

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

THEOSOPHISTS, THEORIES AND SKUNKS.

The boys had gone into the tent and fallen into a dead sleep, the sweetness of which only a hunter knows. Lying back on the soft grass I watched the smoke from the camp fire climb skyward and slowly merge into the deep blue of the heavens.

How long I slept I do not know, but I was suddenly awakened. From the mountain side on the west I heard a voice, a man's voice, singing. The clatter of a horse's feet in a steady lope kept time to the weird and doleful tune. The rhythm was perfect. The words became faintly audible:

"As I was riding by Tom Sherman's bar-room,
I saw a once noble cowboy—"

The horse stumbled, a quirt cracked twice in rapid succession; and a monologue of staccato oaths rept the night air; a moment of silence, and then the song was resumed:

"Play your life lowly
And beat your drums slowly,
As you play your death marches.
Oh, carry me along;
Take me to the graveyard
And throw the dirt o'er me;
For I am a cowboy
And I know I've done wrong."

Our camp was on the trail, and with the last words the singer jerked up his horse within a few feet of me.

"Get down," said I, with a genuine ring of welcome in my voice; for I had enjoyed his approach.

The dull glow from the fire showed a slender man with brown, matted hair, drawn face and elliptical legs.

"Where are you headed for at this time of night?" I inquired.

"Going for bug juice," he replied, with a speaking voice much coarser than his singing voice. "I'm Pete Perkins, better known as Whisky Pete, fence rider, on the Panther Creek ranch."

"What is bug juice?" I asked, by way of politeness and hospitality, and to let him know I was traveling with culture, even if I might not have it.

"Hit's what we use for snake bites and polecat bites in this country. I s'pose you call it whiskey."

I passed him a flask of Deep Spring, and after ejecting a four-ounce quid of Battle-Ax, and laying his sombrero on the grass, Whisky Pete straddled carefully, balanced, tilted, and for two minutes Deep Spring whisky flowed and gurgled as it had never flowed and gurgled before—in our camp.

"Better unsaddle and spend the night," I began, as he lowered the bottle. "We have in camp a psychologist, and—"

He fixed his eyes on me in amazement and backed away.

"Oh, he's all right," I hastened to explain, "simply a young Englishman; never been outdoors before. He's a mental scientist. He believes things are simply as we think they are. For instance:

"This evening we were talking about the odor of skunks, and he said if he should come in contact with one, he would think his clothing was saturated with perfume and that he would walk around camp smelling like attar of roses."

"Has he ever saw one?" asked Whisky Pete, his suspicion disarmed—and much relieved that he might linger longer near the only half-emptied flask.

"No," I replied, "but he is anxious to find one and prove that the scent is all imagination."

"I can't wait until tomorrow," he said, and that gave me a start. But he only took something from his saddle pocket. It proved to be a small vial, and he explained it was "dope" he used in trapping wolves. What it was made of, said he, was a great secret known only to wolf trappers, but it had attar of roses beaten plumb to death.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, uncorking the bottle near me.

"Stop it up, stop it up!" I gasped, with both hands over my nose. For keen, sickening stench I have never smelt anything like it.

"Where is that thing you spoke about?" he said, walking toward the tent.

"That's him on the right, lying on his back, snoring," said I, pointing out the tenderfoot, with some hesitation. But curiosity restrained my humanitarian instincts, and I slid by and watched him saturate the bottom of the cork with the terrible stuff and smear it on the upper lip and nose of the sleeping man. Immediately the tenderfoot began to writhe and strangle in his sleep.

"Skunk! Skunk!" shouted the cowboy, at the same time, discharging his six-shooter.

"Ye Gods!" shouted the psychologist, making a wild lunge. Instinct led him to the creek in quick time, and tossed him in.

By the time we reached the bank the psychologist had scrubbed his head and face, but he stayed where he was, in water up to his waist.

"Horror of horrors!" he began. "That's the worst I ever smelt!"

"Why don't you use Christian Science?" the other boys and I asked simultaneously.

"Why, of course," he replied, collecting himself. "This is all nonsense. It was so sudden and I was so soundly sleeping, so didn't think. In an emergency, you know, a mere student may be expected to forget for the moment."

He sniffed. "You see, the terrible scent has gone and you know it is impossible to wash off the scent of skunks, because you have explained that the only way to rid one of it is by being buried alive."

We walked back to the camp. The visitor and the horse—and the whisky bottle—were gone. Mental Science—with the aid of Owl Creek—had gained a great victory.

The psychologist talked far into the night and dilated profusely on the ignorance of man in failing to utilize his God-given powers to keep him from harm and unhappiness.

When all the boys had again dropped off to sleep, I once more lay down on the grass alone. The fire had burned down to ashes and the only light came from the fiery dots that burned in the overhanging deeps of blue showering silent music upon the world. And as I lay there I thought of the many thousands of beliefs and theories in the world, and how each little insignificant mind had its favorite and how fanatically it clung to it, seeing no truth in any but its own, and branding all others as false.

Again the peace of a sweet sleep was hovering over me, and in my semi-conscious state I thought I heard again the cowboy's song. Rising upon one elbow, I listened. From the gray mists that filled the deep canon on the east, arose, faint and far, a high-pitched, baritone singing voice:

"Go bring me a cup,
A cup of cold water,
To soothe my flushed temples."
The cowboy sang. And:
"But ere I had returned
With a cup of cold water,
A cup of cold water,
The cowboy was dead."

—By Roy Lury Slaughter, in Recreation.

NIGHT FISHING FOR BASS

The anglers are an ingenious lot, or so we fancy. Not one of us, to speak candidly, but has discovered, or thought out, or unconsciously adopted some trick or twist which, being our own, or having been so faithfully fostered that we so hold it, makes us just a little more capable at the art than our brother. There is something wonderfully fascinating about disposing a minnow with a bait rod at just the proper place to engage a bass; and about taking him with a slender line and frail hook, which are scarcely more our weapons in the battle than the knowledge of how to reduce to a minimum the tension on the rod and reel, and thus to defeat the veriest wiles of savagery known to the bass.

One must likewise accept it as proof abundant of that man's fitness to be acclaimed an angler who with his casting rod neatly flips a lure to the edge of the lily pads or beneath an overhanging branch, and thus puts his challenge beyond ignoring to a bass among bass, giving him thereafter a fair and sportsmanlike chance, and at the end of the struggle lifts him with bare hands over the side of the boat, to the scorn of a landing net.

And, further, there is the usual fishing for bass with a delicate fly rod by day, with the exercise of that intuition which suggests the use of flies of pronounced color, or gray, or black ones, according to the brightness of the sun, or the haze all about, or the slow settling of the clouds. And the fly is laid away out yonder to descend just as safely as fell the kisses of the fairies which our fathers and mothers invoked in our childhood. Now it is drawn across the water to make the barest ripple. The bass, practical to the exclusion of everything else, as he is, holding that the proof is only in the eating, exactly as we have been told in our own adage about the pudding and the bag, makes a dash for it, to become, at the end, a fine trophy.

Let us pause here to put the question: Is there anything finer in death than a splendid, big bass?

But to get back to the matter of ingenuity. Have you ever fished for bass with a fly rod by night? This idea, though perhaps not new, was not until this moment common property. Arrive just at dark at that portion of the lake where the bank declines gently and where grass grows to the very edge of the water. Have with you two or three moth miller flies attached to their leaders and wound about your hat, where they will be more convenient than in the fly book.

A creel with the furnished rod should complete your equipment.

Avoid the nights when the moon is bright, choosing rather the hour when it is just due to peep over the horizon, or, better still, have only the light of the stars. Walk along softly, dropping your fly not more than a few inches from the bank, drawing it toward you or outward not more than the length of the rod. The bass are there at your feet, waiting to fall upon and destroy some hapless insect which in jumping may possibly calculate the distance to a grass blade and fall upon the surface of the lake.

Your white fly may, and very probably will, appeal to him. Constant alertness is the price of success. Your rod you see dimly, if at all. Of the directions of movement of the fish you have only the knowledge that is communicated to you through slender strips of bamboo. Whether he be monstrously large or simply powerful for his size, you may not know until you have defeated him. Your line you may protect only as the sense of touch suggests.

A landing net, because of the darkness, is valueless; and so, after a while, when the struggle has grown feeble, with one hand you hold your rod back of you, allowing it to bend nearly double across your shoulder; with the other you catch the line and lift the bass gently to dispose him in your creel. If you are ungovernably curious, you will strike a match by its glow to gain some hint of his size, but very probably that same spark will frighten out into the depths other bass—that might have fattened your basket.

Your sport will last until 10 o'clock—rarely later; not by any means an arbitrary hour, for where nature truly prevails everything is strictly ordered, even to the hours of retirement of a self-respecting bass—Guy C. Seeds, in Outing.

ANOTHER SKUNK CURE

This incident happened while on the farm. My uncle, living about a mile from my home, had a young lady visiting him and his wife, who had proved to be quite an attraction to me. I had called on her several times, and, it being summer time and the roads good, I usually rode over and back on my wheel. On this particular evening I left my lady about 11:30 and started homeward. It was a pretty moonlight night and I was riding at a fairly good gait. About an eight of a mile from home I left the main road and turned into a lane which lead alongside a heavy meadow. The edge of this meadow was a fine smooth path, so I decided to do a little sprinting. I was "going some" when suddenly I noticed a small black object appear directly in my path. I was too close on to it to turn out of the way and riding too fast to dismount, so over it I went and kept on going till I came to the barnyard gate, where I dismounted. The odor that arose from my wheel and clothes immediately informed me what the object was. I had ridden over it. Well, I had on my best suit of clothes, which was at that time the extent of my dress-up wardrobe. The following day there was to be a basket picnic and dance, to which I had made an engagement to take my young lady. I wondered how on earth I could get that scent off my clothes by the next day. I had heard of people burying clothes, so I decided to give it a try anyway, and was soon out in the garden with pick and shovel piling on the dirt.

Next morning about 9 o'clock I decided to take them up and see if the perfume was lasting. It sure was—stronger than ever. I was very much discouraged, as I knew it would be rather embarrassing to explain why I could not attend the picnic.

About this time an old gentleman farmer who was passing by, noticed me shaking my clothes out of the dirt, and suspiciously what was the matter, stopped to ask me the trouble. I told him the whole story and after taking a good laugh at my expense, he said he could tell me how to fix things O.K. in five minutes' time. Simply get some corn meal and place it on top of a hot stove and when it began to char and smoke hold my clothes in the smoke a few minutes and the scent would entirely disappear. With much misgiving I did as he told me and in less time than five minutes the odor disappeared. I thought sure the odor would return during damp weather but it never came back. I went to the dance, had a fine time, and to this day the girl is none the wiser.—A. R. C., in Field and Stream.

DUCK SHOOTING EXTRAORDINARY

Not long ago, while stationed in the Province of Albany, P. I. Capt. Burt, 18th Infantry, and myself decided to take a trip to Lake Bato, some 40 miles inland. We packed all our duffle into an army wagon and with four sturdy mules to draw it, started early one morning for our long drive, arriving at the lake that night. The next morning we hired two catamarans, threw our baggage aboard, and crossed the lake. Then we made camp and cooked chow.

Can you imagine a lake 15 miles in diameter literally covered with fowl? The report of a gun was unknown in the vicinity and, of course, the fowl were not gun-shy. We took life easy until 2 o'clock the following morning, when our guides awakened us. Creeping out of our blankets, we got into our bancas, or boats, and started down the lake shore. About 3 o'clock we reached a rushing stream some 40 feet wide, and I can safely swear that each and every mosquito from tip to tip measured the same. Wow!

We plunged into a marsh, sinking to our knees in many places, and waded some three miles. It was still dark, and I had visions of horrible snakes and mammoth lizards, in which this country abounds. After an hour of this sort of travel we arrived at the edge of a little mud pond some hundred yards in

diameter. One of the guides motioned for the Captain to remain with him and my guide, beckoning to me to follow, jumped into the water to his waist. In I jumped. Ugh! I never forget it as long as I live; soft, slimy mud for the bottom and now and then a snake gliding silently along the water in front of me.

We reached the other side and entered a little inlet. Passing through this we came out into another pond exactly like the first. The guide took me to a little clump of partly submerged alders, and we waded in and got among them as best we could. I was sitting in mud and water up to my waist. But the air was simply alive with ducks, as we knew from the whirr of their wings.

Daylight came, and I shall never forget the sight. Flock after flock came dropping down into the pond. I heard the captain's rifle and knew the shooting was on. It seemed like deliberate murder. Flocks of ducks numbering 500 would fly within 20 yards, and after being shot at would circle and come right back. At about 9 o'clock, gathering our kill, we went back to the first pond. Between us we had ducks enough to give the battalion a Thanksgiving dinner. We shot them all with our rifles.

Since leaving that station my field of labor has been changed to Alindanao, and while stationed on a hill on the shores of Lake Lanao, I have been able to shoot wild hogs by moonlight from the guard house. One night while returning from a small scrap with the Moros, in the Taraca valley, I shot several ducks, feeding in the rice paddies, the full tropical moon making it as light as day. At my present station, Misamis, I have good snipe shooting. There are monkeys everywhere, but they are too human to kill. If they are wounded they cry and sob like small children. The natives eat them and use their hides to make drum heads.

For big game we have the water buffalo, which if wounded, will put up a pretty stiff fight, and in a good many cases it is the hunter hunted if he is not an excellent shot. The woods are full of deer, but they are very small, being about the size of a hound or a shepherd dog. They are easily tamed and almost every American in the provinces keeps one or two tame deer.—Recreation.

A RECORD DAY

I am, as I am bound to admit, the kind of angler to whom record days seem naturally to belong. The worst of it is that their title to "record days," is due to the villainies with which harsh circumstance pursues me. I am permitted to do nothing right. Thus, although I had earned some right to believe that immunity had been purchased by my spring fortnight of 1910, that belief has been completely shattered. My spring fortnight of wet fly fishing in moorland streams, which I am used to count the most chief of all life's pleasures, had been ruined by the weather. No men were ever so cold, no men ever fought against such down-stream hurricanes, no men ever saw more snow and sleet and hail and icy rain and flooded, turbid rivers and freakish thunderstorms than we saw in Wales this year. Few men, professing themselves anglers, ever caught fewer fish. That was indeed a bitter penance, and I said to myself that high Fate had taken it out of me very fully. I said to myself that after this expiation things would go well and merrily down south. Fool!

Four days have I snatched for angling since the Mayfly came up. Not one of them has been good. But, listen, who have hearts to feel compassion, to the deplorable calamities of the last of these days. It was a day brimming over with hope and promise. It was such a day as June rarely gives to mortals. Out of high heaven a compelling sun beat upon the earth, warming its cold listlessness to eager life. A gentle breeze, replacing the high wind, tempered the hat with gracious refreshment. Clouds danced across the sky, swallows flew high, horses neighed with pleasure in the fields, and Mayflies danced up and down, drunk with the desire of their kind. "Go not," I said on arriving at the river in a hired fly and a burst of poetic sentiment—"go not, happy day, from the fields." And the happy day remained.

But, after all, I had taken a considerable journey at considerable expense, and I had flung from my overburdened conscience the memory of work and duty for the sole supreme purpose of taking trout by rod and line and fly. I had hoped, not unreasonably, that there would be a satisfactory rise of Mayfly, and that the trout would display that convenient gluttony which brings trout and men to bad ends. On the other days the fish had regarded the fly with but a languid appetite. They had been far from "elegant at the uptake." This, then, surely should have been the day of days. So confident did I feel that a broad expanse of stream without a dimple, did not dismay me. Even after hours of weary watching hope still burned in me. Even when the fly came up, rather sparsely but quite distinctly, to be entirely neglected by the fish, hope's ashes still were hot. Only at the bitter end did I fall a prey to despair and hurl my compendious malediction on the river, the fish, the fly, the day, and all the vanities of angling.



Sportsman's Calendar

FEBRUARY

Sports for the Month—For the angler, grilse and spring salmon. For the shooter, ducks and geese.

In Season—Ducks, geese, brant, snipe, grilse, salmon, steelheads in tidal water. February 28 the last day of the season for ducks and snipe.

The net result of this day was that I lost a pipe, a cast, three Mayflies, two fish, and a train, so that I am entitled to call it a "record" day. Now the pipe was a bitter loss. I laid it down either after finishing my frugal lunch or during the horrid manoeuvres that ended in the loss of a complete cast. I discovered the loss at 3:15 p. m. I smoked five cigarettes—which I detest—between that hour and tea-time. Then, without tobacco of any kind, I abandoned my dreams of the lower water and tramped up stream again to look for my pipe and a rising fish. I found neither. I did see two good fish rise, each in solitary and purposeless fashion. I rose both and hooked one. He came unstuck after letting me know that he was an entirely worthy fish. All this was bad enough. It was so much worse in that, a week earlier, I had lost another pipe, of which the bowl—which in Wales I had successfully landed as it careered down stream below me—dropped off in a deep hayfield and buried itself irrevocably. Then I had bought, locally and cheaply, the other pipe, and this other pipe had turned out a rare and curious success.

I come next to the cast. Was that my fault? With high and skillful cunning I purposed to reach the one good fish who was feeding at all by pitching the fly on to a particular blade of grass far upstream on the opposite bank, and pulling it with a fall as light as thistledown on to the water. I did so pitch the fly. I pulled very gently, and the brute fixed itself firmly in a hidden stump of absolutely unyielding fixity. I pulled, I tugged, I roared in pain and frenzy. My fish surged away in furious astonishment, leaving a great wake behind him. At last my line came back, leaving the whole gut cast dangling on the stump. The river was a hundred yards deep, and the nearest bridge a mile away. I got so far as to take off my coat with the determination of swimming for the cast, and then I left it with my malediction.

Of the loss of two fish I will say nothing. That is a commonplace of bad angling. But the train! There I was vilely betrayed by B. Him I instructed to purchase a local timetable and look out the train. He did so, and we commanded the hired fly accordingly. On the way to the station I asked if there were time for me to purchase another pipe. Looking at his watch, he said we had ten minutes to spare. Then we reached the station to watch the last carriage crawling out of it. B. had looked out the train from the wrong station. Add to this that I had consented to an earlier train home in order to consult his absurd convenience, and that as I left the river I heard the steady "plop, plop" which marked the beginning of the long-lost rise.

Thus and thus have I enjoyed another record day. Pray forgive me the conviction that angling is an overrated pastime.—Guy C. Pollock.

ST. PETER CAUGHT ONE LIKE THIS

After casting and trolling in the morning with no success, we decided to spend the evening "still fishing" for pickerel. That also seemed to prove a failure, so we became discouraged. As it was near supper time, I inquired of my friend about the time of day.

He arose to look at his watch, and as he pulled it from his pocket the fob, in some way became unbuckled, allowing the gold watch to fall into the water. Recovery was impossible as the water was from ten to fifteen feet deep and the bottom of the lake was matted with aquatic plants. Then I felt a tug at my line, and after a short, uninteresting fight, succeeded in landing a three-pound pickerel. We were so despondent over the loss of the watch that we made our way homeward, caring little for fish or fishing.

Imagine our surprise that evening, when, upon cleaning the fish, we found the watch in its stomach, still ticking.—Russell Blankenburg in Field and Stream.