

**THE ART OF ANGLING:
AS PRACTISED IN
SCOTLAND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649522613

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THOMAS TOD STODDART

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INTRODUCTION.

The very limited number, if not total want, of dissertations upon the subject of Angling in Scotland, and the necessity for having something like an index to our lochs and streams, have induced us to throw together the following chapters. In character and produce, our waters differ very essentially from those of England; we have clear and rapid rivers—torrents black with mosses, or pellucid as diamond—lakes large, and gleaming—tarns deep, still, and terrible, and of these, some are stored with prime, subtle trout, and others are frequented by the active salmon, “the monarch of the flood.”

On the other hand, the English waters are generally flat and muddy, affording few fish, except those which delight in dead, calm places, such as pike, carp, roach, bream, and perch. The trout they may happen to contain, are also very unlike those in Scotland, becoming large and lazy, dainty in their tastes, and capricious as to their feeding hours. Accordingly, a very different and more ingeniously varied method of capturing them, is employed by the southern angler from that practised by us. The fancy is exercised to compound tackles and artifices, which appear altogether superfluous to the eyes of Scotsmen. Insects also are constructed, which, however closely they resemble nature, are seldom if ever

preferred by our countrymen to their own simple undazzling materials.

These facts point out the necessity for a short manual upon the northern systems of angling, and it is to be hoped this small treatise will be found completely to answer the purpose.

We have attempted, in its pages, to confine our remarks as much as possible to the *practice* of the gentle art; accordingly, what may be termed its *poetry* is somewhat cautiously excluded, except in as far as, by the introduction of a few angling songs, it may assist in relieving the more dry and methodical portions of the treatise.

As some information is in demand from various quarters respecting the raising of fish in artificial ponds, we have incorporated a chapter upon this subject, restricting our observations entirely to Scotland. We have also subjoined a list of the angling districts, throwing into it such directions as will most readily assist the intending sportsman. An abstract of the existing statutes by which our salmon fisheries are regulated, will likewise be found appended to the volume. From the more special part of the treatise, we have excluded as much as possible all technical analysis of the specific nature of fishes, venturing only here and there to scatter our handful of ideas, as we have reaped them from the track of personal experience and investigation.

THE
SCOTTISH ANGLER.

CHAPTER I.

RIVERS.

SCOTLAND abounds in rivers of every diversity of character, and nearly all more or less suitable for the purposes of the angler. Perhaps in no country, indeed, of the same dimensions, are there to be found so many streams calculated to afford sport to the brother of the rod and tackle, from the brawling brook and mountain burn up to the majestic Tay, and the sylvan Tweed. We shall endeavour to shadow forth our idea of what constitutes a good angling river, which may be done best by means of contrast.

In rocky waters, where the bottom is without soil and channel, having at most but a thin layer of the latter, good trout never abound; and the reason is obvious: there is no proper food necessary to their multiplication and growth. The banks, which in such streams are generally undetachable, provide neither worm nor slug. Frogs, horse-leeches, minnows, water-insects, and many species of fly, are extremely rare. Floods, although they enlarge

and colour the water, do not create aliment, but are the means merely of altering its position; hence, if it doth not exist in any one spot, there can be no transference thereof to any other. In such waters, no doubt, there are often to be met with certain temporary adaptations for nourishing fish, as in the case of much wood overshadowing them, and thereby, during warm and summer months, raining down great store of tree-flies; also, if fern or sweet thyme crowd the banks, small beetles and grasshoppers are bred; but these form altogether a provisional subsistence, withdrawn by the rigid hand of winter. The fact is proved by many examples; for instance, let us pitch upon a known stream, after this sort. We take the Coe or Cona of Ossian, which runs through Glencoe into Lochleven, an arm of the sea in Argyllshire. A small loch or lake is its proper source, called thereabouts, in the Gaelic tongue, Treachten. After issuing from this, it proceeds with considerable rapidity over shelving masses of rock, itself pellucid as diamond, and fermed in many places into the most enticing pools, which one would naturally imagine were the resort of large and well fed fish; on the contrary, however, a few tiny individuals are all that inhabit them. We could mention many streams of like character, the contents of which are precisely similar. It is, however, worthy of remark, that salmon, grilises, white and sea trout, ascend such waters in great numbers, preferring them even to better provided but more sluggish courses, which shews that their sole object is to spawn with advantage, not to alter their mode of living.

A second reason why trout of considerable size are not met with in rocky rivers, is, that among them there are seldom any direct places of shelter. Weeds, nicely-disposed stones, and shallow banks, are wanting, from which they might watch their prey, elude

human observation, and be protected both during the frosts of winter and the floods of autumn and spring. A rocky channel is thus proved prejudicial to the growth and increase of trout, and we shall now observe what effect a slow muddy bottom produces where food and cover are found in great plenty. Of this nature are most English rivers, excepting those in the northern counties and most mountainous districts. Fish (we speak of river trout) spawn seldom in such waters; nay, they grow so fat and lazy as to be unable to remove for his purpose; besides, the shallows are few among which they may suitably lie during the unclean season. These matters, however, are of small consequence, for it is marvellous to observe how the roe of even one fish, if properly cultivated and bred, will replenish an emptied stream; nor would seemingly meagre spawning fail of this object, were not for other causes and impediments. One of these is discovered in the unnatural voracity of large fish, which prompts them to devour their own young, as well as eat each other's roe—a passion which in streams of this sort is easily gratified, whereas in bottoms composed of loose stones, &c. the young fry find refuge so admirably adapted to their size, that it would be as foolish in a huge trout to attempt seizing them, “with all its appliances and means to boot.” And it may be noted, that even in a sluggish water provided with such peculiar shelter, the fish thrive more abundantly than in one where the cover is under banks and among weeds, both of which can be worked into by a strong active fellow. Nor let any one be too credulous of the fact until witnessed, what amazing power the chin and snout of a milner possess. We have seen, hollowed by a single fish, such prodigious cavities as would lead one to imagine that a plough had actually been driven

under water, and these, too, in the course of a single night. What havoc, then, must be made in a loose embankment by like monsters in search of their prey during the summer months! An additional reason may here be stated, why slow running rivers, like those in England, are prejudicial to the multiplication of trout; and it is this, that such places are greatly adapted to the growth of their natural enemies. Of these, the otter and the pike are the most formidable — perch and eels moderately so. We shall discourse in due order concerning them; meanwhile, let us revert to our original intention, which was to describe our idea of a good angling river.

There are only three kinds of streams, properly speaking, unless we include as a fourth the moor burn, of which hereafter. Two of the three we have just now discussed, shewing in what and wherefore they fail. It remains only to shew those grounds upon which we give precedence to the third class of streams, and our best method of illustration is to be drawn from example. The Tweed, comparing it with the other Scottish rivers, is by no means rapid. The Dee, the Spey, the Lochie, and many parts of the Tay and Clyde, proceed with greater swiftness, and on the whole are infinitely more broken and interrupted. Of all rivers, this quality belongs solely to it, namely, that it is from head to foot beautifully proportioned and justly meted out. There is an evenness and impartiality about it, which distinguish no other stream; its pools and shallows are harmoniously arranged—

It murmurs and pauses, and murmurs again.

Here we perceive no rocky shelves, no impertinent cataracts, saying to ascending fish, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; and here shall thy proud fins be stayed." Nothing of the kind. Nor is there,

on the other hand, any inert tendency; no long, dead, sleeping levels, in which pike may secure themselves. The whole is planned according to an angler's taste; every inch of water accessible to the wader, without danger or interruption. Its banks, also, are in keeping with its other advantages — not naked and barren, neither spongy and overgrown with rushes, nor yet crowded with close and impervious wood, but mostly dry and inviting, fringed in many parts with oak, ash, elm, and beech, and in others hung over with the pleasant alder, among the roots of which is often harboured a goodly and well-grown trout, impatient for some dropping fly or incautious worm. Most to our favour, however, is its choice formation of bottom or channel, fertile in food, provided with shelter, and admirably fitted to the purpose of spawning. A medley it is of gravel and sand, interspersed with largeish stones, just capable of being removed by the hand. Now and then, it is true, these latter assume more considerable dimensions; nay, occasionally, a point of rock may be discovered, yet so judiciously arranged as not at all to cause prejudice to any one stream. Clay you seldom meet with; it is a barren unprofitable substance, impervious to every species of water animalculæ; we mean not by it, the muddy refuse which is often found even in Tweed, proceeding from vegetable decomposition, and not in the least unfavourable to the support of fish, but that hard yellowish till of which the agriculturist complains, as drawing off no moisture, and harbouring no nourishment.

Another leading feature of the Tweed is, that its whole development is gradual, its extension almost imperceptible. It proceeds not, like the Tay or Lochie, from the womb of a large reservoir, supplied but scantily during its course, but commences