

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

THE OPENING OF THE TROUT FISHING

Here's a health to every sort of stream that harbors speckled trout,
And a health to those that put them in and those that pull them out!
Here's a health to every sporting fish that rises to the fly,
To the fish that likes it sunken and the fish that takes it dry!

Here's a health to every angler in whatever land or clime,
With a sop to Lady Fortune and a wink for Father Time!

Here's a health to those that never know the limits of their luck,
And a bumper to the duffers like myself, who chance and chuck!

Chelidion.

The fishing season is open. The weather seems likely to be propitious, the trees are budding, so the trout should be rising. Brothers of the cult are casting care behind them and have hied them to lake, stream, and estuary, to put their skill once more to the test and match their wits against the sagacity of the lusty trout, and salmon. Here's "tight lines" to all good brothers of the rod.

READINGS FROM THE OLD MASTER

The Trout and His Seasons

The trout is a fish highly valued, both in this and foreign nations. He may be justly said, as the old poet said of wine, and we English say of venison: "To be a generous fish." A fish that is so like the buck, that he also has his seasons; for it is observed that he comes in and goes out of season with the stag and buck. Gesner says his name is of a German offspring; and says he is a fish that feeds clean and purely, in the swiftest streams, and on the hardest gravel; and that he may justly contend with all the fresh water fish, as the mullet may with all the sea fish—for precedence and daintiness of taste; and that beginning in right season the most dainty palates have allowed precedence to him.

And next you are to notice that he is not like the crocodile, which, if he lives ever so long, yet always thrives till his death; but 'tis not so with the trout, for after he is come to his full growth, he declines in his body and keeps his bigness, or thrives only in his head till his death. And you are to know that he will about, especially before the time of his spawning, get, almost miraculously, through weirs and floodgates, against the stream even though such high and swift places as is almost incredible. Next that the trout usually spawns about October or November, but in some rivers a little sooner or later; which is the more observable, because most other fish spawn in the spring or summer, when the sun hath warmed both the earth and water and made it fit for generation. And you are to note that he continues many months out of season; for it may be observed of the trout, that he is like the buck or the ox, that he will not be fat in many months, though he go in the very same pastures that horses do, which will be fat in one month, and so you may observe that most other fishes recover strength, and grow sooner fat and in season than the trout doth.

And next you are to note, that till the sun gets to such a height as to warm the earth and the water, the trout is sick, and lean and lousy, and unwholesome; for you shall, in winter, find him to have a big head, and then, to be lank and thin and lean, at which time many of them have sticking on them bugs or trout-lice; which is a kind of a worm in shape like a clove, or pin with a big head, and sticks close to him, and sucks his moisture those, I think, the trout breeds himself, and never thrives till he frees himself from them, which is when warm weather comes, and then, as he grows stronger he gets from the dead still water into the sharp streams, and the gravel and, there, rubs off these worms or lice; and then, as he grows stronger, so he gets into swifter and swifter streams, and there lies at the water for any fly or minnow that comes near to him; and he especially loves the May-fly, which is bred of the cod-worm or cod-lis, and these make the trout bold and lusty, and he is usually fatter and better meat at the end of that month than at any time of the year.

Now you are to know that it is observed that usually the best trouts are either red or yellow, though some, as the Fordgate trout, be white and yet good, but that is not usual; and it is a note observable that the female trout hath usually a less head, and a deeper body than the male trout, and is usually the better meat. And not that a hog back and a whale head, to either trout, salmon or any other fish is a sign that the fish is in season.

THEN AND NOW

The afterglow lingered long in the sky that evening, for it was Midsummer Day and settled weather. The west was a sea of pale primrose, where a few long purple cloud-islands floated. It was as if one stood on a height above some fairy Benbecula, flat, dove-colored, and marked its coastline of innumerable inlets (where celestial sea trout ran) reach out forever to a horizon that was not. Behind me a peerless spire soared from amidst the dark green of elms, as if it would lose itself in the rose of the upper air. I stood on ancient turf,

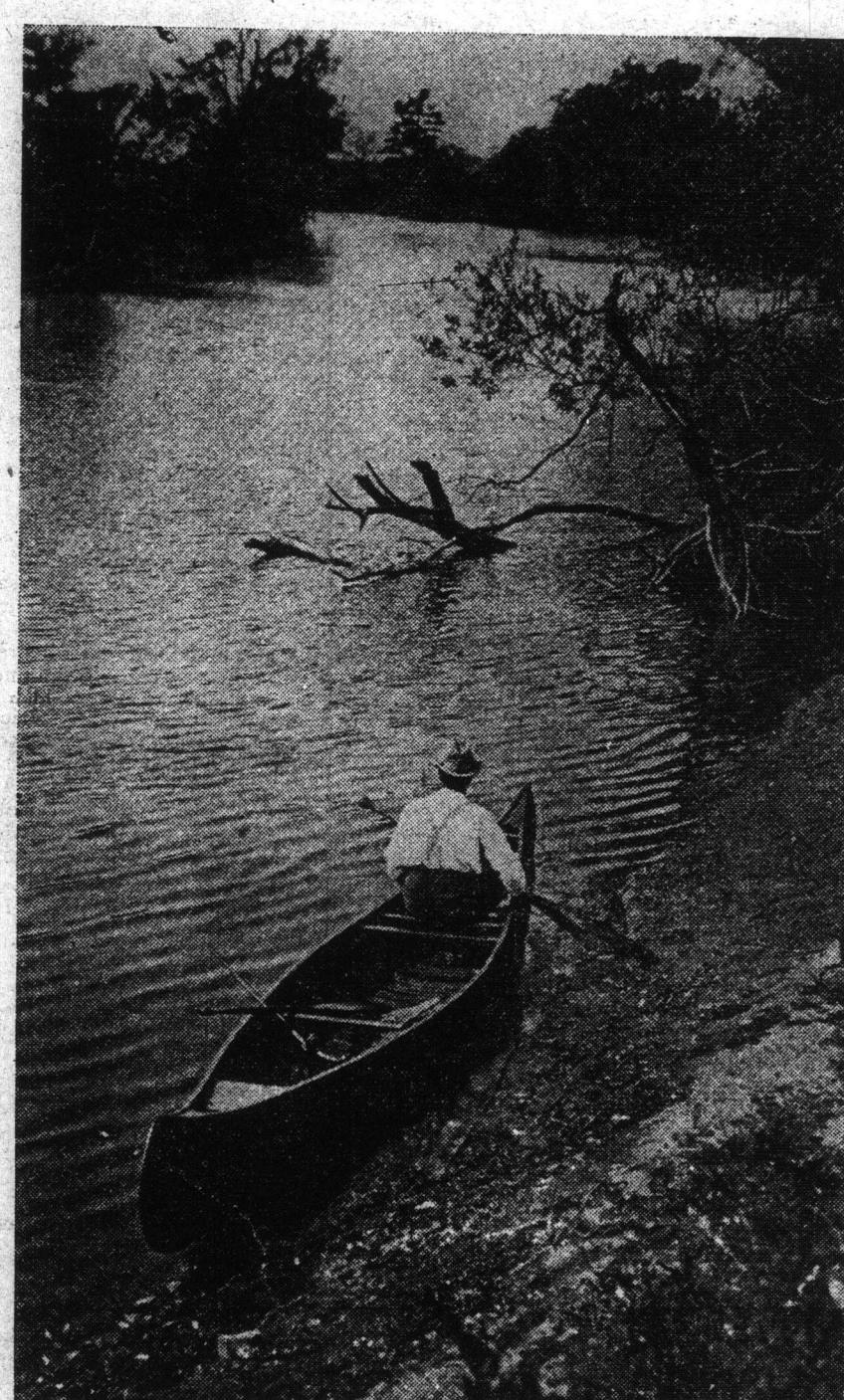
which had laid its seemly carpet of green velvet between odorous flower beds and tall, trim hedges, straight to the old house, where shone a single red window. Ten inches below my feet flowed the river, primrose out of that primrose sea, broad, where night already dwelt. Large, oily rings appeared here and there upon the surface of the water, spread, died away, were succeeded by others, larger, oilier. The stillness was broken only by the purring flight of bats and the sound of great fish, feeding rapidly, greedily on sedge flies. I cast and cast. The frenzy was upon me that is born of the last moments of daylight, a rise and fall, and a biter had upon his head. His round cheeks were apples; his nose was colored by nothing

not be satisfied with verbal evidence. "Tush, tush!" he observed, "what make of angler is this?" I considered whether I might without all loss of self-respect, take this venomous ancient by his admirable middle and heave him into the river. I decided that at all cost I must keep my hands off him. I owed my fishing to a churchman, and the clergy hang together.

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"Good master"—unheard he had rejoined



The Philosophic Angler
Photo from Recreation.

me—"prither suffer a brother angler to make closer acquaintance with that so far-throwing wand." I held out my split cane to him dumbly. He did not take it, but he bent over it, peering at it through the small square spectacles he wore. "Aye," he said, "a pretty tool and a valiant. But what device is this?" "That," said I, in scorn of him, "is the line, passing through these excellently contrived rings upon the so-valiant wand is retained upon a central drum, and may be drawn off" (I drew some off). "I rolled up at will by the miraculous turning of this diff'lt little pin." I wound up, as ironically as I might.

Again my humor failed to touch him. His eyes were round with amazement and delight. "It is even so!" he breathed reverently. I perceived that I had to do with a lunatic or with a supreme artist, in either of which cases everything must be forgiven him. Humoring him or playing up to him—I cared not which, for the rise was over—I indicated the gut trace.

"This," I said, "is the gut, made by extending the entrails of the silkworm. Soo strong it is, and how transparent." I tugged on it. "And see, here is the fly—a sedge. There are five hundred other patterns (sold at half a crown a dozen), all of which I have in these boxes." I opened my creel, and permitted him to peer within. "This," I went on, "is my bottle of paraffin oil, with which I anoint the fly to make it float more rarely, and so deceive and master these subtle fishes. There are the pincers with which I pick my flies out of their

boxes. Here is a tube of dubbin—I smear it on my line, reverend sir, and this causes it to float most excellently. Thus with but one little twitch I do hook the brutes. Here is a piece of blotting paper to dry my flies withal if haply they be wetter. Here—

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