariably do when I know there is a big one about, I started casting in the opposite direction—away from it—and this for a good reason: being human and subject to nerves, I like to have one or two casts in order to be sure of my control before I come near the place where the trout is likely to be. With each cast I increased my length, being alive to the fact that the trout might take my fly any moment. My fifth cast went out straight and alighted beautifully on the water, just as I would wish it to do. Instantly I felt a pull, and I struck. I struck hard! Right enough, the trout was on, and from its weight I knew it to be a big one. Then came the fight. As though shot from a gun, it tore along the top of the water, leaving a wake behind it. It twisted, it turned, it rolled over and over again, never relaxing by one jot the rate it was scurrying across the water. Never before have I seen such tactics employed. Its speed was incredible. It never once jumped clean out of the water, but continued, without abating one moment, its mad rush. My reel screeched as my line ran out and I was quickly out on to the backing (I am never very happy when this occurs). I could do nothing but let the trout have its head, praying that it would stop its wild rush before it reached the opposite shore, which was lined with an extensive bank of weed and where, once it got there, then all hope of landing it would vanish. I had no boat with which to follow! Apparently, the trout had to stop for a breather, and that precious moment gave me the opportunity I was anxiously waiting for. For a fraction of a second I held the trout firmly, almost

pulling on it, and, remember, I had a very long line out. Then I suddenly took off all pressure. As I anticipated, the trout turned, and as quickly as it had shot out it rushed back straight at me, leaving my line hanging loose, trailing behind. At that moment, so far as I was concerned, the trout could do just what it liked. But I had to make up my mind quickly and to decide whether I should haul in with my left hand all the slack line and so get control again with all speed, or whether I should reel up—a very much slower process. I realised that with the first method I should then have to play the trout—if it were still on—from my hand, and should it bolt, as it had done before, I should get a scorched and probably a cut hand, so I chose the latter method and risked the longer delay caused by reeling up.

Long before all slack was reduced I could feel the weight on the end of my line, and my thrill of delight was great. As soon as I applied pressure the trout repeated the same performance, and again it tore off, on top of the water, twisting, rolling, turning, more like the play of a porpoise, only with much greater rapidity. But this time it did not travel so far. Obviously it was tiring. The energy it had used must have been very severe. As it stopped at the end of the second rush I gave no quarter. Not only did I hold firm, but I also started slowly to reel up, and then back came the trout, not a sign of any further struggle—until it saw me. Then began the final stage, always an agitating moment. The trout employed the usual quick rushes, and there was a flop on top of the water in a last effort to break away—a vital moment when, in these days, the gut or nylon is likely to snap near the fly. The trout made short but still violent spurts, lessening now in intensity, until there was no further fight left, and it came up to the top of the water exhausted.

This was the first full view I had of this, my biggest trout, and I trembled with excitement, knowing full well that not until it was safely in the net dare I call it mine. I reeled up steadily, and as quickly as I dared. Then I grabbed the landing net out of the hands of the little ghillie, for I dared not entrust the netting of that trout to a Native boy. Into the net it came, but with only my one hand I could not lift it out of the water! The little ghillie realised the position and put his hands on the end of the shaft that was projecting beyond my hand, and together we raised the net in which lay my biggest trout. It was like a streak of silver, a perfectly formed hen fish. It looked more like a small fresh-run salmon, and for sheer beauty could not be beaten. It weighed 5 lbs. 2 oz. I was back at the hotel within three-quarters of an hour from leaving. The rain had started again—the clouds had never lifted—and I have often wondered what it was that made me rush out and go fishing that afternoon.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

UMZIMKULU

It was the end of the season and my last day's fishing. The afternoon was cold and grey, not at all pleasant. I had caught nothing all morning—not even touched anything. I was a bit disconsolate, as I was loath to finish the season with a blank, and it looked like being so. On this particular stretch down-stream I came on to a pool where a big trout was reputed to be. I had never seen him, but I knew several men who had been broken by him. It had been described to me as a six-pounder some years previously, so it could quite well be an eight-pounder now.

Into the water I went, and as I carefully picked my way I saw half under a stone an eel. I had been told about the eels in this river, but had never yet seen one. As I approached I wondered why it did not glide off, as our Windermere eels would have done. So I boldly went up to the stone and kicked it over for a snake to swim rapidly away! I decided I would not look for any more eels. From the rather shallow run out of this pool I started fishing up-stream, and as I cast up into the pool I felt a bump. It is only big fish that bump; little ones snatch! I wondered—could it have been the big chap? I waited a little while before re-casting, and when I did there was no doubt about it. The fly was taken decisively, and as I struck I knew I was into something big. It is an agonising moment when you feel that your knees will hardly hold you and your throat tightens until you think you will choke—but this is what we call pleasure! All this and more I suffered as the fish tugged at my line, keeping deep in the water, and swimming round and round the pool. I could do nothing, nor did I try, except to hold on to the trout with the rod firmly planted against my chest. I hoped the trout would tire itself out. It kept this up for a very long time, so long that my ghillie—a young man—came into the water close to me with the net, thinking as he apparently did, that it was time the trout was landed. But the trout had other ideas. After what seemed an interminable time it stopped dead and would not budge. Sulking, I thought. Now what was I to do? I tried giving the butt of my rod a sharp blow, but with no result. It felt as firm as a rock. I knew that I ought to endeavour to turn its head down-stream. In order to do this I should get out on to the bank and walk above it, but a large tree prevented this. I could not wade deeper. I just had to wait for the next move, and it came!

Suddenly there was a whack, whack, whack against my line and I saw my fly come sailing away in mid-air. I walked out of the river, wet, miserable —never before had I felt so near to tears! What a magnificent catch to end the season with—if only I had succeeded. My ghillie, equally disappointed, started talking Zulu to me, not a word of which I understood, and he kept up this harangue so long that I got quite frightened. But I had lost the biggest trout that I ever had had on my line—of that there was no doubt. My line was intact, so was my cast, and also my fly. Then why had I lost this prize? Few of us have the opportunity of playing these big trout sufficiently often, and therefore, in many cases, it is lack of experience—as in this instance it was with me.

I know now why I lost that trout. When it stopped its gyrations, not having been successful in getting rid of the little obstacle that was holding it, it decided on another method. When it remained still, sulking as I thought, it was manoeuvring itself into a position when, with its powerful tail, it could whack at my line and so tear out the hook from its jaw. A clever trick! I had been completely outwitted. Why, oh why, had not I given it slack line? Believe me, I shall be ready the next time; though, of course, the trout will have some other ruse ready should that one fail, and for the other ruse I may be entirely unprepared and not able to counter it! I am still waiting my chance. So far as I know, the trout is still there, no doubt more crafty than ever, but I have not touched him since. Though I lost him, and I confess it was a bitter disappointment, yet I gained in experience—and that is worth a lot.

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

These and many such days have brought great joy, happiness and interest into my life. As the years pass and Anno Domini prevents one from continuing more active and strenuous sports which in one's younger days one enjoyed so much, trout fishing still remains. That is one of the great blessings it bestows on you. You can continue to have these grand days on the rivers, days of wonder, beauty and peace. Fortunate, indeed, are the men and women who have the opportunity to begin young. Keenness, skill and knowledge increase with the years. Fishing is unique, almost, in the annals of sport; you are not dependent on anyone else, you are complete in yourself. You can wander along with your rod in your hand in solitude and quiet content, leaving all your cares and sorrows behind you. You need never lack interest in life as long as you can hold a rod in your hand. With such thoughts do I try to influence and persuade all my friends to go fishing, confident that they will never regret doing so. If this little book is the means of helping them towards that end, then I rest well content.

THE ANGLER'S HOPE

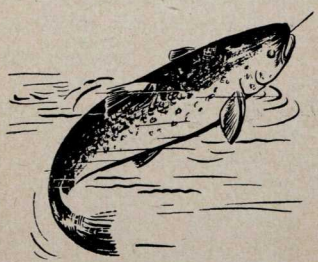
"God grant that I may live to fish until my dying day,

And when it comes to my last cast I then most humbly pray,

When in the Lord's safe landing net I'm peacefully asleep,

That in His mercy I be judged as good enough to keep."

H. BURMAN.



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