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“LET’S GO FISHING !”





*Frontispiece*



Trouty Water.

# “LET’S GO FISHING!”

*by*

L. VERNON BATES

*Illustrated with  
Photographs and Drawings*

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I am glad of an opportunity of thanking them all for their permission, so readily granted, to use extracts from these articles. And especially I would like to thank Mr. R. L. Marston of *The Fishing Gazette*, but for whose kind thought this book might never have been written.

L. VERNON BATES.  
*April, 1940.*



PART I  
WATERCRAFT



# “LET’S GO FISHING!”

## I. WATERCRAFT

ANGLERS can be roughly divided into three classes. First come the specialists, secondly the all-rounders, and finally the casuals.

The specialists are those who fish for only one type of fish—roach, trout, pike, or perhaps bream. Their equipment, their methods, and their whole interest are centred around this fish that they seek, and all others are regarded with disfavour. Usually these fellows are experts in their own particular art, and will catch the fish of their choice when other anglers would fail; but outside their small sphere of activity they are lost. They certainly enjoy good bags while their favourite is on the feed, but on unsuitable days they return home with empty creels because they have neither the knowledge nor the inclination to modify their methods to the catching of other species.

At the other extreme are the casuals. These people take their fishing very indifferently. They have no plan, no precise style, no specialized tackle, and no particular quarry in mind. Vaguely they watch their floats and hope that a fish of some sort

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or other (it does not matter much) will take the bait. Their hope is only seldom fulfilled however, which is not really surprising, for so small an output of effort on the part of the angler deserves only a poor return in the form of fish. Casual anglers not only spoil their own sport but often, unwittingly perhaps, that of others ; for they are careless in their approach of the water ; they advertise their presence to the fish and put the cunning creatures on their guard. Only a fish which was contemplating suicide would think of taking their baits.

Between the highly scientific specialists and the very unskilful casuals lies the class of all-rounders. It must not be thought that their position is second in order of merit to that of the specialists. Not by any means. The only game at which the specialist can beat the all-rounder is in angling for that one fish which he has trained himself to catch.

But the all-rounder gets the most fun. His is an all-year-round season ; there is always something to fish for. Trout, chub, perch, or dace in summer, and roach or pike in winter. There is endless variety—wet fly, dry fly, spinning, trolling, or bait-fishing ; in sea, river, lake, or reservoir. He can choose his fish according to the conditions. When the trout are off he can go fly-fishing for chub, or rise early in the morning to catch the bream at dawn. Or again, if he lives near the sea, he can dangle a luscious prawn from his perch upon the rocks, in the hope that a hungry bass will find it.

The good all-rounder is, in my opinion, the

## WATERCRAFT

most expert fisherman of all. The art which he practices calls for a very wide knowledge ; he must know the habits of the different kinds of fish, their life story, their food, their haunts, and the various methods by which they can be caught. What is more he must know the conditions under which they are most likely to give sport, the correct tackle to use, and how to use it. He must have expert knowledge of *all* kinds of fish, while the specialist needs a knowledge of only one.

But despite his versatility the good all-rounder never compromises. He fishes for only one kind of fish at a time. He studies the weather and the water and decides that it is a good day for roach, shall we say. So he fishes for roach and roach alone. His tackle and his methods are those of the 100 per cent. roach angler ; if there are perch in the swim he ignores them unless they happen to take his bait. For the only way to catch fish consistently is to have one definite object in mind on any one occasion. If the angler's attention is divided between the possibilities of roach and perch, carp and tench, or trout and grayling, he will materially reduce his chances of sport. His tackle, his tactics, and his bait will become a compromise. In trying to suit both fish he will suit neither. Like most people who aim for two goals he will miss both.

So the all-rounder differs from the specialist in that he trains himself in angling for all kinds of fish. And from the casual angler he differs in that,

## “ LET'S GO FISHING ! ”

despite his general knowledge, he yet concentrates on a particular species of fish on a particular day, and fishes for it by methods which would do credit to a specialist.

The object of this book is to give a little help to those who aspire to become good all-rounders.

There are certain angling tactics which are applicable to most styles of fishing. Mostly they consist of the refinements, the important trifles, which distinguish the clever fisherman. A knowledge of general watercraft is most essential to success.

The first move in a day's angling, for instance, is not a headlong rush to the waterside. The expedition must be planned beforehand. First the weather is considered. Is it hot or cold ; calm or windy ? Is the sky clear or dull ; is the weather bracing or relaxing ? Furthermore, has it rained lately ? Will the river be low and clear or full and coloured ?

*What fish are most likely to be taken under the prevailing conditions ?*

Will they take in the river or would the lake be better ? Or—if fresh-water fishing looks hopeless—can we try the sea ?

This is true selective fishing. The angler realizes the effect of the various influences upon the fish, and chooses his quarry and his venue accordingly. In this chapter it is necessary only to deal with general procedure. In the following

## WATERCRAFT

pages the reader will learn what conditions affect the various types of fish, and will find some guidance on the best tactics to adopt according to the circumstances. Thus, by fishing to a definite plan which suits the prevailing state of affairs, we are increasing our chances of taking a good bag of fish.

Having decided where to go and what to fish for, we must next consider the method of attack. Shall we suppose, for instance, that the weather is hot and the sky clear? For some days the river has been falling lower and lower owing to lack of rain. We would like to fish the fly for trout but conditions are very much against us; we have heard that no decent trout have been taken of late. Scared by the low state of the water, they are hiding in the deep holes or under the roots of waterside trees.

What shall we do? Well, why not try chub? This is chub weather with a vengeance; when the trout drops down to his lair the chub rises to the surface and basks in the sun.

But how shall we catch him? Float tackle is no good—it would frighten him out of his wits; and ledger tackle is useless because the fish are so near the surface. But the fly is ideal for the job. A dainty Alder cast by an invisible angler to a point just upstream of the fish is almost sure to be taken. Why? Because the *fish*, the *weather*, the *water*, and the *method* are all suited to each other.

## “ LET'S GO FISHING ! ”

At any season of the year, in almost any kind of weather, it is possible by a moment's consideration to choose a quarry which is most appropriate to the conditions, and to follow this choice up by deciding on the most profitable method of fishing. The angler who lives in a locality where there is plenty of variety, both in waters and fish, obviously enjoys an advantage. A fisherman who lives near the sea, for instance, will most probably have the choice of river, lake, and salt water. But even inland anglers usually have plenty of choice. When the river is a raging flood, absolutely unfishable, they can turn to the calm waters of some reservoir or pool ; when pike are off they can try for roach, and so on.

Next comes the tackle, its selection and preparation. When choosing tackle there are three points to bear in mind—the fish we expect to catch, the water we are to fish, and the style we have decided to adopt. The immense variety of fishing tackle gives some indication of the differing conditions. If we seek large fish the tackle must necessarily be stouter than for those which are small. Precise information on this point is given in later chapters. But even when after big fish we cannot use coarse tackle if the water is clear. Fish are not so stupid as they look. The large ones have only attained their size by being able to see through the tricks of the angler.

The float, too, presents a little problem in itself.

## WATERCRAFT

If there is a strong current a fair amount of shot will be needed to take the hook down to the fish, so the float must be large enough to carry the necessary lead. In still water it should be as unobtrusive as possible ; a tiny quill, balanced by a single shot, is all that is required.

The same meticulous care which is exercised in the choice of tackle should be brought to bear in selecting and preparing bait and ground bait. It is not advisable when planning a day's fishing to depend on only one bait. Sometimes the fish will prefer worms, sometimes gentles, breadcrust, paste, caddis grubs, or even cheese. Furthermore, different species of fish prefer different baits prepared in different ways. Their individual tastes must be considered.

Sound preparation is essential to successful angling. Last-minute performances at the waterside are usually hurried and unsatisfactory. Line greasing, hook mounting, cast soaking, and ground-bait mixing are all jobs which can be done most effectively before leaving home.

Generally speaking, though, it is in their behaviour at the waterside that the greatest difference between anglers becomes apparent. A true fisherman is like a hunter. His primary idea is to creep upon his quarry unsuspected, for he knows full well that a fish forewarned is forearmed and suspicious—and, in fact, practically uncatchable.

“ LET'S GO FISHING ! ”

The rod is tackled up at a good distance from the water, well out of sight of the fish. If the angler is float fishing and knows the depth of the water he will set his float accordingly. His bait is fixed with care ; before touching it with his hands he will rub his finger tips with a bunch of grass so that the worms or paste are not fouled with any human taint.

The trout angler, on the other hand, will mount his previously soaked cast and will straighten it out between his fingers. He may decide to fix a fly there and then, but more probably he will prefer to wait and see what the fish are taking

When all is ready for the fray the water must be approached with caution. First look for the sun. Will it throw our shadow on the water ? If so we must try to manœuvre to another spot. How is the wind ? Will it help our casting or will it hinder ?

But the golden rule, which cannot be too often repeated, is—*keep out of sight.*

Fish in running water always face upstream ; that is, they always face the direction from which the current is flowing ; so if we want to approach them from behind we must keep downstream of them. For their awareness to danger they depend mainly on their acute powers of sight and upon their sensitiveness to bank vibrations such as those caused by heavy footfalls. Noise does not seem to worry them very much, though it would be

## WATERCRAFT

foolish to risk detection by any unnecessary talking.

Their powers of sight are beyond the comprehension of man. Even in these enlightened days we can only guess at what the fish sees. What we do know is that he sees far more than we want him to see. By the phenomenon known as refraction it is possible for him to see around corners. He does not necessarily see things in their true places, but he sees enough to give him warning. For instance, as a result of the process of refraction a man walking several yards away from the river may appear to the fish to be directly overhead. Just as the driver of a car can see what is approaching from behind by looking into his driving mirror, so can the fish see all that is taking place for a considerable distance around him. His already keen eyesight is augmented, and his field of vision much widened, by the refraction of light entering water.

So this is what we anglers have to put up with. The fish has the advantage every time, for he is looking upwards towards the light and can see everything in clear silhouette. But we are looking down at the water ; all we can see is a murky deep which reveals nothing. Or perhaps, when the light is just at the right angle, we can see a brilliant reflection of the trees and sky above.

Never get any closer to the water than is actually necessary. If you do, your efforts to locate the fish will probably result in his seeing you first. If there is no cover the next best thing is to stoop down and

“ LET’S GO FISHING ! ”

keep as far back and behind the fish as possible. The lower your position, the less chance there is of your being seen.

Never wade incautiously. Wading is only excusable where it is absolutely necessary. Fish are very subject to mass emotion ; a few small ones scared by a wading angler will dart upstream and will communicate their alarm to all their fellows for a considerable distance.

There is a great art in hooking, playing, and landing a fish. It is the period of greatest excitement for some anglers. Often the common-sense rules of the game are forgotten in the thrill of playing the fish, and that is why so many get away. It is very galling, too, to have had a fish in play and to have lost him through some error of judgment. But there is infinite satisfaction for the clever angler who keeps his head and lands a large fish on fine tackle. Each year we read of exceptional feats—10-pound pike landed on roach tackle, salmon caught on trout casts, and so on. Some years ago a fisherman of my acquaintance performed an almost incredible feat. He landed a skate weighing 114 pounds on an ordinary size 4 dab-hook mounted on gut. I have yet to hear of a cleverer piece of work.

The psychological moment at which the hook is driven home varies according to the circumstances, the method, and the fish. We shall learn more of this anon. In playing the catch there is a definite

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relationship between the size of the fish, the strength of the tackle, and the water in which you are fishing.

To prevent the fish from making a get-away around some underwater snag it is necessary that the utmost strain be imposed upon him, so that he will tire in the minimum of time. Nevertheless, it is absolutely essential that this strain shall not exceed the strength of the tackle. Furthermore, it is vital that at all times there shall be no slack line between the angler and the fish. The rod must be kept well up and arched. A straight rod indicates a limp line, and this spells failure. If the fish runs away it will be necessary to yield to him, but as soon as he stops running and turns back the angler must be prepared to keep pace with him in

recovering line, so that the strain is always there.

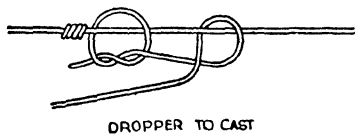
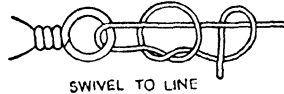
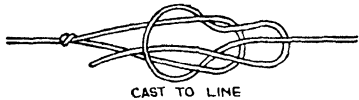
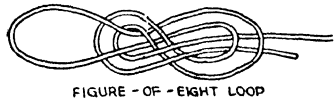
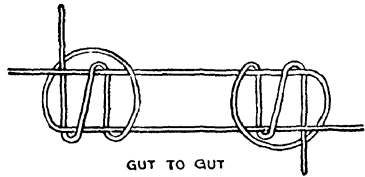


FIG. 1.—Angler's knots.

## “ LET’S GO FISHING ! ”

It is all a question of give and take. If the fish discovers a reserve of energy which is beyond the capacity of the cast you must let him go ; but make him fight for every inch of line which you give him. Then, when he tires, you can recover the line you have lost, plus a little more.

Many a good fish has been lost through the angler’s trying to net him too soon. Some fishermen have the net ready in the left hand a long time before it is wanted. The result is that they have only one hand left to manage the rod and reel. If the net is kept in a handy position it can be forgotten until the fish is played right out, thus leaving both hands free. Then it should be lowered into the water and kept *quite still* while the fish is drawn into it. The fish must be drawn *over* the net ; never try to put the net *under* the fish. A steady lift, and he is on the bank.

Every angler, before setting out, should make himself acquainted with the regulations controlling the water he is about to fish. The three most common offences nowadays are (a) fishing without a licence or permit, (b) fishing out of season, and (c) taking undersized fish. In most districts it is necessary to obtain first of all a licence from the local board of conservators. This licence usually entitles the holder to fish for certain specified fish in the whole area controlled by the said conservators, but before starting the angler must obtain a permit from the landowner on whose ground he proposes

## WATERCRAFT

to operate. The licence issued by the board of conservators only gives permission to fish in the water. It does not give the right to trespass on the bank. This is a separate concern and the landowner's sanction must be obtained.

It is illegal to take fish during the close season. These close seasons vary locally. For trout the period is usually from the end of September to some time in March or April. For coarse fish it is pretty general—March 15th to June 16th. A chub or a dace caught in May while fishing for trout must be unhooked gently and returned to the water with as little injury as possible.

Size limits, too, are subject to local fluctuations, but in most cases are recorded on the back of the licence or permit. They are designed to prevent the killing of immature fish, so that the stock of the water will not be depleted. Anybody can catch tiddlers. In their youthful eagerness they rush at the bait without any thought of the consequences. These tiny fish are the monsters of the future. If they are harmed the stock of years to come will be much reduced.

When unhooking a fish which you intend to return alive you should first wet your hand before touching him. If you hold him with a hot dry hand he will develop a skin disease which may easily prove fatal. The best plan, where it is workable, is to keep the fish under water and to take hold of the hook shank between forefinger and thumb. Usually he will wriggle so violently that he will unhook himself without being touched.

## “ LET’S GO FISHING ! ”

Every coarse-fish angler should take a *roomy* keep-net with him. Small ones are no use because they injure the fish. It is disgusting to kill fish which are not wanted either for food or for setting up in glass cases. Many a good river has been ruined by the type of angler who takes home his useless catch in order that the family shall see how clever he is. An unwanted fish should be gently unhooked and slipped into the keep-net, and carefully released when it is time to pack up.

So far as sea-fishing is concerned there is little to add. The same precautions should be observed as when fishing in fresh water. Everything in angling should be as natural as possible, for the fish you are trying to deceive is actually a wild animal, gifted with all the suspicion and cunning which are so necessary to its continued existence. Baits and lures should not only look natural ; they should also be presented in a natural way. A worm is a much more natural sight to a fish than is a cherry or a piece of cheese. But if it is dropped on the water with a mighty plop, and is every few seconds subjected to unnatural movements because the angler cannot keep his rod top still, it is obvious that the fish will avoid it.

Treat the fish as a clever adversary and leave nothing to chance. It is the small points which count. The angler conscientious as to detail is the one who will catch the most fish.

PART II  
ANGLING FOR COARSE FISH



## I. ROACH

THE roach is a fish typical of England. It is widely distributed throughout the country, and shoals can be found in almost every water, small or large, flowing or still. In Scotland and Wales it is comparatively rare, while in Ireland it is entirely absent.

Roach spawn at mayfly time, the last fortnight in May and the first in June, and the young fish hatch out after fourteen days' incubation. The spawned fish are somewhat languid and out of condition when the season opens, but they begin to recover their full vigour towards the autumn. They reach their best in the winter months.

Many anglers have dreamt of catching a 2-pound roach, but few have realized this high ambition. The record is a fish of 3 pounds 14 ounces landed in September 1939 from a reservoir at Hampton, Middlesex. Incidentally, September seems to be very good for roach fishing; a glance at a list of notable fish will reveal that many fine specimens have been taken during this month.

The most celebrated roach water in England, and possibly in the world, is Hornsea Mere in Yorkshire. For many years a fish of 3 pounds 10 ounces, caught at Hornsea, was a British record.

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Other famous “ still ” waters are the Metropolitan Water Board reservoirs at Hampton (where the record fish was taken) and the reservoir at Tring, Herts. Outstanding rivers are the Hampshire Avon, the Kennet, and the Lea. The rivers Thames, Wye, Severn, and Trent all yield big bags of roach each year, including many specimen fish.

The size limits vary in different localities, though 8 or 9 inches is about the usual mark. A pounder is a very good fish ; a 2-pounder is a “ glass-caser.”

*Habits, Food, and Haunts*

Roach are gregarious fish ; they swim about in small shoals. Most fish of gregarious habit are more given to wandering than those who live solitary lives, and the roach is no exception. For though a shoal may decide to make a certain pool their headquarters, they will wander about a good deal in search of food.

This food consists of any of the small animal and vegetable matter which is found in English rivers and lakes—water snails, fly larva, grubs, grasshoppers, worms, and the green silkweed which grows around submerged woodwork. They are not greedy fish ; they feed sedately and somewhat shyly. Even when they are most willing to take they can hardly be called voracious. They seem to exercise a ladylike discretion in their choice of a meal.

Mainly they prefer quiet waters, but in the early

## ANGLING FOR COARSE FISH

days of the season, in common with many other species, they will take up their positions in the streamy parts. This not only serves the purpose of cleansing them after spawning, but also provides them with the necessary oxygen to restore their vitality.

With their health restored they will begin a more normal existence. They seek calmer waters with an ample larder. They are cruising fish; for hour after hour they will swim up and down a set beat. An angler who can locate one of these swims, without scaring the fish, is in for a very good time. As winter draws on, with its heavy rains and coloured water, the roach will take up residence in a quiet deep pool or a slow-flowing stretch of river. A shoal will be found in almost every spot which offers shelter and food.

While considering the haunts of roach it is important to remember that even when an angler

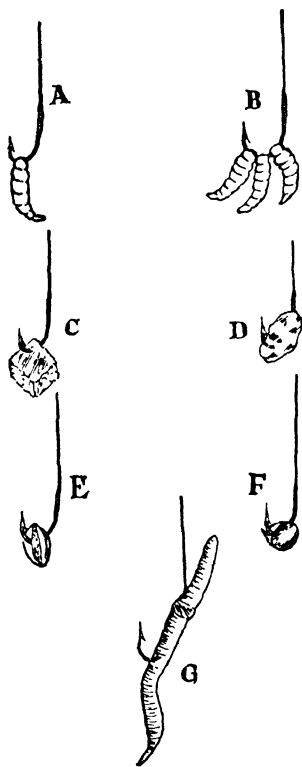


FIG. 2.—Baits for coarse fish. (A and B) Gentles, (C) Breadcrust, (D) Paste, (E) Wheat, (F) Hemp, (G) Worm.

## “ LET’S GO FISHING ! ”

has located a roach swim, he still has to discover the depth at which the fish are feeding. This applies to the roach more than to any other species of coarse fish, for their tendency to swim at varying levels is very marked. They may be feeding at almost any depth between the river bed and the surface, and they will certainly not alter their level to suit the angler. He must adjust his float accordingly. It is surprising how rigidly the fish seem to stick to this rule of feeding levels. Many a fisherman has found that the roach will take only at a certain depth on any particular day. They will ignore the bait if it is six inches higher or lower. Is it because they do not want it, or because they cannot see it ? Or what ?

### *Tackle*

Now a word about the outfit. For roach, and for most other coarse fish as well, there is a choice between two main styles of gear. It is not exactly a matter of personal taste, but rather a question of choosing the appropriate tackle for the conditions—mainly water conditions.

The two chief styles of fishing have been called the Sheffield and Nottingham styles. It would possibly be more explicit and descriptive if they were named the “ quiet water ” and “ fast water ” styles. The first method was introduced and perfected by Sheffield anglers when they found that the quiet waters in which they fished demanded

special tactics. Similarly the Nottingham style takes its name from the anglers of the fast-flowing Trent. Here again, local conditions called for a special outfit and special methods. The Trent, being deep and streamy, cannot be fished with the ultra-fine, slow-sinking tackle of the lake or canal fisher.

And now for a rank heresy. I am going to suggest that it is possible to compromise between the Sheffield and Nottingham tackle so that one rod, reel, and line will do for both. Under extreme conditions a heavier or a finer line may be necessary, but apart from this the only specialized tackle required will be floats, casts, and hooks.

The words "style" and "tackle" must not be confused. I am not suggesting a compromise of style, for the style is definitely dictated by the character of the water. But I do suggest that a well-chosen rod and reel can be perfectly suitable for both styles, and that the only tackle which need differ is that which has already been specified.

The rod in question may be anything from 10 to 14 feet in length. The lower joints must be fairly stiff, and the top springy. This makes for quick striking. The rings must be numerous and stand well out from the rod. The total weight must be such that the angler can hold it under his arm all day without undue discomfort. Furthermore (and this is where the compromise comes in), it must not be an ultra-fine rod; yet it must not be too strong. It should be only just light enough to enable the angler to cast the finest of tackle, and

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to fish fine without much fear of a break. But it must be strong enough to carry a good-sized ledger in flooded water without being unduly strained. It is by no means so difficult to secure this happy medium as one may imagine. There are so many types of rod available to-day that the angler who has a clear mental picture of what is required will have no difficulty in buying one. What is more, the rod described is most suitable for general fishing and will do for almost every coarse fish except pike. All this business of special rods, about which one reads so much nowadays, is very confusing. An over-conscientious angler would soon be completely bewildered (and financially ruined) by the extravagant selection of rods which are supposed to be necessary for coarse fishing. What matters a foot or so in length, or an ounce or two in weight? Or even, for that matter, a hair-splitting variation in the action? Why should a rod for roach be unsuitable for perch, or bream, or chub? A good all-round rod similar to the one described above is quite suitable for angling for anything from gudgeon to giant carp.

Any free-running reel of 3 to 4 inches diameter will do. It must be fitted with an optional check which offers only a light resistance to a running fish. Metal reels are best because they do not warp. Such reels as the "Aerial" combine the lightness of wood with the strength of metal, coupled to which they have an action which leaves nothing to be desired.

## ANGLING FOR COARSE FISH

A line of 2-pound breaking strain is suitable for most occasions, but in very heavy water a slightly stronger one may be required. It should be of dressed silk, for lines so treated cast cleaner and float better. The favourite length of cast is 1 yard, but this must undoubtedly be increased if the water is very clear. Natural gut is infinitely better than substitute, especially when the fish are shy. All strengths of gut from 1x to 6x are useful in roach fishing. The breaking strains of these grades are as follows :

<i>Gauge.</i>	<i>Thickness in Thousandths of an Inch.</i>	<i>Breaking Strain.</i>
1x	9	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.
2x	8	1 $\frac{7}{8}$ ,,
3x	7	1 $\frac{5}{8}$ ,,
4x	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	1 $\frac{1}{8}$ ,,
5x	6	13 oz.
6x	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	10 ,,

The first two, 1x and 2x, are suitable for fast water ; 3x and 4x are for clear, still water ; and 5x and 6x are for circumstances where extremely fine tackle is required.

Hooks should be mounted on gut which is one grade finer than the cast in use. Thus if a break occurs it will presumably be in the hook length, and the cast will be saved. The range of hook sizes is very wide, from 7 to 20. Baits so varied in size as lobworms and hempseed obviously call for different sizes of hook.

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With regard to floats, the conditions must again rule our choice. For the limpid waters of lake or reservoir the tiny crowquill or porcupine quill is ideal. A single shot will cock such a float, and no daintier outfit could be imagined. In waters of greater depth or faster flow a more buoyant float is needed. Goosequills and pelican quills are capable of carrying several shot, and are therefore suitable for the streamy stretches. Alternatively the aforementioned porcupine quills can be obtained fitted with a cork body which adds considerably to their buoyancy.

There are also the celluloid floats. These are made in a wide variety of sizes and shapes which will meet every need.

And finally, no discussion on floats would be complete without mention of the “antenna” type. The bodies of these floats are made of cork or pith, and they are mounted on a crowquill in such a manner that there are several inches of quill sticking up above the main body of the float. They are shotted so that only the merest tip shows above water, and the gentlest of bites is clearly indicated. Furthermore they are extremely useful in windy weather; they offer so little wind resistance that they will remain unaffected by quite a strong breeze.

### *Bait and Ground Bait*

So much for the tackle. Now for that all-important item—the bait.

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The most popular bait of all is paste. It is made with a basis of bread, which can either be used plain or, alternatively, flavoured with aniseed, honey, or sugar. Some anglers dye their pastes to a yellow or pink shade.

Paste is popular because it is a very effective bait which is easy to obtain and prepare. A thick slice of bread should be thoroughly dried in the oven, after which the crust is removed. It is then ground to a fine powder with a nutmeg-grater. The powder is placed in a clean linen bag, is screwed tight, and immersed in cold water. Meanwhile the angler manipulates the bag from the outside so that the water soaks gradually into the bread. A stiff paste will result. If it is too thick a little more water should be added; if too thin, it can be stiffened up by adding flour or cotton wool. Stiff paste is essential in fast water.

Baits of paste are made up in all sizes from the tiny shot-sized pellet, mounted on a No. 16 hook, up to the knob as big as a hazel nut, for which a No. 7 is required. Big baits should, however, only be used when big fish are expected. A small roach has quite a tiny mouth and could not tackle a big ball of paste. The mixture is worked into several shapes—round, pear-shaped, sausage-shaped, and irregular. It is a question of the angler's fancy.

Gentles are also a most effective bait. The roach seems to be instantly attracted by anything white. Probably this attraction is the outcome of curiosity rather than appetite. But if on investigation

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the alluring white object turns out to be a dainty mouthful of gentles or breadcrust, the instinct of curiosity is replaced by a desire for food.

Gentles are used singly, in twos, or in small bunches up to eight or so in number. Their chief value lies in their attractive movement, so they must be put on the hook in such a manner that they can wriggle actively. The best way is to pass the hook through the bit of tough skin at the head. Just skin deep—no more. Then you will do your gentle no injury, and he will dance seductively before the roach. Single or double gentles require a No. 18 hook. Bigger bunches require a slightly larger size—say, No. 14.

Small worms are a good bait, too, especially if they are brightly coloured and active. They are suitable for both clear and coloured water at any time during the season. The best hook sizes are from 11 to 8. The hook is inserted about a third of the way down from the head, the worm is threaded up to the top of the shank, and the point is brought out again. (See Fig. 2.)

Caddis grubs are only obtainable in the summer, but are at their deadliest at this time. They are found in pebbly and sandy streams, and are easily recognized by the protective tubular casing which they build around themselves. These cases are made of leaves, tiny twigs, and fragments of mineral matter. The grub must be removed from his shell before he can be used as a bait; he is nicked lightly on to the hook in much the same way as a gentle.

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Wasp grubs can be used in a similar manner. They also are a good summer bait.

In certain localities the bait *par excellence* is hempseed. A lot of anti-hempseed propaganda has been published in recent years but it is now generally agreed that it is quite a sporting and legitimate bait. All the foolish theories of how it dopes and poisons fish have gradually been exploded.

A quantity of hemp is soaked in water for several hours, and is then placed in a saucepan with just enough water to cover. The water is brought gently to the boil, after which it must simmer quietly for a few more minutes. While it is simmering it must be watched closely. Immediately the outer skin bursts, and reveals the white shoot within, the cooking must stop; and the seeds are then washed in cold running water.

Hooks for hempseed fishing vary in size from 16 to 14. They are not inserted by the point; the bend of the hook is pushed into the slit where the jacket of the seed has opened, and the hemp will close upon it in much the same way as a mussel will close upon a piece of weed. Almost invariably only one seed is used at a time.

Breadcrust, like paste, is easily prepared and is often very deadly. Take a square or tin loaf and cut off the outside crust about  $\frac{1}{8}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch thick. Lay the crust on a flat board and cut it into strips about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide. Then cut the strips across the other way so that each piece of crust is approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch square. The size can be

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varied to advantage, and different shapes can be tried, too. The hook for breadcrust should be just large enough to carry the bait and leave the point projecting. If the hook is driven deep into the crust the bend of the hook will be filled, and this will prevent effective penetration when a fish bites. It is better to use a small hook and to nick it through the corner of the cube so that the bait, in a sense, hangs below the hook (see Fig. 2). The fact that this leaves most of the hook exposed need cause the angler no worry. A fish who is trusting enough to take anything so unnatural as a piece of breadcrust, paste, or hemp, will certainly not be scared by the appearance of the hook.

There are other baits, of course, such as berries, pearl barley, wheat, cheese, and weed. The most generally useful of these is wheat. It is slowly stewed until its outer jacket bursts and a white kernel appears. Then it is ready for the hook, which should be about No. 16. Weed is used sometimes when the roach are taking this sort of food. It is the kind of soft green weed which grows on submerged timber and stonework. A pinch is taken between finger and thumb and is twisted on to the hook. It must be lowered carefully into the water or the bait will be lost. Weed is quite useless in any but the calmest and clearest of waters.

Nearly all the baits mentioned are suitable throughout the season. Caddis grubs and wasp grubs are limited, of course, to the short period when they are obtainable, which is during the warm

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summer weather. And hempseed, too, is more of a summer bait because it is unsuited to water conditions during winter. But worms, gentles, breadcrust, wheat, etc., are almost equally useful in summer or winter.

The duty of ground bait is to attract the fish to the angler's swim, to hold them there, and to stimulate their appetites. It must hold out a promise of food without actually fulfilling that promise. Just as the savoury smell of cooking will whet the appetite of a hungry man, so must the ground bait affect the fish.

There are as many different mixtures of ground bait as there are of hook bait, and many anglers consider this item as the most vital in the whole equipment. Certainly its preparation is a matter for considerable thought.

Once again we have to ask ourselves: "What is the state of the water?" Nearly all our plans, our tackle, and our methods depend on just that; and ground bait is no exception. If we are fishing a still lake we shall require only small quantities of a very light mixture; one that will dissolve into an inviting slow-sinking cloud as soon as it touches the surface of the water. This is true "cloud" ground bait, as used when fishing the Sheffield style.

In a fast flowing river such a mixture would be useless. In a matter of seconds it would be washed hundreds of yards downstream. Fast water requires heavy ground baiting—heavy in two senses. Heavy

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in that it sinks rapidly to the river bed and stays there ; and heavy, also, in that substantial quantities are required. Sometimes we hear of anglers who use many bucketsful of ground bait in a day's fishing, and there are others who are reputed to use innumerable loaves. Such huge quantities are hardly necessary even in the roughest of water, providing that the mixture is of the proper consistency. If the angler is foolish enough to try to use a light ground bait in a heavy water he will find that not even a cartload will have the desired effect.

Ground baiting calls for shrewd judgment. Only the happy medium is likely to prove effective. Insufficient ground bait will give only scanty results; but too much, either from the point of view of quantity or quality, will ruin the swim. Briefly, there must be sufficient to attract the fish and retain their interest, but not enough to feed them.

The basis of most mixtures is bread and bran. A few pounds of crustless bread should be soaked in water, after which it is placed in a colander to drain. It is then worked between the fingers until every lump is broken up into a fine flake. The bran is added a double handful at a time, and is thoroughly worked into the bread until a stiff mixture is formed. The stronger the flow of the river, the stiffer the ground bait must be. In fact, in very fast water it is often necessary to work in a small quantity of clay or cotton wool to bind the

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ingredients together. Sometimes small pebbles are added to increase its sinking powers.

The paste is made into balls of various sizes, ranging from some about as big as a walnut up to others as large as an apple. Bread and bran can be flavoured with sugar, honey, cheese, aniseed, and various other ingredients which are reputed to attract fish. Where appropriate, a few hook baits should be added to the mixture—gentles, hemp, and chopped worms are all useful, though they must be used sparsely.

Gentles, hemp, and chopped worms are often used as ground bait without the addition of bread and bran. In this case the ground bait matches the hook bait, which is a very desirable point. A few are tossed into the water at intervals so that the interest of the fish is maintained.

Cloud ground baits call for different preparation. A number of crustless strips of bread are dried in the oven until they are quite hard and brittle. They are then grated down to a *very fine* powder by means of a nutmeg-grater. This powder must be kept absolutely dry until the waterside is reached. There it is placed in a piece of linen and soaked for a second or two, so that it can be made up into tiny balls about the size of a large marble. These are best used on the "little and often" principle. Every few minutes a ball is thrown into the swim. It will sink in an opaque cloud of fine bread-dust—a most attractive sight to the roach.

*Fishing in Streamy Waters*

In rivers of fair current the Nottingham style of fishing is used. This method enables the bait to explore considerable stretches of water, and ensures that the hook is always at that depth where the fish may be expected to take.

We have seen the tackle required. The outstanding features are the float and the method of shotting. On these two items depends the success of the outfit. First the angler must ask himself how much shot is necessary to carry his bait down to the fish. To arrive at this decision a careful study of the strength and depth of the water is required.

Then a float must be chosen which will carry this burden of shot ; sometimes a heavy load of eight or nine is needed ; and sometimes three or four may be enough. But the float, although it must carry the requisite number, must not be over-buoyant. It should just carry its tip above the water so that it will dip out of sight at the lightest bite. A float which is too buoyant will offer noticeable resistance to the shy biting roach.

When all is ready for fishing a little line is pulled from the reel so that the bait hangs approximately a rod’s length below the top ring. Then, with his left forefinger and thumb, the angler takes hold of the line between the second and third rings, and draws more silk from the reel until his left arm is fully extended at his side. Meanwhile the rod is

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held in the right hand but points to the angler's left. It is now swung smartly out to midstream, and the loop of line in the left hand is released at the critical moment so that it is carried out to its full extent. A further yard or so can be gained by giving the reel a flick with the right forefinger just as the tackle is extending in the air.

But in dealing with the cast we are a little premature. First we must ground bait our swim, for ground baiting is one of the most important items in the coarse fisherman's programme, in that it prepares the swim which he is about to fish. We must make allowance for the current and the depth. It is no good to throw in ground bait which will be quickly washed downstream. We want it in our own swim, not in our neighbour's. So if the current is strong we make our balls of ground bait into a heavy mixture, and throw them in a few yards upstream to allow for their being washed downstream before coming to rest. If we have arranged matters properly the ball will settle a foot or two upstream of the starting-point of our swim. There it will slowly break up so that a constant flow of enticing (if unsustaining) morsels is drifting down in the track of our float. The roach will work their way along this attractive line of scent and will ultimately find our hook bait.

The next problem is the depth. Some anglers use a plummet to determine this; and undoubtedly it is the quickest and the easiest way. Other anglers

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are against it on the grounds that it scares fish. Personally I incline to this latter view. It is easy to adjust to the correct depth without using a plummet. In nine cases out of ten the roach will be found near the bed of the river, and this is where most anglers start their fishing. If subsequent events (or the lack of them) seem to indicate that the fish are feeding at higher levels, it is an easy matter to decrease the depth at which the bait swims.

So we will start on the bottom. We fix the float as near as possible to what we expect the depth to be. If it cocks correctly and travels down the swim without a single stop or drag it is a sure sign that the bait is travelling clear of the river bed. So we increase the distance between float and hook by a further six inches or so, until we find that the bait touches bottom. This is clearly indicated by the behaviour of the float. We can then make final adjustments so that the hook just trips along the bed of the swim.

Having gone through all these preliminaries, we can get down to the serious business of catching fish. In the first place it is desirable that our baited hook should follow quickly in the track of our first ball of ground bait. That first moment is very deadly. The first cloud drifts downstream and the unsuspecting fish, attracted by its promising appearance, search eagerly for some substantial tit-bit. It is a thrilling moment—that first cast.

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It is very necessary that the hook bait should travel a little in advance of the float. This serves two purposes. It ensures that the bait reaches the fish first; thus he sees his food before he detects the tackle which holds it, and he will bite before his suspicions are aroused. Secondly, it is the most effective position for striking. If the float is allowed to travel ahead, as it will probably want to do, there will be much slack line to be straightened out before the hook is driven home. But if it is held back a bit, so that the bait trips on ahead, the line between rod top and hook will be almost straight, and an instantaneous strike will result.

In this way it is possible to fish long swims, say up to 25 yards. In fact, long swims seem to be the fashion amongst those anglers who fish in fast water. Every now and again the necessary amount of ground bait (no more and no less) is thrown into the river so that the stretch is kept inviting to the fish. The tackle is cast in and the float carefully controlled in its journey downstream. Line is released a trifle slower than the speed of the current. When the end of the swim is reached the angler should pause for a second or two and prepare himself for bites. For when the float has reached the limit of its travel the force of the water will swing the bait upwards. This often proves irresistible to the roach. Many anglers strike automatically when the end of the swim is reached, and this procedure often produces fish even though no bite is detected.

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In strong water, usually, the roach will be found near the bottom ; but if no bites result after a few swims down it is advisable to decrease the depth by six inches or so, and to continue to shorten after every few casts until the fish are found. Their level varies with the season. In summer they are sometimes found fairly high in the water, but in winter they favour the deeps.

### *Angling in Quiet Waters*

Sheffield style roaching—the style for quiet waters—is of the “ fine and far off ” variety, coupled with a natural and slow-sinking bait. Unlike the Nottingham style, the tackle can be of the very finest, for there is little or no current to contend with. The float can be the tiniest of quills, and the line and cast are of gossamer texture.

To cast such an outfit by the Nottingham method would be almost impossible, for there is practically no weight to carry out the line. The correct cast is rather like the one used by fly fishers.

The float is dropped on the water in front of the angler, and line is pulled from the reel with the left hand in the manner already described. Then, smartly, the rod is lifted upwards and backwards so that the line shoots out behind. When it is fully extended in the air the rod is brought forward again, and the baited hook travels out towards midstream. At the right moment the

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spare line in the left hand is released and adds a further yard or two to the cast.

Naturally, for this style of casting one needs a fairly tough bait which will not readily be flicked off the hook. This is the reason, no doubt, that maggots are so popular with the Sheffield anglers.

Cloud ground bait is cast in at intervals all around the area to be fished. Little and often is best. Three or four balls of cherry size are better than one ball as big as a walnut. Immediately the ground bait touches the water it should disintegrate into a slow-sinking flaky cloud. If it fails to do so there is something wrong in the preparation.

Sheffield tactics come into their own in summer, when waters are clear and low. Owing to the habit of the fish of swimming at higher levels in calm weather much experiment is often needed before the taking depth is discovered. For this purpose the slow-sinking bait is ideal, for it explores all levels of water and often takes fish on its journey towards the river bed.

Roach fishing during hot sunny days is by no means an easy business. The fish are often most unobliging. The best times of the day are early morning and late evening, for the roach are lazy and extremely shy while the sun beats down upon the water. In winter it is quite the reverse; the best time then is from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

In calm water, where the roach can afford to take the bait in casual manner, the angler will find himself at a loss to detect bites. Often they are

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almost imperceptible. The float just pauses for a fraction of a second ; or perhaps it dips the least little bit.

### *Strike immediately !*

If you do not, you will certainly lose your fish. Many anglers, on noticing this tremor of the float, tingle with anticipation of a more decisive bite. It comes—they strike—but the fish is lost. Why ? Because they should have struck on the first tremor ; they certainly should not have waited for the more decisive knock. The roach has a peculiar mouth. His lips can be extended forward in a cup-like fashion, so that he can take a bait in the gentlest manner. This causes the first flickering of the float. It is the time when he can be caught. If he is allowed time to mouth the bait for a second or so he will detect its suspicious character, for he is no fool, and he will eject it from his lips with such force that the float bobs excitedly. But it is too late to strike then.

### *Roach in Rough Weather*

Going to the other extreme, there are occasions when even the Nottingham tackle is hardly heavy enough for the conditions. Ordinary tackle is at a disadvantage when the river is in flood and the wind blows strong. It will not stay put. The wind blows the float almost out of the water, and the current carries the bait downstream at such a pace that no fish could possibly secure it.

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These are ledger days.

Leads for ledgering weigh anything from a  $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce up to 2 ounces, but possibly the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce and 1-ounce sizes are the most popular. They are drilled so that the cast can be threaded through them. A small shot is pinched on to the cast about 18 inches from the hook, and below the ledger. This prevents the sliding lead from slipping down to the bait.

There are two ways of using a ledger—with a float or without. If a float is used it is so adjusted that the distance between float and ledger is equal to the depth of the water; which means, of course, that the lower 18 inches of gut will be lying flat on the river bed. The ledger itself also rests on the bottom.

The line between float and rod top must be kept fairly tight so that a bite can be struck instantly. As the gut can pass freely through the hole in the ledger the fish can pull down the float without feeling the weight of the lead.

If no float is used the line is kept taut between rod top and ledger, and a bite is advertised by a flicker of the tip.

In rough weather the roach will seek quiet quarters away from the full force of the current. Deep pools, little bays at the side of the main stream, and the calm eddies are the most likely places. And the best bait, usually, is a small worm.

## 2. PIKE

THERE is always a certain fascination about a big fish, no matter to what species he belongs. A 10-pound pike is, to most anglers, much more attractive than a pound dace. Yet the latter is by far the better specimen and a much rarer capture.

If you consult *Where to Fish* you will find a very imposing list of giant pike which is headed with a 53-pounder, believed to be a British record, taken from Lough Conn in Ireland in 1920. There are several Irish fish in this list, ranging from the record pike down to 38 pounds. The largest English fish is one of 37½ pounds caught in a reservoir near Loughborough. Then come two of 37 pounds each, one of which was taken in the river Wye by an angler spinning for salmon. A pike of 20 pounds is a rare capture, however, and for most anglers it is an ambition which is never realized. But every year a great number of fish are taken which weigh between 10 and 15 pounds, and though they certainly do not break any records they are yet sufficiently above the average to justify a little pride in their capture.

It is generally considered unsporting to kill pike which weigh less than 4 pounds. Although in many waters this limit is not strictly observed, it is

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nevertheless a very worthy standard to live up to. The present depleted state of our stocks of pike is mainly due to the thoughtless killing of immature fish.

These fish are found all over the British Isles, both in still and running water. In Ireland, as we have seen, they attain their greatest size, and probably are most numerous as well. Small wonder that Ireland has been called the pike fisher's Eldorado. But we have some very fine waters in England, too. Slapton Ley, for instance, which is near to Dartmouth, has yielded some truly marvellous sport. And so, also, have the Norfolk Broads. The rivers Wye, Severn, Great Ouse, and Thames have each some very big fish to their credit, to say nothing of specimens which have been taken from smaller rivers, reservoirs, and lakes. Their distribution is so general, all over the country, that any angler, no matter where he lives, should be able to obtain pike fishing within a few miles of his home.

### *Life Story*

Pike spawn in March or April, as a rule ; but sometimes they start as early as February. Towards the end of the year they seek out their mates, and for the next few weeks will live together in pairs. This is, for them, quite an unusual procedure, for at other times of the year they lead a solitary existence. As the spawning time approaches these

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pairs of fish forsake their underwater lairs, and go in search of suitable places to deposit their eggs. If they are lake pike they will probably choose a shallow stretch in which a bed of water weeds is growing ; but if they live in a river they will move upstream until they find a slow-flowing tributary or ditch which will serve as a nursery for their young.

And there they lay their eggs, thousands of them. Even a smallish pike will deposit 50,000 ova, but a large one will yield half a million. After oviposition and fertilization the fish are much weakened, and will for some time lie in a helpless state near the spot where their eggs have been laid. In this defenceless state they are often “ wired ” by unscrupulous fish-poachers. A running wire noose is slipped under the body and the fish is virtually lassoed out of the water.

After they are sufficiently rested they will commence feeding ravenously in order to restore their lost condition. The prime pike which swam majestically into the backwater early in March is now but a shadow of his former self. His deep rounded body has become long, thin, and flabby ; his rich colouring has faded ; he is a poor dejected creature. During the next few months he will regain some of his former strength ; but he mends very slowly, and will be languid and out of condition throughout the following summer. He starts to make real progress in September. From then onwards he will improve by leaps and bounds, for soon it will be March

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again and he must regain his full strength in readiness for his next spawning.

So although the law allows pike fishing to commence on 16th June, no angler could find any pleasure in taking these half-dead summer fish. The pike season really begins when the trout season ends—with the beginning of October. The last three months of the year are all quite good, but they cannot compare with January, February, and the first fortnight in March. In the opening months of the year pike fishing reaches its height. The fish are larger, better, and more willing to feed. The first two weeks in March, after which the season closes, are the grand *finale*.

But let us return to the eggs which were deposited in that quiet side stream. In about a fortnight they will hatch out into tiny fish, and will feed from a yolk-sac which they carry beneath their bodies. During the next two weeks they will absorb all the nutriment contained in this sac, and will then start foraging for their food. They are hungry little fellows, and will eagerly devour any minute aquatic creatures small enough for them to swallow. Inevitably they will themselves be preyed upon by larger fish such as perch, chub, and trout, and by pike as well. They grow very rapidly, and, so soon as they are able, will start to feed almost exclusively on fish.

There are some wonderful stories of the voracity

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of pike. Most of them are, I am afraid—just stories. But some are true. There are several authentic instances of large pike rising from the depths and engulfing a duckling, water hen, or rat which was swimming on the surface.

One day I caught a female pike weighing  $5\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. As I was unhooking my spoon from her jaws I noticed the unmistakable tail of a bream still protruding from her throat. So later I opened her up to investigate. Incredible though it sounds, that bream measured 12 inches in length. And a 12-inch bream is a fairly deep-bodied fish. What is more, the head of the victim was partly digested, though the tail end still protruded from the pike's throat ; which seems to indicate that the pike had been in a semi-choked condition for several hours, and had had the audacity to take my 3-inch spoon despite the fact that her stomach and throat were already over-full of bream.

### *Haunts of Pike*

It is not difficult to detect those places which are most likely to contain pike. First it must be borne in mind that this is a somewhat lazy fish, not much inclined to roam about except when very hungry or when moving upstream to spawn. Rather than travel in search of their prey, pike prefer to hide in a bed of weeds, waiting until some unsuspecting roach or dace shall pass within easy reach. Their wonderful colouring makes them almost

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indistinguishable from the underwater vegetation in which they lurk, and many a small fish has wandered almost in to the very jaws of a pike before realizing his danger.

So in the summer and autumn, when the water weeds grow thickly in river and lake, there you will find pike. And in the winter, when the weeds have died down again, you will find them in the quieter parts of the stream—the downstream side of islands and small promontories, the calm pools and protected bends, anywhere where they are not subjected to the full force of the current.

Sometimes they are to be found in fast water, though this is rather unusual. One day I made an idle cast into a very fast current between two beds of weed. Immediately my spoon was taken by a very small pike, which was duly landed and liberated. Half a dozen more casts in the same spot yielded three more fish, though a more unlikely looking place would have been hard to find. Perhaps the weed offered them protection from the current.

In lakes, the problem of current does not arise. Here, again, the weed beds are the favourite lairs, and the fish will seldom wander far away from them except when very hungry. Mostly they favour the shallow water around the shores of the lake rather than the deeps in the middle. A short cast *along* the bank, just a few yards out, will generally yield more fish than a long cast towards the middle of the lake. Many pike anglers, when spinning, make the mistake of casting their lures straight out from

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the bank to terrific distances. A little less effort—in the right direction—and they would catch more fish. Plenty of pike are caught in the deeper water, of course, but the shallows are undoubtedly the most productive.

A most promising sign, when out fishing, is to see small fry leaping from the water in their efforts to escape the pursuing pike, or perhaps a swirl as a big fish turns to take in his prey. Here, you can be sure, is a hungry pike in active search of food. To cast a few yards ahead of him will almost surely result in a run.

There is a very noticeable difference between the pike which live in running water and those which are found in lakes. Generally the latter grow to greater weights but are more deliberate in their feeding.

The fish which lives in a fast current has little opportunity to discriminate in his food. He must take whatever comes along, and be grateful for it ; for in a few moments it will probably be out of reach. Moreover, at any minute a severe storm may turn the river into a mud-coloured raging flood, where food is very difficult to find. All things considered, it is small wonder that the river fish is a smaller, thinner, more active creature than his brother of the lake. The latter has no current to face ; he is rarely troubled with discoloured water ; and he always has an ample food supply within easy reach of his lurking-place. So he grows fatter and lazier. He is more languid and more fastidious in his feeding, and is therefore more difficult to catch. But he is well worth the extra effort.

## ANGLING FOR COARSE FISH

### *Pike-fishing Weather*

Tradition says that the perfect conditions for pike fishing are a bright, bracing winter's day, with a gentle frost tempered by a warm sun, and aided by a light breeze. Extreme cold, we are told, is bad, because the fish become torpid and refuse to take the bait. The same is said of days that are too warm. Heavy weather, when the sky is leaden, the air still, and the visibility obscured by fog or mist, is also supposed to be hopeless. If we are to accept tradition we shall believe that the only suitable occasions for pike fishing are those rare winter days when summer stages a temporary come-back.

Fortunately for us the pike cares not a fig for our preconceived notions, and does not abide by the rules of the game. It is true that good fishing is often obtained on those fine winter days, but it is also true that excellent sport is obtainable under the most adverse conditions. Who would think, for instance, of spinning for pike in a thick fog? It is supposed to be a sheer waste of time. Yet I know an angler who landed a 23-pounder in such weather. And my own best fish was taken on one of those leaden days when pike fishing is supposed to be out of the question.

The bright, clear day is certainly most comfortable for the angler, and compares very favourably with those bleak days when fishing is an arduous business. It may even be true that more fish are

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caught under fine conditions, but this may be partly due to the fact that there are more anglers at work when the weather is pleasant and inviting.

I suggest that pike anglers should not worry too much about the atmospheric influences, for in my own experience the fish are most irresponsible feeders. At times when the conditions are perfect they will refuse the most tempting offers, and no subterfuge of the angler will persuade them to take the bait. On the other hand, when the weather seems quite hopeless they will be most obliging, and a good bag will be obtained when it is least expected.

One point worth noting, however, is that pike in warm weather feed most readily in the early morning and late evening. Seldom are they caught while the sun is at its height. But in winter the rule is reversed ; they will feed only during the middle of the day, say, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

And another point, too : after heavy rain the river will be discoloured and swollen. Food being impossible to find, the pike will adjourn to some sheltered spot and try to forget their empty bellies. At such times it is pretty hopeless to attempt to fish in running water, because it is doubtful if your quarry could see the bait. That is when lake fishing comes into its own, for no matter how heavy the storm it will seldom discolour the still waters.

But the river scores in the very cold weather. Still waters freeze more easily and fishing becomes impossible. Those are the days for river pike.

*Spinning for Pike*

Spinning is the most sporting, and certainly the most interesting way of taking pike. What is more, it is active and full of movement. On those cold winter days when float fishing is a marrow-freezing experience the angler can keep warm by a few hours of energetic spinning.

I imagine that almost every fisherman is versed in the theory of spinning. It is the process of casting out a bait, either artificial or natural, which, when retrieved by the angler, simulates a lifelike action which is attractive to the pike. Some anglers prefer a natural bait, such as a small roach or dace ; and others use an artificial bait—a spoon, plug bait, wagtail, or Devon minnow. But their aim is always the same. As the line is wound in the lure spins, dives, or darts in such a natural manner as to persuade the pike that it is a live fish.

In the old days spinning tackle consisted of a strong rod, a large centre-pin reel, and a thick line. With this outfit heavy lures, some of them weighing  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound, were used to fish for pike. But nowadays the old style of gear is seldom seen, and a war is being waged over the respective merits of the English fixed-spool reel and the American multiplier. Each of these is used with a very short rod, usually between 5 and 7 feet long. In the case of the multiplier the rod in favour at present is the tubular steel type.

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For myself I would choose the fixed-spool reel, such as the Illingworth, every time. Its outstanding features are that it is extremely simple to fish with ; is less tiring ; is more accurate in casting ; and, owing to its slipping clutch, finer tackle can be used. Practically the only advantage of the multiplier over the fixed-spool is the fact that it offers greater control of a hooked fish.

With either of these reels a very light line can be used—6 to 8 pounds breaking-strain for the multiplier, and 4 to 6 pounds for the fixed-spool. For the latter a line of gut substitute is much preferable to flax or silk. It is finer and less visible, casts farther because it does not absorb much water, is less liable to kink, and is cheaper to buy. The latter advantage is to some extent nullified by the fact that gut-substitute deteriorates more quickly than silk or flax, but even so it is a more economical proposition.

A supply of fine wire traces is also necessary. These need not be more than 8 or 12 inches long, and should be fitted at one end with an ordinary plain swivel, for attachment to the line. At the other end is a hook swivel which secures the lure. A few fold-over anti-kink leads should also be carried in the kit.

In addition to the items already mentioned a gaff, disgorger, gag, and priest are required. And, of course, a selection of lures.

Lures for pike are legion, but can be broadly

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divided into four main classes. The first is the spoon class, in which we find spoons of every conceivable shape, size, colour, and action.

Then there are the plugs. These are floating baits which do not truly spin. When fished back to the angler they dart, dive, and wobble through the water in a very lifelike manner.

The third group is a very wide assortment of lures, most of which revolve ; and some of which bear a passable resemblance to real fish. They include Devon minnows, wagtails, phantoms, and the wonderfully lifelike celluloid baits.

Finally there are the natural baits—small fish such as dace, roach, or sprats. They can be used both fresh or preserved, and are mounted on a flight of hooks so that they wobble or spin according to the whim of the angler.

Probably the best all-rounder is the spoon. There is little doubt that more pike have been taken on spoons than on any other spinning lure. The most popular types are the plain, the Colorado, and the kidney, all of which are useful in all sizes up to 3 inches. Spoons, being bright and glistening, are especially suitable for those conditions when visibility is not too good. They have a fascinating action, can be satisfactorily fished at varying speeds and depths, and are almost always acceptable to the fish.

Plug baits are unique in principle, and in the last few years have established themselves as proved fish-getters. Their buoyancy when at rest is their

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outstanding feature, and makes them especially suitable for fishing shallow or weedy waters. With other lures the angler sometimes has to recover line frantically in order to keep his hooks off the bottom. Not so with the plug. If you wind fast it sinks deeper, and if you slow down it rises to the surface. The action is therefore more deliberate and bears a much closer resemblance to the nonchalant movements of a live fish. It dives under water with a fascinating wiggle, it pauses, and floats slightly upwards ; then it rolls, turns, and, with a flick of the tail, moves slowly over a pikey-looking bed of weeds. It is a bait which really swims and hovers at the angler's behest. Furthermore, it is foolproof. When left to its own devices it does not get into trouble but floats dutifully to the surface again. Under the same conditions a metal lure would probably get caught up on the river bottom.

Devon minnows are a somewhat heavy, fast-spinning lure, rather inclined to twist the line, and requiring to be fished a little too rapidly because of their quick-sinking tendencies. Owing to their smaller water resistance they will sink much more rapidly than will a spoon of the same weight, which makes it rather difficult to work the bait in the approved fashion.

The celluloid spinners can be fished very slowly—a most desirable feature—and they are extremely lifelike in shape and colouring, though not so natural as the plug in action.

Many anglers swear by dead-bait spinners. In



There are many types of pike spoon.



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the first place they are real fish, and require no touching up to improve their appearance. They can be mounted on two types of tackle. The first is a flight of hooks headed by a spinning vane which causes the fish to rotate in the water. The other type has no propeller; a metal spear is run down the body of the fish, and is then bent over to produce the "wobble" action.

Although we have already agreed that pike fishing is not bound by any hard and fast rules as

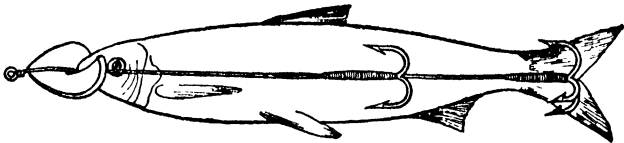


FIG. 3.—Dead-bait spinner mounted.

to the condition of weather and water, there are nevertheless certain circumstances more favourable than others. The first essential to successful spinning is that the pike shall see the lure, and this he can most easily do when the water is clear or only lightly coloured. If it is thick and muddy there is very little hope of sport. But clear water is of little use if the outside light is poor. A ray of sunlight falling on the spoon, and causing it to flash like a small fish turning under water, will fetch the pike up from his den in double-quick time. On a dull day, however, the lure has little attraction, for it looks just like a dark shadow passing over the fish's head.

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The temperature should not be too high when one is spinning. On warm days the pike quite often appear to be devoid of energy, and will not give chase to a rapidly moving bait. They will wait until a passing dace or gudgeon can be caught with a minimum of effort. But bracing, nippy weather will tickle their palates ; they will cruise around in search of a meal, and make a headlong rush at the first dainty morsel which comes within their range of vision.

So spinning weather should be sharp and clear, with an open sky and a burst of occasional sunshine to add brilliance to the lure. Moreover, there should be a gentle breeze to ripple the surface of the water so that the fish cannot easily detect the angler.

One final condition is that the water shall not be too weedy or full of snags. During the course of the day our lures will spend much of their time scouring the depths, and any underwater obstructions are a potential cause of loss of tackle. A live-bait, fished on a float tackle or paternoster, is the best way of exploring snaggy or weedy water.

And so to the waterside—to the river, lake, or canal. Either type of water will hold excellent pike which will take readily if the lure is properly fished. For spinning is not merely the process of casting out and retrieving. The bait must be “ worked ” to suit the fancy of the fish. Sometimes they like a slow-moving erratic lure, which wobbles

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and flounders through the water like a disabled fish. At other times, more rarely perhaps, they will fly at a scintillating Devon minnow, spinning straight and fast. On certain days the lure must be fished deep, and on others it must swim a mere six inches below the surface. Again there is no set rule. It all depends, I feel sure, on the fish's appetite. If he is hungry he will expend some energy in capturing a meal; however fast the lure he will swim faster; however far away he will give chase. But if he is well fed he will become finicky and will take only those baits which look most inviting, and are most easily obtained.

The only way to discover the mood of the pike is to experiment until fish are caught. Try all methods. Do not tie yourself to the procedure which is *supposed* to be correct for the circumstances. There are many old-established maxims connected with angling which are open to question, although they are accepted by many fishermen. Fish slowly, fish fast; fish deep, fish shallow; fish straight, fish erratically. Try all the tricks until you find the one to which the fish respond. Then you will have something to work to.

The same applies to lures. They, too, must be varied to suit the prevailing fancy of the fish. On a bright day, with very clear water, the dead bait is most suitable because it will withstand closer inspection than the artificial kind. But on dull days, or in coloured water, a sparkling lure will be

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more effective in catching the fish's eye. In other words, lures should be visible but not of startling appearance. A very bright spoon on a very bright day looks rather like an underwater firework display.

Some time ago I had the idea that most metal lures were too ostentatious and had a tendency to scare the fish, so I allowed a few spoons to become dull and tarnished, and others I painted so that the reflecting area was considerably reduced. These proved a great success in clear water.

The weight of the lure has considerable influence on the speed with which it is recovered. If it is very heavy it must be wound in quickly to prevent its sinking, but if it is light it can be worked back slowly. It is all a question of the relationship between weight and water resistance. In the same way a lure cast downstream and fished back can be retrieved very slowly, because the opposing current will help to raise it in the water. But if it is cast upstream and fished down it must be wound in quickly or it will fail to spin, and will probably sink. Never wind in so slowly that your lure stops spinning ; a momentary pause will reveal to the pike that it is not what it appears to be.

If a particular lure, after having been thoroughly tried, fails to get fish, it should be changed to one of different colour, size, action, or type. Suppose, for instance, that the first few casts are made with a 1½-inch nickel-plated spoon. This produces no result, so we try a larger spoon of a copper colour which we fish in a variety of ways in order to persuade

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the fish to bite. If this fails we can change to a spoon of a different type—a Colorado instead of a kidney, or vice versa. Or we perhaps may make an even more decided change. We put on a plug bait ; the heavy action of the spoon is replaced by the buoyant movement of the plug. This may be just what the pike are waiting for. Once again it is experiment which pays.

Casting along the bank is most productive, especially if it is possible to get close to the weeds. Pike will often follow a lure for several yards ; they want to take it but are probably suspicious. At such times a slight quickening of the movement of the spinner will cause them to make a rush to secure it. I firmly believe that the deadliest moment is when the lure is about to be lifted from the water at the end of a cast. It seems that the pike realizes that his meal is about to escape him, and he will hurl himself at it for all he is worth. I always delay lifting my spinner from the water until the very last second. After a cast, when it arrives almost at my feet, I continue to work it by moving the rod top from side to side ; and many are the pike that I have caught in that final turn. Several times they have jumped right out of the water and taken the lure as it was being lifted for the next cast.

Towards the end of the season, when the pike are pairing up for spawning, it is often possible to take two fish from the same spot, and in successive

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casts. For at this time of the year it is almost a certainty, when you catch a fish, that its mate is lying quite near. So a cast to the same place will probably yield another.

Pike take the spinner in two ways. Sometimes the “ run ” is a sudden pull on the rod top and there is a sharp tug as the fish seizes the lure. At other times they seem to follow up and take it gently ; there is no jerk but the pull on the rod becomes increasingly heavy. In either case a firm decisive strike is *immediately* necessary. The rod top is raised smartly to drive home the hooks into the hard bony mouth of the fish. He must be played carefully. He should be kept on tight line and prevented, where possible, from heading for weeds or submerged snags. No attempt should be made to land him until he is quite exhausted. Then just slip the gaff under his gill and make a clean lift on to the bank.

### *Live-baiting*

Live-baiting is not nearly so sporting as spinning, but it has certain advantages. It is particularly suitable for weedy water where a spinner could not be used. It is also generally considered to be more effective when angling for large and cunning fish, and is sometimes more successful than the spinner when the fish are shy.

There are two main methods of live-baiting, *i.e.* float fishing and paternostering. Of these float

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fishing is easily the most popular. Any light pike rod of 8 or 9 feet long is suitable for either method. Extras include a Nottingham centre-pin reel with a fairly large drum, a dressed silk line of 12-pound breaking strain, a couple of *Fishing Gazette* floats, a few Jardine or Bickerdyke snaps, and some small spiral leads. In addition a bait can is required, in which to keep alive the dace, gudgeon, roach, or whatever it is we use for bait.

In float fishing it is most essential that the line should float on top of the water. This is assured by first rubbing down with Mucilin. The end of the line is attached to a short gut cast which is in turn fastened to the loop of the snap tackle; and the float is fixed some distance above. A small spiral lead, of sufficient size to cock the float, is wound on midway between float and snap. The depth at which the bait is fished depends on the water. In shallows it need not be more than 18 inches to 2 feet, but in deep water it must be increased in order to bring it within the range of the pike's eyesight.

In Fig. 4 can be seen the method of baiting up with the Bickerdyke tackle. The snap is attached in such a manner that the bait is correctly balanced and hangs in a natural position in the water. Care should be taken when inserting the hooks, for the bait will not fish well if it is injured. This tackle is quite suitable on all sizes of baits from 3 inches upwards; but on smaller ones a single hook, passed through the upper lip, is best.

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As gently as possible the outfit is cast into any of those places likely to contain pike. Sometimes the fish will bite freely, and a dozen baits will be gone in a very short time.

A pike usually takes the bait gently at first, and then goes off in a rush. The float will quiver,

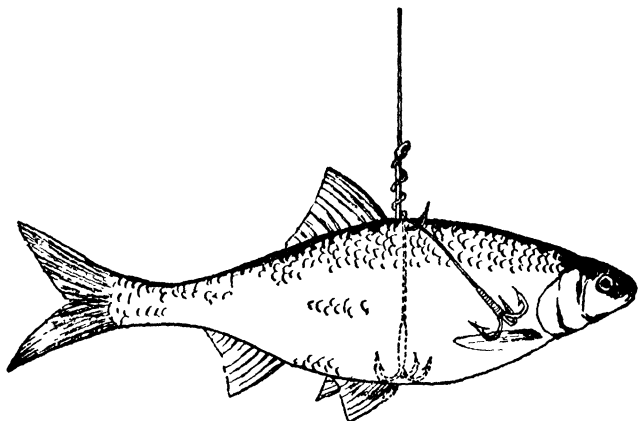


FIG. 4.—Bickerdyke snap in position.

then it will travel several feet along the surface of the water. Suddenly it will dive, and will travel beneath the surface at an increased speed. This is the time to strike. A second or so after the float has disappeared the line should be tightened on to the fish, and the hooks driven firmly home. After that it is merely a question of playing him out and bringing him to the gaff.

Paternostering is rather like ledgering without

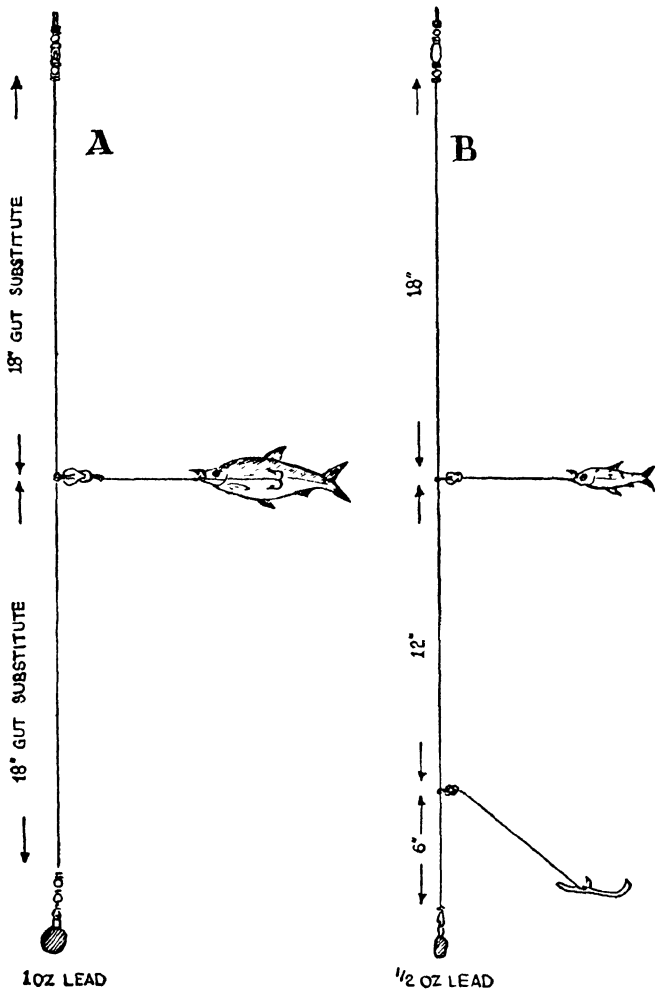


FIG. 5.—Paternosters.  
(A) Pike, (B) Perch.

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a float. It is an ideal method for exploring a strange water, especially if there is a possibility of snags. The tackle is so simple and easy of control that it is much used by anglers who rove about in their search for fish.

A stout gut cast about a yard long is secured to the line by means of a swivel, and at its other end a 1-ounce lead is attached. Midway along the cast is a loop through which a snap tackle is threaded, and this carries the bait as shown in Fig. 5.

The paternoster is lowered into any “ pikey ” corner. It has the great advantage of seldom getting caught up, and can be fished in the tiniest gaps between weed beds.

When the lead reaches bottom the line should be drawn just tight, and the check is slipped on. Thus a bite from a fish will be instantly recorded by a sudden pull at the rod top.

When a bite is detected the rod should be slightly *lowered* to give the pike a little slack line, and the check should be freed so that he can run with his prey without noticing any resistance. He will usually swim away a few seconds after the first knock, and this is the best time to strike.

### 3. PERCH

THE perch fully deserves the popularity which he "enjoys" (it is doubtful if *he* really enjoys it) for he is a striking fish. Undoubtedly he is the handsomest of the coarse fishes, and one of the most sporting too.

Furthermore, as he is found in great numbers in nearly all English rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and canals, he is very important from the angler's point of view. He probably holds third place in the ranks of British coarse fish, the first two being roach and pike.

The average weight of takeable perch lies somewhere between  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound and 1 pound. A 2-pounder is a good fish and a 3-pounder is a "whopper." The largest authentic perch was taken from Stradsett Lake in Norfolk, and weighed just over  $5\frac{1}{4}$  pounds. A larger fish, weighing  $5\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, is supposed to have been taken from the River Waveney many years ago, but there seems to be some doubt as to whether this catch was genuine.

Perch spawn in April as a rule, though sometimes the process is delayed until May. The eggs, like those of most water-born creatures, are contained in a coating of jelly, and they are so attached that

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they form a string not unlike a necklace. This the female deposits in festoons on underwater weeds. The youngsters hatch out in about a fortnight.

Perch are gregarious of habit. They do not wander to any great extent. A small shoal will take up residence in an approved spot and there they will stay. The places they prefer are fairly easy to identify. The water must be fairly deep and of moderate flow, with preferably some submerged stonework or timber in the vicinity. Perch love bridges. They will browse for hours among the weeds which grow in the cracks and crannies. They are found around sluice-gates, weirs, and underwater woodwork ; and near lock-gates in canals.

They are voracious fish of a carnivorous appetite. All sorts of water creatures, snails, caddis, frogs, tadpoles, shrimps, and small fish are welcome. As they grow older their fish diet increases, and they will take quite large minnows, gudgeon, etc.

There is a reservoir near Birmingham which is famous for large perch. It is quite a common sight to see a school of these fish, as if working to a pre-arranged plan, driving a shoal of small fry into some corner of the reservoir. Once cornered, there is no escape for the little chaps. The way back into the open water is guarded by a regiment of hungry perch. In sheer fright the small fry pack together in dense masses, and every few seconds a perch will dive in amongst them, taking his fill. Then back he will go on guard again while another takes his turn.

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Perch fishing begins in mid-June and ends in mid-March, but the fish are in their best condition during the period from September until the end of the season. Nevertheless they will provide good sport throughout the season, for their outstanding feature is willingness to feed at all times, except when the weather is particularly unfavourable. Throughout the summer and autumn they are the standby of many anglers, for there are many who prefer perch to roach. During winter also they provide many red-letter days, particularly if the weather is bright and the temperature mild. Cold weather usually slows them down, and coloured heavy water is liable to make them go off the feed.

Like most carnivorous fish, they will take the bait at various levels ; they are not essentially bottom feeders. Sometimes, in fact, when the river is clear, they can be seen swimming at mid-water, or even higher. It is quite a good plan to start fishing on the bottom and gradually decrease the depth until the fish are found.

For perch there is no special gear required when fishing with float tackle. Paternostering and spinning certainly call for a few extras ; but of this more anon. Delicate tackle fished in the Sheffield style is most suited to quiet waters such as lakes and slow-flowing rivers. Where a stronger current is found, coupled with a greater depth of water, the heavier Nottingham outfit is necessary. Perch do not favour very fast water as a rule, but sometimes

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they have no choice. Under such circumstances a ledger tackle is most suitable for two reasons ; firstly, it will hold its position better than float tackle in a strong current, and secondly, it gets down to the river bed—the place where the fish are most likely to be found when the conditions are rough.

As for baits, there is nothing to beat a worm. It matters not if the worm is large, for the perch has a large mouth with which he can engulf a hearty meal.

Multi-hook tackles, such as the Pennell and Stewart, should be avoided in the case of perch. Their big mouths enable even small fish to bolt the whole worm, and the disgorging of three hooks often results in fatal injury. A single large hook is much easier to detach without hurting the fish, and as for hooking power, it is just as deadly if the strike is delayed a second or so until the fish takes firm hold of the bait.

Other baits which find favour are gentles, caddis, grubs, and small fish such as minnows, gudgeon, and dace. Although these live baits can be fished with float tackle it is preferable to use a paternoster or ledger.

Ground bait can almost be forgotten, for it is only useful on rare occasions. On most predatory fish it is completely wasted.

A perch bite is no uncertain business—bob, bob, and away. The hook should not be driven home until the float is disappearing under water. A hooked fish should be played with a minimum of disturbance. Where there is one there are others,

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you can be sure ; and, providing they are not scared by the sudden disappearance of one of their brethren, many more may be caught in the same spot.

They seem to group themselves in schools according to their size. If a good fish is caught it is almost a certainty that there are others of the same size in the same swim. This is a prospect which is worth following up.

### *Paternostering with Worms and Live Bait*

A correctly manœuvred paternoster is a deadly tackle for perch fishing. The outfit consists of a yard of gut of medium strength which is looped at each end. The top loop is attached to a small swivel and then to the line (no float is used), and the lower loop is fastened to a small pear-shaped lead weighing  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce. About 18 inches above the lead the gut is looped to carry a hook (see Fig. 5). Some anglers attach their hook to a 3-way swivel let into the cast at the aforementioned point. Personally I object to this practice on the ground that it presents too much "ironmongery" for the inspection of the fish. A gut loop is almost invisible and, though you may not think it, seldom causes the hook to get twisted round the cast. If desired, more hooks can be looped on, but as the number of hooks increases, so the sporting qualities of the tackle decrease, because the outfit begins to resemble the long-line of the professional sea fisherman.

If two hooks are used the lower one should be

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looped on to the cast 6 inches above the lead, and baited with worm. The top hook is baited with a lip-hooked minnow or gudgeon. Quietly the lead is lowered into any likely spot; the line is drawn taut as soon as the bottom is reached; thus a bite is instantly registered by a sharp movement of the rod top.

The great advantages of the paternoster tackle become instantly apparent. It is possible for the angler to select his spot to a nicety, and to be certain that his bait will stay there without travelling away down the swim. This is a feature normally associated with the ledger outfit, but the paternoster enables the bait to be fished at much higher levels than those which are possible with the ledger.

Paternostering for perch is an excellent game for the angler who is prepared to work for his fish. It is not wise to stay too long in any one swim. If after a few minutes no bites have resulted, the rod should be carefully raised and the position slightly altered—nearer the bank, more towards the piles of the bridge, upstream, downstream, and so on. When the spot has been thoroughly fished the angler should move along to another part of the river. By moving about from swim to swim the fisherman can keep warm on the coldest winter day, and there is added satisfaction in catching a fish which has been really sought out.

*Spinning for Perch*

Like all fish that feed on others the perch will take a spinning lure. A small dead bait such as a minnow, sprat, or gudgeon is very effective, especially if freshly killed and not preserved in spirit. These natural fish are most deadly if the water happens to be a bit on the clear side. They should be mounted on a tackle such as the "Archer" or "Aerial." In dull weather or coloured water, where a more brilliant lure is needed, a small fly-spoon or Holroyd spinner is hard to beat. An inch-long Devon minnow or a small celluloid lure are also very useful.

Such small lures as those required for perch are not easy to cast except from a fixed-spool reel used in conjunction with a trout spinning rod and ultra-fine line. But with such equipment great fun can be obtained. With a gentle swing the bait drops close against the stonework of the weir pool. For a moment or two it is allowed to sink, and is then fished back to the angler. The next cast is close alongside the first but a few feet to the right or left. Thus every inch of the water is searched. Sometimes the lure is fished slowly and deep, then perhaps fast and straight; and occasionally it is varied with erratic movements imparted by "working" the rod.

Spinning for perch is not sufficiently exploited. These fish will take a lure almost as readily as any pike. In fact I have often caught them when

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spinning with a large pike spoon. I have also had schools of small perch, too tiny to tackle the spoon, chasing the bright brass swivel on my cast, and pecking angrily at it every few moments. Their predatory instincts are very strong, and so they are very susceptible to a spinning lure. I feel sure that if spinning were more widely practised it would yield as many fish as any other method.

#### 4. CHUB

THOUGH many anglers profess to despise the chub, there are none who can deny his sporting quality. He is unique amongst coarse fishes in that he demands almost as much angling skill as do trout, and provides comparable sport when hooked. Furthermore, he will yield readily to a carefully fished fly, which in itself is a substantial claim to the angler's attention. Many times during the hot summer months, when trout fishing has proved unremunerative, I have cast my fly to chub, and have turned a blank and rather trying day into one full of interest and enjoyment ; for though the fish is not so satisfactory as trout from a culinary standpoint, it nevertheless compares very favourably in almost every other way.

From this it must not be imagined that the chub is a stupid fish which can easily be caught when the trout are off. Far from it. They are cunning indeed, and shy to the point of extreme nervousness, but it just so happens that they occasionally take the fly willingly when the trout will not, and have therefore brightened many an otherwise uneventful day.

They are distributed in practically every corner of England except the peninsula of Cornwall and

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Devon. They are also found in parts of Scotland and Wales, but not in Ireland.

Outstanding chub waters are the Great Ouse and the Hampshire Avon. These two rivers are noted for record-breaking fish, but others which produce a good number of specimens each year are the Kennet, Wye, Thames, and Trent; and, to a lesser degree, the river Severn.

Several exceptional fish weighing between 7 and 8 pounds have been caught on the Hampshire Avon in the vicinity of Christchurch; but few anglers can hope to encounter such giants. A chub of 5 pounds is nowadays a notable fish, with which any angler can be highly pleased. Even a 2-pounder is not to be despised, for he will provide quite a thrill, particularly if caught on fly.

Chub spawn in May. Their eggs are deposited in shallow water on a gravelly bottom. The condition which they lose by spawning is quickly regained, and they are well on the road to health and strength shortly after the opening of the season in the middle of June. In the early summer months they are found in the streamy parts of the river. The fast-flowing water serves to cleanse them after their spawning operations, and the extra oxygen acts as a tonic. Their haunts, food, and the method of fishing for them are so different in summer from those of winter that it is perhaps best to deal with the fish as they affect the angler in these two distinct seasons.

*Chub in Summer*

Chub are very fond of rivers of pure water and gentle flow, preferably with a clean hard bed; though I have seen excellent fish in very muddy streams. They do not favour still waters in the least; but occasionally they go to the other extreme and are found in very fast rivers such as the Trent. They are a sociable sort of fish; where you find one you will find a "school" of anything from six to a dozen, or even more.

In the early part of the summer chub are not so shy as they become later, but their temporary boldness should be no excuse for any carelessness on the part of the angler. In late May and June they haunt the fast-flowing shallows, and can be fished for, in the last fortnight of June, with various baits on delicate float tackle. Possibly the best baits at this time are gentles, caddis larvæ, or worms.

The rod need not conform to any precise standard, so long as it is light and strong and fitted with rings which will allow the line to slip through easily. The reel must be fairly large in the drum and sensitive to the slightest touch, so that the angler can pay out line steadily while the float travels down the swim. Heavy line is unnecessary. A 5-pound strength should be adequate for the largest chub, and for smaller stuff it is almost impossible to go too fine. Casts of 1x or 2x gut are about right for average fishing; and hooks mounted on gut one grade finer are useful in all sizes from 6 to 11.

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This wide range of hooks is necessary to cope with the immense variety of baits which chub will take.

Where the fish are large and are found in heavy water, the strengths recommended above can be increased slightly. The greatest difference between the tackle used for moderate water and that used for heavy water lies in the float and the shotting thereof. The most fanatical of fine tackle enthusiasts (and some of them *do* carry their creed to extremes—verbally, if not in actual practice) would not think of suggesting a tiny quill float for fishing in a Trent or Thames flood. In strong currents a substantial number of shot is necessary to sink the bait down to the fish, and a small float will not carry more than one or two. The best advice I can give as to the choice of float is that it should be the smallest that will carry the amount of lead required to sink the bait. This has already been discussed in the chapter on Roach fishing.

Chub are hungry fellows and are fond of a substantial meal. Minute roach baits are of no use to them. Where you might use a single or double gentle for roach you will need a bunch of half a dozen or more, on a size 8 or 9 hook, for chub. Caddis larvæ, too, are best baited in twos or threes, for the fish's mouth and stomach are of similarly large proportions. Worms always make an acceptable meal; a couple of small brandlings on a size 8 hook, or a juicy lobworm on a size 5, are each likely to be taken readily.

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Sometimes ground baiting pays, but at other times it does more harm than good. It is all a question of the state of the water and the mood of the fish. I am sure, though, that ground baiting for chub is of far less value than for roach, bream, tench, carp, etc. Why, it is hard to say; perhaps it is because the chub, though shy, is not such a fickle feeder as most other fishes. Moreover, his haunts are fairly easy to locate, so the angler can go direct to the fish instead of trying to attract them to himself. If ground bait is used it should consist of the usual basis of bread and bran to which are added a few of the hook baits. If the water is strong the mixture must be made heavy, or consolidated by mixing with clay; but in a gentle current it should be light and finely mixed, breaking into a nebulous cloud as soon as it starts to sink.

Ground bait should always be thrown a yard or two above the intended swim, so that it will drift down in the current to the spot to be fished. It is a great idea to drop in the baited hook a second or so after the ground bait, so that it swims in the rearguard of an attractive cloud of bread and bran. The cloud will draw the fish but will not feed them; they will quickly detect the hook bait as the only substantial titbit in this rather attractive mirage. It is often possible to get a fish in the very first swim down when using this simple trick.

When fishing down a swim the float should be made to travel at almost the same speed as the

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current, but should be held back slightly so that the bait is a little ahead.

It is a matter of some practice to control a line nicely, but this is an indispensable art to all anglers who would fish streamy water successfully. After casting out, the rod should be lowered and pointed slightly downstream, so that there is no awkward angle between the rod top and the line. Thus, as the float travels away the reel can be tapped round with the forefinger to release more line, and the entire stretch can be fished thoroughly. If the angle between line and rod is correct, and the reel is tapped at the correct speed, the float will travel down the stream perfectly, without a single jerk or unnatural movement. What is more, the angler will have no slack line between rod and hook, and will be able to register an effective strike immediately.

And you cannot strike too quickly for chub. They have a big mouth which usually engulfs the bait in one bite, but in addition they have a knack of dropping a suspicious titbit with incredible speed. So any delay is fatal.

In early autumn cheese makes an excellent chub bait. And it matters not (in fact it is better) if it happens to be really “ talkative ” cheese. Chub are unaccountable creatures. Although among the wariest of coarse fish, second only to the carp, they will yet accept baits that a stripling roach or perch would regard with grave suspicion. For instance,

what other fish would be so foolish as to take a cherry suspended in mid-water? But the chub will; many a fine fish has been caught on a cherry, with the stone removed, mounted on a size 4 or 5 hook. Others have greedily seized bits of banana, meat, macaroni, and slugs. These baits are not just exceptional experiments; all of them have been tried repeatedly and with very fair success. So when out chub fishing you need never fear running short of bait so long as you have a few sandwiches in your pocket.

These fancy baits, however, are more successful when the water is clear. During winter, or whenever the stream is discoloured and heavy, the worm becomes the great standby.

### *Chub on the Fly*

In the hot months, July, August, and September, the chub forms the habit of lying just below the surface. Sometimes he will cruise around in leisurely fashion; and at other times he will lie motionless, basking in the sun. These are the days when float fishing is almost useless; the clear water and the position of the fish make it easy for him to detect the angler and his tackle. It is now that the extreme shyness of the chub becomes most apparent. For you have only to approach him, no matter how quietly, and as soon as you get within his range of vision he will quietly sink out of sight. No hurried rush; almost imperceptibly he will

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sink, gradually getting farther and farther away until he disappears in the opaque depths below. He will not return for some time, either ; for a chub once scared takes hours to get over it.

These are the days for fly fishing, the days when the chub provides the best sport of all. No one will deny that a shy summer fish, stalked with infinite care and caught on a neatly presented fly, is worth two such fish pulled up from the river bed during a muddy winter flood.

The tackle is almost identical to that used for trout ; almost any trout fly-rod and line will do. Casts should taper to 3x and must not exceed two yards in length, because often the chub is found in awkward places where a long cast could not be put out so nicely. The only items of tackle calling for special mention are the artificial flies. They are not exactly a breed of their own, although one often hears them referred to as “ chub flies.” Actually the dressings are just the same as for the various patterns of trout flies, but they are much larger. Mostly they are of the Palmer or grub type, intended to represent anything from a caterpillar to a blue-bottle. Outstanding favourites include Black Palmer, Red Palmer, Soldier Palmer, Zulu, Cochybondu, Red Tag, etc. Mostly they are tied on large hooks, sizes 4 to 8 (old scale). It must not be imagined, however, that the chub is only interested in these grotesque monstrosities, which do not really represent any fly at all. Sometimes he will prefer a small

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Black Gnat, a Wickham, a Greenwell, or an Alder ; and in its appropriate season there is nothing he prefers to a Mayfly, though this fly is usually over before chub fishing starts.

Most of these flies are fished dry, especially when the fish are lying near the surface. Wet flies fished fairly deep will often take fish from the river bed just as in trout fishing, but when the chub is lying low a bait is more successful than a fly.

I believe, then, that successful fly fishing for chub depends primarily on the fish being within the angler's view ; in other words, near the surface. If they themselves cannot be seen it is generally possible to detect them by their rises if they are in the least inclined to take the floating fly.

At this time of the year they are to be found in the gentle streamy parts. They love the shady water where the branches of the willows droop almost to the surface, the rippling glides between the weed beds, or the sheltered places at the foot of steep high banks. In very small streams which one can almost jump across they seem to choose for their home those places where tall reeds fringe the banks on either side. When the water is very low, in common with most other fish, they seek the deeper holes. A very promising spot is where the current has hollowed out a deep hole in the bank at a bend in the stream ; if this spot is shaded by overhanging trees whose underwater roots provide suitable hiding-places, you can be almost certain

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that the chub are there. Slowly and majestically they parade up and down their short beat, and so long as the angler keeps out of sight there is an excellent chance of taking one or two of them.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of giving the chub no cause for alarm. If he catches so much as a glimpse of the angler or his rod, if he feels the least vibration on the bank as a result of a careless footfall, he will disappear from sight and will not return to the surface for a long time. He must be stalked. A dog, if he sees a bird, will rush at it in headlong fashion, barking and making a great commotion. That is how some anglers try to catch chub. Like the dog, they fail. But a cat, so soon as it sees the bird, stops dead—it seems to be thinking out the best method of approach ; it drops down on its belly and quietly darts from cover to cover until it is within striking distance ; it always keeps behind its quarry. A chub angler must do just as the cat does ; sometimes, even, he must actually resort to crawling if he wants to catch fish.

There is a very good spot for chub in the river Arun, just above Pulborough, in Sussex. The river is small, just a narrow passage-way between reed-fringed banks, and up and down this avenue several shoals of nice chub are wont to swim. The approach to the spot I have in mind is none too easy, for the angler reaches the water by walking down a sloping bank which throws up his silhouette on the skyline.

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The reeds act as a partial screen when the waterside is reached, but the main difficulty lies in getting so near to the fish without being noticed *en route*. The chub can be seen as soon as the angler looks down from the top of the slope, but by the time he is within casting distance they have disappeared.

The only way is to crawl. Day after day I wormed my way down that twenty-yard slope, suffering agonies from the densely growing thistles. I dared not even raise my rod above the level of the ground for fear of it being seen. When I reached the bottom I lay on my side at the water's edge, and by peering through the reeds I could see the school of chub not five yards away. It was difficult to cast from a prone position without raising the rod top too high, particularly as the reeds had to be surmounted, but after several unsuccessful attempts I managed to drop my fly almost on the nose of a fat 2-pounder. He took it like a shot, and naturally I had to stand up to play him out, which meant disturbing the other fish in the swim. Twice a day for several days I fished that same spot. It was just a question of being satisfied with one fish on each occasion, for as soon as one was hooked the others would disappear, and would have to be rested for a few hours before they would come to the surface again.

It was here that I learnt an invaluable trick which has since proved very deadly. Through the

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reeds one day I could see about half a dozen fish, the largest being about 3 pounds. This big chap was cruising up and down the swim, which was about a dozen yards long. Repeatedly, as he passed by, I would drop my Zulu just a foot ahead of him. The first time he came up and looked at it, then turned away to continue his journey in apparent disgust. I waited for him to come back, and I cast again just ahead of him ; but he went past as if absolutely indifferent. After repeating the process several times I was beginning to despair of catching him when, by a slight error of judgment, my fly fell about a foot *behind* him. I never saw a fish turn so quickly. He must somehow have sensed that fly falling on the water behind him and was afraid of losing it, though he had refused it umpteen times when it dropped in front of him. Anyhow, he took it in with lightning speed and was soundly hooked. Usually, of course, it is best for the fly to fall just ahead of the fish. Many times since this experience, though, I have tried the same trick after my fly has been repeatedly refused ; and invariably it works.

There is never a slack moment when you are fly fishing for chub. First you must find your fish, then you must get within casting distance without his seeing you or your rod. This is more than half the battle. The final stages—casting, hooking, and playing—are comparatively easy, although each calls for considerable angling skill ; the fish is so

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resourceful that he will quickly take advantage of any mistake made by the angler.

### *Chub in Winter*

In suitable rivers winter chubbing will provide sport of a very high order. At this time of the year they favour deeper waters—the holes under steep banks, the pools at the bends, or the sheltered positions just below islands.

If the water is not too heavy float tackle can be used, providing it is appropriate to the strength, depth, and colour of the stream. Extra strong currents demand the use of a ledger.

Possibly, too, there is more reason for ground baiting in winter than in summer, for the fish are seldom visible and it cannot be said for certain whether or not they are in the swim. A wise angler, though, will make a mental note, when the water is low during the summer, of all the irregularities in the river bed. All the likely spots, which are then much easier to find, he will carefully remember; and when winter comes, with its deep coloured floods, he will be able to select with certainty a place which is likely to hold fish.

The outstanding winter bait for chub is a worm. Their taste varies in different rivers; some like a tiny brandling, some a massive lob, while others prefer cockspurs or some other local variety. Cheese makes a good alternative to worms for winter

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fishing. They take their food mainly on the bottom during cold weather, and the bait should never be more than six inches above the river bed.

In winter chub do not move very far from their selected home ; if you have nothing to show after half an hour in a swim, it is advisable to move on to another spot. For the absence of bites can denote only two things, *i.e.* either that the fish are not there, or that they are not interested in the bait. In either case a move to a fresh swim is indicated.

A hooked chub usually makes off in one long rush, generally heading for a bed of weeds or the submerged roots of a riverside tree. Some anglers aver that this first rush is his only show of fight and that afterwards he comes up like a log. This may be true of fish caught on heavy tackle, but it cannot be said of those taken on the proper equipment. They will fight hard and long if given a chance.

## 5. TENCH

OPINIONS vary as to the value of the tench as a sporting fish. In some localities, where suitable waters are to be found, they are highly esteemed by anglers, and many satisfactory bags are recorded. In other places they are almost unheard of; if they are caught it is more by accident than design.

And therein, possibly, lies the secret of successful tench fishing—the selection of a suitable locality. For they are peculiar fish; they are not to be found except in those waters which suit them. Unlike other fish, they will not adapt themselves to adverse conditions. They seem to have very definite ideas of what constitutes the ideal home, and there, and there only, are they to be found.

They are a somewhat lazy, heavy type of fish, not much inclined to travel far. They like still, or practically still, water. Never, except by accident, are they found in fast-flowing currents. Lakes and ponds, and quiet stretches in slow-moving rivers, are the places they seek. What is more, they like weeds and beds of lilies. If a quiet pool can be found, which is thick with aquatic vegetation, it is always worth a trial. The bottom should be muddy and plentifully besprinkled with rotting leaves,

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weeds, and so forth. A hard shingly bottom is of little use.

Probably their choice of muddy ground is made to facilitate arrangements for their winter hibernation. Tench are essentially a summer fish. From the beginning of the season they feed well, and continue to do so until the end of autumn. When the weather grows colder, however, they become torpid and disinclined to take the bait. As soon as the first wintry snap occurs they dig for themselves a shallow nest on the bed of the river or pool. With their tails and noses they make a trough amongst the mud and rotting weed, and in this they settle down for a long winter's sleep. When embedded they so nearly resemble their surroundings as to be almost indistinguishable ; thus they can sleep free from fear of being detected by the ever-hungry pike.

Thus, winter angling for tench is generally useless—useless, at least, from the point of view of organized tench fishing—because most of the time the fish is fast asleep. But sometimes, perhaps in the middle of the winter, they will wake up for a day or two and feed ravenously, and the angler who is fortunate enough to be at the waterside will enjoy undreamed-of sport. To try to select these days would be futile, for no man can tell when the tench will awake. And in any case, after a day or so of feeding they will hibernate again. But the winter roach or perch angler should always be on the look-out for those exciting occasions when the tench come on the feed. Then it will pay to forget

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the roach and perch, and fish for tench alone. The angler, if he catches a winter tench, can be fairly sure that there are dozens of others, equally hungry, prepared to take his bait if it is properly presented. Many a fisherman, working a quiet stream for December roach, has enjoyed a remarkable day among the tench.

Tackle must be a compromise. It must be stout enough to hold the fish away from the weeds, but not so coarse that it will be easily visible in the calm water. The same difficulty is experienced in carp fishing. Tench and carp live in similar waters—waters which are quiet and clear. Fine tackle would seem to be absolutely necessary until one remembers the weeds.

There is little to say about the rod. Most of us have a rod or two for fresh-water fishing which we can adapt to practically all styles. The line should be of dressed silk of 3- or 4-pound breaking strain, and the gut cast 1x or 2x. Hooks, which should be mounted on 2x or 3x gut, vary in size according to the bait used, *i.e.* for paste or gentles, size 12 or 13; for worms, size 8 (old scale). Floats, as befits quiet water, should be small and inconspicuous.

The outstanding tench bait is a worm. There are innumerable varieties of worms, and each angler has his particular favourite. Some will recommend a lob, some a brandling, and others a cockspur. I really do not think it makes much difference. A

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worm is a worm for all that ; and I doubt if the tench can distinguish between the various types. It is true that the size of the bait may be worth consideration. Occasionally the fish may feel inclined to take a substantial mouthful such as a Nottingham lob. At other times they are finicky, and will respond more readily to an active little brandling.

Other baits are paste, wasp grub, gentles, and bread-crust. All are useful at certain times, according to the humour of the tench. But worms are absolutely necessary. Whatever other baits are carried, the supply of worms must not be stinted.

Another important consideration with tench fishing is that of ground bait. Seldom will good sport be obtained except from a carefully prepared swim. But before ground baiting it is necessary to choose a suitable scene for operations. Most tench water, as we have seen, is thick with weeds in which the fish love to lurk. If a clear space in the weeds can be found, with a suitable depth of water, this spot should be baited regularly in preparation for a day's fishing. If no clear spot can be found it will be necessary to make one. Obviously it is better to find a natural gap in the weeds if one exists, for the tench will be suspicious of any alteration in his home. But if no such space is available an area must be cleared a few days before the actual fishing. Scythes and rakes are useful tools for removing weeds from ponds. It is advisable to clear and prepare two or three places in case the first one chosen fails to attract the tench.

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And then the ground bait is thrown in. It should include a small proportion of the hook bait, so that the nose, eyes, and palate of the fish shall be adjusted to detecting and eating the bait which the angler intends to offer.

Suppose, for instance, that we intend to fish for tench on a certain day, and that we are to use worms as hook bait. A few days beforehand we visit the water and select suitable places to fish which, if necessary, we clear of weed. Into the prepared swim we throw a goodly heap of bran mixed with bread and a small quantity of stewed wheat. To this mixture should be added a generous supply of chopped worms. The next day we call again, and this time present the fish with a slightly lesser measure of the same mixture. The following day we give them even less. And so on. If we adopt this procedure for a day or two, not forgetting to decrease the dose each day, the fish will become accustomed to seeking their food in the selected swim, and will be ready to take the bait when the angler turns up for serious fishing.

Sometimes, I know, this systematic ground baiting is not possible. Under the circumstances the only course is for the angler to bait his swim as early as possible on the day he intends to fish. Though this may not be so satisfactory it will nevertheless produce fish.

When tench are "on" they can sometimes be caught in enormous numbers throughout the day.

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Many anglers have exciting tales to tell of occasions when they could not go wrong. But this desirable state of affairs is rare. The fish are dainty feeders, with fickle appetites, and generally speaking are not to be taken when conditions are unfavourable. They prefer not to feed in the heat of a summer day. In the morning before the sun warms the air they are ready and willing, but so soon as the day grows hot they cease all activity and lie motionless and absolutely unresponsive. Then comes the cool of the evening again, and they will awake and take an interest in what the angler has to offer.

Tench always feed well on the bottom. The bait must lie on the mud, and it must lie still. What is more, the angler himself should move about as little as possible. Once scared, tench take a long time to recover. A swim is easily spoilt.

Tench fishing is one of the most restful forms of angling. Only occasional casting is necessary, and between times the angler must just sit still and wait.

A hooked fish will usually make a run for the weeds, but if a strain can be kept directly over him by following his course with the rod top he can easily be tired and steered into clearer water. He must be taken from the water with a minimum of disturbance, and unaccompanied by any war-dance on the part of the angler. Carelessness or over-excitement during the playing of a fish will inevitably scare all the others in the swim.





Carr and tench love the lily beds.

## 6. CARP

Now we come to a most difficult subject. The primary object of this chapter is to help the angler to catch carp, but for no book that was ever written can much success be claimed in this direction. Many good fishermen are well acquainted with the methods to which the carp is supposed to succumb, yet they can rarely catch them. More cunning and ingenuity have been employed in attempting to catch carp than for any other fish ; but the carp is even more cunning, the wiles of the angler are detected, and the basket remains empty.

Little fish can be caught, of course, but the big ones very rarely. Sometimes a big fellow makes a mistake and takes a worm with a hook inside it. These occasions are so rare as to justify lengthy notice in the angling press.

And from all this it may be supposed that carp fishing is hardly worth while. For the angler who needs excitement it certainly is rather useless. Perch, roach, or pike would be a more suitable quarry. But carp fishing has its special appeal to the angler who has the patience and the resource to attempt to outwit the craftiest fish of all. Specimens will be few and far between, even from a good water, but it is a pleasure indeed to think that by dogged perseverance and the exercise of no

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little ingenuity one has succeeded in outwitting a large carp—a fish which most anglers would give up as a bad job.

There must be plenty of big carp in British waters. More, even, than we realize, for the comparative rarity of their capture is no guide to their numbers. They favour similar waters to the tench, still, quiet, and weedy, with a muddy bottom. Most of these fish live in small private waters rather than in the vast areas of rivers and lakes which are available to the public. A quiet lake or pool, for instance, in the grounds of one of our old country houses, will probably abound with carp, while a broad river which flows only a few miles away will scarcely contain one. A moat around an ancient castle is another likely place, for above all these fish like peace and quietness. Old waters which have remained undisturbed for centuries are the natural habitat of the carp.

They live to a great age. There seems little doubt that a hundred years is not an exceptional span of life for them. And they reach a fair size too; fish of over 20 pounds have been taken with rod and line. Any carp over 3 pounds in weight is a capture well worth while. A 6-pounder is something to be proud of.

Spawning takes place in May usually, especially if the weather is mild and warm. In cold weather it may be delayed for another month. They lay an enormous number of eggs; a moderate-sized fish

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will deposit half a million, but a large female will contain two millions. It is remarkable, really, that our waters are not infested with carp. But as is usual where such profusion exists, the percentage of fish which reach maturity is very small.

They are bottom feeders, mainly interested in worms, shrimps, snails, and other water insects. It is possible, also, that quite a fair proportion of vegetable matter finds its way into their diet. There is no doubt that carp are very careful and dignified feeders, which accounts, to a large extent, for the difficulties of catching them. They will not rush at food, and only seldom will they feed in a way which indicates that they are hungry. This is a characteristic of many fish which inhabit still water.

The choice of tackle for carp fishing is a problem not easily solved. The extreme cunning of the fish, and the still waters in which he lives, seem to demand a gossamer-light outfit. Yet the presence of water weeds and the possibility of finding a large hard-fighting fish make ultra-fine tackle useless. Many anglers would prefer to hook a fish and lose it, rather than not to hook a fish at all. At the same time it is extremely annoying to have a once-in-a-lifetime fish in play, and then to lose him because the tackle was too fine. If information can be obtained as to the probable size of the carp in the water we are about to fish, this can be used as the basis for selecting our tackle. If the fish do not exceed 3 or 4 pounds it is quite in order to use

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a fine outfit; but if there are 8- and 10-pounders we must use tackle which will withstand their fighting powers. We shall not get so many bites, obviously, when using the stouter stuff, but at least we shall stand a better chance of landing any fish which we happen to hook. A 2-yard cast of 2x gut may be strong enough to hold the smaller fish, though an 8/5 strength would be the minimum for the extra big ones. The same goes for the line, which should be just slightly stronger than the cast; and which, incidentally, should be most carefully greased before setting out. The float, obviously, must be of the "toothpick" variety, *i.e.* a crowquill or a porcupine quill.

Baits are quite varied. Worms are probably the most favoured, though sweetened paste is also very deadly. Gentles are quite useful at times. To cater for the carp's occasional preference for a vegetable diet some anglers use small new potatoes, peeled clean and partly boiled. If boiled to the correct degree these make quite a firm hook bait, and can be cast considerable distances with the greatest of ease. In carp fishing more than in any other it is vitally necessary that the bait should be free from any human taint. A warm hand will leave a faint scent which the fish will quickly detect, and a bait so tainted is as useless as a stone lying on the bottom. Before the worm or paste is handled the finger tips should be well rubbed in a bunch of moist grass. This will leave a natural smell which the carp will not find disturbing.

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The best times for fishing are in the early morning, the late evening, and at night. Carp seldom take well in the middle of the day. As in tench fishing, a space should be cleared amongst the weeds, and should be baited systematically before fishing is begun. Weeds will often betray the presence of fish. Large carp, as they push their way through them, will cause a movement which can be seen above water. Thus a spot where fish are known to lie can be prepared for the angler. The ground bait question is of some importance. The mixture includes bran, bread, and grated potato, to which should be added a small quantity of the hook bait. For it is useless to educate the fish to look for potato when worms are used on the hook. A few chopped-up worms will develop their taste for the hook bait.

Every carp fisher has little fads or tactics of his own which have probably stood him in good stead from time to time. An old dodge which most anglers have tried is that of removing float and shot, casting the line over a floating leaf, and allowing the wind to carry the improvised float to the spot where the fish are expected to be. This sounds very cunning and effective, no doubt, but in practice the trick is only rarely successful. A suitable leaf cannot be found, or it will not carry out the line, or the wind is blowing the wrong way in the baited swim. Nevertheless, if ever the circumstances are favourable it is well worth a trial.

When carp are seen lying just below the surface

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on a hot day they are seldom worth fishing for. They are probably basking in the sun, fast asleep, and will not look at food. Generally speaking they only take their food from the bottom, so the float should be adjusted to allow a few inches of gut to lie on the mud. In still water a single shot will serve to carry the bait down to the fish. If it is fixed just a few inches below the float the bait will sink in a leisurely and natural manner. In these quiet places frequent casting is unnecessary because the float does not move far from the place into which it is first cast. If the bait is left unmoved for lengthy periods the natural suspicions of the carp will be overcome and they will be more inclined to take it. But frequent casting and retrieving, with all its accompaniment of rod-waving and splashing, will put them well on guard.

Ledgering has produced some good fish. A parboiled potato slightly larger than a big marble, or a fresh lobworm, are the best baits. A drilled ledger lead is threaded on to the cast and a shot is pinched on below it, as far as possible from the hook. Personally I prefer to have the sliding lead threaded on to the line, and the shot nipped on where the cast and line are joined. Thus the hook is 6 feet from the lead (on a 2-yard cast) and there are no obstructions in the form of knots which will prevent the fish from taking line. This is rather a useful point ; at no time should there be any drag or weight on the fish. The least resistance

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and he will drop the bait at once. The ledger outfit is swung out into the centre of the area which has been ground baited, and is there allowed to lie. The rod should be set in a rest which will not allow it to overhang the water ; then a few yards of line are pulled from the reel and laid in a neat coil on the bank, so that when a carp makes off with the bait he will be able to run quite a distance without feeling any restriction. Then, when he has the hook well into his mouth, it is time to strike.

A long rush for the reeds will follow. This should be checked if possible, and the fish kept in the open water. There must be no hurry to land him, for he will fight to the last and will surely break the tackle if there is any undue haste on the part of the angler.

I remember once seeing an old angler playing a good carp in the river Adur at Henfield. His tackle was fine and his rod slender, and the river at this point was thick with weeds. But he didn't lose his head. It was delightful to see the way that he controlled that fish under difficult conditions. He knew the strength of his line to a nicety, and imposed the utmost strain on the fish every time it ran for the reeds. Eventually, by a bit of really clever angling, a 9-pound carp was landed. Not bad on a hot summer day, with the water low and clear !

I think that there are great possibilities in the threadline reel for carp fishing. To be able to cast

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a small potato or a large lobworm to fair distances is a decided asset. Furthermore, either of these baits could be cast without float or lead, so that grounds for suspicion are eliminated. A small potato, dropped accurately into the swim, will sink of its own accord, and will then lie on the bottom awaiting the carp. The thin cast and gut-substitute line will be almost invisible. If the pick-up of the reel is disengaged, line can be pulled off direct from the spool without offering the slightest resistance. A final point in favour of the threadline reel is the slipping clutch. This useful refinement makes it possible to fish for large carp with the finest tackle, and without fear of a break, the only objection being that there is less control over the fish when they head for the weeds.

A very expert angler of my acquaintance has made a speciality of night-fishing for carp in the Sussex Ouse. Often in the late evening and night the big fellows can be located by their splashing and rolling on the surface. In places where the fish were known to be this angler would prepare a swim by careful ground baiting. Just before dusk he would arrive at the waterside, his tackle all mounted beforehand. He always approached the water with the utmost caution, never giving the carp warning of his presence by any unnecessary movement ; and never would he carry a lantern as some night fishermen do.

He fished with a ledger. After casting out he

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would lay down his rod and uncoil those few yards of line from his reel. Where the line hung down from the bottom ring he would twist a piece of white paper around to act as a bite indicator. The paper was cunningly attached; it was so arranged that it would move upwards if there was a pull on the line, and yet when it was stopped at the first ring the line could still pull through easily. An upward movement of the white paper, which could be easily detected even when it was quite dark, would denote a running fish. There was no need to interfere with the run, however, for even when the paper reached the ring the fish would not feel the slightest resistance. A long run and a firm strike—that was the slogan. In this manner the angler caught many fine carp weighing 8 or 9 pounds.

## 7. BREAM

FOR big catches of fair-sized fish the bream is hard to beat. Five-pounders are fairly common ; a few 7-pounders are taken every year ; 2 to 3-pounders are quite ordinary. As these weights indicate, their average size is fairly high when compared with other coarse fish. But they have an added attraction in that they are found in huge shoals, so that catches of several stones of fish are by no means uncommon. The record fish was taken from Startops Reservoir, Tring, in August 1939. It weighed 12 pounds 15 ounces.

This reservoir is famous for big fish, but the breamiest of all waters are the Lincolnshire Fens and the Norfolk Broads. Still waters, or rivers of moderate flow and fair depth are the bream's favourite haunts, particularly if the bottom is muddy.

They are roving fish: Great shoals of them will cruise about in rivers and lakes searching for food. They feed mainly on the river bottom. Like piscine pigs they root about among the débris of the river bed, and from it they extract all sorts of insect and vegetable food. Sometimes they can be easily located by the disturbance which they cause while rooting. Often the water will become clouded with the mud which they have dislodged ; and

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innumerable bubbles, some perhaps from the fish themselves and others from trapped air which they have released, will rise to the surface.

In the angling press of late there has been much discussion and argument regarding a sucking noise which certain fishermen have heard at the waterside. Many are the theories advanced as to its cause, and many are the different species of fish which have been said to make this noise while feeding. It is possible that many different breeds make a sucking noise while feeding, but I can personally vouch for the bream. Soon after dawn, in weedy, slow-flowing rivers, I have many times heard a great commotion caused by the bream sucking food from the underside of lily leaves. The individual sounds are quite as loud as a human being could make by sharply clicking the tongue. This noise, made simultaneously by vast numbers of fish, is quite awe-inspiring in the silence of a summer dawn.

Bream are late spawners and are not in the best of condition at the beginning of the season, but they improve considerably towards the end of July, and will provide excellent fishing until the arrival of the cold weather. Then they seem to go off the feed. Winter bream fishing is certainly not impossible, but it is rather unremunerative. From November until the end of the season sport is very uncertain, though an occasional good day may occur by way of a surprise.

The tackle for bream fishing varies slightly with

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the depth of the water. It is not much use trying to fish a 14 feet deep swim with a 9-foot rod. It might be possible with a Nottingham slider float, but most anglers prefer not to use this rather cumbersome float unless the depth of the water makes it imperative. Generally speaking, where deep swims are concerned, the length of the rod should be at least equal to the depth of the water. The gut cast should be 2 yards in length, and of any thickness from 9/5 to 1x, according to the size of the fish. Floats, as usual, should be the smallest possible in conjunction with sufficient shot to sink the bait. A line of 4- or 5-pound breaking strength should be ample for most fish. Bream will take quite large baits, and hooks must be in proportion. Sizes 5 to 7 are suitable for lobworms or large pellets of paste; and 9 or 10 for caddis, stewed wheat, or barley.

In bream fishing the value of thoughtful ground baiting cannot be overrated. The fish are great wanderers. Though there are some holes which can be regarded as almost certainly breamy, it is impossible to tell whether the fish are in residence or on tour. It is the purpose of the ground bait to attract them to the angler; to offer to them an interesting something which will cause them to forget their wanderlust. After all, most of their journeys are made in search of food; so if they are offered the right inducement they will stay in any place which promises well.

Ground bait should be generous and fairly heavy.

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Heavy ground baiting in quiet waters may seem unethical, but it is quite the approved practice when fishing for bream. The basis is the same as for other ground baits, *i.e.* bread and bran; but to this are added mashed potato, brewer's grains and a few samples of hook bait such as chopped-up worms. This mixture is made up into balls about as big as a small orange.

The best of all hook baits is a worm. Sometimes it may be a large lobworm, on other days a cockspur, but the most deadly of all is the rather objectionable brandling. It must be fished well on the bottom; in fact it is not a bad plan to fix the distance from float to bait at least a foot greater than the depth of the swim.

If possible the intending bream angler should bait two or more swims for a day or two beforehand in order to be certain of finding the fish. If this is not practicable it probably pays best to select a likely hole and to keep on plugging away—ground baiting and fishing—until the fish find the spot. This may mean several hours of tedious waiting until the cruising fish find the land of milk and honey, but it is a more certain procedure than roaming in search of them. This suggestion is probably even more applicable to rivers than to still waters. It only applies to bream, though. Roving tactics would probably be more successful when the angler is in search of other varieties of fish.

I have never been very successful when bream

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fishing at night. This does not mean that nocturnal angling does not pay. There is plenty of evidence to the contrary. But my own opinion is that the term " night fishing " is rather loosely applied and becomes somewhat misleading. If it were called " dawn fishing " or " twilight fishing " it would convey a much truer impression of the times when the bream come on the feed. Fish are often caught in the middle of the night, and at all times during the day, but the best sport is obtained " between the lights." Serious feeding starts just after dawn, about the time when things begin to be distinctly seen, and is carried on until about 8 or 9 a.m.

During the heat of the summer day the fish usually lie quiet, probably asleep, and then, just when it is becoming difficult to see the float, they will start biting again. That is, of course, supposing that the spot has been thoroughly ground baited.

A bream bite is unique ; the behaviour of the float is very peculiar. It trembles, then leans over slightly, then rises to the surface and lies flat. Finally it is pulled under at an angle and starts to glide away. This is the time to strike. A hooked bream makes heavy runs to the bottom and will strain every muscle to get under a weed bed—a move which must be prevented at all costs. The best method of checking him is to follow his movements with the rod top, keeping the strain directly above him. In this fashion he will soon tire and will come to the net.

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Bream fishing can occasionally become child's play, and huge bags are taken with a minimum of effort. There is a strong temptation to retain all the fish caught in order that the people at home shall be provided with substantial proof of our angling prowess. This temptation must be overcome. A couple of stones of bream may *look* very fine, but that is about the limit of their value. They are useless as food and can only be thrown away. What is more, when dead they are valueless from the angler's point of view, for they have no further capacity for providing sport. So the only bream that is any use at all is a live bream. If you kill him you do a bad turn to yourself and to the angling fraternity as a whole.

## 8. DACE

THIS pretty little fish deserves much more credit than it receives. To most anglers it is just a jolly good pike bait. It never occurs to them that the dace has a sporting value of its own.

Dace are found in most pure rivers where the water is streamy and well aerated. They have a preference for a clean hard bed such as pebbles, gravel, or sand. In summer and autumn they occupy the fast-flowing shallows. Here, quite often, a shoal of a dozen or more can be seen disporting themselves in the sun. Can be seen, that is, so long as the angler remains invisible; but they will bolt for cover if they suspect his presence. They are very fond of weed beds, and will hover over a selected patch for hours. If they take alarm they will disappear under the weeds, but can be lured out again by swimming a dainty bait along a clear passage-way between the beds.

In winter they leave the streamy water and seek shelter in the quieter deeps, but even then their preference for well-oxygenated water is indicated, for they will usually choose a pool which has a rapid shallow at its head, or one which consists of a quiet bay just alongside the main current.

Their food consists of worms and water insects

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such as snails, caddis grubs, and fly larvæ. Possibly a small proportion of vegetable matter is also included. From the angler's point of view they are particularly interesting because of their habit of taking the surface fly, especially in summer and autumn. They cannot be said to be bottom feeders in the strictest sense of the term. In rough water they keep well down, but they swim at higher levels when the weather is settled.

Possibly the lack of interest on the part of anglers is due to the fact that the dace does not attain a very great size. The record, it appears, is a fish of just over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds taken from the Hampshire Avon. This river, in company with the Beane, Kennet, and Mimram, is famous for large dace. A half-pounder is quite a good fish, and a pounder is a real specimen. Almost every year we hear of the dace record being beaten, but closer investigation reveals that the new record-breaking "dace" is actually only a very indifferent chub. In many waters the two fish closely resemble each other. There are various means of identification, but the infallible test is the anal fin—the one beneath the body and nearest the tail. On the dace the outer edge of this fin curves inwards, while on the chub it curves outwards.

The dace spawns in March, April, or early May, and is therefore in excellent condition at the opening of the season, despite the fact that his preference for fast water seems to indicate a wish to scour himself after the business of reproduction.

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Tackle for these little fellows can hardly be too fine. Certainly 3x gut is strong enough for the largest fish ; and the line, reel, and rod should be identical with those used in ultra-fine roach fishing. As regards the hook, size 16 is not too small for a brace of gentles or a tiny pellet of paste, a size 14 or 13 will carry a cube of bread-crust, and for a very small worm or the tail end of a lob, perhaps a size 9 would be best. Gentles, paste, and bread-crust are good summer baits ; worms are best in the winter.

When dace are in the streamy shallows there is no bait to compare with the gentle. Fix the float and shot so that the bait travels at about three-quarters of the depth, and pay out line so that it moves down the swim without let or hindrance. If it drags in any way the dace will take alarm and will disappear. When it reaches the end of the swim the float will most probably swing in towards the bank. It can be retrieved along the edge of the water without disturbing the fish, and can be cast out again as before.

Every now and again two or three gentles should be flicked into the water so that they drift down in the same course as the hook. These will attract the fish. Ground bait, in fact. The depth, too, must be varied until the level at which the fish are feeding is found. Do not stay too long in one spot if results are poor. Lack of success may be due to the fact that the fish have taken alarm, which they do very easily. Or it may be that the shoal has shifted up

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to the next shallow. In any case dace fishing is a roving job.

In winter the tackle must obviously be adjusted to fish the deeper waters, and the bait might profitably be changed to a worm. Sometimes in winter a ledger tackle is most suitable, with the bait fished right on the bottom. Ground bait is changed to bread and bran mixture, with a few chopped worms added.

When the dace can be seen to be taking the surface fly the dry fly fisherman can obtain some very good fishing, and some that will test his skill even more than trout fishing so far as hooking the fish is concerned. For dace are notoriously hard to hook. An angler who can hook three out of every six fish which he rises is doing very well. Even two out of six is not bad. The same applies in float fishing, but not quite to the same extent. The fish takes the float under with startling suddenness, and very often lets go before the angler has recovered from the shock.

Celebrated dace flies are Red Tag, Zulu, Black Gnat, Cochybondu, and Wickham's Fancy, all tied small and on small hooks, so that the fish can mouth them easily. During summer mornings and evenings, when the dace rise very freely, great sport can be obtained by fishing the dry fly upstream.



PART III  
TROUT AND GRAYLING



## I. TROUT

ANGLING is an evolutionary business. There are many experts among us to-day who began their fishing career with a garden cane, a length of cotton, and a carefully bent pin. Those were the early stages, when an abundance of optimism made up for deficiencies in outfit and experience.

Angling develops within us not only from the point of view of tackle and tactics but also in ideals and aspirations. At the very beginning of things we are transported into the seventh heaven by catching a few gudgeon on the aforementioned bent pin. But later comes the desire for better things. With the acquisition of some slightly improved tackle we perhaps become enthusiastic roach or bream fishermen. Gradually the vast field of angling opens up before our eyes. We have odd days among the chub, dace, carp, perch, and tench. Feeling the need to go one better, we make expeditions after pike. There seems to be no limit to the scope of our pastime.

And as our field widens and our experience grows our methods begin to show decided improvement. Our fishing becomes purposeful and intent; we have learnt much about the various species of fish and the waters they live in; we have learnt

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how best to deal with every set of circumstances which may arise. A good angler has evolved from a raw beginner.

Sooner or later in every angler's life will come the desire to fish for trout. Some are so fortunately placed that they can skip the lower rungs of the ladder and begin their angling apprenticeship with trout fishing. But for others the training in coarse fishing must be served first, and the desire for trout will come later.

Trout fishing is easily the most expert art in British angling ; higher, even, than the quest for salmon. Therefore, no doubt, it is the goal to which so many anglers ultimately aspire. There is no snobbery about this. It is an accepted fact. There is something about fly fishing for trout which calls for the highest angling skill and the greatest knowledge of your quarry and his habits. It is hard to define the subtle difference in the sporting values of trout fishing and, say, roach fishing. But a difference undoubtedly exists. Perhaps the following pages may help the angler to form his own conclusions.

### *Distribution of Trout*

The trout is found almost everywhere ; in practically every brook, stream, river, lake, or reservoir where the water is pure and the food supply adequate. In Scotland, Wales, and Ireland the waters which do not contain trout are the exception rather than the rule. In England most

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rivers hold a stock, but there are a few exceptions, more especially in the Eastern Counties, where the waters are essentially of the coarse fish type.

The most famous river in England for trout fishing is the Test in Hampshire. There we find a slow-flowing water with an almost inexhaustible supply of fish food. Consequently the Test trout are large and numerous, but also rather finicky. They certainly are not easy to catch.

Another prolific water is Blagdon Reservoir. For those who can afford to pay a high price for their fishing this place is hard to beat. The average weight of fish taken is probably higher than from any other water in the country.

A lake which has fished amazingly well of late is Gerian, in Anglesey. Three-pounders are quite common there.

The Thames has some enormous trout inhabiting its weir pools. Unfortunately they are mainly cannibals and will not take the fly. Several weighing between 7 and 8 pounds are caught each season on live baits and spinning lures.

In hilly or mountainous country, such as that in Devon, Wales, or Scotland, the average size of the fish is rather small, but they have the compensating feature of being much more numerous and more willing to feed. In the lochs, lakes, and reservoirs in these districts they attain a much larger size than in the surrounding streams.

Generally speaking the size limit of trout is between 8 and 9 inches, and the average of *takeable*

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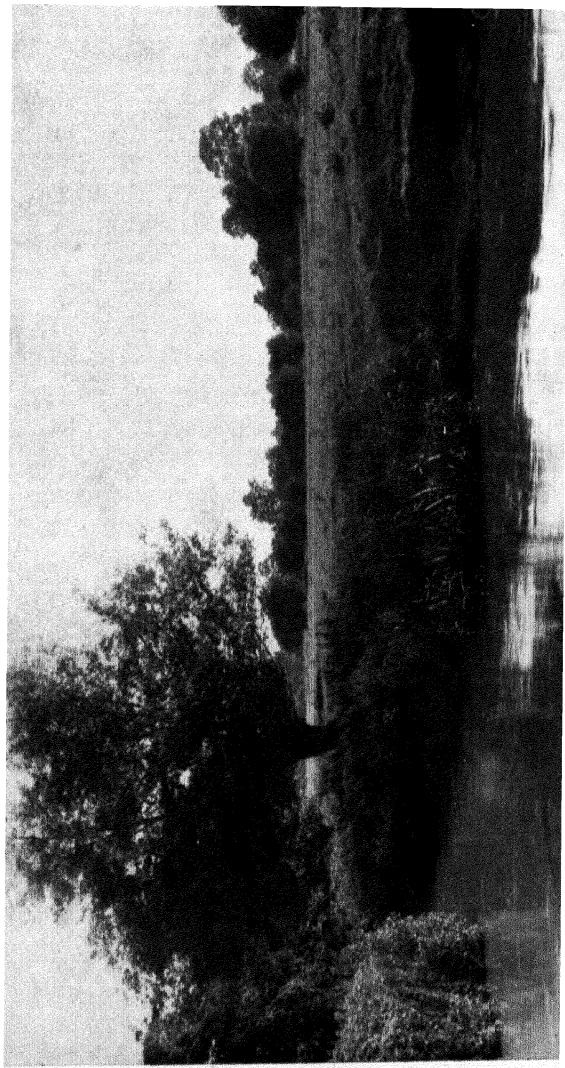
fish would be only a little above this limit. But in almost every water there seems to be a few outside fish, even though the general run is small. Occasionally one hears of 4-pounders and 6-pounders taken from tiny brooks. These once-in-a-lifetime trout have probably gone there to spawn and have overstayed their leave from their usual home.

Mentally I divide trout waters into three classes. First there is the famous river or lake known to everybody. Because of its reputation such a place can only be fished on payment of a substantial fee, and even then there is no insurance against blank days. Next there is the hard-fished public water of the more modest type such as is attached to certain hotels and angling associations. A smaller payment is demanded and sometimes the sport is quite good. These rivers are often kept in good condition for fishing, and are regularly stocked to replace those fish which are caught.

Finally there is that humble stream which nobody seems to care about ; a small water wandering through some farmer’s land ; a brook that he thinks is worth nothing. He knows, perhaps, that it contains a few trout, and he is prepared to let anybody fish it for a shilling or so. Stocking is out of the question ; the bottom is foul with fallen branches ; the place is just as Nature made it—untouched.

And very often these neglected waters provide some excellent fishing. Sometimes the going is





A likely spot — where the side-stream flows in.

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hard ; the bushes and trees are just in the wrong places. Sometimes in summer it sinks so low that it almost disappears. But there is one redeeming feature : such streams are seldom fished to death ; and the trout, though neither too numerous or too large, are quite unsophisticated. There is a charm about these neglected waters which is all their own.

### *Life Story*

Trout spawn sometime between October and January ; the precise time varies in different waters. For spawning purposes they prefer shallow streamy water flowing over small gravel and pebbles. As soon as they are ready they migrate upstream to find a place which meets with their requirements. Even the lake trout will in most cases leave their quiet home and travel up some tiny inflowing brook. For years it was believed that trout could not spawn in still water, but now the possibilities of such a process are not denied.

When the spawning ground is reached the cock and hen fish mate up in pairs, and the hen proceeds to dig a hole in which to lay the eggs. It is hard to visualize an armless and legless creature like a fish digging a hole, yet it is done with amazing dexterity. Using her powerful tail like a scoop the hen fish soon makes quite a " nest " amongst the gravel, and into this she deposits her eggs. Meanwhile the cock fish has taken up his position immediately upstream of his mate, and as soon as he sees that

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the eggs are deposited he releases a white fluid called "milt." This fluid is carried by the current over the eggs, and those which it touches are fertilized.

When a quantity of eggs has been deposited and fertilized the fish take a short rest, then resume again when they have partly recovered from their exertions. Thus the business continues, probably for a day or two.

Finally the pair are spent. The process is complete. With a final flick of her tail the hen fish covers the nest with loose gravel, and the both of them, thoroughly exhausted and in a very sick state, seek a quiet spot in which to recuperate. The purpose of the close season is to protect the fish during the spawning period and to give them time to recover their health.

In about a month each of the fertilized ova develops a pair of little black spots which ultimately become the eyes of the fish. After a further seven weeks the tiny creature hatches out. At this stage he is known as an alevin. He is a wee fish about half an inch long, with a small ungainly yolk-sac suspended from his stomach. This yolk-sac provides him with food during the next fortnight, after which he starts to feed on minute animal and vegetable matter.

Most of his time is spent in lurking under stones; for even at this tender age the little fellow is aware of the dangers that beset him. Eventually, however, as he gains in size and strength, he becomes able

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to fend for himself and soon begins the life of a normal adult trout.

The trout season varies locally. In some parts it commences in March while in others it is delayed until April. In most places it closes at the end of September.

### *Haunts of Trout*

In fly fishing for trout it is vitally necessary that the angler should be able to pick out those places where his quarry is likely to lie. There is now none of the ground bait used in coarse fishing to draw hungry fish to the hook bait.

It is easy, when trout are rising to the surface fly, to go to the water and locate a feeding fish. At such times the trout are almost advertising their whereabouts. But it is not so easy when the surface of the river is unbroken and fish are feeding below. It is a good plan to mark the spots where rises are seen, even if you are not fishing at the time, for trout do not travel much and will often be found in the same residence for months, sometimes years. "Once a good spot, always a good spot" is a quite reliable maxim.

They lead solitary lives; they are not a shoal fish like perch or roach. After selecting their home they will remain there indefinitely and will discourage visitors who seek to share it with them.

The haunts of trout vary greatly owing to the different types of water in which they are found.

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In the rough-and-tumble hill stream, for instance, they seek out spots which offer protection from the full force of the current. Such places are the quieter pools and the smooth glassy glides which are to be found at intervals between the stretches of rough water. The downstream sides of boulders or stones are also favourite lurking places. Here a fish will take up his position in a quiet little haven; each side of him the main current rushes by but leaves him untouched. From his point of vantage he is in a position to dart out and seize any food which is brought down by the stream; and then, just as quickly, he can regain his position again. But these mountain trout have a hard life. The water in which they live is subject to great fluctuations. A rainy spell will turn it into a mighty torrent which sweeps all before it; and in the summer it shrinks to a mere trickle. The hard stony bed yields little food, and a great proportion of this is killed in each drought. When the living is so precarious it is little wonder that the fish are small, hardy, and nearly always ready to take the angler's lure.

In the low-lying rivers things are quite different though even here the trout are subject to certain adverse conditions—pollution, river traffic, competition from coarse fish, and the attentions of pike. In large rivers the flow is usually of moderate pace and the fish will take as their home almost any spot which offers an adequate food supply coupled with reasonable comfort and safety. In such rivers as

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the Thames, Wye, and Severn, for example, they show a decided preference for streamy, well-aerated water ; though at times when the water rises with heavy rainfall they will adjourn to some quieter place. The downstream end of weed beds, the tail of weir pools, the junction of tributary streams, or just below the rapid stretches, are all places to watch.

The smaller the water the easier it becomes to locate the possible home of a trout. We now come to the tiny streams, the tributaries which help to make our large rivers. They are innumerable. Almost every few miles of countryside is intersected by some such brook, and in most of them a few trout are to be found. These waters have infinite variety. They have shallows and deeps, rapids and slacks ; some stretches are weedy and others weedless ; some parts are sheltered by trees and others are open to the sun and the wind.

Weed beds, because of the food they hold, are always a favourite hunting-ground for trout. In waters which are mainly shallow fish are found in the deep pools which occur at intervals.

Bends in the stream are also good, more especially if the current has cut a deep hollow under the bank. The type of place I like best of all is a bend such as this in a stream of sandy or gravelly bottom ; in the bend itself is a deep hole which gradually shallows off towards the opposite bank ; just upstream is a short stretch of rapid water, and downstream the pool tapers off into a shallow. If

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such a spot as this has the additional attraction of a shady tree or bush growing on its banks, with its roots exposed under water, you can be almost sure of a fish. Generally a big one. For the biggest trout choose the best places ; and this is their ideal home.

In water of constant depth and moderate flow the haunts of fish are not so easy to identify, for here they are more evenly distributed. No one stretch is much more attractive than another. The same applies in lakes and reservoirs. The trout may be anywhere or everywhere. A shady spot is always promising on a hot day ; an inflowing stream may also interest a few fish ; but apart from these local attractions it is safe to assume that in quiet waters the inhabitants are spread out more or less evenly.

### *The Trout's Food*

The food of trout is very varied, but the fish are mainly carnivorous. Indigenous to the water in which they live they find snails, small frogs, beetles, the larvæ of aquatic flies, and all sorts of water insects. They will also feed on small fish such as minnows, loach, etc., and on the fry of almost any species which happens to hatch in their locality.

Incidental food, which is carried to the water by wind and rain, includes worms, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and all sorts of grubs which live in the riverside bushes.

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The most interesting item in a trout's diet, at least so far as the angler is concerned, is the water-born fly. There are hundreds of different species of these flies, and it is impossible to deal with them at length here. Most of their life, from the egg to the larval or nymphal stages, is spent under water, and ranges from one to two years. In this state they are much preyed upon by all sorts of fish. Eventually they approach maturity and prepare to leave the water. They rise to the surface, burst open their skin, and the fly emerges. Their life as a fly is relatively short and is spent almost entirely in mating and egg laying, but as the eggs are in most cases laid on the water the flies never move far away, except, of course, if they are carried off by a strong wind.

Thus even in the last phase of their life these tiny creatures are preyed upon by the trout, who seem to regard them as a particularly succulent mouthful. As the fly hovers just above the water, or floats downstream with the current, the ever-watchful fish rises with open mouth and sucks him down.

### *Dry Fly Fishing*

The angler who intends fishing the fly for trout will find that he has the choice of two main methods—dry or wet. There are some enthusiastic dry fly anglers who maintain that theirs is the *only* way to catch fish. This is far from being true. Dry fly

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fishing is extremely artistic ; it is often very deadly, but it is certainly not infallible. But then, neither is wet fly fishing. There is no method of angling which carries with it any degree of certainty. If there was, fishing would lose its charm.

The dry fly is considered to be the highest form of the angler's art. It calls for equal skill, I think, to that required for wet fly fishing, and it certainly demands a greater knowledge of the fish, their habits, and the flies on which they feed. For in most cases the lure is intended to represent the natural insect—a definite type such as an Olive, a Blue Dun, or a March Brown—and is cast on the water so that it floats down in the approved manner, appearing to the trout below to be one of those dainty creatures on which he is so fond of feeding. As it is natural, under suitable conditions, for the trout to rise to the surface fly, it is only just plain common sense that the angler's lure, under these same circumstances, should be put in the position where the trout are expecting to find it. Thus there are times when the dry fly *is* the only lure, and these times the angler must learn to distinguish.

The tendency nowadays is to use shortish rods of extremely light build—a very sound idea, providing that it is not carried to extremes. The angler who visits the larger waters, the lakes and big rivers, should use a rod of about 10 feet in length and of moderate strength. The ultra-light 8- and 9-foot rods are not really suitable for big

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waters ; they are intended for fishing the smaller streams, especially if the water is well bushed. I have a favourite little 6-foot split-cane fly rod which is invaluable for brook fishing where short casts between bushes are the order of the day ; but I would not fancy it for fishing, say, the river Severn or a Scottish loch.

The reel must be proportionate to the rod. The type with the narrow contracted drum is a great favourite because it enables the angler to recover line quickly.

A double-taper medium weight dressed-silk line of 30 yards long is also required. This is spliced to an equal length of backing so that the total length is about 60 yards. The line should nearly fill the drum of the reel.

Tapered gut casts must be slightly shorter than the length of the rod. They are obtainable in several lengths, but the most used are 2-yard, 2½-yard, and 3-yard, with the gut tapering down to 3x. In addition, the angler will find a dozen spare 3x "points" very useful, to make good the gradual shortening which takes place each time a fly is attached.

And now for the vexed question of flies. Nearly every angler, when he first takes up fly fishing, buys his flies very unwisely. He buys far too many. Bewildered by the almost limitless variety, he purchases half-dozens of this pattern and that, and soon his fly box is overcrowded with a useless

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menagerie of weird and wonderful creatures which, pretty though they look, are quite hopeless for fishing. These are the sort of flies which catch anglers, not trout.

Dry flies differ from wet flies in that they are built of stiffer materials which will enable them to keep afloat. But all flies, wet or dry, can be subdivided into two more classes—the naturals and the fancies. The former group are more or less faithful imitations of certain recognized species of flies which are found at the waterside. The latter, on the other hand, are weird combinations of gaily coloured fur and feather which do not represent any living insect. These are the flies to avoid. Goodness only knows that the trout is suspicious enough, even of a natural-looking fly. These strange creatures will merely increase his alarm.

Against this it must be said that the fancy patterns *occasionally* have their uses. They are useful mainly in lakes for wet fly fishing, and under these circumstances a colourful lure is quite effective. There are certain fancy flies which closely resemble naturals; the Greenwell's Glory, for instance, is suggestive of a Dark Olive. Such flies are excusable, for it is only in name that they depart from the natural insect.

It is difficult to suggest a range of flies to suit all anglers and all waters, but the following list will be found useful in practically every river and stream in the British Isles. I have grouped them according to the month in which they are most

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effective, though this arrangement is somewhat flexible. Many a March Brown has caught trout in September.

### *Flies*

*March.*—March Brown, Iron Blue Dun, Olive Dun, Greenwell's Glory.

*April.*—March Brown, Iron Blue Dun, Olive Dun, Greenwell's Glory, Red Spinner.

*May.*—Alder, Olive Dun, Greenwell's Glory, Red Spinner, Black Gnat, Black Spider, Mayfly (last few days).

*June.*—Alder, Olive, Red Spinner, Black Spider, Black Gnat, Mayfly (first few days).

*July.*—Alder, Red Spinner, Black Spider, Dark Brown Sedge (evenings), Olive, Black Gnat.

*August.*—Alder, Red Spinner, Black Spider, Blue Upright, Olive Quill, Dark Brown Sedge (evenings), Coachman (evenings).

*September.*—Olive Quill, Blue Upright, Black Spider, Red Spinner, Black Gnat, Greenwell's Glory, Blue Dun.

This comprises a slender stock of flies which no angler should be without. They are the stand-bys—always useful. Additions to the above selection should only be made after a careful study of local conditions.

The other accessories for dry fly fishing are line dressing, fly oil, scissors, cast damper, and landing net.

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Before setting out for the waterside a couple of casts should be placed in the damper. Soaking takes the springiness out of gut and enables it to be cast out straight and true. The line must be greased lightly with the dressing—Mucilin is quite good—so that it will keep afloat. If during the course of a day's fishing the line starts to sink, it must be dried and re-dressed.

The fly also is oiled, to help to keep it afloat. A drop of liquid Mucilin is dabbed on to the hackle, then the fly is squeezed in the handkerchief to remove the surplus. If too much Mucilin is used it will leave an oily patch on the surface of the water, and this will certainly scare the fish.

It is no simple matter to give written instructions for casting a fly. A few minutes of practical instruction are of more value than whole volumes of print. However, here goes !

We will assume that the line has been threaded through the rings and a well-soaked cast attached. The correct knot for this job is shown in Fig. 1. Next the fly is fixed to the other end of the cast. This knot is also shown in Fig. 1.

We are all ready.

Pull the line through the rings so that a yard or so hangs down from rod top to fly, while the rod is held at an angle of about 60 degrees. The style of grip is seen in Fig. 6a.

The right elbow must be kept close to the body. With the left hand pull a few yards of line off the

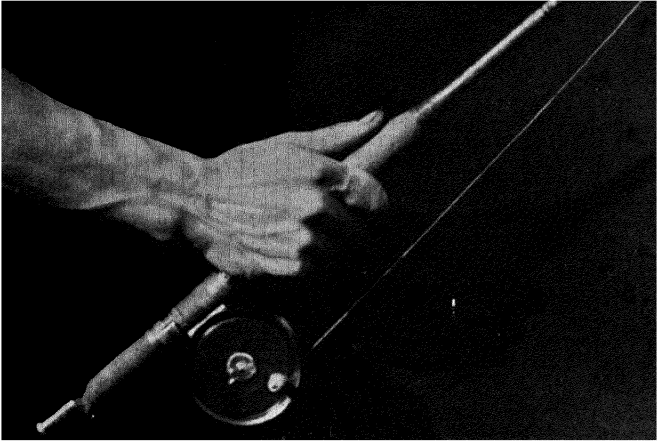


FIG. 6 (a).—Rod grip for fly fishing.



FIG. 6 (b).—Rod grip for threadline outfit.



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reel and hold these in open coils between the fingers.

With a decisive movement of the forearm and wrist switch the rod backwards to a position about 10 degrees past the vertical. A slight pause. This backward stroke will flick the line into the air and cause it to extend itself behind the angler. That is what the pause is for. The forward cast must not be made until the line is fully extended behind. When this happens the rod is brought smartly but smoothly forward to its former 60-degree position, and the line will then extend itself forwards. When it is fully out, and the back cast is about to be made again, a coil or two of line should be allowed to slip from the fingers of the left hand. This will increase the length of line in the air. Repeat the process. Another forward cast; a bit more line released; another back cast; until the length of line in the air is sufficient to reach the mark at which we are aiming. If there is insufficient line in the left hand, more should be drawn from the reel.

These are called "false" casts. They are necessary in order to get the required length of line into play. It is obviously impossible to extend 15 or 20 yards in a single cast, so we must work up from a short manageable length and gradually increase. After each completed forward stroke we can add a little extra distance.

After a few false casts we see that our fly, when fully extended forwards, is about over the spot we wish to cover, so we prepare to drop the fly on the

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water. First take about a yard of spare line into the left hand, then make just one more backward cast. Then forward again to 60 degrees. As the line flies out the rod is gently lowered to about 35 degrees. At the psychological moment, when the extending line begins to pull (it is easier to sense than to describe), the last yard of line is let go from the left hand. It shoots through the rings and stops any backsnatch on the fly, which alights in fairylike fashion on the water.

That is, if you've done it right !

You cannot expect to do it the first time. It takes a long while to perfect one's casting. To watch an expert at the waterside, and to obtain, if possible, his advice, is the best way to learn. There are one or two mistakes, however, that almost every beginner makes, and it is just as well to beware of these.

First, it must be remembered that the back cast is almost as long as the forward cast, so it is imperative that the ground behind the caster should be as clear of obstructions as that in front.

Secondly, there is the question of the amount of force required. Beginners usually employ too much energy. This is not only tiring, but makes for bad casting too. The catapult action of the rod does the work. Only a gentle motion from the angler's elbow is required to send the line into the air.

Finally, the timing must receive attention. This is the most important point of all. The pauses between the back and forward casts are vitally

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necessary. Having made the back cast, it is a good idea to turn the head and watch the line, while the rod is held rigidly in the just-past-vertical position. It will be seen that the line forms a loop which gradually rolls itself out until the fly is fully extended. This, and not before, is the moment to make the forward cast. Anglers learning fly casting for the first time suffer from the illusion that an incessant and rapid movement of the rod is necessary in order to keep the line in the air. This is quite wrong. Try casting as slowly as you can, and you will be surprised how it adds to your style.

The dry fly is almost invariably cast upstream. More than that, it is usual for the angler to work upstream also. So before starting we must go to the lowest extremity of the water we intend to fish, and work our way up towards its source. We have seen the necessity of this procedure in a previous chapter; the fish will be facing the current: we are thus always approaching them from behind.

The first problem of the day is the choice of a suitable fly. First take a look at the water. Are there any rising fish? If so, what are they taking? Perhaps you cannot be sure of the exact species of fly, but you can see that it is black, or brown, or blue. Look in your fly box. If there is a pattern which resembles those on the water, both from the points of view of size and colour, this is the fly to use. Rising trout are queer creatures. They will decide on a particular type of fly, and will take that

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and no other so long as there are any left to rise for. If you are to catch them you must present them with the fly which is their fancy of the moment.

If there are no rising fish, or if it is impossible to detect the fly which they are taking, the angler must bring his knowledge of watercraft to bear. What is the most appropriate fly at this time of the season? Which fly is most suitable for the prevailing conditions of water and light?

Already we have seen which flies are most effective during the various months of the season. Several patterns are suggested for each month. If the day is bright and the light strong we must choose a small dark fly; something which will not scare the fish; a small Alder, Greenwell, or Black Spider. The latter is particularly useful on those hot summer days when the water is low and clear and the trout are abnormally shy. When the light is not so good, a fly of gayer hue may be more easily visible—a Red Spinner, a March Brown with a red body, or a dainty Olive Quill. Larger patterns can be used on the dull days too.

A plan adopted by many anglers, and one which is often most successful in determining the “ taking ” fly, is to examine the stomach contents of the first fish caught, providing, of course, that he is of a size which entitles you to retain him.

If the stomach is removed and the contents gently squeezed out (it is not nearly so gruesome a business as it sounds), it is often possible to detect the species of fly on which the trout has been

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feeding, and this can be copied from the fly box. If the stomach contents are placed in water they will separate, and the individual items will become more easily distinguishable. These post-mortems often prove very interesting.

There are some dry fly anglers who only fish the rise. They will drop their fly only in those places where they have detected feeding fish. Undoubtedly this is the easiest method of fishing; the whereabouts of the trout is definitely established by the rings which he leaves on the water; what is more, there is the added certainty that he is in a feeding mood, which is half the battle. Often enough, too, the nature of his food can be clearly seen, and can be imitated from the contents of the fly box.

So, wherever possible, the angler should cast to a rising trout. The chances of catching him are twenty times greater than those of taking a fish which lies sulking on the bottom. The fly should be cast a foot or so upstream of him, so that it drifts down naturally to where he lies. When it has floated down well below him the line can be picked off the water and cast again. Sometimes the fish may take the fly at the first offer; sometimes a dozen casts will not tempt him. So long as you know he is still there, there is a hope of rising him. A change of fly, a different pattern, a larger or smaller dressing, may cause him to yield to its charms. If you have scared him you must let him

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rest for awhile, but note the spot and return to him later.

If there are no rising fish things are not so easy, and we must consider the possibility of fishing “ wet ” if we fail in our efforts to lure them to the surface. Casting here, there, and everywhere in likely places is known as “ fishing the stream,” as distinct from “ fishing the rise.” Every promising spot is worth a trial even if there is no sign of a fish.

It is of vital importance that the fly should fall lightly, just above the spot where the fish is supposed to be. Furthermore, it must float downstream without let or hindrance. Any suspicion of drag must be most carefully avoided. As the current returns the fly to the angler, he must pull in the slack line through the rings with his left hand. Never at any time must there be any unnecessary line between the fisherman and his fly. In fly fishing the strike is a lightning affair—not hard—a mere tightening of the line by a backward movement of the rod top. But it must be done quickly, for it does not take the trout long to realize that the thing which he has just taken into his mouth is not a natural fly at all. And he will reject it instantly. A fish may release a juicy worm reluctantly, even though it contains a hook ; but anything so foreign and unsatisfying as an artificial fly is rejected immediately, and without any regrets.

Do not strike too hard. If you do you will either break your cast or tear your hook out of the fish's mouth. In any case hard striking is a sign

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of a bad fisherman. Most of us are painfully aware how easy it is to drive a hook into our fingers, and no greater force is necessary in driving it home in the trout's mouth. Just tighten the line—that's all.

Success with the dry fly depends largely on the angler's capacity for overcoming those little difficulties which arise on each fishing day.

Take drag, for instance. A good fish is located, we will suppose, in a quiet spot close under the opposite bank. But between the angler and the trout, running down the centre of the stream, is a fairly rapid current. If we cast a fly to the fish the intermediate line will be seized by the current and carried downstream. In a few seconds it will tighten on the fly and cause it to skate across the water, leaving a great rippling wake behind it.

So if we thoughtlessly make that cast before noticing the current we shall only succeed in scaring the fish, and having scared him, the next cast, even if it allows for the drag, is hardly likely to be successful.

Drag can be overcome by casting a crooked line. If a certain amount of slack is cast upon the water the current will have something to go on with. By the time it has carried all the loose line downstream the fly will have floated sedately over the fish. And if drag occurs ultimately, when the fly has passed downstream of the trout, it is not likely to have any evil effect.

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A crooked line is thrown by provoking “backlash” of the rod. Unintentional or unnecessary backlash is a sign of bad casting, and will often be noticed in a beginner. But when the angler has mastered the secret of throwing a nice straight line, it is not so easy to make a crooked cast.

The first move is to get plenty of line in play when making the false casts. The amount should exceed by several yards the distance between angler and fish. As the forward cast is made the rod is *stopped short* at the 60-degree position. This will cause the tip to flick back, and will pull on the extended line so that it falls on the surface in a sinuous coil. In the quiet water near the opposite bank the fly is floating down towards the fish in a very natural manner; meanwhile the current is gradually pulling out the slack line into a great hoop downstream.

It is all a question of distance, time, and speed. If the fly has been cast too far upstream of the fish, or if insufficient loose line has been cast on the water, the current will cause drag before the fish is covered. So casting a crooked line calls for a careful estimate of the relative speeds of the two different parts of the stream.

If the angler can see that there is a danger of drag taking place before the fly floats over the fish, there are two courses open to him. The best procedure, where possible, is to move quickly a yard or so downstream, extending the arm and rod as far as possible in a downstream direction. This

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will ease the tension on the line and will give the fly a few more seconds grace.

Failing this, the only alternative is to retrieve the fly before it starts to drag, even if it is almost over the fish. A fly lifted neatly off the water is far less alarming than one which drags.

Another problem which often occurs is that of casting to a fish which is lying in a difficult position. Funnily enough, the best fish seem to lie in those places which are most awkward to cast to. They probably delight in watching the angler's vain efforts to reach them.

We have all seen the ungracious trout who chooses for his home a shady spot right underneath a line of alder bushes on the opposite bank—alders whose treacherous twigs hang down to within a foot of the water, waiting to entangle our fly. With derisive regularity such a fish will rise to the natural duns which float past, fully conscious, apparently, of the security of his position. The overhead cast is useless under the circumstances, because it would inevitably flick the fly into the bushes. On such occasions the side cast is the most useful. The rod is held horizontally at hip height, but is otherwise worked in exactly the same way as for overhead casting. The low position will enable the angler to drop his fly right under the bushes. When first practising the side cast difficulty may be experienced in placing the fly to a nicety, but the trick is quickly mastered.

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It is worth noting that in all fly casting the ultimate position of the line is approximately at right-angles to the position of the rod when the force of the forward cast ceases. So if the angler is side casting and wishes to reach a spot directly opposite him and at right-angles to the bank, he would cease the forward *stroke* at a point parallel with the water's edge. Then, when the line was extending, the forward movement could be gently continued so that the fly falls lightly. This “ right angle ” rule is extremely useful to bear in mind, for it enables the angler to check up on his casting faults. It is possible to decide, with mathematical exactitude, just where the rod's movement should cease if the fly is to land in a certain position.

Sometimes a fish will choose a spot which is impossible to cover from below. The only course is to move upstream and cast down to him. In the first place this calls for extreme caution in approach, because the angler is then directly in the trout's line of vision. Secondly, it calls for a peculiar type of cast. The side cast is best, as it does not raise the rod top on high where it may be seen by the fish. But here again drag must be considered. For as soon as our fly has floated downstream to the full extent of the line its resistance to the current will cause a considerable “ wake.” So once again we must throw a crooked line, allowing sufficient length to cover the fish. As soon as the slack is fully paid out the fly should be lifted from the water.

Unfortunately fishing days are for most of us

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strictly limited occasions—week-ends, holidays, etc.—and the available waters are somewhat restricted too. We cannot pick our days, when the weather is favourable and the trout hungry; nor have we the choice of unlimited waters in which to fish. On those occasions when we manage to get a little fishing the trout may be disinclined to oblige and the weather may seem hopeless, so we are faced with the problem of catching trout in an (apparently) fishless stream.

If we are to enjoy any measure of success we must fish the available water systematically. It is no good dodging from pillar to post. Rising fish are a great inducement to leave one spot in favour of another, but the intervening water will be spoilt unless the angler exercises great care in changing his position. Suppose, for instance, that we start fishing at the lower end of our water with the intention of working our way upstream; but fifty yards ahead we see a rising fish. Shall we skip the intervening water and go all out for him? A rising fish is worth a dozen non-risers, and the desire to cast to him is very great. Unless we cover him immediately he may go off the feed. Against that, however, is the possibility of spoiling that fifty yards of stream which lies between, and this is an important consideration when there is only a short stretch of fishing available.

The correct procedure will depend on the geography of the waterside. Obviously it would be ruinous to wade up to the fish in question, and it

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would be almost equally bad to walk to him along the bank. So, as a rising fish cannot be ignored, the only way to approach him is by making a wide detour—coming back to the bank just below the spot where he has been seen. And having cast to him, and possibly caught him, we can then detour back

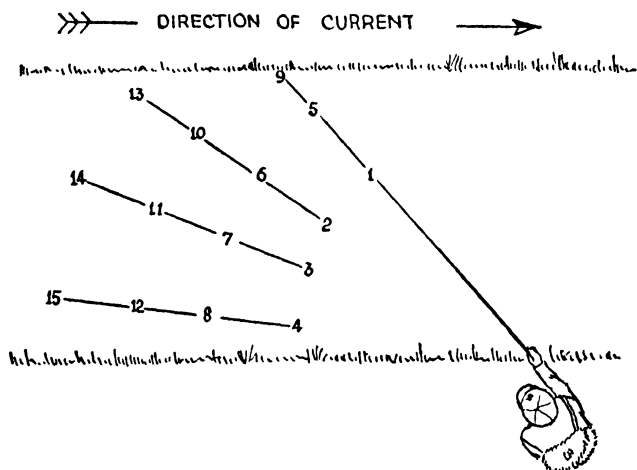


FIG. 7.—Covering the water.

again and resume our fishy progress at the point where we left off.

Small waters must be thoroughly covered, but unobtrusively. Wading should only be practised where absolutely necessary. If there are no rises to betray the presence of fish one must assume that they are everywhere, and must deal with each patch of water with infinite care. This is where systematic

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casting comes in. From each stance a big area of water can be covered. The first casts should be made with a short line so that the angler is not casting beyond some near-lying fish. An excellent method is shown in Fig. 7, each cast being numbered according to the order in which it is made. Number one is a short cast upstream and across at an angle of 45 degrees. Number two is on exactly the same length of line but is a foot or two more towards the angler's bank, and is consequently more directly upstream. The next one is a foot or so farther to the left. And so on. Thus the angler is covering all the water upstream within the radius of his short length of line. When this is completed the radius is increased by another yard or so, and the same procedure begins again. This progressive plan is equally effective for dry fly, wet fly, or spinning.

### *Wet Fly Fishing*

There are many waters where the wet fly is more effective than the dry. Also there are days, even on the so-called dry fly rivers, when a wet fly is more productive. It is a question of circumstances. The wet fly is usually favoured on fast-flowing rivers and broken streams; and, going to the other extreme, on the absolutely still water of lakes and reservoirs. Local information is certainly the most reliable when choosing between wet or dry, and the advice of a man who knows the water should be sought. At

the same time one should bear in mind that no fish in any water abide absolutely to any set feeding plan. There is always a possibility of their departing from their normal habit, and on such occasions they will only be caught by adapting one's methods to their whim of the moment.

For many, many years it was almost sacrilege to mention the wet fly in connection with the trout of the famous river Test. Many books were written, by some of the most eminent angling authors, all of which sought to prove that the dry fly was the *only* fly for that river. It became almost a religion. But the creed was badly upset by the observations of Mr. G. E. M. Skues. In his very original books he ably proved that the sunk fly can hold its own with the floater. So well was his case made out that the faith of the most ardent dry fly men was severely shaken. Which all goes to prove that there is no “one and only” method. If the wet fly had not justified its existence it would have died out years ago.

There is little additional tackle required for wet fly fishing. In fact the only difference lies in the flies. Some anglers use different rods according to whether they are fishing dry or wet, but almost any fly rod will do for either.

Most of the flies already mentioned are obtainable dressed wet as well as dry, and these patterns will serve as an adequate opening stock. But if the angler intends doing any lake fishing he will

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need to make a few additions, most of which are of the "fancy" type. This departure from nature is more excusable in wet flies than in dry, for the practice of wet fly fishing is in itself unnatural. No mature fly is in the habit of swimming about below the surface as our lures are made to do, and we are therefore forced to conclude that the fish mistake them for nymphs or other water insects, or perhaps small fry. However this may be, there is no doubt that a fancy fly will occasionally work wonders in a lake. Some of the best patterns include Butcher, Invicta, Peter Ross, Zulu, and Hare's Ear. In addition, there are several *series* of flies tied in a variety of hackle and body colours but with a basis of woodcock, partridge, snipe, mallard, grouse, or teal, *e.g.* mallard and claret, snipe and purple, teal and red. The Palmers, too, are celebrated wet flies which are also tied in many different shades.

None of these patterns can be said to be appropriate to any particular month, as in the case of natural flies. The most suitable size and colour can be decided after noting the state of the weather and water. In any case the wet fly angler has two or three chances to the dry fly man's one, for it is quite common practice to use a cast carrying two or three flies of different sizes and types. Size is often more important than colour. One fly is fastened to the end of the cast and is called the "tail." The next fly is called the "dropper." It is attached to a separate strand of gut which is

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fastened to the main cast by means of the knot shown in Fig. 1.

The top fly is referred to as the “bob,” which is secured to the cast in the same way as the dropper. The distance between the flies is roughly one-quarter of the total length of the cast.

Wet flies are intended to be fished below the surface, and are made from soft materials which, because they hold more water, will enable the fly to sink. They should not therefore be oiled. In fact it is better to wet them well before starting to fish. Some anglers wet their flies by placing them in their mouths—but this is asking for it. It is no easy matter to remove a hook which has become embedded in the flesh beyond the barb. One day I had the unpleasant job of removing a large treble hook from the lobe of a fellow angler’s ear. It was well embedded, and I almost removed the ear itself in the process. At least the poor victim said that it felt like that.

That is why teams of more than three flies on a cast should be avoided. Big teams, as used on some of the Scottish lochs, are almost certain to get caught up sooner or later. And whether they attach themselves to a part of the angler’s anatomy or to some near-by tree the result is almost equally annoying.

Wet fly fishermen have the choice of fishing upstream or down. The downstream method is easier of control, but upstream is more deadly.

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Mr. W. C. Stewart, one of the most famous Scottish anglers who ever lived, championed the upstream method in his book *The Practical Angler*. Previously it had been almost the universal practice to fish downstream, but Stewart, an original thinker and a very clever fisherman, proved by his wonderful results that the upstream method was superior. It is obvious, when one reads his book, that his amazing catches depended mainly on the precautions which he took to prevent the trout from seeing him. In fact a gentleman once described a day's fishing with Stewart as "twenty-four hours of creepin' and crawlin'."

Nevertheless here was a man who produced bigger baskets of fish than any angler of his time, though the only tangible difference in his method was that he fished upstream instead of down, and took infinite pains to avoid being seen by his quarry. Surely there is a lesson in this somewhere.

Casting the wet fly is in no way different to casting the dry. Upstream fishing is practicable in any but the fastest of water. The most difficult part of the business, and one which beginners will find extremely tiring, is keeping proper control of the line. This is vital for two reasons—firstly, for detecting a rise; and secondly, for being able to make an effective strike. The wet fly is fished by touch, whereas the dry fly is fished by sight. The latter sense enters to some extent into wet fly fishing because often a taking trout can be detected

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by a sudden twitch or stoppage of the line. Sometimes this is so gentle that it can be more easily seen than felt. Sometimes, too, a flash of gold, “ the little brown wink under water,” will be seen when the fish turns in taking. An excellent plan is to grease the line so that it floats. In most cases the gut cast is plenty long enough to allow the fly to sink to the desired depth. With a floating line a sudden stoppage or downward jerk is easily detected, and should be answered with a prompt strike.

After having been cast upstream, the fly will return to the angler at a pace which varies with the speed of the current. As the wet fly can only seldom be seen, its position must be estimated by the amount of line which floats on the surface. The left arm has almost as much work to do as the right, particularly in a fast river, for the line must be kept reasonably tight. While the fly drifts down the left hand is kept busy drawing all slack line through the rings and coiling it loosely between the fingers. And gradually the rod top is raised, so that when the cast is worked out a sharp flick upwards will suffice to make the back cast prior to putting the fly out again, and the coils in the left hand can then be released.

In extremely fast water this procedure becomes very exhausting, because the fly is returned with such lightning rapidity that it is almost impossible to keep it under proper control. Moreover, it is necessary to re-cast every few seconds. Under the circumstances the best plan, except for the angler of

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unbounded energy, is to cast downstream, or across and down.

The latter method is often favoured because of the splendid opportunity it offers for controlling the line and letting the current do most of the work.

The cast is made across the water, or even very slightly upstream. For a short distance the fly will drift more or less in the same direction as the current; but eventually, when the line begins to tighten as it goes downstream, it will be pulled across and will finish at a point directly below of the angler. Here, the reader will think, is our old enemy—drag. It certainly is drag, but this time it comes as a friend rather than an enemy. In wet fly fishing it can almost be regarded as favourable, because it gives the fly a lifelike movement without disturbing the water. While the fly is drifting with the current it is like a helpless dead thing; but when it cuts across it gives the impression of some small creature swimming strongly against the stream. It is a deadly moment, and the angler should key himself up to respond to the slightest pluck at his rod top.

Another likely time is when the fly eventually comes to rest downstream of the angler. Automatically, when the line is fully extended, the current will cause the fly to rise slightly in the water. Probably the trout think that this is a nymph about to rise to the surface and burst its shell. It is always worth while to leave the fly in this position for a few seconds.

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In some waters it is advisable to impart a little movement to the wet fly. This practice, called “sink and draw,” will often tempt unwilling fish; but it must be used with discretion, for there are times when the trout would be scared by it. The fly is allowed to sink (a heavy fly is best for the job) and the rod top is then raised, meanwhile, of course, the angler retrieves line with his left hand. This raising and lowering movement is repeated every few seconds, but the line must not be allowed to go slack when the rod is lowered. Thus the fly is not only travelling *through* the water, but *up* and *down* in it as well. The irresistible attraction of a moving object is well known, and a fly thus worked is visible from many angles. Fly fishing in thick muddy water is next to impossible; but in the intermediate stage, when the stream is just that little bit too coloured, this method will often get a rise whereas a lifeless fly would pass unseen.

The conditions which most anglers seem to favour are those when the sky is blue but broken with intermittent cloud; when the air is warm but not hot; when the breeze is fresh but not strong; and when the water is of very moderate colour. In other words, an average fine day.

It is only seldom that the weather conforms to such exact rules, at least when we are out fishing, and even then one is not certain of catching fish. No more certain, in fact, than on the most unpropitious day. An upstream breeze is favour-

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able because it helps when casting ; a moderate temperature is preferred because fish do not rise well in extreme heat or cold ; a slight colour in the water helps the angler to keep out of sight.

An impending thunderstorm is reputed to be one of the worst conditions for fishing, yet most of us can remember having had quite good sport under such circumstances. And we can all remember the other days so perfect that we approached the water absolutely bubbling over with optimism and delighted anticipation—and returned fishless.

Never lose enthusiasm for a day's fishing just because the weather seems unkind, providing, of course, that you can fish in reasonable comfort. The state of the water is often a much more important factor than the climatic influences. No man is foolish enough to try to catch trout on a dry fly in thick muddy water ; yet there is always a chance of a fish, even in the most extreme *weather* conditions, providing the water is right. Extremes in the state of the water are much more serious than extremes of weather. Obviously, taking an average over several seasons, more trout will be taken on those days which conform most closely to the ideal, but this does not mean that the other days are useless. Surprisingly good results often await the angler who sallies forth on those occasions when there is little promise of sport.

There is one condition with which every angler should make himself acquainted, and that is the

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difference between a *bulging* and a *rising* fish. Bulging fish are a snare and a delusion to those who cannot recognize them as such. They persuade unwary anglers that they are taking surface food, while actually they are feeding at midwater. Consequently the uninitiated, thinking that they are fishing according to plan, use the dry fly where only the wet would be successful.

A bulge has all the appearances of a true rise. There is a swirl, followed by an ever-widening circle of ripples. Here, thinks the angler, is a rising fish ; but though he casts, and casts, and casts, he cannot induce the trout to take his floating lure.

Why ? Probably because the fish does not even see it. They are really feeding under water. Nymphs are rising from the river bed and are endeavouring to reach the surface so that they can shed their nymphal skin and become a fly. But the watchful trout, always on the look-out for a tasty mouthful, are ready to prevent the fulfilment of the nymphal wish. As they twist and turn to take their prey they cause a series of swirls to rise to the surface, and these appear to the unwary angler as genuine surface rises.

Under such circumstances the wet fly or the nymph are the only lures. The trout's vision and his palate are adjusted to the taking of underwater food and, like most beasts of prey, he will pursue his quarry with such concentration and single-mindedness that the possibilities of other food will be completely ignored.

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Wherever bulging is suspected, it can be confirmed by watching the nature of the rise. A true rise is made by the trout breaking the surface with his snout as he takes down the floating fly. In nine cases out of ten the nose can definitely be seen, and often a "plop" can be heard. Bulging is quite silent; you will never hear anything; nor will you see the fish actually break the surface with any part of his body. All you will detect is a strong swirl which rises to the surface like a miniature whirlpool and which causes a series of ripples just like the natural rise.

This state of affairs is much disliked by some anglers, though it is hard to say why; for it is the next best thing to a true rise. Both bulging and rising indicate that the trout are on the feed; and for those fishermen who can distinguish between the two it is an easy matter to decide on the most suitable type of fly.

On many streams the artificial nymph is used to fish for bulging trout. It is dressed very much like a fly but without wings and with very little hackle. The anatomical features of the true nymph—the head, thorax, abdomen, legs, and setæ—can be clearly distinguished in the artificial counterpart. As it is very desirable that the nymph should have quick sinking powers, they are made with slightly weighted bodies. Only those which represent natural nymphs should be used—Olives, Blues, March Browns, etc.

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They are cast like a wet fly, and are fished as such. Though many highly specialized nymph fishermen claim that it is an entirely separate art, it is difficult to see how these claims can be justified ; because in almost every particular except the actual dressing of the lure the two methods are almost identical. There is no denying, however, that for bulging trout the artificial nymph is a superior lure to the wet fly, because it more nearly represents the insect on which they are feeding.

### *Spinning for Trout*

Since the advent of the threadline reel, spinning has gained enormous popularity ; and small wonder, for it is a really fascinating art.

There are certain waters where the fly is almost useless. Take, for instance, the weir pools of the Lower Thames, where trout of 7 and 8 pounds are quite common. These dour fellows are not in the least interested in flies : they want a more substantial mouthful. There are a few such trout in almost every river and lake. Some of them are confirmed cannibals. Nearly all fish are cannibals to a certain degree, but trout are not so described until they renounce surface food and live almost entirely on a fish diet. In the advanced stages they are very ugly fish, with big heads and gaping mouths, and long lank bodies.

Spinning is not only confined to cannibal fish, however : nearly all trout are susceptible to a

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well-fished minnow. The first point to decide is when and where it can be practised, not only from the point of view of filling the basket, but also with the idea of keeping within the unwritten laws of the game. An angler who spins for trout in water where others are fishing the fly will be very unpopular. The spinner should be reserved for waters where the trout are poor risers. If it is used on fly fishing water it should be limited to those occasions when the fish refuse to take surface food. On the other hand, if the angler is fortunate in being able to fish a water where other anglers are seldom seen he can spin with impunity, knowing that he is disturbing nobody.

There are many small waters in England which flow sedately through pasture land. Their banks are much too bushed for fly casting, and they are mainly fished by the "locals" with worm. A few years ago I fished just such a brook in Warwickshire. There was never a rise to be seen except at Mayfly time, yet that little water contained a few fish up to 4 pounds. A worm was considered the only bait. The water seemed too full of sunken timber and other snags to be suitable for spinning. There was one angler, however, who decided to take a chance, and the results were really surprising. For, though there were many blank days when worm fishing, there was never a blank with the spinner. Lovely trout, too, they were. A brace or brace and a half of pounders is a good return for a day's fishing in a tiny brook.

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A special trout-spinning rod is absolutely necessary, for there is no other that will do the job. It is between 5 and 7 feet long, light as a feather, but with good lively action. All the rings must be large and lined with agate or porcelain to avoid friction with the line.

The reel is of the fixed-spool type for threadline fishing. There are dozens of different makes on the market to-day, but the original, the Illingworth, has never been beaten. It should be filled almost to the edge of the spool with a line of gut substitute not exceeding 3-pound breaking strain. This can be bought in a 40-yard coil, and should have an equal length of fine silk backing. Silk lines are sold for use with fixed-spool reels, but they do not cast so well as gut.

A stock of artificial lures will also be required. They consist mainly of Devon minnows, spoons, small plug baits, celluloid lures, and a host of nondescripts which do not belong to any particular class. None of them should exceed  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length. The best size is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch.

For spinning with the natural minnow the “ Aerial ” tackle is probably the best. It consists of a small mouth lead, three treble hooks mounted on gut, and a short gut cast fitted with swivels. The minnows themselves can be bought preserved in a special fluid. The small sizes are best for trout. Wherever possible, however, the angler should use freshly killed minnows. They can be carried alive in a glass jar fitted with a screw stopper, which

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should not be more than half filled with water. When a minnow is required he is removed from the water, tapped on the head, and mounted on the tackle. Freshly killed minnows are at least twice as



FIG. 8.—Aerial tackle.

deadly as the preserved variety, especially when the water is low and clear.

The natural baits, either fresh or preserved, are almost invariably necessary in clear water conditions. At such times the fish are extremely shy and will not touch a suspicious-looking lure. Moreover, visibility is much improved in clear water, and

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the artificial is easily recognized as such. But when the river is coloured, and the visibility poor, a brilliant Devon minnow or spoon will catch the eye of the trout, while the natural would probably pass unnoticed. It is no easy matter to strike the happy medium so far as the visibility of the lure is concerned. Yet it is quite an important factor. A lure must obviously be of sufficient brilliance to attract the fish which it is intended to catch, but it must not be so brilliant that his interest is turned into suspicion. It is best, I think, to err on the side of less visibility, for by so doing one is not scaring the fish. Even though none are caught their suspicions are not aroused. A bait which proclaims itself too loudly will put the trout instantly on guard, and the result is the same—no fish.

When natural minnows are used they should be mounted on the “aerial” tackle with extreme care, for they are fragile creatures and will quickly fall to pieces unless gently handled. The head of the previously killed minnow should be held between the forefinger and thumb of the left hand. A gentle squeeze, and the jaws will open very slightly. The lead is then inserted to its fullest extent, and one hook of each treble is firmly driven into the body (see Fig. 8). The minnow should be bent slightly before inserting the hook. This will give it “wobble” which is often attractive to the trout.

Many types of spinning tackles are fitted with a celluloid propeller at the head. With these a wobble

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is unnecessary, they are intended to give a straight spin. On most tackles of this type it is necessary to fix a small anti-kink lead a foot or two from the lure; otherwise the line will be twisted and will eventually kink.

Casting with a threadline outfit is such a simple business that there is no need to describe it in detail. The lure hangs down a couple of feet from the rod top. The line is freed from the flier (never forget to do this) and is trapped in the crook of the forefinger of the right hand, which is gripping the rod as shown in Fig. 6*b*. Notice that the forefinger is the only finger above the reel bracket; the others are below. If the surroundings are clear enough to admit of an overhead cast the rod is tilted slightly backward, then brought smartly forward. At the psychological moment when the maximum pull is exerted the forefinger is straightened out, thus freeing the line and allowing the bait to travel to the spot aimed at. To reduce friction the rod should point straight along the line of flight. When the lure falls on the water the line is trapped again, either by the finger or by an automatic pick-up. After allowing a second or so for the bait to sink, according to the circumstances, the reel is brought into action. If it is a left-hand wind, and it is preferable that it should be, the reeling-in can be commenced without the awkward business of changing the rod from the right hand to the left.

Trout spinning is very different from pike spin-

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ning. Generally speaking the trout prefers a lure fished fast and straight, with a slight swing round, perhaps, as it nears the bank. As in fly fishing, the upstream method is best but should not be adhered to slavishly, for sometimes the trout will take a lure fished downstream even though they have steadfastly refused it when fished up. When fishing upstream in rapid water it is necessary to retrieve the bait at a quicker pace than when fishing down. This is because the current and the lure are travelling in the same direction, and the speed of the current to some extent neutralizes the speed of the bait. Thus a lure cast downstream can, if desired, be fished very slowly. It will still spin rapidly.

It is sometimes possible for a lure to spin too rapidly in a fast current, so that it prevents the hook from being properly driven home. Once, when fishing a Sussex river, I made a short cast into a very rapid stretch which was not more than 18 inches deep, and as clear as gin. I was fishing across the stream, but the current was so strong that in a few seconds my tiny Devon minnow was directly downstream. From my point of vantage on the high bank I could see the subsequent procedure perfectly. When the minnow was almost directly below me a fine sea-trout rushed from under the bank and seized the lure. As soon as I struck he went downstream like a rocket. At the end of his run he leapt three feet in the air, and the line went slack. He was off! So far as I could see I had made no mistake; I had struck him most carefully,

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and had instantly lowered my rod top when he leapt.

Disappointed, I went away, but ten minutes later was back again. That fish fascinated me. Another cast in the same spot and, lo and behold—out he came once more. Incredible though it sounds, the same thing happened all over again.

Late that afternoon I returned to the same place, determined to have one more shot. At the first cast nothing happened. At the second he sped from under the bank, took the minnow in his stride, and went off downstream. He was on for a few seconds longer this time, but eventually, with one of his fine leaps, he got away. And that was the last I saw of him. He must have been feeling in a suicidal state of mind thus to take my Devon three times.

I can only conclude that the minnow was revolving much too fast when being drawn against that very rapid current, and the small single hook (it was not a treble) had no chance of getting a good grip. Had I used a slow-spinning wobble bait, such as a natural minnow, that fish would probably have had no second chance.

The value of spinning lies in its capacity for luring trout from their hiding-places—the deep holes, hollows under banks, etc. It often provides an irresistible attraction to fish which would ignore a fly. When fishing water of moderate flow and more or less uniform depth there is little to indicate the most fishy spots. Under such circumstances it

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is advisable to adopt the plan shown in Fig. 7. First make a series of short casts a few feet apart, then increase the distance until the whole water within reach is covered. Do not try to save time by covering the water with several long casts. If you do, your extended line will probably scare any near-by fish. The nearest water should be explored first, and the distance increased as soon as the angler is satisfied that there are no feeding fish within close range.

In big rivers the fast water generally proves best. The pools below weirs, the loop stream which flows between an island and the river bank, the swirly parts where the water deepens just below the rapids, or the smooth, flat, pebbly shallow at the tail of the pool. All these are haunts for trout in big rivers. Unlike their brethren of the small streams, they do not run to earth at the first sight of man. They will hold their position in the open, confident, apparently, that the size and strength of the river ensures their safety.

In small waters there is a different tale to tell. Though many trout may be seen in the open, providing they have not been alarmed, the type of fish caught by spinning will most probably be found in the pools or under deep banks. The “ neck ” of a pool is an excellent spot ; a boulder or a fallen tree causes the current to converge into a narrow neck, and immediately below it widens out into the pool. The fish are just on the edge of the fast water as it enters the deep. There they lie in wait

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for anything in the way of food which may be brought down by the current. The concentrated flow of water at this point is almost like a conveyer belt; it brings down for the fish's inspection practically everything the river has to offer in the way of food.

When trout do not appear willing to yield to ordinary spinning tactics the angler's ingenuity and resource must be brought into play. Different sizes of lure should be tried, both large and small. Colour sometimes makes a great difference; a silver lure will be mostly appreciated, but occasionally a golden one is best. Variations can be made in the spinning of the lure—faster, slower, deeper, higher, straight, or wobbling.

And finally, do not forget that an occasional downstream cast is well worth trying. Or across and down in fast water. There are those certain days when the fish will not look at a minnow cast upstream, but will take it avidly when it is cast down.

With the threadline outfit the slipping clutch is adjusted so that its strength is slightly less than the strength of the line. Thus the clutch will yield before the line breaks. At least it should do, but it is as well to remember that a sudden snatch at the line may break it before the inertia of the clutch is overcome. So it is best to have the clutch adjusted too lightly rather than too hard.

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This is important when striking or playing a fish. Usually a trout takes a spinning minnow in no uncertain manner. He takes it at a rush, and there is no doubt about it. Sometimes, however, he will pluck at it nervously and the run is rather difficult to detect. In either case the fish should not be given the opportunity of recovering from the shock of feeling the hook. An immediate strike should be registered. If the clutch is set fairly tight the strike should be a light one, but if it is only lightly set the strike should be fairly hard.

When playing the fish the reel is almost fool-proof. If you are recovering line and your quarry suddenly streaks off downstream you need not fear a break, for the clutch will pay out the necessary line, even though you continue to wind in. On the Illingworth reel there is a ratchet which ticks when the fish is taking line. When the ticking ceases you know that the fish has stopped and line should be reeled in immediately. If the trout heads for a snag he can be checked by laying the right forefinger against the rim of the spool, not hard nor suddenly—just gently, so that the slight extra brake will prevent the clutch from paying out so easily. This will impose an added strain on the fish, and will prevent him running far. But always remember to keep this tension within the breaking strain of the line.

## 2. GRAYLING

AFTER the trout, the grayling.

This applies in more senses than one, for the grayling season reaches its best just after the trout season closes. October and early November are the best grayling months, at least so far as fly fishing is concerned ; but September is also good. In autumn and early winter these fish provide sport almost equal to trout fishing.

They spawn in April and are somewhat slow to recover their condition. Though they are fished for in June, July, and August they are hardly worth catching ; they put up a feeble fight and are of poor appearance when landed. Grayling fishing before September is certainly not worth while.

The eggs hatch in approximately fourteen days after oviposition, and the young fish grow fairly rapidly. They reach a takeable size in about two years. At three years old they are adult fish of half to three-quarters of a pound. The largest grayling mentioned in *Where to Fish* is one of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  pounds taken from the river Wylde, a very famous water for these fish. Other good fish have been taken from the Test, Itchen, and Kennet ; and several Midland rivers, the Teme, Lugg, Arrow, and Wye, are famed for their stocks of grayling.

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Any fish of a pound or over can be regarded as good. A 2-pounder is remarkable.

The most essential feature is that the water should be absolutely pure. They are delicate creatures, and will succumb to slight pollution more quickly than other species. Favourite rivers are those of fairly rapid flow, with alternate rapids, glides, and deeps ; the grayling is seldom found in the actual rapids, however, as the trout sometimes is. The best stretches are the smooth streamy glides, the fords, and the pools.

Generally speaking he lies deep, and even when rising to the surface fly he will operate from the river bed. Another feature of the grayling which is worth noting is his preference for midstream ; he is not often found under the banks, and, in fact, seems to make no attempt to hide himself so long as he is not really scared.

Grayling live in small shoals, and though they usually adopt a certain swim for their home they will travel upstream or down in search of food.

One of the most attractive features of this fish is his willingness to take the artificial fly, either wet or dry. This is by far the most interesting way of catching him, even though the bigger fish are caught on bait.

The tackle required is in no way different from that recommended for fly fishing for trout, except that it should be ultra-fine. Many of the natural

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patterns of trout fly are suitable, such as Olives, Iron Blues, Red Spinners, etc., but the grayling often rise more readily to fancy dressings. Perhaps the most popular are Wickham's Fancy, Red Tag, Apple Green, Red Ant, and Orange Tag. My own particular fancy is an Orange Quill dressed very small and on a tiny hook. All grayling flies should be small, for the fish's appetite is very ladylike.

The rise of a grayling is also a ladylike affair. Except in the case of the over-exuberant youngsters, he does not take the fly with any display of acrobatics. Just a quiet rise, with a gentle series of ripples to mark the spot where his nose was pushed carefully above the surface to intercept the floating fly. Only at Mayfly time have I seen them rising with any show of spirit, and then they are not worth catching anyway. A feature noted by Izaak Walton, which has since been quoted by practically every writer on grayling fishing, is his persistence in rising to the fly, even when he has missed it (or it has missed him) several times. He is not easily "put down" by repeated casting, but he quickly takes alarm if he catches sight of the angler.

An old trick which some anglers resort to, and one which is reputed to tempt the fish when they are off the feed, is to nick a gentle on to the hook. I think that this subterfuge is often adopted in the belief that the gentle tempts the fish; whereas actually it is the splash of colour, rather than the gentle itself, by which they are attracted. A tag of

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white, red, or orange wool at the tail of the fly would have the same effect.

Grayling being of a gregarious nature, many rises will often be noticed within a small area, and the angler should think out his plan of campaign very carefully lest he spoil a glorious opportunity. First, upstream fishing if possible and an infinitely careful approach; no wading unless absolutely necessary. Second, cast to the nearest fish first; the "whopper" at the top of the swim can be dealt with later. If we try to get near him we shall have to cast over the rearguard, and the whole shoal will take alarm. Moreover, if a fish is hooked he must be brought downstream as smartly as possible. If he goes up he will start a stampede.

A grayling must be struck gently, for his mouth is soft, and anything approaching force will tear out the hook. Likewise he must be played cautiously for the same reason. When fly fishing for grayling the weakest point in the outfit is not necessarily the fine gut point. The hook's grip of the fish's jaw is often weaker.

Bait fishing for grayling yields bigger fish than the fly, but is far less interesting. The favourite baits are small red worms, gentles, caddis grubs, and grasshoppers. If the fish are well on the bottom and do not show any inclination to rise to the surface, or even to midwater, it is best that the bait should be adjusted to drag along the river bed.

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Both the tackle and the method are much the same as described in the chapter on roach fishing." The outfit should be as fine as the water will allow—small float, little shot, and tiny hook. A bite, no matter how small, should be struck instantly but gently, for a grayling will often mouth the bait in a most undecided fashion, and will let go if the hook is not driven home.

A much more interesting method is swimming the stream with ultra-fine gear. A tiny grayling float is used and is weighted with a very small shot. The hook is adjusted so that it swims at midwater. This is cast into the stream and allowed to travel down at the speed of the current. When it finally swings round to the bank at the end of its journey it is retrieved with a minimum of disturbance and is cast out once more. In a fast-flowing stream this method will keep the angler fully occupied, for when he is not paying out line he will be drawing it in. The bait is never still. But it is good exercise on a bright October day, and will take fish whether they are feeding at the surface or in the depths.



PART IV  
ANGLING IN SALT WATER



## 1. BASS

EVERY keen sea angler will develop, sooner or later, what I call "bass fever."

Even the humble dab or whiting angler is not immune, for some day he will almost surely see a brother fisherman engaged in battle with a grand fish. Here, he will think, is something very different from dabs and whiting ; something which fights and thrills ; which matches cunning with cunning and strength with strength. And when that fish is landed and laid on the beach, with its defiant fins erect and its wet sides glistening in the sun, then will come an irresistible desire to catch one like it. And another bass fisher will be born.

That's just how it happened with me ! In my early teens I was completely happy when I could catch a dozen whiting or small flatfish in an afternoon. I thought that such success denoted enormous piscatorial skill. Never could I understand the patience of those bass fishers who sat there, day after day, and never seemed to catch anything. But one day I saw one caught ; an enormous fish it seemed to me then, though it weighed only 7 pounds. I saw the gallant fight, the mad rushes, the angry shake of the tail ; and when the fish was landed I gloated over its handsome

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head, its symmetrical shape, and its beautiful glistening flanks.

From that moment I became a bass fisher too.

*Habits, Food, and Haunts*

Bass are not found all around our coast. They are inclined to favour the south, possibly because of their preference for warm water. Seldom are they found in any great quantity farther north than the island of Anglesey, off the coast of north Wales. Here, in the famous Menai Straits, some excellent fishing is obtained. Moving southwards we find them plentiful all along the Welsh coast, especially near the mouths of such rivers as the Glaslyn, Mawddach, and Dovey. They are also found in great profusion along the rugged coasts of Devon and Cornwall. A notable place is Dartmouth, which probably has more big bass to its credit than any other fishing centre in Great Britain.

Continuing our journey along the coastline, we find that a good number of fair-sized fish are taken each year from the coasts of Dorset and Hampshire. Any one visiting the latter county should certainly try the vicinity of Bournemouth, which is particularly noted for bass.

Sussex has yielded some fine sport—the best places being Littlehampton (a fine place for big ones), Lancing, Newhaven, Seaford, and Beachy Head. From here their number begins to decrease.

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Around the coast of Kent they get fewer and fewer, until the Thames estuary is reached.

North of the Thames bass fishing is definitely not worth while.

A knowledge of the habits, haunts, and food of bass is absolutely essential to the specialist angler. Nearly all successful fishermen make a keen study of their quarry, and therefore can say with reasonable certainty just where the fish are most likely to be found, what bait they will take, and how it should be presented. Such understanding is very necessary in the case of bass, for he is a cunning fish indeed, and will only succumb to well-planned tactics.

In April or May the "schools" of bass begin to appear around our coast. The winter months have been spent in deeper and warmer waters, but the fish are now moving to their summer home. During the sunny months they live inshore and are never found very far from the beach. The "bass season," as we call it, is that period from April to October when the fish are always within casting distance of the water's edge. They roam about in schools of half a dozen or more, the largest fish acting as the leader. And thus they hunt for their food.

Their appetite is enormous and their food varied, but they are mainly carnivorous in their tastes. Small crabs they are extremely fond of, and will bolt them complete in their shells. Prawns, too, are a much-favoured delicacy, to say nothing of shrimps and worms.

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Any fish which is small enough to be swallowed comes as a welcome addition to the menu. Sand-eels, whiting, small flatfish, and whitebait are all acceptable.

This food question is very important. In the first place it offers several helpful suggestions as to the most suitable bait to use ; but secondly it gives a clue as to the whereabouts of the fish. For the bass, like all wild creatures, is nearly always thinking of his next meal, and can therefore be found where his food supply is most adequate.

Most of his food is found on the bed of the sea. Rocky beaches, where all sorts of small marine creatures abound in the nooks and crevices, are his happy hunting-ground. He is a great forager. He will search every cranny in the hope that it contains a luscious prawn ; he will nose into patches of weed in search of small crabs ; he will browse around the piles of a pier, the stonework of a harbour or break-water, or even around a sewer pipe which runs out to sea.

One of the best places of all is a river estuary. When the rising tide enters the river mouth, and the waters begin to flow inland again, there you will find bass. Sometimes they will journey many miles up river with the flowing tide ; and work their way back, still searching for food, with the ebb. They are always near the water’s edge, moving landwards as the tide rises and presents to them fresh ground for exploration.

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But if a shoal of whitebait or sand-eels passes overhead they will abandon the sea bed and will give chase to the small fishes which swim at higher levels. Then the excitement begins.

Have you ever seen a flock of gulls wheeling and screaming over a small area of water which, if you look closely, seems strangely disturbed? A school of bass has located a shoal of whitebait and has given chase. The little fish have fled to the surface in their efforts to evade the bass. They leap from the water in hundreds in their vain attempts to escape. And the watchful gulls, ever on the look-out, come from miles around to share in the riotous feast. The poor whitebait are trapped between submarine and air attack. The frenzied bass, snapping to right and to left, are below, and the noisy gulls are besetting them from above.

If the angler is fortunate enough to be on the spot when this happens, and has the appropriate tackle for the circumstances, he can have such sport as he will never forget. For at such times the bass are indulging in a mad orgy of feeding; caution is thrown to the winds, and they will eagerly snap at anything which even faintly resembles a small fish.

One of the most exciting times I ever remember was a summer morning a few years ago. It was very early; the sun had just broken through a hazy mist on to a dead calm sea. It promised to be a very hot day.

We were fishing the driftline method; light river rods, a fine silk line with no lead or float, a

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long gut cast, and a small hook baited with prawn. This delicate tackle is allowed to drift away from the boat in a very natural manner ; and, as it gradually sinks, the bait offers a great inducement to any passing fish.

Suddenly, a hundred yards away, the water began to seethe and boil. The calm surface of the sea was lashed into turmoil as if by a miniature hurricane ; and whitebait, hundreds at a time, leaped in the air to escape the hungry mouths below. Every few seconds the heads or tails of big bass broke the surface as they turned in chase of their nimble prey.

It was an opportunity not to be lost. For once in a while there was no need to go in search of bass. They were there in dozens, waiting to be caught. With all speed we reeled in, and exchanged our prawns for silvery soleskin flies. It was fortunate that we were fishing with supple river rods and dressed silk lines, for with these we could cast exactly as in fly fishing. We pulled up our anchor and rowed quietly to the edge of the shoal.

And what a time we had ! For ten hectic minutes, while the rise lasted, we caught fish after fish. Big fellows they were, too, who fought like tigers on our light gear. Then, just as suddenly as it began, the rise ended ; the sea was calm again ; and we sank exhausted—yes, really exhausted after all that excitement—on to the thwarts of our little boat.

That is how the bass spends his summer months, cruising around in shallow water in search of food.

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But sometime during the warm weather he gets the urge to seek his mate. So together they enter a river estuary and, after selecting a suitable spot, the eggs are deposited and fertilized. In a very short time these hatch out into tiny fish which swim about in large shoals, feeding on minute vegetable and animal matter.

Like their elders, though, they are hearty feeders and grow very rapidly. In October, when the weather gets colder, they swim out to sea and spend the winter in deep water, returning to the coast next April. While they are small they are gregarious of habit, swimming about in great shoals; but as they grow bigger the shoals break up into "schools" of six or eight fish. The very largest bass have the reputation of leading solitary lives; but I have personally seen schools of half a dozen fish or so containing two or three over 10 pounds in weight. So it seems that this rule, like so many others in angling, was made to be broken.

Bass grow to a considerable size. A list of notable fish, published in *Where to Fish*, mentions a bass of 22½ pounds caught on a handline at Felixstowe. This is really exceptional. There are several weighty bass mentioned whose authenticity seems to be in some doubt, but there are many recent and well-authenticated fish ranging from 12 to 16 pounds.

Any fish of 3 pounds or over is well worth while. To catch a 7- or 8-pounder is a grand experience. One lucky angler of my acquaintance

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had the good fortune to land an exceptional brace,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  pounds and  $12\frac{3}{4}$  pounds, in a single afternoon. These two fine fish were taken while angling from the beach at Lancing, in Sussex.

Smaller bass, sometimes called “schoolies,” are quite good fun, though it is bad practice to kill them if they are below  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds in weight. If returned unharmed to the water they will perhaps grow into the monsters of future seasons. A certain number of these school bass do not migrate into the deeper water during cold weather. They stay around the stonework of breakwaters and harbours and can sometimes be caught in the middle of winter.

### *The Outfit*

Now about tackle!

There are some people who would have you believe that a vast stock of rods and reels is necessary if you are to catch bass. Some writers seem to think it necessary to have a different rod for almost every day of the season. And yet, when you come to analyse all these varied recommendations you will find that the actual differences are very small, so that two or three well-chosen rods will meet every need in the most satisfactory manner. It would be foolish to suggest that a single rod would serve efficiently for all styles of bass fishing, though there are many anglers who manage tolerably well with only one. I suggest that three are required

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if each method is to be practised comfortably and effectively.

I do not mean that three rods should be bought for bass fishing alone. Fortunately the selection which I suggest will cover practically every form of British sea fishing, and two of them are equally useful for certain styles of river fishing. We will deal with each in turn.

The first might be described as a heavy sea rod. It is strong, but not without a supple action; it will cast leads up to 8 ounces or more without suffering any harm. With proper handling it is capable of dealing with any fish up to the size of a large tope. In length, anything from 8 feet up to 10 feet 6 inches is quite suitable. The most appropriate reel for this rod is a good large centre-pin or multiplier, which should be fitted with a hundred yards of undressed flax line with a breaking strain of about 24 pounds. The only remaining necessities are a supply of plain and running booms, lead links, and swivels; a number of gut or gut substitute casts ranging in length from 1 to 3 yards; a stock of hooks in all sizes from 4 to 3/0; and leads, of course, weighing from three ounces up to half a pound. A big stock of leads is unnecessary however; 4 ounces and 5 ounces are the most popular weights.

The next outfit is much lighter. A supple pike spinning rod, 7 or 8 feet long; a threadline reel or multiplier fitted with a line of 8- or 9-pound breaking strain; a few gut casts of similar strength; hooks

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from 4 to 1/0; and a few leads weighing from half an ounce up to two ounces.

And the third outfit, the lightest of all, consists of a fairly stout river rod or fly rod about 9 feet long; a centre-pin reel fitted with dressed silk line of 6- or 8-pound breaking strain; a stock of fine gut casts 3 yards long; and a few good quality hooks, sizes 1 to 4, mounted on best fine gut. This tackle is meant primarily for driftline fishing, but the addition of a few floats and spiral leads will make it suitable for float fishing also.

Now we will examine the influences which control our choice of tackle.

When preparing for a day's fishing there are certain problems which have to be settled, not the least of which is the selection of the appropriate gear and the most suitable bait. Therein lies the secret of success—to adapt one's style of fishing to the prevailing conditions, and to choose the correct tackle and bait for that particular style.

So always, when planning a fishing trip, start by examining the state of the weather and water; then decide what method and what bait is most appropriate. This gives you a clue as to the tackle required. Perhaps a few examples would illustrate the point more clearly.

### *Light Ledgering*

It is early in May. The weather has not yet reached summer standard, for though the sun shines

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brightly there is a pleasant nip in the air. The sea has a good "popple," as it is called in the south; it is teased up into tiny wavelets by the light sou'west breeze. Apart from this surface ripple it is quite calm, and there is only a gentle wash at the water's edge.

The bass will be feeling peckish. The bright bracing weather, the nip in the air, will help to put an edge to their appetites. They will be out hunting, roving from place to place in search of food. What is more, we can be fairly certain that they will keep to the sea bed, for it is full early yet for the appearance of the shoals of small fish which attract them to the surface.

But although hungry, they will be just a little shy, for the water is fairly clear and coarse tackle would be noticed. The best choice then, all things considered, would be the method known as light ledgering, incorporating our light pike rod and the previously mentioned outfit.

Light ledgering is usually practised from the beach and is sometimes called surf fishing, a very apt name which readily conveys the idea of casting just beyond the breakers. It is possible only when the sea is fairly calm, and is particularly effective when the bass are inclined to be shy. For it is most unobtrusive and delicate, and is beyond the suspicion of the most cautious fish. Moreover, it is not only suitable to the weather already described—big bass have been taken this way in the difficult sultry summer days, when they are most difficult to catch.

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The rod, reel, and line have already been described in detail, but the gut cast needs special mention. This is of the type known as a beach paternoster, though, unlike most paternosters, it is not encumbered with an entanglement of wire booms. It is between 1 yard and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  yards in length. The top end is attached to a small swivel, which is attached, in turn, to the line. The bottom end carries a lead link to which a lead weighing upwards of 2 ounces is fastened. Midway along the cast a small loop is made, using a figure-of-eight loop knot as shown in Fig. 1, and to this the hook is attached.

Perhaps the two best baits for surf fishing at this time of the year are lugworm or shuck crab. It is too early for prawn, and in any case a slightly odoriferous bait, such as the crab, will be more effective in the lightly coloured water. Its fruity smell will attract the bass and stimulate his appetite. If lugworm is used a size 4 hook will be plenty large enough, but a size 1 or 1/0 will be necessary for crab.

So we are all ready to start. We walk to the water's edge; in fact, if we have waders, we may walk in a little way to add distance to our cast. But this betrays over-eagerness; the fish are just as likely to be within thirty yards as fifty. In fact, I have seen bass within ten yards of the beach and in water not more than a foot deep. So don't over-balance yourself in your strenuous efforts to cast your bait far out to sea, for it is probable that the cream of the fishing is to be obtained close inshore.

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Sometimes, naturally, a long cast is necessary ; usually I have found this the case when the tide is fairly low.

The suitability of our outfit for light surf fishing will be readily appreciated. In the first place, the most delicate tackle can be used and can be cast out very easily. The beach paternoster supports the bait very nicely in the water. And finally, when a fish is hooked he will give great sport, for on such fragile gear he must be played right out before he can be beached.

Surf fishing is particularly effective over rocky ground. Here, as we have seen, the bass will prowl about in search of food ; and here, with luck, he may find the dainty titbit which we are offering him. It is unfortunate that a certain amount of tackle will almost inevitably be lost on submerged snags. This loss must be endured philosophically, for one cannot enjoy the best sport without paying for it in one way or another. However, the beach paternoster is easily the best tackle for rock fishing and does not get caught up so easily as would certain other patterns. It is always a good plan, when recovering line, to wind in as fast as possible, so that the hook and lead are kept in midwater instead of being slowly dragged along the bottom.

Generally speaking, the most productive stage of the tide is from half-flood to half-ebb. One angler of my acquaintance, however, and a very successful one too, always considers that the beginning of the flood is the very best time for surf fishing ; and

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certainly he proves his argument by some wonderful catches of big bass. Of course, there may be a question of locality in this ; what is suitable on the south coast may not be effective in the west. But new theories are always worth a trial, especially in angling, for there is still much to learn.

A trick which has often served me well when surf fishing is that of inspecting the sea bed when the tide is out, with a view to making mental note of all the most likely spots. There is usually a fair amount of beach exposed when the water ebbs, and much can be learnt from a study of it. Little pools or hollows in the rocks should be noted, and the trough-like waterways made by centuries of ever-moving water. Have you ever noticed, too, how the swirl of the tide round the end of a breakwater or groyne will form a pool much deeper than the surrounding sand ?

These are the places. Almost any feature that breaks the monotony of the sea bed will attract the bass, for they know that prawns, crabs, and other creatures will seek shelter in such spots.

Make a note of them. Fix in your mind their exact whereabouts, so that when the water flows in and covers them you can still cast to them with reasonable accuracy. Plan your fishing carefully and you will surely get fish.

### *Fishing the Driftline*

Now let us imagine that summer is at its height. A hot sun burns down on a dead calm

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sea. The water is warm and very clear, and the air lifeless.

Such conditions are difficult indeed. The bass are torpid with the heat. They betray no enthusiasm for food and are extremely shy ; so shy, in fact, that the shadow of a boat, which can be plainly seen in the clear water, is quite sufficient to scare them out of their wits.

What can we do ? In these circumstances no man can be sure of sport, but at least we will make some effort to tempt these dour fish. Obviously it is useless to try to lure them with heavy tackle ; we must try something delicate, unobtrusive and, above all, natural.

Yes, the driftline—without doubt the most sporting and artistic way of fishing for bass.

The tackle comprises the river rod already mentioned, complete with its supplementary gear—the fine silk line ; the three-yard gut casts of about four- or five-pound breaking strain ; and the needle-sharp hooks. In driftline fishing proper there are no floats, booms, or other paraphernalia. The running tackle consists merely of the line, cast, and hook. Some anglers use a swivel to attach the cast to the line, but I am personally of the opinion that this should be avoided. It will inevitably be noticed by the fish and will cause suspicion. Better far to attach gut to line as in fly fishing, using the knot shown in Fig. 1. A pardonable addition to the outfit is a small sliding lead. Sometimes, when the current is too strong to allow the unweighted line to

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ink, a small lead will carry the bait down to the fish. Always, though, it should be fixed as far as possible from the hook.

And as for bait, well, obviously we must have something succulent and tempting—something which will give a fillip to the jaded appetites of the fish. At the same time we do not necessarily need an odoriferous bait while the sea is clear like this. Something irresistible is wanted, such as a live prawn or sand-eel.

These two are typical summer baits. They can be fished alive or dead, but are much more effective when capable of lifelike movement and action. It is a very difficult business trying to keep them alive in hot weather, but it can be done by means of a “courage.” This is a small closely woven wicker basket into which the prawns or sand-eels are placed. It is then tied to a length of cord and lowered over the stern of the boat. Thus the bait is kept alive in his native element.

Before we can start fishing we must select our mark and anchor our boat. Then, when the full length of anchor rope is paid out, we must determine the depth. So we attach a lead weight to the hook and lower it over the side. When it touches bottom we make a small loop in the line at the surface of the water, and into this loop we insert a tuft of red wool, or some other visible substance. Six or seven yards above this we place another tuft, preferably of a different colour, so that we have a fair idea of the amount of line in use. Everything is now ready.

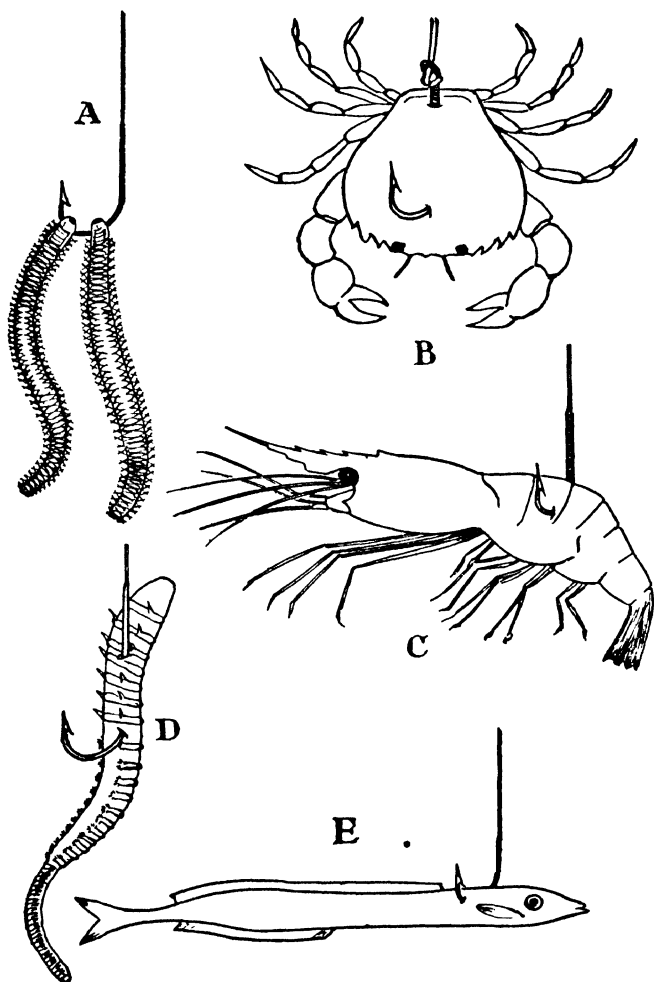


FIG. 9.—Baits for sea fish.  
(A) Red ragworm, (B) Soft crab, (C) Prawn,  
(D) Lugworm, (E) Sand-eel.

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If we are using a live sand-eel—and generally it is a far better bait than the prawn—it should be lightly hooked through the lower lip, or at the shoulder; but if prawn is used it is hooked cross-wise through the fourth or fifth joint from the tail. Both these methods are intended to give the bait that freedom and naturalness of movement which is so essential to success. The accompanying sketches show the idea.

Gently the bait is lowered over the side of the boat. It should not be cast or “flicked,” as this will almost surely cause him injury. Line is then paid out so that the drift will gradually carry it away from the boat, meanwhile it will sink slowly to search for bass in the depths. In paying out line you will soon reach the red tag which denotes the depth of the water. Keep on, for this is not nearly sufficient. The next tag will be reached, and still you pay out line. In fact you continue to pay out steadily until you are sure that the bait is sinking nicely at a good distance from the boat.

Never take your eye from your line or rod top. Almost as soon as the bait touches the water there is a possibility of fish, for in summer they often swim at higher levels. A bite may be indicated by a sudden flicker or hesitation in the line’s movement, or by a quick twitch of the rod top. When this happens a fairly firm strike is necessary to take up any slackness in the line. The rod is raised upwards in a quick and decisive manner, but without jerking.

And then, if the fish is hooked, the fireworks

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will begin. The tackle is so light that the bass is given full rein. Unhampered by heavy leads, strong lines, and broomstick rods, he will put up a tussle worthy of a fish of twice his weight, and will tax the angler's resource to its utmost. If you are not careful, when you have drawn him to the side of the boat and think that you have him beaten, he will discover a new lease of life and will dive under your keel or around your anchor rope.

The bass is never yours until you have him in the boat. If he is fairly large you should not attempt to lift him by hand or by hand-lining. Just slip the gaff under his gill and make a clean lift straight into the well of the boat ; and then, unless you are extremely unlucky, he is really yours.

I remember once, however, when I was fishing from a south coast pier, seeing an angler land a nice 4-pounder, which he promptly put into a shallow fish bag which he had brought for the purpose. An interested onlooker asked for another look at the fish. The bag was opened for him and—swish. With a quick flick of the tail the bass was out of the bag and into his native sea again, leaving his former captor open-mouthed and bereft of words.

Driftline fishing is much practised in estuaries, although, as might be expected, the addition of a little lead is required to counteract the greater strength of the current. If much lead is added, however, so that the bait is held down on the sea bottom, the method becomes almost the same as ledgering.

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In rocky estuaries the gullies, bays, and eddies would always be tried, for intriguing-looking spots seem to hold a fascination for the fish. The chief value of estuaries lies in their complete reliability. In dead calm weather, when the open sea is hopeless, they offer greater movement and activity; and when the open sea is too rough to be fishable the river mouth can be fished in comfort, often with highly gratifying results.

### *Float Fishing in Calm Waters*

Another method of angling especially suitable for calm weather is float fishing. Either the driftline rod or the pike spinning rod can be used, but the dressed silk line is absolutely essential. Before fishing it should be rubbed down with Mucilin to keep it afloat. The only additions to the outfit are a few floats and a supply of spiral leads. The floats should not be of the cumbersome type usually sold for bass fishing. It is better far to use one of the larger river floats such as the Nottingham "slider." At the correct depth a small stop is looped into the line in the manner already described. The float is threaded on below this, and a lead is fixed a few yards above the bait. Thus, before the bait is cast it, the float will slide down until it reaches the lead, making casting easy. But when cast upon the water the weight of the lead will pull the line through the rings until the stop is reached, so that the bait will be fished at the predetermined level.

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In float fishing, as in driftlining, the sand-eel and prawn are the best baits. If the former is used it must be lightly hooked through the shoulder as in Fig. 9, instead of through the lower lip. Again, as in driftlining, an effort should be made to fish as far as possible from the boat, especially in clear water.

When float fishing the angler has a much more definite idea of the whereabouts of his bait. It is therefore a very suitable method for searching amongst the piles of piers, where a driftline would get caught up. It is also a favourite style for fishing over rocky ground such as that found at the foot of the "wall" at Newhaven. Here the prawn is fished so that it trips just lightly over the weed-covered rocks. And many are the bass which have fallen victims to its charms.

### *Heavy Ledgering in Rough Seas*

And now let us suppose that it is late September. A half-gale is blowing from the sou'west. In fact, it has been blowing for a couple of days, and the mud-coloured sea is thrashed up into a foam-flecked inferno of tumbling water. Every few seconds great rollers crash heavily on the beach. Everything is torn between the strength of the wind and the fury of the water.

For those hardy enough to brave the elements there is a promise of big bass in such weather. To take a boat out to sea would be asking for trouble. It is almost equally impossible to fish the beach

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owing to the great rollers which would wash the bait ashore, to say nothing of the huge deposits of weed at the water's edge. Fine tackle is useless ; driftlining, float fishing, or light ledgering are out of the question. This is the day for the heavy rod, the strong tackle, and the five-ounce leads.

And what of bait ? When the water is so murky the fish's vision is very limited, just as our own is in a fog ; and so he has to depend on his sense of smell with which to find his food. Obviously, then, we need a bait of attractive odour, such as shuck crab, a piece of herring, or a strip of pilchard. What is more, I have found that it pays to fish with two hooks instead of the usual one, and to bait each hook differently. Thus, on a strong cast of two yards long I should have one hook at the end and one midway, and the top end of the cast would be attached to the boom. On one hook, a size 1/0, I should attach a large crab ; and on the other, of the same size, a goodly slice of pilchard or herring.

Somehow we must get beyond the breakers in order that our bait shall not be washed ashore again. There is only one way—to fish from a pier, a breakwater, or a groyne. From this vantage point we can easily cast to the comparatively quiet water beyond the rollers, and here it is that the fish lie. They are searching the bottom as usual for food, but this time their enthusiasm is redoubled, for they know that the mountainous waves will surely dislodge some delicacies which might otherwise remain hidden.

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When fishing this way the angler should never leave hold of his rod. Anything might happen under such conditions. A sudden rush, and—if you are not prepared—ping! and your cast is broken as if it were a cobweb. It is a disturbing experience to see strong tackle broken so easily, and the angler is left speculating as to the size of the monster which could perform such feats of strength.

You must not strike too quickly, however. In agitated water a fish may take a second or so to get a secure grip of the bait. I always visualize a bass bite as—knock, knock, pause, run; and this movement can often be detected on the rod top. The first “knock, knock” is made by the fish when he seizes the bait and presumably tries to shovel it down his throat by a couple of rapid movements of the head. This is followed by the “run”; the bait is well within his jaws and he is making off. The whole movement occupies only a second or two, and the strike must be correctly timed or the fish will be lost. To strike on the first “knock, knock” is fatal, though many anglers find it hard to resist the temptation. Wait until the bass has a good grip and starts to run; strike then and you will seldom miss.

### *Spinning, Trolling, and Fly Fishing*

These methods are not practised nearly so much as those already described. This may be partly due to the fact that they require some energy, and can hardly be called restful occupations.

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Spinning from the beach, from rocks, or from a drifting boat is a pretty way of taking bass. The pike spinning rod and outfit is ideal for the purpose ; the only extras required being a supply of Devon minnows, spoons, or plug baits. Recent experiments in plug fishing from the beach have proved that this lure is just as effective for bass as for pike, trout, and salmon. The water should be tolerably calm and not too clouded. If by any stroke of luck the bass can be seen close inshore feeding on sand-eels the lure should be cast out to cover them, and is almost certain to be taken. Plug fishing from the bank in shallow estuaries is a most pleasureable and profitable experience.

A spoon, a plug, or a Devon minnow cast over rocky ground from a drifting boat is also a very artistic way of catching bass. If the wind is not too strong the boat is left to its own devices ; and, as it drifts along, it carries the angler over constantly changing ground, but gives him time thoroughly to explore every square yard of water within casting distance.

Trolling is not nearly so attractive. The rod is tackled up and a lure attached. Line is then paid out so that the spinner is fished at a distance of about fifty yards from the boat, which is rowed slowly over any ground where bass are likely to be. It is preferable that the angler should have a boatman, so that he himself can sit in the stern of the boat holding his rod. But if a boatman is not

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available the angler must row the craft himself, with the rod jammed between his knees. This is real work, and any fish so caught is well earned.

Fly fishing is excellent sport but can be only rarely practised. The most suitable places are bar-harbours. I have often thought that the bass in estuaries and harbours are wont to swim at higher levels than in the open sea. The deep pool which is found just inside most bar-harbours is always a good holding-place for fish, and a fly cast into such spots, whether from a boat or from the beach, may be accepted readily.

As in spinning, if the fish can be located feeding near the surface the fly becomes a very killing lure, as is proved by my own recently recounted experience. Always row to the windward of the shoal, so that the breeze is in your favour ; but do not get so near that the fish are scared.

There is no need to be fussy about flies. Any old salmon patterns will do, or the white fly with a silver body which is sold especially for bass fishing.

### *The Weather for Bass Fishing*

A final word about climatic influences. Spring tides are generally far better than neaps. Why it should be so is hard to say, for I imagine that the fish must still eat irrespective of the state of the moon. Bright bracing weather is also a great help, especially if a sou'west wind is blowing.

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Possibly the best weather of all is a good “blow up” following a period of calm. If this happens to coincide with a spring tide the odds are very favourable.

As regards the time of the year, in April or May the bass are comparatively few but usually of fair size. In June, July, and August they become more numerous, and fish both large and small are caught ; though, inevitably, in the still hot weather the fishing becomes more difficult. In September and October we have rougher seas ; the fish get scarcer but are usually the biggest of the season.

## 2. CONGER

MOST of us have heard the stories of the huge mythical conger which lives under the local pier, or in some underwater cave at the river mouth, or perhaps in a sunken wreck far out to sea. Several times this monster has been hooked ; always he has escaped. Some herculean anglers have even raised him to the surface, but the sight of his head, as big as a sheep's, and his jaws bristling with hundreds of broken hooks, has been too much for them. In sheer fright they have to let him go. So we are told.

There is no denying that conger run very big. It is also true that they have broken more angler's tackle, probably, than any other fish. And as any escaped fish is always accredited with several extra pounds it is not surprising that these tales of monster congers are told at almost every seaside town. The funny part about it is that even the " locals " believe them ; the taller the story, the more acceptable it seems to be.

Conger fishing is a summer or autumn pastime, though small fish are occasionally caught in the winter months, particularly on the south coast. Most of them, however, migrate to deeper and warmer waters when the weather gets cold.

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They begin life as a tiny egg deposited in a far off sea of great depth. After hatching, and having gained a certain amount of strength, they migrate in millions to almost every corner of the globe. In their new homes they feed and grow very large ; from Ireland a giant of 72 pounds is recorded, and there are many of over 50 pounds. Eventually, when maturity is reached, they feel an urge to return to that far off spot in the ocean where they were born. And so they migrate again, thousands of miles ; after which they carry out their breeding arrangements and finally die.

Although scientists have not yet satisfied themselves as to the exact details of the eel's life history, they are nevertheless agreed that all eels, in every part of the world, are born in a common breeding ground which they leave as soon as they are strong enough. And after travelling incredible distances during the next year or two they eventually return to their birthplace to spawn and die.

To a casual observer a small conger might almost be mistaken for a large silver eel. Even experienced anglers sometimes trip up. But whereas the eye of a silver eel is small and pig-like, a conger's eye is large and staring like the eye of a cod. But an even more definite proof is obtained from the mouth. The conger's upper jaw projects slightly beyond his lower, while the lower “ lip ” of a silver eel projects very definitely beyond his snout.

You need strong tackle for this sport, for there

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is no telling what you may encounter. The strongest of the three rods recommended for bass will do nicely, and should be fitted with a large reel and 100 yards of 26-pound line. Running booms are best, for the conger is a sensitive and deliberate biter. Moreover, as he is so often found in strong drifts a good supply of heavy leads may be necessary. The monstrous grappling-iron type of hooks usually sold for conger are quite unnecessary and are positively detrimental to successful fishing. My own favourite hook for this game is a Limerick, sizes 1/0 to 6/0, with an O'Shaunnessy eye, that is an eye which lies flat in the same plane as the shank of the hook. These are mounted on fine single-strand rustless wire which forms a cast 2 yards long incorporating at least two swivels. These fish have dangerous teeth and will easily bite through strong gut.

The conger has a reputation for being a foul feeder, but if on the strength of this theory you decide to use a none-too-fresh bait you will return home fishless. No fish is more epicurean in his choice of food; he will accept a tasty cutlet from an absolutely fresh mackerel, herring, or pilchard, but will spurn a bait which has become dried or slightly tainted through exposure to the sun. The size of the bait should be decided after due consideration of the type of fish one is likely to encounter. Large conger will make short work of half a mackerel on a 6/0 hook, but for smaller fish a strip cut from the side about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide,

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mounted on a 1/0 will be found quite adequate. The bait must be firmly hooked, for the fish has an annoying habit of nibbling away small pieces until only the bare steel is left.

Most of my conger have been taken on what a Scotsman would call a “ bricht, moonlicht nicht.” These fish are certainly night prowlers and seem to be unduly active in fine weather when the moon is full. They are often caught in daylight, of course, but they will bite more readily after dark. A rocky sea bed is their favourite hunting-ground. Although I believe that the adult conger is by choice a solitary individual, they are often drawn to a common feeding ground in great numbers, possibly owing to the good fare which is to be found there. And so, if you are lucky, you may get on a mark where many conger are foregathered ; and if so you should have some very good fishing. Deep water over rocks will usually hold conger, but many good fish are taken close inshore on rugged coasts such as those of Devon and Cornwall. Many large fish have also been caught off Sussex.

To say that the conger nibbles at the bait is probably the best description. His bite certainly does not give much indication of his size. The rod top will flicker once or twice and the line will tighten with that inaudible “ twang ” which usually denotes a crab at the other end. This is the overture. Great care should be taken not to disturb the fish by a careless movement of the rod top.

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

The check should be released and a finger laid lightly on the drum of the reel. All is now ready for the conger to make away without feeling any resistance. That is where the running boom comes in ; the fish can take line without having to drag the lead. The weight of the latter would undoubtedly scare him. If he decides to make a move he should be allowed to pull a yard or two of line from the reel without being checked in any way. Then, as soon as he makes some decisive movement which indicates that he has taken a firm hold, the hook should be driven home.

The next few seconds are hard work. At all costs the fish must be prevented from going "to earth," for if once he gets his mighty tail around a rock or piece of sunken wreckage you can say good-bye to your conger, and probably to your tackle as well. So strike him hard and then, before he realizes what has hit him, pump him up with rod and reel so that he cannot bolt for his lair.

Congers are not easy fish to fight, though they do not as a rule put up a very bold show. They thrash the water to foam ; they twist, and writhe, and roll over ; and when it comes to gaffing, they are a very difficult target. It is folly to try to gaff them before they are played right out. The job must be done smartly and without hesitation—no fumbling. Slip the hook of the gaff deftly into his gill, and in one continuous movement lift him straight into the boat.

Then look out !

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Their energy is terrific. They will thrash about in such a wild manner that you will begin to wonder if the boat is big enough. And their teeth, too—beware of them ; for they are terribly sharp and are set in powerful jaws. Certainly do not attempt to remove your hook until the fish is absolutely dead.

There are several ways of killing conger. Some say a sharp rap on the tail, and others pierce the brain with a knife. Probably the best way is to give the fish a smart blow in the vicinity of the vent.

### 3. MACKEREL

THE mackerel might aptly be described as the "trout of the sea," for there is no other salt-water fish which so nearly resembles the trout in fighting qualities, size for size. Moreover, mackerel can be taken by more sporting methods than most sea fishes; they are readily responsive to the fly, to the spinner, and to float fishing. Fine tackle can be used and maximum enjoyment thereby obtained.

Mackerel are found all around our coast. They are a seasonable fish, usually appearing some time in late spring. They spawn in May on previously selected breeding grounds. For some time after the eggs are hatched the tiny fry drift helplessly along wherever the ocean currents may take them, and they feed on minute particles of animal and vegetable matter. As they gain in size and strength they foregather into huge shoals. In summer they migrate shorewards, pursuing such small fish as whitebait, etc; and as winter approaches, with a promise of cold weather and heavy seas, they move out to deeper water again.

A lot of silly statements have been made to the effect that the mackerel is a foul feeder. Nothing could be more misleading. Like most pelagic fishes his choice of food is usually beyond criticism, and

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there is no doubt that he ranks very high as a wholesome meal for human consumption.

In the early months of spring and summer mackerel fishing is not a very remunerative business, for the fish are gathered together in great shoals and move very rapidly from place to place. Suddenly, out of a calm sea, a shoal will be sighted ; at whirlwind speed they travel landwards in pursuit of the whitebait ; the sea seethes and boils as they break the surface ; but soon they disappear into the far distance, and may not be seen again for hours, or even days. Fishing under such conditions would be futile.

About June their spring madness seems to leave them ; their organized hounding of small fishes becomes less noticeable ; the shoals, instead of rushing around the sea like packs of hungry wolves, take life much easier. The huge densely packed regiments of fish are now seldom seen ; they have become scattered and more widely distributed, and this is the time when mackerel fishing, from an angler’s point of view, becomes really worth while.

Most summer days are suitable for mackerel fishing, for the fish will prove obliging under any but the worst of conditions. A rough sea with a boisterous wind is pretty hopeless, of course ; and so is a heavy, overcast day which threatens a storm. Bright sunny weather, with a gentle breeze to ripple the water, usually gives the best results. I have a deep affection for the mackerel, however, because

he will often provide sport under conditions when bass fishing is almost out of the question. When the clear sea is set in an oily calm, and a merciless sun beats down from above, they can be seen swimming just a few feet below the surface, and can be caught if the proper tactics are employed.

### *Float Fishing*

Float fishing is probably the most popular method of taking mackerel. Every summer, on seaside piers, rocks, or in boats, many anglers will be seen casting their light float tackle for these sporting fish. A real mackerel fisher is as great an enthusiast as a trout or bass angler. Once one has enjoyed the thrill of hooking and playing one of these fish, most other forms of angling are forgotten while the mackerel season lasts.

But the sport which they can give depends mainly on the tackle used. The mackerel is not a large fish and should not be angled for with the hefty machinery normally used by sea anglers. I have had the doubtful pleasure of catching mackerel on fairly heavy tackle when fishing for bass, and though their sporting qualities were very much in evidence, they nevertheless did not put up so good a show as would have been possible on the lighter outfit.

There is no need to buy special tackle. A sound 10-foot river rod and reel to suit, a fine dressed silk line of 3- to 4-pound breaking strain ; a Nottingham

## “LET'S GO FISHING!”

slider float not exceeding 5 inches in length; a supply of fine 2- to 3-yard gut casts, and some sharp hooks sizes 5 to 7. It is essential that the rings of the rod be fairly large, to make casting easy; and the reel must be of good size so that line can be recovered quickly.

The bait is a most important item in any form of angling, but in mackerel fishing the value of careful selection and preparation cannot be over-estimated. The best bait, strange to say, is a silvery strip cut from the side of another mackerel—a case of setting a mackerel to catch a mackerel. Above all, bait must be absolutely fresh; it must be firm on the hook and should, as far as possible, retain that brilliant sheen which is one of the most attractive features of this beautiful fish.

The secret of success lies in preparing the bait so that it resembles the small fish on which the mackerel is wont to feed—a tiny silvery slip of a fish which never stops wriggling in its futile efforts to keep its course against the powerful ocean drifts. First our bait must be filleted. With a sharp knife one entire side of the fish is sliced away from the backbone. It is then laid on a piece of flat board and cut into strips. These are cut at an angle, as shown in Fig. 10, and are about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide and 2 to 3 inches long. The next job is to remove most of the meaty flesh from the inside of the bait. This should be shaved away until there is no more than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of flesh adhering to the skin. Mackerel are like cats; they quickly detect a moving object,

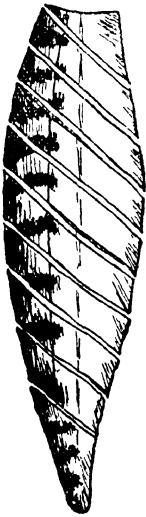
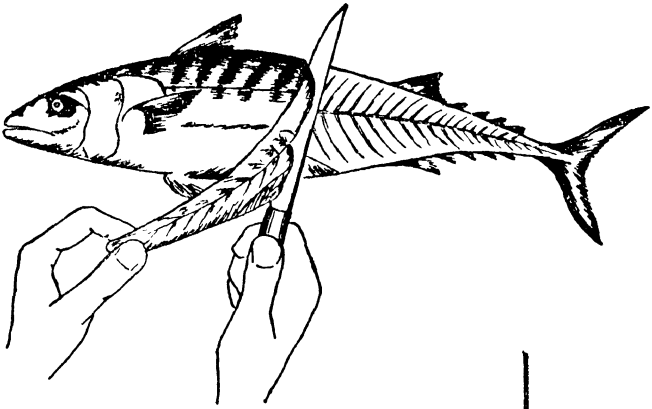


FIG. 10.—Preparing a last of mackerel.

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but seldom notice anything which remains still. Our bait is shaved down thin so that it will wriggle attractively in the water ; it is useless if it hangs heavy and lifeless. What is more, the hook should be slipped through the bait in the manner illustrated, leaving the silvery “ tail ” free to move about under the influence of the current.

I find it a great advantage to prepare a few dozen of these baits about an hour before leaving home, and to pack them carefully, with a little salt, in a tin of some kind. If the process of preparation is left until the water is reached, it is usually scamped in eagerness to get started. Many a time I have seen anglers baiting with huge shapeless chunks of fish which no self-respecting mackerel would even look at.

Another point which requires attention before setting out is the greasing of the line. A line which floats perfectly will instantly lift from the water and will cause float and hook to be smartly raised ; but a sunk line, at the first strike, will pull the float *under* the water. This causes a tremor of the hook but does not drive home the point ; the fish will take alarm and release the bait before the hook is ultimately struck in an upward direction.

The principle of the sliding float needs but little explanation, for it is well known to most anglers. Instead of the usual float-cap, for attaching and securing the float to the line, the Nottingham “ slider ” is fitted with two rings through which the line is passed. Thus it is free to run up or down

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

the line within certain predetermined limits. For example, when the line is recovered the float will slide down until it reaches the lead. When cast out again it will float on the surface; meanwhile the lead will pull line through the rings until a small "stop"—a tiny bit of string or rubber which has been knotted into the line at the desired depth from the hook—is reached.

The depth at which the bait is fished is varied according to the level at which the mackerel are feeding. Sometimes it will be almost at the surface, sometimes at midwater, and, very occasionally, deep down. The best plan is to use two hooks, one midway along the cast and the other at the extreme tip. Thus you are fishing two levels of water at the same time. For the first few casts the depth should be fixed about three feet below the surface. If this yields no result an extra foot can be added by shifting the "stop." By increasing the depth a foot at a time the fish will eventually be located. Do not forget, though, that the tide will rise or fall quite a considerable distance in a couple of hours; this should be taken into account when adjustments are made.

In some respects a mackerel bite is like that of a roach—the bait is taken and, if found to be suspicious, is rejected in a split second. But the effect upon the float is entirely different; the roach takes the bait so gently, so doubtfully, that the float scarcely twitches. The mackerel, however, takes it in a headlong rush; in a flash it disappears. An

## “ LET’S GO FISHING ! ”

instantaneous strike is necessary ; unless the hook is driven home immediately the bait will be released, and the float will come bobbing back to the surface again.

Float fishing for mackerel is great sport. Size for size, I suppose that they are among the fastest fish in British waters. When hooked they go all out to make a getaway. It is almost impossible to follow their course ; they dart and dive in all directions and call for the highest angling skill.

### *Driftline Fishing*

We have already seen how the driftline can be used to catch bass ; and there is little modification necessary, either in tackle or tactics, if it is to be used for mackerel. The main difference, obviously, lies in the bait used. The small slips of mackerel already described are quite suitable for driftline fishing, but a better bait, possibly, is a small sand-eel, which should not exceed  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length. These are “ lipped ” on to a size 5 hook.

The bait is fished in exactly the same manner as for bass ; but a very keen look-out must be kept for bites, owing to the mackerel’s capacity for rapidly ejecting the hook when his suspicions are awakened. Quick recovery of slack line is essential, for the fish has a nasty habit of running under the boat, or getting himself entangled around the anchor rope. An angler who can control a mackerel properly, keeping up a constant contact without

exerting any undue pressure on the fish, is a clever fisherman indeed, and should be able to apply his experience very profitably to other less exciting forms of angling.

*Fly Fishing, Spinning, and Trolling*

All of these methods will yield their share of fish. The first two are well worth a trial, providing that the mackerel can definitely be located in a certain spot. Failing this, it would be rather exhausting to search a big area of water with a small fly in the hope that the fish could be found. White flies with silver bodies, fished fairly deep and with plenty of movement, are an easy favourite. A boat is almost always necessary, though in some parts of the coast it is possible to fish from the rocks.

Trolling, as usually practised by holiday makers, is very poor sport. A heavy hand-line, lead, and spinner are cast over the stern of a moving boat; and the hooked fish is hauled willy-nilly aboard.

On a light rod and fine tackle, with a small Devon minnow, the fishing is much more enjoyable. The line should be fished at a considerable distance from the boat, which should be rowed or sailed (a motor boat does more harm than good) at a moderate speed. The depth should be varied by the judicious application of a little lead about six feet from the lure. When a fish is hooked the boat should be stopped so that he can be effectively played out.

#### 4. TOPE

TOPE and conger are about the largest sea fish that the average English angler will encounter. There are plenty heavier, of course, such as halibut, shark, skate, and tunny ; but these bigger fish are seldom encountered except by anglers who are fortunate enough to be able to make special expeditions in search of them. Large fish of other species are sometimes hooked by tope or conger fishermen ; but, generally speaking, exclusive fishing for these monsters is hardly worth while except in such well-favoured places as off Valencia and Ballycotton on the south coast of Ireland. Or, if tunny are the quarry, off the coast from Scarborough.

The tope is closely allied to the sharks, and resembles them in all the characteristic features of the family. Some fishes of the shark class deposit their young in the form of eggs ; these are the rectangular leathery cases, rather purse-like in shape, which are found in hundreds on seaside beaches. The tope, however, brings forth its young alive.

They are fairly generally distributed all around the British Isles, though the south and east coasts are most favoured. Notable spots are Herne Bay, Bournemouth, and the Sussex coast. In weight they range from 15 to 50 pounds ; the largest fish

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on record scaled 62 pounds. This fish was undoubtedly a female, for the females grow much larger than the males.

Their food is found on the bottom of the sea and consists mainly of small fish. In their search for food they are guided largely by their keen sense of smell. Their season is short, but is often quite hectic. June is usually the earliest date of their appearance, for they are definitely a warm water fish. July, August, and September are all good months, especially if the weather is warm and calm. In the latter month the tope seem to disappear as suddenly as they arrive.

For tope fishing a boat is generally a necessity, because the best fishing is to be had between three and six miles out to sea. Tope grounds vary locally ; sometimes they are a considerable distance from the shore, while others are quite near. Last year two anglers fishing off Newhaven had several good tope within one and a half miles of the harbour, and there are one or two places in Wales where they can be taken from the beach.

There are some fishermen who would persuade you that the tope is not a sporting fish, despite his size. The same might be said of a trout if he were caught on a pike rod. In tope fishing the lack of sporting quality lies in the tackle used, and not in the fighting powers of the fish. A tope will fight if you give him a chance, but you cannot expect him to put up a very good show when he is bound,

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gagged, and handcuffed by heavy tackle. Salmon weighing 30, 40, and even 50 pounds have been caught on slender cane fly-rods, fine gut casts, and tiny flies ; yet for tope of similar weight we find anglers using rods as thick as broomsticks, casts of heavy Bowden cable wire, and massive hooks that would hold a shark. If you suggest a lighter hook they will tell you that they are useless because they straighten out when strained upon. Of course they do ; with a heavy fish at one end, a relentless crane-driving angler at the other, and an unyielding rod, something is bound to happen. Either the fish will throw up the sponge and come up like a submerged log, or else the tackle will break.

And after a few such breaks anglers have come to the mistaken conclusion that heavier lines, traces, and hooks are necessary, whereas the correct solution is to use a lighter rod with more give and take, and lighter tackle. Then you can play your fish as you would a 3-pound trout on 5x gut ; and your tope will change from a submerged log into a dashing, hard-fighting fish.

In the chapter on bass fishing three rods were mentioned. The heaviest of these is quite suitable for tope. A slightly larger reel, say 5 or 6 inch, may be necessary, and also a stronger line. The latter should be of 30-pound breaking strain, or thereabouts. A running boom is best, as it allows the fish to run without feeling the weight of the lead. The trace is 6 feet long, and is made of medium strength rustless wire of as supple a grade as pos-

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sible ; it must incorporate at least three swivels, otherwise the fish will twist the wire until it kinks and snaps.

Some anglers use treble hooks, and others use singles of slightly greater size, say 4/0 to 8/0. The latter, I think, are preferable. They are mounted on the same grade of wire as that used for the trace. The hook wire should be obtained in three lengths, say 8 inch, 6 inch, and 4 inch ; and the other end of the link should be looped for attachment to the

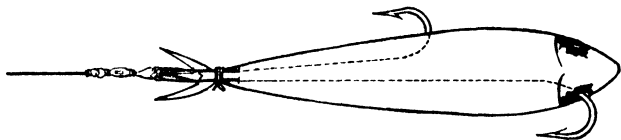


FIG. 11.—Mounting a mackerel bait for tope.

hook swivel at the end of the trace. The reason for this differentiation in the length of the hook link will become apparent when we start to bait up.

There is no more effective bait than a whole mackerel. After this, in approximate order of popularity, come herring, pouting, and small dab. They must be absolutely fresh, because the tope, like the conger, will have nothing to do with a dried-up, evil-smelling meal.

The attaching of the bait is a delicate process which must not be hurried, for it is most essential that the hooks should be properly placed and securely held. Take a hook with a long link according to the size of your bait, and, by using a

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baiting needle, pass the loop in through the eye and bring it out alongside the tail. This is shown in Fig. 11. Take another hook of shorter length, so that when threaded in midway along the other side of the bait its loop will correspond with that of the hook which was inserted first. A few turns of fine copper wire—such as fuse wire—are then wound round the tail, thus binding tail and hook links together ; and the two loops are attached to the hook swivel. The end of the line is threaded through the eyes of the running boom and is attached to the top swivel of the trace ; a stop is inserted hereabouts to prevent the boom from travelling down to the hook.

On a calm, warm summer day, with an outfit such as this, some marvellous sport can be had if the boat can be placed over a known tope mark. Clear water is no detriment ; in fact the tope seems at his best when most other forms of fishing are off. Sufficient lead should be added to ensure that the bait rests on the bottom, for these fish seldom rise to their food.

The rod can be laid down over the stern or gunwale of the boat, for quick striking in tope fishing is not necessary. The check should be set to keep the line fairly taut.

In all probability the first sign of a run will be the violent screaming of the check. The tope has seized the bait and is moving off. But wait ; he has it only lightly held ; a strike now would only pull it from between his jaws. Lay hold of the rod

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

quietly, without causing a tremor down below, and wait until the fish has pulled about thirty yards of line from the reel. It is a critical moment. Having reached this distance, it is usual for the tope to take its quarry more firmly between its jaws and to proceed to bolt it head first. But who can tell precisely what is happening on the bed of the ocean? Here the element of luck comes in. A golden rule, however, is to strike late rather than early, for the fish is not particularly sensitive of hooks.

The strike must be hard and decisive; the tope has a mouth of iron, and large hooks cannot be driven home without using considerable force. Having been hooked, he will put up a very creditable fight if properly handled, and will not readily come to the gaff. Gaffing, as for any other fish, is as much a test of the angler's skill as the hooking, playing, and landing. It is amazing how some fishermen, quite expert in every other respect, make a hopeless mess of landing a fish. There must be no indecision, no futile plunging with the gaff. With the handle firmly held, a careful look-out is kept until the most suitable moment presents itself. Then, in one continuous motion, the hook is driven home and the fish hauled aboard. The hooks should not be removed until he is dead, for his teeth are very sharp.

As a further proof of what tope can do on light tackle, a recent experience of a friend of mine is of interest. We were out tope fishing with moderately

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heavy gear. Though the weather was good we had been out several hours without even getting a run ; so my friend decided to fix up a light rod and try for smaller stuff. He mounted a slender lancewood rod with a small reel and 12-pound breaking strain line, and baited with crab. After a few moments he had a gentle bite ; a small fish, a whiting, or dab presumably, had taken the bait. So he struck, and proceeded to wind in, but had scarcely drawn in a yard of line when he had a bite of terrific violence which took the reel out of his fingers—a tope (or so we both believe) on the wrong rod.

What had happened, we concluded, was that the tope had seized the smaller fish which he had just hooked, and doing so had become hooked himself. That fish went like the wind. There was no stopping him ; and my friend's hands were scored in his efforts to stop the racing reel. Practically a hundred yards of new line disappeared in no time, and then—ping !—it broke where it was tied to the reel.

And that was that ! Some anglers may argue that a tope would not have run so far as that ; but who can say what they will do when caught on such light tackle ?

## 5. CODLING

NEAR the end of October bass fishing ceases to be worth while, and many anglers who ought to know better carefully stow away their rods. To the accompaniment of several heartrending sighs they prepare themselves for a period of inactivity which lasts until the following spring. They will tell you that their interest in angling ceases with the autumn migration of the bass ; that there is nothing left in the sea which is worth fishing for.

But just as the grayling comes into his own when the trout season draws to a close, so comes the codling in November to act as a welcome substitute for bass.

In many ways their similarity to bass is very striking. Their respective average weights are much about the same ; a 3- or 4-pounder is a nice fish ; but though the cod will grow to many times the weight of a bass, those caught close inshore do not usually exceed 7 pounds. Then, their food is much the same ; both are fond of small fish, mollusca, crustacea, and worms. Generally speaking the codling, like the bass, is a bottom feeder, so that their haunts, too, are very similar.

Beneath the lower jaw of the codling is a small barbule which is extremely sensitive. With this he

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“ senses ” his food on the sea bed. He has a great weakness for herring spawn, which he will consume in enormous quantities ; in fact his appetite is almost insatiable.

Almost anywhere around our shores these fish will be found, though they are much more plentiful on the north and east coasts. The adult cod is a deep-sea fish, but the codling, which is of more interest to the inshore angler, lives mostly in shallow water.

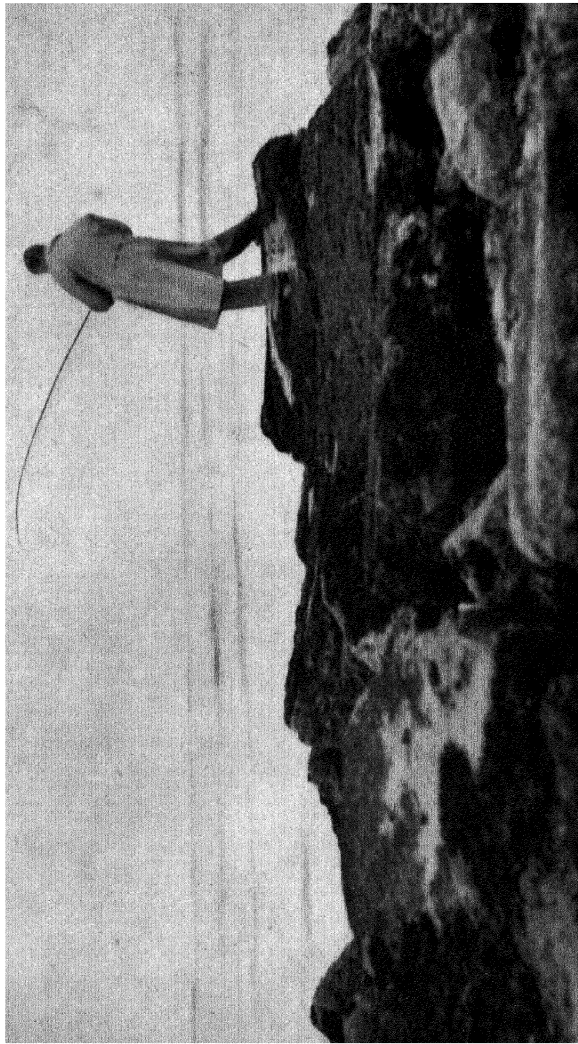
Codling fishing enjoys a short season from November to February, for it is only at this time of the year that the fish is within casting distance of the beach. In February they migrate to their spawning grounds. Each female cod contains millions of eggs, which hatch, if they are not previously devoured by other fish, into creatures so small that it seems incredible that each one is a potential 20-pounder. They feed voraciously and grow quickly, however, and soon they become sturdy fish well able to take care of themselves.

For those who seek the largest fish a boat is absolutely essential. But when the weather is too rough to go afloat the smaller fish, up to 7 pounds, will provide excellent sport for the angler who can fish from rocks or from a pier.

Bass tackle is ideal for the job. If the sea is rough the heavy outfit will be called into use, though on calm days the lighter gear is quite adequate.

And as for bait, well, almost anything will do ;





Rock fishing for winter codling.

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mussels, worms, herring, mackerel, and crab are all excellent, though possibly the last mentioned is the best of the lot. It is a marvellous bait ; there is hardly a fish in the sea which will not take it with avidity.

It is best to fish on the ledger principle. Either the beach paternoster, as described for bass, can be used, or, alternatively, a running boom fitted with a 2-yard trace. It is quite a good plan to use two hooks, one baited with crab and the other with lugworm or mussel. In any case the bait must lie on the sea bed ; for, unlike the bass, codling seldom rise to the higher levels of water. Their hunting-grounds are rocky or weedy beaches. Any rugged coast or boulder-strewn estuary is sure to yield a fish or two, especially if the water is moderately deep.

I have caught codling in every kind of winter weather. Sometimes they bite best when the sun is bright and the temperature mild. At other times they seem most hungry when the day is grey and bleak. In boisterous weather, when the sea is very discoloured, big fish are taken. The angler who can face the roughest conditions will often reap the highest reward.

Though it may sound a cold and unpleasant business, good fishing can be obtained on a moonlit winter's night. This is not half so bad as it seems. If the night is calm and clear, and the angler well protected by adequate clothing, it is quite an en-

## “ LET'S GO FISHING ! ”

joyable experience. A small lantern is necessary to facilitate baiting up ; and a spot should be selected where it is possible to cast in darkness. Another point to watch is the landing of hooked fish—a job which is not always easy at night. If fishing from the beach a strong gaff should be taken ; if from a pier or breakwater a drop net and a powerful torch will be needed. To use a drop net successfully a companion is necessary. While the angler plays the fish his friend should lower the net until it is about a foot below the surface of the water. Then, guided by the torch, the angler steers the fish over the net, which must be kept perfectly still. As soon as the fish is in position the netsman raises it smartly, but not jerkily, until the fish is brought up on to the pier. From the time the fish leaves the water the angler must not wind in any line while the net is being raised, for if by any mishap he jumps clear of the net the fish will certainly snap the line if it is suddenly tightened in his downward plunge.

Another asset in night fishing is a small bell mounted on a light spring, which, when clipped to the rod tip, will announce the slightest bite. The best plan, though, is to always hold your rod. A slogan which was drilled into me when I first began fishing was “ A good fisherman never lets go of his rod.” It's very true too. After losing a few fish through striking too late I began to realize the value of this advice. If the bait is fifty or sixty yards from the rod tip there must obviously be a perceptible time lag between the actual bite of the fish and the

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

twitching of the rod top. Then the angler takes a second or so in seizing the rod and striking, and further valuable time is lost while the strike is communicated along the line to the hook. Some bites must not be struck instantly, it is true, but an angler who has his rod in hand is prepared for action from the very first tremor of the line.

## 6. BLACK BREAM

SOMETIMES the black bream offers good fishing, and sometimes he is a perfect pest. When after bass I have on many occasions been much worried by small bream which insisted on nibbling all the bait from my hook. Their small mouths saved their lives, for they were too tiny to swallow the large piece of crab, on No. 1 hook, which was intended for the bass.

But when the bream are large enough to be worth a special expedition they are quite a good fish to catch. Once hooked they will fight hard, in the true firework style, and a day's fishing never lacks thrills.

Theirs is a short season. During the month of May and early in June they appear in vast shoals off the coast of Sussex. The Kingsmere Rocks, off Bognor Regis, are a favourite fishing ground, though fish are taken as far west as the Isle of Wight and as far east as Brighton. In view of their enormous numbers and their very brief localized visit, it would appear that some form of migration is taking place, possibly for breeding purposes.

They prefer rocky ground and swim close to the bed of the sea. Mostly they show a liking for deep water, but a few years ago many small ones

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

were taken in the river estuary at Shoreham, in Sussex; and quite a few are caught in shallow water off Brighton.

As their average weight is somewhere round about 1 pound, with an occasional 2-pounder, the tackle need not be heavy, providing, of course, that the drift will allow a light lead to sink. The business end of the line should consist of a trace-cum-paternoster. This is made of 1 yard of gut above the lead, which is looped midway to receive the hook, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  yards of gut trace below the lead with a hook at its extreme end. Thus one bait is fished about eighteen inches above the bottom while the other moves attractively along the ground a few feet away.

Small hooks are absolutely essential, because the bream has a very tiny mouth; size 4 is about the largest which should be used. Nor must the baits be too large; the best of these are lugworm, ragworm, mussels, or small piece of shuck crab.

Successful bream fishing depends to a large extent on a knowledge of local conditions. To reach a mark frequented by these fish the advice of a boatman is necessary, for though they may be very numerous at a certain point they will be entirely absent from a spot only a short distance away.

If the bream are located great sport will surely follow, for they are so densely shoaled that the angler is kept very busy playing and landing fish, and then rebaiting again. Striking should not be too rapid;

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time must be allowed for the bream to take in the bait, usually just a matter of a second or so. If many bites are missed the angler should use smaller hooks, smaller baits, and delay his strike a little longer.

If the fish caught are mainly small the boat should be rowed to another position a short distance away. In my experience large bream and small ones seldom intermingle ; although a big shoal may include fish of all sizes the heavier chaps seem to swim in a little *bloc* of their own. Possibly they lead the shoal, and the small fry tail behind. It is hard to say.

Morning and evening are reputed to be the best times for fishing, though good results are often obtained throughout the day. It is probably a question of the depth of the water. In the deeps the fish may feed boldly all day long, whereas in the shallows they are extremely shy when the sun is at its height.

Any angler who intends fishing seriously for black bream—and they are well worth it—should make arrangements with a Bognor boatman to let him know when the fish are in. Their movements are somewhat uncertain, and a visit “ on spec ” may lead to disappointment.

## 7 WHITING

THE whiting is the great standby of sea anglers. When most other fish fail us they will usually oblige. They do not grow to any great size, especially those which come close inshore, though even these may occasionally reach  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound. The best fish, those round about a pound, are found some distance out to sea.

But what they lack in weight, they make up for in numbers. When the shoals are about, the sea seems full of them, and they can be pulled up three at a time on a three-hook paternoster. Bags of fifty or more are by no means uncommon.

They favour cold weather, and possibly for this reason they are more numerous and much larger in the north than in the south. Every year our shores are invaded by vast shoals of millions of these fish. Sometimes they are very small, no more than 4 inches long, and on these occasions the angler's patience is taxed to the uttermost. For, like bream, the large fish do not seem to mix with the small, or at least they swim in a different part of the shoal. It is very trying to be robbed of bait by these tiny creatures.

I remember fishing one cold winter's afternoon at Newhaven. There were only tiddlers about, but

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these were biting like mad. So eventually, as it became dark, I decided to give it up as a bad job. A few days later I met another angler who had remained fishing after I had left, and he told me that a short time after my departure the small fish seemed to pass on ; and after a brief lull the big fellows began. He left Newhaven “ wall ” that evening with about 20 pounds of good sized fish.

The winter months are definitely best, and the evening is the most productive time of the day. It appears that the shoals wait some distance off-shore during the day, and move into shallow water as soon as it grows dark. The angler who is hardy enough to take up his position on pier, rocks, or groyne, and who is prepared to face a biting northerly breeze, will get his share of whiting.

A light 9-foot rod and fine line are necessary, and a sufficient weight of lead to sink the bait to the bottom. A gut paternoster about 6 feet long, fitted with three No. 4 hooks, is the best arrangement of tackle.

Although the whiting has a large mouth for a fish of its size, it is quite unnecessary to use large baits or large hooks. Possibly the two best baits are lugworm and shuck crab, after which come ragworms and “ lasts ” of mackerel or herring. These last two baits are especially useful for night fishing.

Night fishermen must take a lamp of some sort ; unhooking of fish and rebaiting are very difficult in the dark.

## 8. DABS AND FLOUNDERS

PLAICE, dabs, and flounders are often grouped together in the angler's mind under the heading of flatfish. Other species, such as soles, brill, and turbot, are not so frequently encountered. Of the first three the plaice is by far the most attractive, both from a sporting and culinary standpoint, but can seldom be caught by the shore fisherman owing to his preference for slightly deeper water. He is easily distinguishable from the others by his brilliant orange spots on his smooth grey-green back. These should not be confused with the dull orange patches found on some flounders, but in any case the flounder's main colour is a dark blotchy brown. Flounders vary considerably however, and have a capacity for changing their colour every few minutes, so that they almost always match the colour of the ground on which they are lying.

The dab is the palest of the trio. He has a few yellow spots on his back, but is easily detected, if any doubt exists, by the roughness of his skin on the upper side. Moreover, his white underside has a faint bluish tinge, whereas the flounder and the plaice are pure white. Dab and plaice are excellent eating, but there are few people who would

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appreciate the flavour—or lack of flavour—of a flounder.

Summer is the best time, especially for plaice, but either of these fish can be caught at almost any time through the year.

As their shape indicates, they are bottom feeders, hugging the sea bed where it is sandy or muddy. They are seldom found on rocky ground. Their food consists mainly of worms, so lugworms are the best bait. Both black lug and the ordinary common red lug are good, and sometimes mussel and king ragworm are worth trying.

All these fish have very small mouths, so it is unwise to have too big a bait. What is more, it is absolutely imperative that a small hook should be used. Personally, I use No. 6. Anything larger than size 4 is unsuitable. Short-shanked hooks are best. The tendency of some anglers to use a long-shanked hook when using worms for bait is wrong.

The rest of the tackle can be of the very lightest, providing, of course, that the strength of the current will allow of using a small lead. The bait must lie on the sea bottom. A free trace is better than a paternoster. A boom is attached to the end of the line and a lead is secured to the lower swivel. A  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -yard or 2-yard cast, looped to accommodate two or three hooks, is then attached to the arm of the boom. Thus the baits will lay flat and can move freely in response to the tide.

## ANGLING IN SALT WATER

For a bait to be free to move is a very definite asset. Years ago an old angler gave me a useful tip which is especially applicable when one is after flatfish.

Every few minutes after casting out he would wind in a half-dozen turns of line on to his reel. This, as he pointed out, would shift his bait a foot or two along the sea bed, so that for each cast he was fishing quite a large area of water. But, in addition, a moving object will catch the eye of a fish much more readily than a still one; so there was a double chance, not merely of moving into a new spot where a fish may be lying, but also of attracting one from some distance away. I remember his delight when he showed me how to do this, for almost immediately he had a good bite and landed a nice flounder. He was very pleased to find that the value of his little tip had been so quickly proved.

These small-mouthed fish will suck at a bait for some time before they really swallow it, so it would seem wiser not to strike too soon after a bite is indicated. On the other hand, however, I have usually found that even when struck immediately the fish is securely hooked. So the only logical conclusion is that he has been munching the bait so gently that no bite has been registered on the rod top; but having engulfed it, a bite is indicated when he attempts to swim away. Incidentally, a hooked flounder will lay absolutely doggo on the floor of the sea. If you do not notice his first bite

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the chances are that you will be unaware of your fish until you wind in some minutes later.

Dabs and flounders can be caught from almost any seaside pier or beach where the bed is sandy or muddy. The latter fish often swims quite a distance up river estuaries, and sometimes even penetrates as far as the fresh water. But the plaice is usually in deeper water a mile or so out to sea. Most local boatmen, when hiring out their boats, will be only too pleased to give particulars of the bearings of a suitable “ mark ” for these fish.

Weather doesn’t seem to be of great importance. Good or bad days are not necessarily controlled by actual good or bad conditions. So-called unfavourable weather should never be allowed to damp the angler’s optimism, for, goodness only knows, there are thousands of fishermen who can testify to having had wonderful sport at times when they least expected it.

And this goes for all fishing, too, whether it be in sea, river, or lake.

THE END







