

**GOLDEN DAYS: FROM
THE FISHING-LOG OF A
PAINTER IN BRITTANY**

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Golden days: from the fishing-log of a painter in Brittany by Romilly Fedden

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ROMILLY FEDDEN

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PAINTER IN BRITTANY**

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FROM THE FISHING-LOG OF
A PAINTER IN BRITTANY

BY

ROMILLY FEDDEN



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*The frontispiece is from a drawing by
S. Curnow Vosper, R.W.S.*

PROLOGUE

B.E.F., FRANCE,

1918.

TO-DAY I have fished again in France !

Oh ! but that sunlit hour was wonderful ! Only those who have endured these weary times will fully understand—to find forgetfulness ! And I had found much more—a wealth of old attachment, the mystery of the river, keen scents, soft well-remembered sounds, clean sunlight and the greenness of the valley, even a friendly miller, quite like a Breton, save that he did not wear a beaver hat—such a good fellow too, kindly, gesticulating, uttering the strange new language of these times : “ No bon ” this pool ; I must come down and fish his meadow ; that sign-

board on the hedge with its scrawled "pêche réservée," that was "no bon" too. In fact it did not count—or only "pour les Boches—compre?"

The miller left me to contented solitude. This pool "no bon" indeed! Why, already I had taken and returned two fish, both bright if undersized; and there was still a big one who cruised and sucked continually beneath the spreading thorn!

The fairy seed of the thistledown tiptoed from pool to pool. Among the weeds the dabchicks clucked contentedly. I sat in the long grass expectant, and fastened on an olive-dun. I pulled the wings apart and started oiling . . . while on the air there came a droning sound, faint but growing—surely no voice of river midge could thus break crystal silence! . . . even a bumble-bee . . . Then up on the hill above the anti-aircrafts opened out—the shriek of shells resounded down the valley. They could not touch the faint grey speck that floated in the

blue, high above white bursts of shrapnel. Only the fairy spell was broken, its glamour gone—one fell athud to thoughts of wreck and ruin, to madness, ugliness and pain; to dust-choked roads, crowded with sweat-stained, grim-faced men; to the weariness of their marching. . . . What right had I to golden-houred oblivion in such times as these? Then under the thorn-bush came again a “plop” with following circle, as if to say good-bye. But I did not regret that old trout a bit. Thank heaven that he still lives!—only a Mills-bomb could take him in his fastness. . . . Besides, we had both had our little bit of fun; each realised that patch of starwort weed five yards below his tail—a sure and certain sanctuary.

So from the short-lived peace of water-meadows I turned to glaring highroad, where in the dust the endless lorries passed. Beyond, the camp, the incinerator’s reek, the trampled horselines, the petrol-cans, the dumps. The guard-tent, its barbed encircling

wires ; the canteen's ugliness, the odour of stale beer, the rag-smearred tables and the flies. Then came the village, with its ruined church, its broken crucifix, its sightless lath-lined windows ; its one small shop where you can buy " silk-cards," eggs, and sometimes chocolate. On again up to the cross-roads, where on your right you meet a one-time farm. Behind it you will find a big green orchard.

In the evening light this seemed inviting—there at the further end a tent, its flaps flung wide to candle-light that glimmered on its white spread table. Here we dined well, thanks to the A.S.C. ; likewise our good host's cook, who can disguise even " Maconochie." . . . Below, the bugle notes rang out—faint and fainter down the valley. Afterwards the orderlies arranged our chairs, with coffee and liqueurs, under the apple-trees ; while overhead the searchlights stared unceasingly, projecting beams of silent light,