

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

MY BIGGEST FISH

(Richard L. Pocock)

I noticed a little time ago an article concerning fish and fishermen in which the writer remarked that anglers do not weigh or measure their fish according to the accepted standards of weights and measure, or words to that effect. Of course I realized as I read the article through that it was "writ sarcastic," and that the writer was poking fun at us fishermen, and wrote as a scoffer. Well, we can stand it. But there is many a true word spoken and written in jest. Doubtless the writer would expect his assertions to be repudiated with emphatic and scornful denial, but I for one have no such desire to answer his mildly derisive remarks in this fashion. Of course the true "bred-in-the-bone" angler is above such hard and fast rules as are imposed by standard weights and measures. To describe a fish, valiantly fought and gloriously vanquished, in terms of mere avoirdupois or lineal measure is unfortunately a necessity to which he is reduced in order to convey to the mind of the poor unfortunate who is without the pale of anglers' freemasonry some idea of how valiant the fight has been and how glorious the victory achieved; if his hearer is more than ordinarily dull to the charms of the fish sense, then it becomes necessary to add somewhat to the number of vulgar pounds or inches by which we describe our best fish in order to make the necessary impression upon his dull intelligence. Unfortunately, he, in his lack of the poetic sense of fishermen, takes us literally, and makes no allowance for fishermen's poetic license, and walks away muttering mournfully about fishermen and Ananias.

"What was the weight of the biggest fish you ever caught?" I wonder how often this question is asked by fisherman of brother fisherman. I also wonder how often the same question asked of the same fisherman brings exactly the same answer in terms of pounds and ounces. "What was the biggest fish I ever caught?" "Are you a fisherman?" "Yes?" "Well, then, I will tell you." Picture in your mind a little brook, small enough for any but a hobbler-skirted suffragette to jump across, running through the kitchen garden and the meadows of a country home in Great little old England. Trace the little brook a mile or two through, here a meadow, there a little copse of larch and pine, until you come to an old mill with a huge creaking wooden wheel, slowly and protestingly revolving at the gentle but insistent pressure of our little brook, which, tired of its sleepy wandering past peaceful kine and the drone of cooing woodpeckers, throws itself in playful abandon over the paddles of the old green wheel, laughing at its groans in protest, and splashing up again as a child looks back laughing at the older mortal on whom it has played some childish prank.

This for a setting. Just above the mill, as if the stream were laughing to itself in mischief at the prank it is about to play, it is quieter and deeper than ever yet. Just here imagine that you see two boys, just boys who were born with the fish fever in their blood. Each has a cheap stiff rod, and on the bank is a tin of worms in moss and milk. Hold your scorn a minute; the boys are very young, and they are not fishing for trout; they are fishing for eels. Trout-fishing is something of which as yet they know nothing, except by hearsay; with them to catch a two-ounce roach is a delight, to land a trout of any size at all is one of those hitherto undreamed of joys, which are spoken of reverently as something which may perhaps some day be theirs, when they have journeyed farther on the sea of life.

Watch the pair awhile. Presently a stage whisper, "I've got a bite!" and then the anxious dialogue. Moments of fearful suspense, as the eel is allowed time to swallow the bait, and then at last, after a fearful and painful exercise of patience, is dragged from his oozy bed by main force and swung well back among the bushes over the youthful angler's head. It is the first blood of the day, and his young caper is jubilant; but soon his companion's turn is to come. His float bobs once and then goes under, out of sight. He is puzzled, as this does not represent the accustomed behaviour of the slimy eel. Before he can think much about the unusual behaviour of his float, it starts on a rapid journey up stream, and instinct bids him wait no longer. Fortunately the tackle is coarse and strong, and the rod top stands the jerk, as the fish is torn from the water with one vigorous upward sweep, and deposited well into safety in the middle of a briar bush. What is it; what can it be? It is rushed at and pounced on and killed, well killed to make sure, and then is gazed on by a pair of awestricken youths, one of whom has just achieved the undreamed-of, and landed a beautiful golden-bellied, beautifully-spotted trout of truly enormous size. Indeed it was the most beautiful fish the lads had ever seen, and they could hardly believe their good fortune, but there it was; they knew it was a trout, and they had caught it in a place where no trout were known, by them at any rate, to exist.

They were both far too excited to do any more fishing that afternoon. The second best part of a successful fisherman's outing had to come as soon as possible, the fish must be shown to others and their admiration seen and their congratulations received.

Their hearts full of joy, they could hardly stop to stow the tackle, before hurrying home

the shortest way along the country road, and displaying their great catch to admiring relatives. At last, reluctantly, the fish was delivered to the tender mercies of the cook, who added the last drop to a cup of happiness already full, by announcing solemnly, after carefully and decorously weighing the prize, that it turned the scale at exactly NINE OUNCES! Myself the happy lad who scored the prize, that, gentlemen, was the biggest fish I ever caught.

IN QUEST OF THE RED TROUT

A week had passed since the opening day before I was able to set out on my first expedition after the red trout. In this part of the country the question, "Where to go?" does not occupy the attention to the same extent that it does at home. The London angler has a variety of prospects before him for his spring outing. The fascination of wading up a moorland stream in Devonshire, or the recollection of a good day among the Welsh hills, may lure him to the west; or, if he be of the dry-fly persuasion, the chance offered by a midday hatch of olives on one of the south-country streams may well prove irresistible; or, perchance, his ambition or his purse may carry him (and his Alexandra) no further than the confines of Middlesex. But for the angler resident in Montreal, nature, ably assisted, no doubt, by the early colonist, has kindly (or unkindly) settled the question; for, though the St. Lawrence and its tributaries—of which there are some half-dozen within reach of the city—hold abundance of coarse fish, the trout has long since disappeared from their waters. Whether the marketable qualities of this fish have caused it to fall a victim to the nets and snares of the professional fisherman, or whether the large towns, which, as in all new countries (and many of the old ones, too, for that matter), find in the river a convenient and ready-made sewer, have driven it to purer waters, it is impossible to say, but the fact remains that the angler must nowadays go further afield for his sport.

The Laurentian Mountains, which here form the northern boundary of the St. Lawrence valley, offer the most convenient retreat for the sportsman, and almost the only one within reasonable distance of the city. This range runs for some hundreds of miles across Quebec, and contains numberless lakes and streams, where red and grey trout abound; many of them still virgin waters, where perhaps none but a chance lumberman has ever cast a fly. But, though such delectable spots are now becoming scarce, there are still lakes within driving distance of the railway which yield good sport to the skilful fisherman. The more accessible portions in this vicinity are at present leased by the Government to numerous angling societies; some, indeed, own almost as many lakes as they have members, a policy which, though advantageous for the preservation of the trout, still further limits the choice of anyone outside their numbers. The streams, too, are for the most part unfishable in the spring, owing to the operations of the lumber companies, who use them to drive the logs from the lake shores, where they have been felled during the winter, down to the mills among the foothills in the south of the range—a fact which, had I but known it, would have saved me a couple of unprofitable days on my first outing.

Nor does the angler need to spend much time or thought in deciding by what train he will travel. It may be he is going to some favored locality, where there is both a morning and an evening train on each and every day in the week, Sundays excepted; but if his destination be over fifty miles distant, or off the main line, it is probable that the railway company has decided for him. The only point on which he must be careful is to see that the day of the week he intends traveling corresponds to that on which the train runs. Time, of course, is a minor consideration, and an hour or less in a journey of sixty miles is regarded with philosophical indifference—at all events by the officials. But this journey rarely becomes tedious, for the Laurentians is what a good fishing district should be—a land of lakes and woods, waterfalls, dark pools and sparkling stickles, and the angler may well pass the time in making plans for future expeditions as the train pants slowly up the steep mountain gradients, turning and twisting with snakelike agility as it follows the course of a torrent rushing through a rocky gorge in the valley below. The lake which I had been recommended to try on my first expedition was situated about eighty miles up the line and seven miles distant from the station. The train was, as usual, crowded with anglers; in fact, though I have since made several journeys by this line, I have seldom met anyone on the train who was not a fisherman, past or present, generally past, each being prepared to maintain the absolute superiority of his own particular like, to the exclusion of all others. A fellow traveler on this occasion spent quite a considerable time in trying to persuade me to abandon my projected expedition in favor of the lake at his own village, out of which, he assured, no less than 1,000 fish had been taken on the opening day. Inquiry elicited the information that these had all been taken with bait. The desire to fish with a fly he evidently regarded as due solely to ignorance of the habits of trout. These fish, he explained, could be caught in greater numbers with a worm—a style of fishing which also rendered unneces-

sary the use of one of these wobbly poles, which wasted a minute or more in landing each fish. By the time we arrived at his destination his opinion of my intelligence had reached a low ebb.

It was dark before we arrived at the camp—a wooden shanty, rough but waterproof, built in the woods close to the lake shore, for I may explain that there is as a rule no kind of hotel accommodation in these outlying places. The simplest and most usual kind of camp consists of one room, constructed of logs, containing two or three bedsteads and a table, with a lean-to at the side, where the guide does the cooking. A night in the mountain air, and the prospect of a day with a (to me) new species of trout, conduce to early rising, and at a time when in the city I should be still three hours or more from an enforced consciousness, I was standing red in hand by the shore of the lake, watching the guide, who, with gloomy countenance, was looking first at the sky and then at the two craft drawn up on the beach at our feet. These two craft, the selection of which seemed to be causing him some uncertainty, consisted of a boat and a canoe, both typically Canadian, the former a clumsy, flat-bottomed tub, pointed at bow and stern, its sides formed of a single plank, with thole-pins in place of rowlocks; the latter a veritable birchbark, made from a single strip from one of the giant trees which could be seen shining among the woods on the lake shore, the ends sewn up with catgut or some similar material, differing in no respect from those used by the Indians before the white man came to trespass on his hunting grounds. And, in truth, the choice was not an easy one, for the boat leaked like a sieve, while the wind, which had risen during the night, was now making whitecaps across the exposed portions of the lake, was such as to make the handling of a canoe no child's play, particularly with a passenger unversed in their little peculiarities. The canoe eventually won the day, and we steered toward a reef of rock running out from an island at the south end of the lake. These canoes differ in some respects from the modernized "Canader" now so popular on the Thames, being of much lighter build, rather broader in the beam, and of exceptionally shallow draught, which makes them liable to upset unless carefully handled. They have thwarts, usually three in number, connecting the gunwales, the paddler kneeling at the bottom and supporting himself against the thwart. The first step into one gives much the sensation of treading on a jelly fish, and the kneeling position deals hardly with an Englishman's rheumatic joints; but certainly for ease in casting and comfort in handling a hooked fish, the canoes have no equal.

The flies in use here are mostly of the brightly colored variety, and I put up a Silver Doctor and Parmachene Belle, the latter in deference to the wishes of my guide, who seemed to have a penchant for this piece of feminine gaudiness; he also suggested adding an ibis, which he had seen in my box, but this I resisted. For my own part, I prefer fishing with one fly only, considering that the advantage of a dropper is more than compensated for by the danger of the second fly getting hung up while playing a heavy fish, though I have seen men using as many as four medium-sized salmon flies on a two-yard cast. At the first assault the reef drew blank, except for a fingerling, which bolted the Silver Doctor, and nearly ended his existence thereby. However, he was returned without much damage. The Canadian guide has one thing in common with his confreres in England, a rooted objection to returning a fish to the water. I saw him eyeing the fingerling with regret as it wriggled slowly to shelter, and the next fish, which we have weighed 24lb., he had smitten on the head before I had time to remonstrate. The rain which had been threatening all the morning, now started in earnest, and we were soon glad to move under the lee of the island, where a shoal of small fish were feeding close in shore, and a few half-pounders, after a sporting struggle, took up their quarters in the bottom of the boat. But one does not go to this lake to catch half-pounders, good sporting fish though they be, and when lunch time arrived without a sight of anything bigger I began to be skeptical of the guide's tales on the previous evening, in spite of his prophetic utterances that we should "Get 'em come supper time." I even began to suspect the veracity of a photograph hanging in the camp, in which was depicted a portly angler smirking behind a row of still more portly trout. The Parmachene having become embroiled with a stump (of which I was secretly glad, as the guide's admiration of her scarlet petticoat did not seem to be shared by the trout. I took the opportunity to put up a fly of more respectable appearance—to wit, a silver mallard.

A second visit to the reef added a fish or two of rather better size to the basket, all taken on the mallard, and once I thought the lake was about to justify its reputation, for a trout bored deep and played like a heavy fish; but it was only a small one, four-holed in the belly. Just at sundown came a lull in the storm, which hitherto had been raging with unabated vigor, and immediately the reef was alive with fish, coming up from the bottom like torpedoes, with an impetus which frequently took them right out of the water, as pretty a sight as any angler could wish to see, though trying to the nerves, the temptation to strike too soon being almost unconquerable. Very often when rising in this manner the red trout

will miss the fly altogether; but, like the grayling, will generally come again as ferociously as before.

But the night was falling rapidly, and as a last resource I changed the doctor for a Blagdon March brown, an old and weather-beaten fly which had seen better days, but was still of goodly substance, and cast it carefully under a ledge of overhanging rock. The response was immediate, and for a couple of minutes the reel sang cheerily. "Pound and a half," grunted the guide in satisfied tones as he shook out the net, but the prosaic spring balance took a couple of ounces off his estimate. There was still just light enough for a few casts, and I dropped the flies gently on the other side of the ledge. Another rise, but this time from a small fish, who seized the dropper almost before it touched the water. He was soon alongside, over the net in fact, when suddenly a dark form shot from under the canoe, rolled like a porpoise over the March brown, and plunged down to the bottom, dragging the little trout after it, and tipping the canoe till the gunwale was level with the water. Then came an ominous pause. We paddled round and tried pulling from every direction, but it remained immovable. Eventually by careful hand-lining it came free, and for a moment I thought he was still on; but it was only the little fish, still fighting, which came to the net. Examination showed that the dropper in the mouth of the small fish had caught in some weed, and the large trout had, of course, broken away. We counted the catch—just under two dozen, all told. "Not so bad, considering that d-d comet," growled the guide. Well, perhaps not; but—that dropper!—H. D. T.

FROG SHOOTING IN CANADA

A full-grown specimen of the bullfrog in Canada will measure 7 or 8 in. from nose to end of body, and the hind legs will weigh nearly a quarter of a pound per pair. It takes some five or six years to attain this size. The bellow of an old male frog is very loud, and can be heard a long distance away. It sounds like "better-go-round" or "jug o'rum" repeated several times in a very deep bass voice. It is only heard in spring and early summer, and is no doubt meant as a call for a mate.

A day's bullfrog shooting is amusing and profitable sport. Two friends of mine have a light, flat-bottomed canvas boat specially for this. They make an early start from town, taking the boat on the light, four-wheel spring wagon, and in it they place their little 22-rifles, 200 rounds ammunition apiece, a long bamboo pole with a line and triangle hook, a well-filled lunch basket, and a supply of liquid refreshment nicely packed in ice.

The stream, about six miles away, is soon reached. The boat is launched and the horse is then left at a barn close by. One man takes his place at the stern to paddle, the other sits on the centre seat. The bank and the water weeds are carefully searched by two eager pairs of eyes for Mr. Frog.

Presently one is seen sitting half submerged on a lily pad; the boat stops, and a well-placed bullet under the jaw puts number one out of action. Another, this time on the bank, is bagged. One here and one there, many are missed or dived into the water and escape. At noon a stop is made for lunch, after which the slain are skinned and the legs are cut off and put away packed in ice. A fresh start is made, and this time the bamboo pole is brought into use for a change. The hook is baited with a piece of red flannel. When a frog is seen, he is carefully approached and the hook is dangled in front of his nose. Soon he opens his huge mouth and snaps, only to find himself lifted into the boat, there to receive his quietus. Often the hook does not hold, but this does not scare the frog, who will sometimes take the bait several times before being caught.

This, with occasional shots at distant frogs, continues till dusk, when the boat is once more lifted out and placed in the cart and a start is made for home. But if the bag is not satisfactory sport can be continued after dark with a lantern and a stick or the hook. As the boat goes along the light is flashed on the bank and water-weeds. As soon as a frog is seen he can be easily approached, and will not move while the glare of the light is on him. A tap on the head with the stick settles his account, or he may be even caught by hand, though being as slippery as an eel is difficult to hold. If necessary, owing to weeds, the hook may be used.

I strongly recommend those who turn up their noses at the idea of eating frogs' legs to try them at the first opportunity, and I am sure they will then agree with me that a more delicate morsel cannot be had anywhere.—Walter G. Percival, in Bailey's.

A RESOLUTION BY THE CANADIAN CAMP

In view of the painful frequency of so-called shooting accidents in the hunting season, when men, aiming at a patch of color or a motion in the brush, shoot a man instead of game, the Canadian Camp records its utter condemnation of such criminal carelessness, and the opinion that no man who pulls trigger before he knows positively that he is shooting at game and not at a human being, is worthy to be classed among sportsmen. And since public opinion can do more than



Sportsman's Calendar

APRIL

Season for all game fish now open—Trout, salmon, bass, char.

Geese may be shot but not sold.

N.B.—Non-resident anglers can only fish in British Columbia on taking out a license.

legislation to abate the evil, and with a view to informing public opinion, the Canadian Camp requests the publication of this minute in the daily papers and in all magazines for sportsmen.

BOY OF NINE KILLS BEAR WITH A .22

Wilbur Irving Follett Little, son of J. M. Little, of Oakland, is probably the youngest hunter to land a bear in California. This youthful nimrod, who has just passed his 9th birthday, had the satisfaction of bringing down a 175-pound bear on his father's orchard lands in Plumas county, with a .22 caliber Marlin rifle. Mr. Little, sr., owns a lot of orchard land near Virginia, Cal., and during a visit to the place the owner found that bears had been playing havoc with his trees. So one morning he and Wilbur went out gunning for bears. The first one they sighted was close enough for the boy to draw a bead on, and when the bullet from the little rifle reached the bear bruin curled up and died on the spot. An examination proved that the boy had hit the bear in the eye.—Field and Stream.

ANIMAL LIFE IN OCEAN'S DEPTHS

The colors, phosphorescent organs, and remarkable organs of sight of the animals in the different layers are evidently correlated with the distribution of the sun's rays in sea interesting experiments bearing on this subject. Professor Helland-Hansen by means of an apparatus he had constructed succeeded in exposing photographic plates at various depths for any desired length of time, and by using panchromatic plates he was able to ascertain the different depths to which red, green and blue rays could penetrate. His experiments revealed that considerable quantities of light penetrated down to 500 fathoms, whereas at 900 fathoms the plates were not affected even after an exposure of two hours. At a depth of 300 fathoms the light consisted principally of ultra violet rays, while rays which are seen by the human eye were only present in extremely small quantity. The red and green rays could not be detected at 300 fathoms even after exposure of 40 minutes; on the other hand, the blue rays were noticeable. At a depth of 50 fathoms during brilliant sunshine and after an exposure of two hours all colors of light were found, there being least of red, rather more of green, and by far the largest part of blue and ultra-violet.

All the red and black pelagic animals which the expedition captured at depths below 300 fathoms float in a layer of water untouched by any of the sun's rays that we can see; their colors may be assumed, then, to render them invisible when viewed from above. Those marine creatures which are provided with phosphorescent apparatus can shed light for a short distance into the obscurity around them. On the other hand, the transparent, crystal-clear, and blue-colored animals which occupy the surface layers must in their turn be invisible to the animals of the deeper layers when looked at from beneath.—Sir John Murray, in Harper's Magazine for March.

AN EASY DIVORCE

If the Burmese husband and wife come to the conclusion that they are not suited to each other divorce is simple and direct. The wife does not go to her solicitor, but to the tallow chandler. From him she obtains two little candles. These she brings home and she and her husband sit down on the floor, placing the candles between them. One candle represents the husband, the other the wife. They are lighted at the same moment, and the owner of the one which goes out first leaves the house, taking only his or her clothes, while the owner of the more enduring candle remains also the owner of the house and all that there is in it.—Utica Globe.