



Higher Sharra Pool

FISHING FACTS AND FANCIES

H. G. MICHELMORE



Arch of Staverton Bridge

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Preface.

This interesting, instructive and amusing book is due to constant persuasion on my part to induce my friend, Mr. H. G. Michelmore, to give to fishermen the benefit of his great experience.

For nearly twenty years I have fished with him on the Dart, and though others might have blank days, he almost always returned with a salmon—and sometimes two or more; and even the most modest sportsman cannot belittle a fine fish.

Any man may have a lucky day, but the season's record is the test.

Catching the author in an incautious moment after dinner, I was not surprised to learn that he caught on the Dart ninety-seven salmon during the 1945 season, which season it will be remembered was generally said to be a poor one. This is a great record for anyone, but especially so for a very busy man, whose professional and business activities have perforce to take precedence over any desire to spend a day by the river.

From such an experienced and successful fisherman a few hints and wrinkles must necessarily be of great interest, so I have never missed an opportunity of trying to persuade him to write a book. After many unsuccessful efforts on my part, he has at last put into writing some of the result of his fifty years of experience. The reader will find his views, given with his characteristic amusing and whimsical touch, both interesting and profitable.

It is an unusual book, but then the author is an unusual and exceptional sportsman, for in addition to being an expert with rod and line, he won the Tennis Championship of Devon for twenty consecutive years.

I am glad that he has been persuaded to write the book, and my only regret is that he did not add a few more chapters.

TOM EASTHAM.

29th May, 1946.

Preliminaries.

Ever since I landed my first eel in my Nurse's umbrella—a feat which, if my memory serves me, aroused more enthusiasm in my breast than in hers, I have been a keen fisherman, and an enemy of mine, whom I had thought a friend, has been pressing me for some time to write a book containing some of my experiences, and now, saying like the maid that I would ne'er consent, I have foolishly consented.

I understand that such a book should commence with a few words of advice upon the choice of a rod, but this dates back to the good old days when a manufacturer was always willing to send you three or four rods to choose from, so that you could take them to a river or a field and see which suited you best. The only advice I can give you now is, if you are so lucky as to find a manufacturer willing to sell you a rod, to accept it without criticism and make the best of it.

The next thing to do is to spoil the appearance of the rod by painting it a dull green. This will deduct 50% from its appearance and add that amount to its efficiency.

You have probably noticed, when fishing a river, that if you become aware of some other rod in the distance on the same stretch of water, the first thing that brings his unwelcome presence to your knowledge is the flash of his rod, and you will perhaps agree that if this flash attracts your attention in the distance, it is even more likely to attract the attention of the fish who are close at hand.

In the absence of advice on the choice of a rod, I would suggest that before you fish any stretch of water it is wise to make quite sure that that water is inhabited by the fish that you wish to catch. I remember as a small boy spending many hours fishing a large pond in a brickyard, which I thought myself fortunate to obtain permission to fish, but I later found that this pond contained nothing more edible than a tadpole,

Novices' Luck.

DOES IT RUN IN FAMILIES?

A friend of mine, whose busy life had permitted no time for sport, acquired a mansion within the district of the River Teign and, incidentally, decided that he would learn to fish.

He favoured me with the suggestion that I should teach him, and being ever anxious to encourage the pursuit of knowledge, I called to collect him one day with a view to showing him how bass should be caught in the estuary at Teignmouth.

I found many artificers at work upon the higher portions of the mansion, and my friend told me that they were engaged in converting many small bedrooms into a very few large ones. He explained that he disliked spare bedrooms because in his experience they harboured guests.

We collected another friend for whom his godparents had selected the name of Herbert, and proceeded to the Teign.

On our way to the quay we met a weird character, who was what the natives describe as "not quite exactly." His habit was to stop anyone he might meet, with the information that his name was Albert Dymond, and that he had three sisters called Faith, Hope and Eliza. He would then solicit a gift of a halfpenny. He never asked for more and, as far as I know, he never asked for less.

Our friend was laughing, more with him than at him, but an old lady at her cottage door, who knew them both, chimed in with the advice: "Master 'Erbert, you should never laff at the afflicted, for you might be struck comical yourself one day, you never know."

We floated on to the river and armed our pupil with a sufficiency of lead and a live sand-eel. When he told us that the sand-eel had developed unexpected strength in the current and was pulling out his line, we assured him that this usually



Lower Sharra Pool

flood, the fish left the pool and went down the rapids to Lower Sharra Pool. All my backing was out and the cliff made it impossible to follow, so I asked my man to hold the rod while I went around the cliff by the path and down to Lower Sharra Pool to inspect. The odds were 1,000 to 1 against my seeing anyone in that desolate region, but the pixies sent down the opposite bank the sportsman who rented the fishing there, and he arrived at Lower Sharra Pool at the same moment that I did. It then became apparent that, owing to the sharp bend in the river, he could reach my line with his long gaff from the left bank half-way between the two pools. He did this, hand-lined the fish to his bank in Lower Sharra Pool and gaffed it. He then took off my cast so that I could wind up my line and return to higher Sharra Pool. I threw the line across to him, when he replaced the cast and hooked on the fish so that I could pull it across and take it out on my side. And what could be fairer than that!

A day or two later I went to fish on the right bank of the river at Staverton, and on this occasion I had the comfort and society of divers agreeable female friends. I will always tell



Pixies' Cave

any damned lie to avoid taking women fishing with me, but if one does get landed with them the only thing to do is to make the best of it. In the white water right under the weir there was a fish constantly rising. I asked the ladies to try for it, but they said: "No, you must catch it," which was, of course, what I wanted them to say. It seemed a certainty, but the fish was so close to the weir that I decided to float a prawn past it. This I did many times, but the fish took no notice. I then explained to the ladies that if a fish refused a prawn it would often take a shrimp, and I floated a shrimp past it many times, but there was nothing doing. The only way to fish with a fly was to hold my rod out at arm's length and dangle the fly over it in the white water. This I did until my arm was breaking off, when the pixies caused a gust of wind to blow my fly right across to a spot twelve inches the far side of the fish, whereupon the fish rose and grabbed the fly at once and in due course I landed it. I found on examination that its left eye was entirely missing, and the pixies had adopted the only possible method of catching it.