

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

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The Art of Angling, as Practised in Scotland by Thomas Tod Stoddart

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THOMAS TOD STODDART

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SCOTLAND.

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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.

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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.

TAKING them all in all, there are few streams equal to those of our own land. They have a glad, free music in their sound, accordant with the freshest feelings of our nature, and a bright, living purity, which gives a measure of its complexion to the thoughts of such as

“Wander among blossoms and meek flowers
That strew their margins.”

Many, very many are the rivers of old Scotland; and of these, none is without its attractions, whether scenic, historical, or otherwise.

Tay, for instance, can boast of its Scone, the former abode of royalty—of Perth, too, and Dunkeld, and the Breadalbane's Tower; Tweed is skirted by the abbeys of Melrose and Dryburgh, by Abbotsford and Ashiesteil; Clyde hath its celebrated falls; Nith is sanctified to the memory of Burns, and Forth to that of Wallace, the champion of our liberties. But why speak of more and lesser streams, that have all and each their hold upon the heart—endeared to us whether by some old melody, or grateful recollection?

We would talk at present, not as philosophers but anglers, as those who cultivate the solitary art, and value by its finny treasures

“ The tuneful brook, that to the birchen tree,
Chimes as it wanders with a merry strain—
The thoughtful river sweeping solemnly
Toward the surges of the distant main.”

In this chapter upon Scottish rivers, we shall endeavour briefly to give 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 Loch Leven, 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 formed 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, grilses, white and sea trout, ascend such waters in great numbers, preferring them even to better provided but more sluggish courses; which shows 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 this 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