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<td>Undressed pure white silk</td>
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BY

J. W. MARTIN

("THE TRENT OTTER")

AUTHOR OF "FLOAT FISHING IN THE NOTTINGHAM STYLE"
"BARBEL AND CHUB FISHING"
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Some of these men have not the time to make a complete study of these fish; and I know by long experience that they are ever ready to welcome any practical and useful remarks by a known practical man, who has travelled far and wide for his sport. A series of short chapters on the different branches of this sport is the special feature of this volume.

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This edition is entirely rewritten from start to finish and brought down to date, and is also very much extended.

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PREFACE

In these pages you will not find an elaborate list of tackle and goods recommended, but only what I know by many years' experience to be exactly suitable for the sport described.

No college training or book learning have I had, but simply an education in the hard world of experience and the open book of Nature herself.

With confidence I leave this with you, and thank my hundreds of friends for the kindly words and the cordial reception they gave my last volume of personal experiences. I trust this will meet with a similar reception.

J. W. MARTIN,

July, 1907.

"THE TRENT OTTER."
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CHAPTER I

WHICH INTRODUCES THE PIKE

Ancient writers on the pike—Retrospective—The sweep and the champion pike angler—Description of the pike—His ferocity and voracity—Tench as food of pike, or doctor—Breeding of pike—Weight and growth of pike—The pike in ancient times—Its value as food.

"He loves no streams, but hugs the silent deeps;
And eats all hours, and yet no house he keeps."

THEOPHILUS FRANCK, the poet, a good many years ago, in singing the merits or demerits of our old friend the pike, delivered himself of the foregoing couplet; and all writers, both ancient and modern, before and after Franck's time, who have taken this fish as a text, are very much in agreement as to the general character they give him. They all looked upon his formidable teeth, his wicked eyes, his elongated shape, and his villainous aspect, as being fit subjects for a good deal of vivid descriptive writing; even the very root sound of his name they suggested spelt voracity and ferocity.

One of the earliest writers who make mention of the pike, the Latin poet Ausonius, who lived and wrote about the fourth century, says in one of his poems—

"The wary Luce, 'midst wrack and rushes hid;
The scourge and terror of the scaly brood."
A poem entitled "The Innocent Epicure," written in or about the year 1697, has the following lines in one of the verses—

"Go on, my muse, next let thy numbers speak
That mighty Nimrod of the streams, the pike."

Coming down to later times, we find Pope, too, sings in very much the same strain in one of his poems when he says—

"And pikes, the tyrants of the watery plains."

These quotations go to prove that even old writers, when pike-fishing was little known, and trolling was only in its infancy, looked upon the pike as a fish of prey, that pursued and hunted down its smaller and weaker brethren, while the very aspect of its powerful jaws and cruel teeth was enough to strike terror into the hearts of the superstitious people of those days.

I remember as a boy hearing an old Lincolnshire fen fisherman tell tales of this fish—tales wild and improbable; but like a true pupil, who had not even a rudimentary knowledge of the fish and his habits, I believed even the wildest story. Since those far-away days, as the result of close observation, and a practical experience extending to river, lake, and mere, under nearly all conditions, I have been forced to the conclusion that our English pike has been credited with attributes that do not belong to him; and more stories, fables, and untruths have been told about him than are exactly good for his reputation and character.

I hope I may be pardoned if I claim to be a commonsense sportsman, who has been intimately acquainted for many years with my friend the jack; has disturbed him time and again; has routed him out of his fastnesses of reeds and flags; has seen him leap like a trout down the shallow streams, and shake his old head like a terrier with a rat; has felt his sullen tugs at the very bottom of deep and gloomy tarns, far from the madding crowd; and turned him over to look at his superb markings on both
WHICH INTRODUCES THE PIKE

sides, when the fight has ended, and his long length lies quivering on the bank.

I find on reference to my notebooks that one season I landed no fewer than two hundred and twenty-seven pike, all of good standard size; and in the process wore out five fifty-yard lengths of plaited silk lines, besides twice renewing the rings on my spinning-rod. That was the hardest season's work I ever put in, and this, too, was in a well-fished public river, where Tom, Dick, and Harry had an equal right to fish.

I find also on reference to other seasons' work that the sizeable jack landed have been as few as six; while from twenty to thirty in as many days' outings have been recorded as a very fair average season's take. My friend Mr. William Ball, the famous "Trentsider" of the Lower Trent, in a letter written to me the other day, said: "Ah, my boy, there does not seem to be the keenness and the pluck among the fishermen nowadays as there was in the days you write about in your last book: the Tommy Sunmans, the Andrew Broughtons, the Frank Sims, the Thomas Bentleys, and the anglers of that kidney, that you name, are few and far between; men who cared for no weather, no matter what it was, but were found with spinning or other seasonable rod in hand during their spare time." Those men, and more of the same sort that I do not name, are sacred memories with me; and, in common parlance, "What they did not know about pike-fishing was not worth knowing."

I used to make it my business to go on a tour of inspection all down the rivers which for the nonce I was residing near to; and after one of these rambles I would remark to one or other of the famous anglers named above: "I saw a good jack or two in a certain place." "Then," the answer was given quickly, "that pike's death warrant is as good as signed, sealed, and delivered; he won't get much grace." I don't write in any boasting strain, but only wish to show that my masters and pastors and companions were men of
the very keenest instincts, who never lost a chance; and
the lessons they taught have stood me in right good stead.

I saw a statement some time ago in one of the sporting
papers that Mr. J., the champion pike angler, fishing Lord
B.'s private lake, had landed in one day nearly four hundred
pounds' weight of jack. I read this over to Tipler the
sweep, who just then was casting a pike bait over a likely-
looking stretch of the Lower Trent. "Ah," said he, "I
wonder how he won that title of champion pike angler.
It is all very well when you can pick and choose your water;
but if he was in my position, and had a hungry wife and
children looking on, same as I have over there"—at the
same time indicating with a jerk of his head a trio seated
on the bank—"and had to fish a well-tried public river
and catch a jack before they could have their breakfasts,
I reckon his bags would not be much heavier than mine."

This neatly sums up the situation; the great bulk of
pike fishermen must of necessity ply their craft in well-
fished public waters, and they must know the best method
to adopt in all and every condition of wind, water, and
stream. Private lakes that swarm with lurking jack are
not accessible to the majority of fishermen; these men are
content to spin on a public river, and consider it a treat
worthy a special page in their mental notebooks if by chance
a brace of jack going ten or a dozen pounds between them
reposes in the bag at night. I know as an experienced
man that this is not done without some careful thought;
a chuck-and-chance-it angler now and again drops by
accident across a good thing, and gets the fish of his life-
time, when he did not deserve it.

This, then, is the plan I have mapped out for the present
volume: my own personal observations and experiences
will be most carefully noted; hints given on baits and
tackle, and the various methods of using them; when,
where, and how to fish; the smallest cost of the necessary
appliances; all this in plain and simple language that
any one will be able to understand.
Our English pike, or jack, as it is generally called nowadays, when in good condition is a handsome fish, and one that is much sought after by anglers of every degree. Bewildering in quantity and amazing in shape and colour are the artificial baits, the spinning tackles, the snaps, the floats, the traces, and everything connected with his capture.

Scientifically he is known as *Esox lucius*, and I find he is technically described in a dictionary as follows: "So called from the shape of his head and jaws. Head depressed, large, oblong, blunt; jaws, palatine bones and vomer furnished with teeth of various sizes; body, elongated, rounded on the back, sides compressed, covered with scales; dorsal fin placed far back over the anal fin; whole body mottled with white, yellow, and green."

Izaak Walton says that the pike is "a solitary, melancholy, and bold fish"; and most certainly this is not a bad description, although at odd times they may be found congregated in considerable numbers. Generally speaking, however, they are not often discovered in shoals like bream, roach, and barbel; more often than not, especially during the winter months, they are solitary tenants of a quiet reedy corner, away from the rush of the main stream, sole kings of that small domain, ready to pounce out at a moment's notice on any unwary roach or dace that happens to stray within striking distance.

One old writer, describing the haunts and habits of pike, uses a few words that are so suggestive of the fish that they are worth repeating. He says, "Shrouded from observation in his solitary retreat, he follows with his eye the shoals of fish that wander heedlessly along; he marks the water-rat swimming to his burrow, the ducklings paddling among the water-weeds, the dabchick and the moorhen swimming leisurely on the surface; he selects his victim, and like the tiger springing from the jungle he rushes forth, seldom missing his aim, there is a sudden swirl and splash, circle after circle forms on the surface of the water, and all is still again in an instant."
Many fables and traditions have been handed down from one writer to another, and from father to son, on this point of the pike's savage ferocity, and also on his marvellous powers of digestion; and none of these traditions seem to lose anything by being repeated; and they need lose nothing, for he has deservedly earned the name given him by many writers—the "freshwater shark."

When you come to look at him, and consider the question of his food in all its bearings, it is more difficult to determine what he is not likely to eat, than what he will; for many anecdotes are told of the extraordinary things he has been known to run at, and fairly and squarely seize. One writer says that "a swan was observed on a lake in a very peculiar manner, the head and neck for a long time under water; on proceeding to the spot it was discovered that a pike had got the head of the bird firmly fixed in its throat; and being unable to extricate themselves from this extraordinary difficulty, the pair of them had died."

Now I should not like to hint for a moment that our jack opened his jaws with intent to swallow the swan altogether; probably when the bird's long neck was thrust down into the water he seized it on the off-chance, and paid with his life for his rash error. More than once or twice I have seen a pike that had been taken from the water an hour or two previously, make a sudden spring and lacerate the hand of an angler who had incautiously put his finger in too close proximity to the fish's jaws. That wounded hand haunts me even to this day, and causes me to impress most strongly on the young angler that he must not on any account put his hands too near a captured pike, or in all probability, if he is grabbed by those terrible curved teeth, he will remember it for the rest of his life.

I remember once taking home several six- and seven-pounders, and turning them out of my bag into the long iron trough under the kitchen tap; my wife went for a can of water, and, reaching over the trough, was startled, and screamed out loudly, when one of the fish made an upward
WHICH INTRODUCES THE PIKE

spring and only missed her arm by an inch. Be very careful in disengaging hooks from pike. Always carry a spring gag, that can be bought for sixpence, to insert in the mouth and hold the jaws apart; and a short, heavy club also is useful to give him a smart tap between the eyes. This will effectually settle his nonsense.

Pike do not confine themselves to a fish diet. I have found all sorts of things inside them—rats, chickens, tiny ducks, moorhens, and other small birds and mammals; and once I found a rusted key, no less than five inches long; another time there was a metal tea-spoon, and a good square of old rag, while again a lead plummet with a brass ring on the top was brought to light. This latter article had been lost by a roach angler earlier in the day; he said a pike had seized his plummet, and I had the pleasure of restoring to him his lost property.

The strangest capture of a pike I ever made or saw was a five-pounder, who rushed at a big swan-quill float that I was using under the boughs for chub; when winding bait and float home again, he came like a flash, and the float firmly stuck under his gills and the opposite corner of his jaw; that float was hopelessly ruined, but the pike was bagged.

When pike are hungry they will run at almost anything that moves in the water, if it only bears any resemblance to the living things of the water or bank; but when not on the feed scarcely anything will tempt them. Expert pike fishermen know very well the difference between the "runs" when he is "on the job," and when he is not; he often plays with a bait, mouthing and killing it, but has no intention of taking it fairly, so that he can be hooked. Sometimes he allows himself to be hauled about, and even dragged to the surface, when with a wink of his eye and a flap of his tail he carefully drops the bait and rolls over into deep water; and you are prepared to swear there was a mocking grin on his wicked-looking face as he did so. But I cannot help thinking that it is a fortunate thing they
are more often "off" than "on" the feed, because if they were always in a taking humour there would soon be nothing left alive—in well-preserved pike waters at any rate; everything else they could eat would soon be cleared out.

I often wonder how the pike manages to live and thrive at all in certain waters; there does not appear to be much there for the likes of him. The truth is he is endowed with the power of long fasting, and exercises this power both from necessity and choice.

I have seen it stated that no matter how hungry a pike is he won't take a tench. From Walton's time downwards Tench has been reckoned as the pike's physician, the touch of a tench being a cure for all sorts of ailments and accidents that a pike was subject to. Well, I don't suppose a man would want to swallow his doctor, and a pike would perhaps be on the same footing; but I am afraid the tale is only an old legend, and has no foundation in fact. I heard of two cases once, where a gentleman had a lot of very ill-conditioned pike in a small lake; he turned a big consignment of tench into that lake, and within three years the pike had very much improved in general shape and appearance. This was put down to the presence of the tench in the water, and not, as I should suppose, the plentiful supply of fresh food so generously put there in the form of those tench. The other case was in a similar lake, and this lake had in it quantities of the very finest tench I ever saw, but the jack that lived there were the ugliest and worst in condition I ever met with, and more wicked-looking than usual.

Pike, to be in good condition, depend more on the water they inhabit, the nature of the weeds and cover, the state of the springs, and the natural supply of its feeders, together with the quality of the natural food bred and fed in the water; and no amount of tench being turned into a rank bad water will make it a good one.

Pike spawn between the latter end of February and the
WHICH INTRODUCES THE PIKE

beginning of May; it all depends on the state of the weather as to whether they are early or late. I have observed them pairing as early as St. Valentine's day, and I have also seen them as late as the tenth of May, which my notebook says is the very latest I have any record of. Spawning time is a very long and trying period in their history. At this time they seek out all sorts of dykes, ditches, backwaters, and creeks, depositing the ova among the vegetation, and so absorbed are they that scarcely anything frightens them. They have fallen victims in scores to hand-nets, wire snares, and even snatch-hooks suspended from the centre of a long clothes line. Now they are in the very worst possible condition—slimy, lanky, and unwholesome as food, and should in a well-regulated pike fishery be left alone till October, or September at the very earliest.

Under favourable conditions these fish will grow to a very large size; but what their heaviest weight is, or was, or is likely to be, we cannot determine; so many fables and romances have been written on this subject that we have to be very careful what we accept. There is a tradition of a Scotch loch pike that reached the extraordinary weight of seventy-two pounds; another fish, whose head is preserved, was credited with forty-two pounds as its weight.

Traditions have been handed down by succeeding generations of Irish fishermen that pike reaching the enormous weight of eighty pounds have been taken in the lakes and tarns of that land of romance and superstition. Pliny, the ancient writer, mentions an Esox that weighed a thousand pounds; but this cannot be identified with the Esox lucius of modern times. I dare say the top weight of our everyday pike would reach forty pounds, and these would only be few and far between, the big Irish lakes being the most likely places to find them. Perhaps Mr. Jardine's brace of thirty-five pounders can be set down as our record English pike at any rate. Any-
thing from seventeen to thirty pounds can be set down as a fair specimen, not often caught.

Experts say that under favourable conditions pike grow rapidly; they have been known to weigh between four and five pounds when only four years old; and they also say that next to a carp they are the longest lived of any fresh-water fish, forty or fifty years being fixed as the extreme limit.

Some years ago the Anglers' News reported the taking from a lake of a dead pike weighing sixty pounds. Dowdeswell, near Cheltenham, was the place; but as the result of investigation this pike also must be added to the list of the fabulous. The old Trent professional, Charlie Hudson, who lived at Dunham and fished the Lower Trent for well-nigh, if not quite, fifty years, and who was the most likely man to know the biggest Trent pike that ever came from those famous waters, assured me that, during the long series of years he had fished with hundreds of patrons, he had only a record of four pike that individually exceeded twenty pounds. Strange as it may seem, the very largest of all, a fish going twenty-seven and a half pounds, was taken on a lobworm and leger, when breaming in the hole under the very shadow of Newton cliffs, a swim known locally as Dunham Dubbs.

In an old volume of the Fishing Gazette dated November 22nd, 1879, Mr. Brougham, an old-time secretary of the Thames Angling Preservation Society, contributed an article on Mr. Jardine's big pike. He said that it weighed on the club scales of the Piscatorial Society 34\frac{1}{2} lbs., and was an exact counterpart of the other 35-pounder captured by Mr. Jardine two years previously. This ought to settle the vexed question as to the exact weight of Mr. Jardine's brace, as they have been growing during the interim.

In the same volume of the Fishing Gazette there is an account of an interview with Mr. John Cooper, senior, the very king of fish preservers, and he said a thirty-eight
pounder from Lough Earn in Ireland was the largest pike he ever handled.

Some anglers seem to think that pike and jack are two separate and distinct fish, but this is not so; years ago it was a recognized thing to call this fish if under five pounds a jack, but a pike if he exceeded that figure; gradually the distinctive title has been abandoned, and, no matter how large or small, they are now more often called jack than pike.

Very old pike are extremely ugly and disgusting; as great age creeps on them they get thinner and thinner, the huge head and fins, together with an eel like body, giving them a sour and truculent appearance. I remember being in at the death of two of these brutes; one was more than a yard in length and only weighed 6½ lb., the other was more than four feet and only tipped the beam at sixteen pounds odd.

Pike are a pretty ancient fish; as far back as the reign of Henry II the fish formed part of the coat of arms of the family of Lucie; this is one of the earliest recorded instances of fish being used in English heraldry. We are told that “during the reign of Edward I this fish was so very scarce and dear that very few could afford to eat it, the price being double that of salmon, and ten times higher than either turbot or cod.” A well-known authority says that the reason of this is most likely the fact that pike had then only just been introduced into this country, and as a natural consequence was very scarce. Coming down a little later to the time of Edward III we find that “this fish was most carefully preserved, kept in stews, and fed. In 1446 pike was one of the chief dishes at the High Church festival given in that year by George Neville, Archbishop of York. During the reign of Henry VIII it fetched as much again as house lamb in February; and a very small pickerell was dearer than a fat capon, and pike figured on all the menus of civic banquets in London and elsewhere for many generations.”
Personally I look upon a jack from a good running river as being a very fair fish for the table; second only to the perch, as far as coarse fishes are concerned. One from a muddy, stagnant pond would not be a success, neither would one caught before October. During the summer and early autumn they are flabby and in the worst possible condition, and give any one a poor idea of what the same fish is like at Christmas. They are cooked in various ways, and really no particular method can with advantage be recommended; but whatever you do, always see that the cooking is thorough; half-cooked pike is detestable; the flesh ought to leave the bones with the utmost freedom.

A fish of six or seven pounds, which would be best steamed, will be improved by placing two handfuls of salt in its open mouth, and hanging it tail downwards for six or seven hours before cleaning or washing. For my own part I prefer a small one from three to four pounds, cleaned and split, and then divided into four parts and fried crisp, in sufficient boiling lard to cover them.

A very old writer writing of this fish and the esteem in which it was held during his time said—

"Lo! the rich pike, to entertain your guest,
Smokes on the board, and decks a royal feast."

While, on the other hand, the ancient poet Ausonius says he is

"Unknown at friendship's hospitable board,
Smokes 'midst the smoky tavern's coarsest food."

With these two very contradictory quotations I will close this chapter.
CHAPTER II

ANCIENT AND MODERN ANECDOTES
(FACTS, FICTION, AND FABLES)

The pike of fiction and fancy—The giant Mannheim pike—The Cambridge pike—The parish clerk and the Lillieshall pike—Pike in Sweden—The union jack of Loch Tay—The pike of solid fact—Dame Juliana Berners on the capture of pike—The pike and the gander.

The pike of solid fact and the pike of fable are two separate and distinct things; but unfortunately the two have been so mixed up that the task of separating them becomes well-nigh impossible. Look at the tale of that giant pike that has been gravely quoted by modern writers as not only having some foundation in fact, but older writers give us the impression that they really accepted it as being beyond the possibility of doubt.

It was said this huge pike, which was taken from a lake near Mannheim in the year 1497, had a medal or an expanding ring fastened to it, on which was recorded the strange news that the fish was put in the lake by Frederick the Second in the year 1232. They wished the world to understand that the pike had lived no less than 250 years, and had survived social and political upheavals, and had seen many kings and emperors come and go. Not the least remarkable feature of this astounding tale was the extraordinary size the fish is said to have reached, being no less than nineteen feet in length, and 350 pounds in weight. So that no doubt might be cast on the statement, its skeleton was said to be preserved in the local
14 DAYS AMONG THE PIKE AND PERCH

museum; but when this was examined by an experienced naturalist he had no hesitation in pronouncing it a clever fraud, evidently built up to fit the story.

Another story mentions a pike that seized the lips of a mule that had gone into a lake to drink; and still another historian puts on record that a pike seized the foot of a Polish woman who had stepped into a stream.

All sorts of tales have been gravely handed down from father to son, in all probability gaining weight in the process, as to what has been found in the belly of certain jack at one time or other. There was one tale told in a village in Cambridgeshire about a man who was drowned in a very deep pool in the river there. Some time afterwards a very large pike was captured from the same pool, and on opening the fish the watch and chain belonging to the dead man were found; and as if it could prove the statement, the watch was exhibited, together with several large metal buttons that had formed part of the clothing of the unfortunate man. By this, I take it, it was implied that the pike had either attacked the man, or picked his pocket, or something very like it. Another tale was to the effect that the body of a dead infant was recovered from the inside of another mighty pike.

Sir J. Hawkins, in his notes to one edition of the Complete Angler, says: "On a Tuesday in the year 1765, at the Lime Works, Lillieshall, near Newport, a deep pool was drained, and an enormous pike was found. He was drawn out by a rope fastened round his head and gills, in the presence of hundreds of spectators. He weighed upwards of one hundred and seventy pounds, and is thought to be the largest ever seen. Some time ago the clerk of the parish was trolling in the above pool, when his bait was seized by the furious creature, which by a sudden jerk pulled him in, and doubtless would have devoured him also, had he not by wonderful agility and dexterous swimming escaped the dreadful jaws of this voracious animal."

The authority for this amazing pike tale was stated to
be the columns of a London newspaper of that period, in which it had appeared as an item of interesting news. I am not certain as to whether the pike would have been able to swallow that parish clerk, if he had kept hold; but, anyhow, we find it impossible to swallow pike tales of that magnitude.

In the lonely tarns of Sweden, waters that do contain enormous perch and pike, it is a very frequent occurrence to take pike that are never hooked at all. The native fishermen set a series of curious and unusually strong fixed or night lines, baited in some instances with huge worms or bunches of garbage; perch of four and five pounds weight swallow these baited hooks, and huge pike in turn swallow the perch; and although the pike are rarely or never hooked themselves, yet the prickly fins and the hard scales of the perch set so fast in the throat of the swallower that the fishermen have a difficulty to drag them asunder. One old traveller and sportsman who made Sweden his objective, left it on record that the very largest pike he ever got, and he went far and wide after them, and got into communication with well-known men and districts for several years, was a forty-pounder, the head of which, I believe, is now preserved in England.

The pike of solid fact sometimes get themselves into strange and alarming difficulties, but I question if a stranger situation was ever created than that witnessed by a boatman on Loch Tay. One day he saw a commotion in the water, a violent struggle was going on between two pike. He promptly gaffed them, and found such an extraordinary state of affairs that he sent them exactly as gaffed to Mr. F. Buckland, the distinguished naturalist, who took a cast of them.

The two jack weighed between them a little over nineteen pounds, as near as possible each being the same size; the head of one, beyond the gill covers, was firmly wedged in the throat of the other; and it was the violent struggle to free themselves that attracted the attention of the boatman.
Now what are we to say about this case? Surely one ten-pound pike did not make a deliberate attempt to swallow another ten-pounder? The mind boggles at this, unless one of those pike was suffering from a very serious deformity of vision. Or were they fighting, and one made a tremendous charge at the open mouth of the other with such disastrous results?

Some anglers are afraid of jack; they look upon them as things to be avoided, and won't put their hands anywhere near them if they can help it. But with ordinary care there is no danger. I have been many times in close quarters with these fish, and even if I crawled ever so gingerly towards them and peered cautiously through the flags and rushes at them, as soon as ever my eyes met the wicked-looking ones of the fish, like a flash of light he would vanish, and leave scarcely a ripple behind.

A friend of mine has a small pond in his garden, and we put a baby jack some ten inches long in it one day. This jack was fed on worms, and in a couple of years it had grown some three inches only in length. A lobworm held at full length in my friend's fingers and dangled over the water would be followed all round the pond by that fish. It was very interesting to watch; and I often wondered if pike have any reasoning faculties; it looked very much like it in that case, although one distinguished writer says "they have neither sense nor feeling."

The Rev. Mr. Manley, in writing of this fish and its habits, uses much the same words; he says "that in reality nothing comes amiss to him. He has no more taste, in the true sense of the word, than he has feeling. All's fish, at least food, that comes into his net. Certainly when left to his natural devices he is the sort of gentleman who would eat the toast on which asparagus is placed to drain, the tinfoil in which Rochefort cheese is enwrapped, the crust of a game pie, or the envelopment of an Oxford brawn."

Pike-fishing engaged the attention of our forefathers a
A SURREY PIKE (Weight—27½ lb.).

Caught on 5 March, 1907, by Mr. H. J. Jacob, of Creek Lodge, Ravenscourt Park, London, W.
good many years ago; and trolling with a dead gorge, and live-baiting more or less after the fashion of to-day, were the methods most in vogue. Dame Juliana Berners, who wrote the first book on angling that was ever penned, gives some very queer and amusing instructions in the art of catching pike; here is an extract in the original spelling:

"Take a codlynge hoke, and take a roche or a fresh heeryng, and a wyre with an hole in the ende, and put it in at the mouth, and out at the taylle, down by the ridge of the fresshe herryng; and thenne put the hoke in after, and drawe the hoke into the cheke of the freshe heeryng; then put a plumbe of lead upon your lyne a yarde longe from your hoke, and a flote in mid waye betwene; and caste it in a pytte where the pyke usyeth, and this is the best and moost surest crafte of takynge the pyke. Another manere of takynge him there is; take a frosshe (frog) and put it on your hoke, at the necke, betwene the skynne and the body, on the backe half, and put on a flote a yerde therelfro, and cast it where the pyke hauntyth, and ye shall have hym. Another manere; take the same bayte, and put it in assafetida, and caste it in the water wyth a corde and a corke, and ye shall not fayl of him." And then again that good dame instructeth: "And if ye lyst to have a good sporte, thenne tye the corde to a gose fote, and ye shall have a gode halyngne, whether the gose or the pyke shall have the better."

This sort of sport, as recommended in such quaint fashion, of tying a baited hook to the leg of a goose, seems to have been a fashionable pastime, and highly popular in former times; for another old writer tells us that:—

"The principal sport to take a pike is to take a goose or a gander, or a duck; take one of the pike lines, tie the line under the left wing, and over the right wing, about the body, as a man weareth his belt; turn the goose off into the lake where the pikes are; there is no doubt of sport, with great pleasure, betwixt the goose and the pike; it is
the greatest sport and pleasure that a noble gentleman in Shropshire doth give his friends entertainment with."

An interesting account of a struggle between a pike and a gander was published many years ago, and is worth quoting here.

"A farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Lochmaben, Dumfriesshire, kept a gander, who not only had a great trick of wandering himself, but also delighted in piloting his cackling harem to weary themselves in circumnavigating their native lake, or in straying amid forbidden fields on the opposite shore. Wishing to check this vagrant habit, he one day seized or snared the gander as he was about to spring into his native element, and tying a large fish-hook to his leg, to which was attached a large frog, he allowed him to proceed upon his voyage of discovery. As had been anticipated, this bait soon caught the eye of a large and greedy pike, which, swallowing the deadly hook, not only arrested the progress of the astonished gander, but forced him to perform half a dozen somersaults on the face of the water. For some time the struggle was most amusing, the fish pulling and the bird screaming with all its might, the one attempting to fly, and the other attempting to swim from the invisible enemy; the gander the one moment losing, and the next regaining his centre of gravity, and casting between whiles many a rueful look at his snow-white fleet of geese and goslings, who cackled out their sympathy for their afflicted commodore. At length victory declared in favour of the feathered angler, who landed at last on the smooth green grass one of the finest pike ever taken from the castle loch. This adventure is said to have cured that gander of his propensity for wandering."

This style of pike-fishing—tying the bait to the leg of a goose—seems to be somewhat like trimming with a movable trimmer all alive and kicking. I don't suppose anybody nowadays would attempt to entertain their friends with sport of this description, whatever they might have thought about it in the days of long ago.
CHAPTER III
THE HAUNTS OF THE PIKE

Old days among the pike—Pike of the Trent—A suggested remedy—Haunts of pike—Pike of the Ouse—In their reedy fortress—Pike in a baited swim—Good localities for the pike—The pike of various districts.

GOOD pike-fishing nowadays in public waters can hardly be expected; the fish is much sought after, and anglers spare no pains if they think there is a reasonable chance of sport. All waters that can be got at by the general run of fishermen are very nearly fished to death; but still pike-fishing has such a fascination for anglers that they keep going, and are well content if a dozen fish represent the total take of their whole season's outings.

Pretty fair public waters are still accessible. Pike anglers have increased a hundredfold since that far-away day when I had the thrilling experience of landing my first jack. That is a sacred memory, and the old wooden-legged angler who first taught me how to cast out a bait is not forgotten, although forty years have been recorded on time's dial since I last saw him and felt the strong grip of his hand as he bid me the last farewell, and I went away from boyhood's scenes and associations to another district to seek work and meet what that fickle jade Fortune had in store for me.

I said at the outset of this chapter that good pike-fishing in public waters could hardly be expected nowadays. When I use the term good in this connection I mean as it
was in the early days of my angling career, on rivers where a dozen good pike in a day's spinning was not counted as an extra good catch, but simply a fairly good one. Or go back a little further still; but even this is in the lifetime of an old friend who has lately plummed his last swim. The last time I saw him he told me that he could remember the time when flags and rushes grew in abundance all along the brink of the Trent, and had seen the disturbed jack bolt out of the reeds, not here and there an odd one, but every few steps he took. And when employed as keeper by the late Dr. Waterworth and Mr. Cafferata, he attended those celebrated anglers; and they thought nothing of a bag of pike numbering thirty fish, many of them from eight to fifteen pounds apiece.

Tom Beck, an old netter who lived next door to me during my residence on the Trent, has given me, chapter and verse from his old notebook, records of marvellous takes of pike from a dozen well-known spots on that river. A famous corner of his, and a very convenient spot to sweep his net round, was the flag-strewn bend just below Meering Ferry, a hundredweight of good pike often resulting from a single haul.

I can also remember when the late Mr. Sam Hibbert rented the Staythorpe fishery on the Middle Trent, he got heavy bags and good fish nearly every time he cared to go. Then look at those days of long ago when we roamed the canals, fen drains, and rivers of Lincolnshire, how the jack would fly at our old wobbling spoon, or an imperfectly mounted and spun roach.

During the fifteen or sixteen years that I roamed the Trent I found many places that jack, and good ones sometimes, could be got from. Somehow or other, in spinning over the corners, eddies, slacks, weir pools, and streams of that river, no matter what I used, nor how many hours during the day I put in, I never got a heavy bag, six fish being the most during one day.

Taking it all round, the eight years I spent on the Great
Ouse were the most prolific years in my pike-fishing career. One season alone I got two hundred and twenty-seven, large and small.

I should say the Hampshire Avon is the best pike river in England to-day; while the whole district of the eastern counties, comprising Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, etc., still maintains its ancient character, although perhaps in a lesser degree. I look round and find plenty of suitable pike water. At present the fish are woefully thinned down; but constant restocking should be carried on, and a stringent by-law passed for the protection of those pike waters; the size of takable fish should be regulated, the close season extended, and the methods of capture clearly defined, and all regulations strictly enforced. Only under conditions like these, every angler and every preservation society working together for the common good, can we expect a certainty of sport when we go pike-fishing, especially pike-fishing on a public river.

What man who has had the privilege of wetting his lines in a first-class water, and found the big jack well on, has ever forgotten the experience? None of them, I warrant; at least I can speak for myself as to the very few occasions I enjoyed that great good fortune. The anxious novice who happens to read these pages, and would very much like to be a successful pike fisherman, must make up his mind, if he follows this branch of angling in public waters, to two things: first, he is bound to catch more pike under four pounds than over that weight; and, secondly, if he gets three or four jack during a day's spinning or live-baiting he can consider himself extremely lucky.

Taking them in a general way, pike are not sociable fish, though large ones are often discovered in pairs. After floods and frosts, or owing to some accidental circumstances, they may sometimes be found collected together in numbers in favourable eddies or in a backwater away from the main stream, or at the tail end of an island where
the stream is, as it were, cut in two, with a curling, oily dimple of an eddy between those two streams.

The side of reed beds, among the flags and rushes, in odd corners and lay-byes, the tail end of old lochs, up deepish backwaters, and cuttings that have entrances into the river, are all favourite spots for lurking jack, and should not be missed on any account.

A deepish corner away from the main stream, particularly if it is fringed with a dense undergrowth of weeds, water-lilies, and a scattered crop of flags and rushes sticking up here and there, with little runs winding through and between them, is, generally speaking, a capital place to find pike. I have found good ones, particularly during September and October, in the rough water close under the foot of a weir, where old tree roots had been swept over by a flood and lodged there, or where large stones stuck up above the surface and an eddy formed behind, and the frothing waters kept churning round and round. I remember once working my old spoon in one of these weir eddies, a place not more than six feet by four, and getting two jack in two casts, going nearly fifteen pounds the pair. In another place, half of an old gate and the stump end of a willow tree had been carried over the weir, forming a curious wedge-shaped eddy, with the water racing away on either hand; the eddy itself was not more than two feet deep. I tried a Clipper artificial, as that bait would begin to spin rapidly as soon as it struck the water, and got a jack eight and a half pounds, and a trout nearly four pounds. I wondered how these fish got into such a difficult and cramped position, and how they agreed so closely together.

Another capital haunt for jack during the early part of the season—say, September and October—are the shallow streams that flow from mill-tails, weirs, and similar places, especially those streams where small tufts of weeds stick up, and you can see the scattered undergrowth in strings and ribbons and bunches, waving and swaying under
water with every swirl of the current. I have had as many as half a dozen four- and five-pounders from these streams in a couple of hours, using both natural and artificial baits, and the water has not been two feet deep.

In a rather swift-running stream like the Trent we only meet with pike occasionally out in the very rapid midstream runs, as they prefer to hug the shore, especially if that shore has a hollow clay bank, rough stones or boulders, bunches of flags, or a thick cover of old sallow bushes.

A river like the Trent, that has a superabundance of bends and corners—which we are told by those versed in the matter are necessary for the very existence of those rivers, or they would run dry—will provide good sport. Just in these corners and bends the water as a general rule is deeper, and nothing like so rapid as it is in the straight-running shallows. During the early autumn good jack are often picked up in these deeper corners by knowing anglers, who sink a spinning bait deep down and search the whole corner well, winding the bait slowly home.

Down the Lower Trent, from the Corporation swim at Winthorp to Laneham and Rampton, a distance of many miles, there were holes and corners of this character in plenty, and easily recognizable; scarcely any angler could miss seeing them. Some of the old anglers named in the first chapter, and myself, have had many a brace of good jack during the seasons we fished those noted waters. I can call to mind one or two instances of heavy Trent pike being had on spinning tackle from the very centre of the heaviest runs; but whether they followed the bait and seized it when in midstream we could scarcely determine.

I remember once getting a brace from a very heavy run of water, about a quarter of a mile below the Sentry Box swim, in the deep straight run of river going down towards the Meerings. We used to know the place as the South
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Rack. Those two fish were the largest brace I ever got in one day on spinning tackle, and they both took the bait almost the very instant it dropped in the water. It was the selfsame Clipper bait that accounted for the pair of fish under the weir hole mentioned a few pages back.

I remember once my old friend Sunman spinning the Corporation swim; he stood on a projecting knoll of bank that was undermined, and was using tremendous force to hurl his bait under the slacks and willows on the opposite side. After nearly exhausting himself with his prolonged efforts, and just as he was about to lift his bait from the water for a fresh cast, the very jack that he had been after shot right from under the very knoll on which he stood and seized the bait with such right good will that he stood no chance of escaping; that fish leaped three times like a salmon, and scaled exactly nine pounds. In this instance the fish lay right under the bank.

Another capital place for jack on the Trent was the slack corner some distance above the old wooden bridge that carries the Great North Road over the river. I once helped the late Harry Norledge of Newark to land fourteen fish from that corner, the biggest exactly fourteen pounds; I fancy that was the best bag of Trent pike that ever I could personally vouch for. I once got nine from that stretch of water running from the Midland railway bridge down to Kelham Hall; six of them, I remember, without moving a yard. This bag was had on a snap paternoster tackle and live bait.

In slow-running rivers like the Great Ouse, the Nene, and the vast watershed that drains the whole of the counties forming that district, it does not matter so much about selecting the deepest corners; indeed, during the late summer and early autumn, the shallow and weedy places, over which a slight stream wanders along, even if less than a yard in depth, are by far the best places to try; but the spinning bait has to be so manipulated that it must not,
for fear of catching the weeds, be allowed to sink even three inches under the surface.

During the winter, when the weather is cold, and all the weeds have rotted down and been carried away by the late autumn floods, the deeps can be tried with more chance of success; although I may say that this is not a hard and fast rule, as I have taken good pike, on both live-bait and spinning tackle, in very shallow water in the Ouse when the weather was most cutting and severe; but still, taking it all round, and carefully considering my own experiences, the deeps show the best results when the weather is severe.

In fishing over these sluggish rivers, especially with a spinning bait, it will be as well to try the whole of the water, although I am aware that several jack may lurk within the space of a few yards, while the next half-mile may be practically tenantless.

There are many pike rivers that have small islands, or tiny jungles of reeds and flags with open spaces behind or in front; jack as a rule hide themselves among the roots of these fastnesses, now and again coming out into the open water to feed. A practised pike angler, the very first time he sees a water, can tell whereabouts the pike are likely to lie. Sometimes when a long fringe of flags runs alongside a river, and there is a considerable depth of water for some distance amongst these flags, the jack back in, and show no inclination to come out into the open water in front. I remember once a gentleman bringing down to the Great Ouse a splendid can of Thames dace; we tried all down by the side of some flags. Two or three hours' work resulted in only a four-pounder; when I suggested that we should borrow a long clothes-prop, go from end to end of the flags, and bang about as far as we could reach with the pole among them. This we did, and half an hour later those dace again went on a voyage of discovery, and this time we got five right good fish, averaging six and a half pounds each; we had bolted them out of the flags into
the open water in front, where they were more likely to see our baits.

Some odd times pike will congregate in a baited swim, and the angler wonders what made his barbel go so suddenly off the feed. A notable case in point comes into my mind at the moment. I had sent a celebrated amateur angler four thousand lobworms a week for three or four weeks to bait up a big eddying swim at Clifden Hampden on the Thames. After putting in eight thousand in eight or ten days, he had capital sport every evening afterwards for a week or more, when they suddenly went off the feed, and three subsequent evenings failed to produce a single fish. He wrote to me, and by return of post I suggested pike in the swim. Live bait were procured, and a couple of paternosters carefully worked all over the place, with the result that nearly thirty pike, from three pounds to seventeen, were captured.

Once or twice during my own fishing days on the Trent I have known the pike to take possession of the Corporation barbel swim at Winthorp, and careful measures had to be adopted to rid that place of their presence.

It is a much easier matter to find the haunts of pike in a good lake than it is in a river; although I am aware that in certain lakes most of the pike are in a very small space, more than three-fourths of the water being practically tenantless. The Dorsetshire Stour is a capital pike river, and lends itself to spinning for these fish. I once explored some miles of that river, and found holes and corners interspersed with long shallow runs and flags and reeds and small islands very much in evidence everywhere, all these shallows being capital spinning water during the autumn months.

The Avon and the Frome in Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire, are in my opinion among the very best pike haunts in the kingdom; and most of the big specimen jack exhibited in the London Angling Clubs come from that locality.
There is a wide field for the pike spinner to roam over in the eastern counties. I know by a long experience its capabilities; and far and wide the haunts of the pike stretch away in every direction. There is plenty of water yet that can be spun over, and live-baited, even if the results are not so good as they were thirty or forty years ago.
CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING PIKE RODS

Conflicting opinions on pike rods—Selecting a rod—Materials used in manufacture—Winch-fittings and ferrules—Rings and their makes—A word of warning—Weight and cost of pike rods.

There seems to be a tendency among rod-makers in general nowadays to sacrifice strength in a rod for the sake of extra lightness and elegance; and in no rod is this more apparent than in what they are pleased to call pike rods. Whole reams of paper have been written upon, and whole columns of the sporting press occupied in a wordy war as to the merits or demerits of light v. heavy rods, leaving the anxious novice more anxious than ever, and utterly at a loss to determine what he wants and which is the best.

Even experienced pike fishermen themselves are smitten with the same sort of mania, and will insist on having a rod for general pike-fishing that is totally inadequate for the work they now and again call on it to do. Personally I am far from being a believer in a heavy, clumsy weapon for the sport now under notice; but I like to draw the line at something like reason, and start with, at any rate, a rod that is not likely to play me false at a critical moment. I have seen jack rods in use that hardly looked stout enough for chub, and as for throwing a bait with any degree of accuracy, why, that seemed out of the question altogether. "But," says one of these believers in extra light and flimsy rods, "I once killed a six-pound barbel and a four-pound trout on that rod; and if it will kill fish like those, why,
it surely ought to be good enough to kill any jack I am likely to get hold of."

True, my friend, I should have to reply to this argument, because I don’t look upon a jack as being anything like such a good fighter as a barbel, while he is a long way behind a big and lusty trout. But there is something beyond this; if the rod had nothing else to do except kill the pike when hooked, I should have no more to say in the matter, because the actual killing of the fish, especially in clear and unobstructed water, is one of the easiest tasks the rod is called upon to perform.

When the angler selects a rod for pike-fishing he must bear in mind the following three important points: First, some considerable strain is required in casting out a heavy bait to a respectable distance; secondly, when a good jack is hooked, and he goes headlong for his favourite flag bed or old root, it wants something fairly powerful to turn him; thirdly, when your hooks and bait get hung up in some tough old weeds, or lily roots, and a strong line and gimp tackle is employed, very considerable force sometimes has to be used to loosen it or break away. These points cannot be too strongly impressed on the young angler; as all three are of frequent occurrence, especially in weedy rivers, lakes, and backwaters, so that a very light and flimsy rod would soon get strained and ruined beyond recovery. I don’t recommend a clothes-prop, or anything of like nature, but a rod fairly stiff and powerful, with a nice spring in the top, sufficient to cast out the bait in comfort and with accuracy.

Pike rods are made from a variety of materials, and in a variety of patterns; some of them, I am bound to add, more for ornament than use. Hickory, greenheart, lance-wood, ash, and sometimes a combination of them all, is used in one rod; while two or three different kinds of cane, and even split and built-up cane with steel centres, all come more or less into requisition; but as the latter are very expensive, the general run of anglers leave them out
Pike Rod Ring, with Porcelain Centre.

Two-Joint Split Cane Casting Rod, 10 feet.

"The Trent Otter's" Solid Cane Ideal Pattern Pike Rod.

Pike Rod Ring, with Porcelain Centres.
of the question. Some men will swear by greenheart, all through, from handle to tip; others swear by a combination built with an English ash butt, a lancewood centre, and a greenheart top. I used one of the latter for years, and right good service did it give me. But one thing can be urged against these solid wood rods; they are inclined to be very heavy. Good, tough, and nearly solid cane has sprung up of late years as the principal material to use in a pike rod, and certainly I know of nothing more durable, more light, or more handsome when nicely spotted, mottled, and polished. As good and as cheap a pike rod for all practical purposes, and one that will be within the reach of all, should be made in three lengths; the butt and centre of good tough and lasting male cane, and the tops either greenheart or lancewood. I have used both, and have no choice; sometimes I have fancied greenheart has more resistance than lancewood; then again I have thought that lancewood sprang better to the pull of a fish, and the bait was thrown out a little easier; then again I fancied my greenheart top stopped that eight-pounder from running into that bed of flags easier and quicker; but, as I said, I really have no choice now. But every pike rod should have two tops; one for paternostering and live-baiting, the other for spinning, the latter being a few inches shorter than the former, and just a wee bit stiffer.

If the handle is fixed over the cane of the butt, so as to form a balance grip, and finished off with cork, cane, string, or wood, it will be all the better for freedom of balance and easy casting; while a rubber knob or button screwed in the end of the butt will be found a special comfort during a long day’s spinning.

The length of a pike rod for easy spinning over open waters and shallow weedy runs, where quick recovery of your line and bait is necessary, need not be more than from ten to eleven feet, the former being about the most useful length for casting with, and the latter for paternostering.
The joints should always be carefully examined, and see that the ferrules fit strongly and accurately, even down to the tenon or dowel that projects from the bottom end of the joints. There is more in this careful fitting together of a pike rod's joints than is apparent to the novice; because on an accurate fit depends the power you have in casting out the bait; or instead you would cast apart your rod joints, or else buckle them up into all sorts of shapes. The ferrules on a rod of this description should be about ten-sixteenths of an inch on the butt, and seven-sixteenths of an inch on the centre, measuring inside diameter of the ferrule.

The winch fittings of a pike rod should also be a matter of careful selection, as it is necessary that they should grip the plate of the reel firmly, with no possibility of the reel or winch being jerked away from the rod and falling at your feet or rolling into the river. What is known as the tapered graduated fittings are far and away the best, as they grip almost any size reel plate firmly and tightly, a small reel plate being fixed as firmly as a much larger one; and these winch fittings are so constructed that none of the wood or cane need be cut away from the butt of the rod.

Whatever you do, don't have a pike rod with a bored-out butt; this is a source of weakness, and if you must have a hollow handle to carry a spare top in, why, have a landing handle that is so constructed.

The rings on a pike rod should also be a matter of consideration, and they should be fixed on the rod in such a manner, and be of such a size that the line, in whatever method or style the bait is thrown, should run freely through them without the possibility of a catch or tangle. Suppose the angler throws the bait with the line coiled at his feet, and there happens to be a snarl in it, and a pike takes; the rings should be such that the kink will easily pass through. Rings are many and various; and a lot of anxious thought has been expended on them; porcelain
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rings have been employed very largely; and certainly they are pretty good, but liable to damage, and frosty weather causes them to be very brittle in use. This is one drawback to the universal use of that material. Agate, bone, horn, and even ivory, have all been tried with varying degrees of success, and certainly the line does run with smoothness and freedom through them.

Soft brass rings should not be tolerated at all, as the line speedily wears deep grooves in them; and pike lines wear out quite soon enough without any assistance from these faulty rings. I always consider the snake pattern, made of bronzed and hardened steel, to be as good as anything that can be used. For one thing the inner surface of these rings does not offer much resistance to the free passage of the line, and the less friction the easier the cast; that is the conclusion I have come to after many years' experience. Whatever rings are employed, they should be large enough, so that an ordinary pencil can be easily passed through any of them, those on the butt and centre being still larger. Above all, don't have too many rings on a rod, as the greater the number of rings the greater the friction. One on the butt, two or three on the centre, and no more than four on the top are ample. The end ring also is a matter to be carefully considered; it should always be a little larger than the others on the top joint. I always preferred a big plain hardened steel loop, something like half an inch in diameter. A favourite ring with many pike fishermen for the extreme end is one with an inner revolving ring of phosphor bronze or hard steel; but useful as they are undoubtedly, I do not think them any better than the plain loop ring of bronzed steel. The porcelain, or agate, or bone, or horn rings that some spinners insist on, look so very clumsy to me, and they have a tendency to rattle and shake, giving you the impression that the joints of your rod are slipping apart. Still they are very good, even when used on any portion of the rod, and I have nothing to say against them; but still
I can cast out cleanly and well without overrunning, jerk, or much friction with the snake, and the plain steel loop at end.

This question of the rings on a pike rod has been a bone of contention for a long time, and I found that the worst complaints came from the more inexperienced casters—men who use a stout and stiff waterproof line, coiled on the ground at their feet, with all sorts of snarls and kinks to contend with; but in casting direct from the reel with a smooth undressed silk line, I found no fault whatever with the ordinary snake ring.

There is another thing that must be impressed strongly, and that is, the bottom band or ring of the winch fittings must not be less than seven inches from the button on the butt, or you cannot spin in comfort; the reason for this will be explained in the chapters on casting. Many times I am asked the question as to whether a very stiff top added to a light chub rod would not make that rod, for all practical purposes, a strong and good pike rod. To all such I must answer with a very decided "No." As a practical rod-maker I must say that a short stiff top in a very light rod makes that rod weaker still. Rods are just as strong as their weakest parts; and a short stiff pike top in a light rod is a great source of weakness; the strain would all be thrown under the ferrule of the second joint, and the result, if persisted in, would be ruin to that rod. I have seen this many times, a lovely roach rod quite spoilt by making it do what it never was intended for. My advice is, have a pike rod, and use it for pike-fishing, and do not be deluded into making a pike rod of an old favourite roacher.

On page 30 will be found an illustration of a good pike rod, one that is the result of much anxious thought. It is built after the most approved pattern, has plenty of power in all its joints, and yet a pretty good spring that will respond gamely to the most vicious tugs and runs of a twenty-pounder.
I have three rods here all built after the pattern as illustrated; they vary much in price; balance and spring are alike or nearly so in all three; finish and material making the difference in charges.

No. 1 has a cork handle grip, is eleven feet long, with the long top, and ten and a half feet with the shorter one; it weighs twenty-one ounces, including rubber button and one top, and the cost is twenty-five shillings.

No. 2 is of similar build, about the same length and weight; this has a hard wood polished handle grip instead of cork, and the price is fifteen shillings.

No. 3 is similar to No. 2, but plainer in finish, and has tough lancewood tops instead of greenheart; this rod is a few inches shorter than the others, weighs about the same, and costs seven shillings.

I have touched upon this question of pike rods in rather a lengthy manner; I do not think the time has been wasted, as I was anxious to give the would-be pike fisherman a few hints; I know many will welcome the information, judging from the number of letters I am constantly receiving from anxious novices. The novice will know now what to do when he orders his rod, and I might add that there is nearly a lifetime's experience in rods, rod-building, and rod-using, compressed into the foregoing few pages.
CHAPTER V

PIKE REELS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Ancient and modern reels—Nottingham reels—The centre-pin—The Mallock reel—Slater's Combination reel—The author's pike reel—The Coxon casting reel—The Duplex reel—Hardy's Silex reel—Cost of reels—How to select a pike reel.

A REEL, or winch as it was termed in former days, is a most necessary part of a pike angler's outfit; this item appears to have been used only on a trolling rod during the time of Col. Venables. This sportsman's book, published about the year 1662, contains the following:

"The next way of angling is with a troll for the pike, which is very delightful; you may buy your troll ready made, therefore I shall not trouble myself to describe it, only let it have a winch to wind it up withal."

In those far-away days, when trolling was in its infancy, and when pike lines and tackle were only rough and crude affairs, a reel was considered a necessary article. What could be done without a reel nowadays, when lines and everything else connected with that branch of sport have been reduced to extra fineness, and the science of the thing so very pronounced, I don't know. Anyhow, you cannot very well fish for pike with a tight line, or the line tied fast half-way down the rod like a Lea roacher; you must have a pretty fair length of line, and a reel to comfortably hold it. This being so, we will consider the question of reels, and we find that they are made in a variety of patterns, from different materials, and at nearly any
price; but I consider a good stout and fairly free-running Nottingham wood reel as good as anything that can be tried.

It is not absolutely necessary to have one of those lightning centre-pins for this work, as it is in chub-fishing down a stream. That class of centre-pin is almost too free; it ought, however, to be one fairly free and easy in its action, so much so, in fact, that a cast with a small gudgeon will cause it to revolve. In spinning, or even throwing out a float and live bait, I always do so direct from the reel, as I think it is by far the cleanest, easiest, and best method to adopt. A four-inch reel will be the best size, as this enables the angler to regulate the revolving barrel with his finger-tips; anything much over that size is apt to be a little awkward. An old walnut gun-stock is the very best material to use, and it should be fitted with a movable check; and if you like a line-guard fitting closely to the top edge of the revolving plate, it can with advantage be added. A good plain spindle reel, with a nut screwed on the front, is my particular fancy, and the price should not exceed six shillings for the best quality in these reels.

Of course a centre-pin can be employed if our angler can afford the extra outlay; and as these reels are made with aluminium back plates and flanges, so as to prevent any sticking or warping when wet, perhaps it would be better; besides, if our angler fancies he would like to cast a very light bait, like a wagtail without any lead, over the weedy waters of a choked-up lake, he will be able to do it much better with a centre-pin. This latter reel will cost about twelve or fourteen shillings; but when the angler gets to know its little peculiarities he will never regret the outlay.

Some anglers tell me they cannot, do as they will, cast a bait direct from the reel, in what we call the Nottingham style. They either have to coil the line at their feet, or leave unfinished some of the best water, for there are places where it is necessary to stand knee-deep among flags, reeds, thistles, thorns, and all sorts of rank undergrowth
Plain 4-inch Pike Reel with Bickerdyke Guard and Movable Check.

The "Coxon" Casting Reel with Guard and Check.
among which the line would tangle and jerk, and be generally aggravating.

The "Mallock" reel was invented to meet the difficulty of these casters; but after a careful inspection I have come to the conclusion that it is more useful to the salmon fishermen who use it in wide open rivers, with plenty of stream and a good depth of water. If an angler is using it in a shallow weedy lake, and it is necessary to begin winding in the bait the very instant it touches the water, it is likely to be a failure under these conditions. When a bait is cast from this reel the barrel, which revolves in other reels, does not turn round; it is fitted with a hinge, so that it can be turned half round, the end of the reel facing the rings on the rod. The force of the cast pulls the line off, and as the weight of the bait carries it onwards, the line unwinds itself like pulling thread over the end of a bobbin. Now this is where the trouble comes in; before you can wind in, the barrel of the reel must be twisted back again and relocked, and before this is done the bait sinks a few inches and grips fast the weeds, and therefore that cast is spoilt. Of course, in deep and unobstructed lakes this objection does not hold good; but I always found the best pike lurked in the fastnesses of the weed beds and jungles, where it was necessary to begin winding in the very moment the bait reached the water.

There are scores of good spinners in Ireland and Scotland who swear by these reels, and can cast out marvellous distances, but being made of metal they are apt to be very heavy, and they are also rather expensive; but, I must add, they are calculated to assist those anglers very much who cannot master the vagaries and peculiarities of an ordinary easy-going Nottingham.

Slater's "Combination" is a pike reel of the very highest class. The revolving barrel of this reel runs in a cage that is firmly fixed to the back. Sometimes even in experienced hands the line drops outside the reel in casting and jerks round one of the handles; this fixed cage in which the reel
runs is about the best thing I know to prevent the line from falling out; in fact a four-inch Combination made of good hard walnut, with aluminium back and flange, is a Nottingham pike reel *par excellence*, even if somewhat expensive. I believe I have one of the first, if not the first, Combination reels that Slater made; anyhow, I have used it since 1882, and cast a bait with it many thousands of times. It is a veritable diamond in the bright, is four inches in diameter, will hold one hundred and fifty yards of line, cost fourteen shillings, has earned its price many times over; has given out line to many hundreds of fighting jack; and looks like lasting as long or longer than I am likely to use a pike reel. There, Mr. Slater, there's an advertisement for you; if that is not a good one, I don't know what is.

Of late years many reels have been invented for pike-fishing, more or less useful, and all of them ingenious, so that the anxious novice is likely to get bewildered, and to hesitate when making a selection. I am hoping to help him in these pages.

The "Coxon" spinning reel is one of the latest; this is also on the centre-pin principle, and will run round almost with a puff of wind. The revolving barrel of this reel is the lightest I ever saw; it is on the spider pattern, and is a work of art, and spins round so truly and smoothly that a very light bait can be cast direct from the rod point. This is one of the most valuable reels in a spinner's outfit, and when I mention the fact that it is made by Messrs. S. Allcock and Co. of Redditch, that is a guarantee that the finish and material are above reproach.

Another casting reel made by the same firm is known as the "Duplex"; it has a light aluminium drum, so accurate, and running so smoothly upon a steel centre, that even a quill minnow can be cast direct with it. But where this reel differs from the ordinary Nottingham is that while the bait is travelling to its destination after being thrown, the handle does not spin round; and it also differs from the "Mallock" mentioned on page 39:
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the latter has to be twisted half round and locked before the bait can be worked home; in the Duplex the line can be recovered and wound home again in an instant.

Then there is the "Silex," another casting reel of splendid finish, and, I may add, long price. I believe this reel holds the record for distance cast; but as far as I could see as a practical fisherman, and not as an exhibition caster, there is a great difference between actual pike-fishing and casting a weight along a grass lawn.

Now many of these reels are out of the reach of the ordinary everyday working-man angler; but I am anxious to give a few instructions in these pages that, coupled with a little practice, will enable him to cast out a bait clean and well, without catch or tangle, and only a plain Nottingham reel to do it with.

I can call to mind many of the very best working-men anglers I knew, who were second to none in casting a bait across river, lake, and stream, and they never used anything but an easy, plain Nottingham reel.

Here is a list of these reels and the price:

1. An easy-going four-inch Nottingham with check and line guard; very reliable tool. Price 5s. 6d.
2. An extra easy-going Nottingham four-inch centre-pin, with aluminium flange, line guard, and check. 14s.
3. Slater's "Combination" four-inch, with cage, check, and aluminium flange. 10s., 15s., 20s.
4. The "Coxon," very light barrel, easy running, guard and check, four-inch size. 32s.
5. The "Duplex," extra light drum, four-inch. 35s.
6. The "Mallock." Price 25s.
7. The "Silex." Hardy's casting reel, four-inch. 45s.

The whole secret of using a reel and casting out a bait direct without overrunning, jerking the bait off by a sudden stoppage, or having a lovely tangle of line when the bait reaches its destination, or having the fingers smartly rapped by the revolving handles, lies in a judicious se-
lection of the rod, reel, and line, combined with the easy forward swing that alone is necessary to get the bait out to nearly any distance, and above all to the proper and well-timed pressure of the finger on the revolving edge of the reel. Then the reel itself should run very smoothly; it should not wobble, nor yet "chatter," as we call it, while the bait is travelling to its destination. The back or fixed part, and the barrel or revolving part, should fit close together, so that there is no play or looseness between the nut on the end of the spindle and the brass plate under it. There is more in this than meets the eye of the casual observer, because if the reel chatters and does not run smoothly and well, more force is required in the cast to start the bait upon its journey.

When the young angler selects his reel he should carefully examine it, see that it is strong and well made, that it has a stout cross back, is fitted with a movable check, and that the handles on the front are firm, but capable of being turned round on their pins easily; because if your handles are tight and won't rotate on their pins, you will always be screwing them off in use.

Having satisfied himself on the above points, he should hold the reel firmly by the back in his left hand, and with his right tap the edge of the revolving part smartly downwards. If it revolves freely and smoothly without wobble or shake, and feels firm and rigid under the brass nut, and its spindle is not loose and shaky, he has without doubt got a reel that is admirably adapted for throwing out and working home a pike bait in this most deadly and easy style. I am now alluding to a plain spindle Nottingham wood reel, without any doubt as good and cheap an article as he can get, and I might add the price should not exceed five to eight shillings.
CHAPTER VI

ON PIKE LINES, AND THE OUTFIT

Nottingham spinning lines—Waterproof dressed lines—The "Stag" brand lines—How to dress a pike line—The line dryer and its uses—The landing-net for pike—The flight box and haversack—Varnish and waterproofoil.

A CAREFULLY-SELECTED line is one of the most important items in a pike angler's outfit, and I might as well say at the outset that there are lines and lines. Before our fisherman buys his line he should know what he is going to do, and how he is going to cast. I would strongly impress on him that a strong and heavy waterproof line will not be a success if tried as a casting line direct from the reel. We will take one that shall be suitable for the Nottingham style first of all, and this should be an undressed silk, or at most only slightly and smoothly oiled and dressed down. I prefer a plain white silk; colours, green and black mixed in, I do not like, as I fancy this dyeing of the threads has a tendency to rot them.

The line must not be too thick nor too thin, because when constantly winding in and throwing out through the rings on the rod it is liable to be chafed flat, and soon becomes weak. I like fifty or a hundred yards of No. 9 plaited silk, which will lift a dead weight of eighteen or twenty pounds; these plaited lines are free from any objectionable kinks and curls. When an angler essays the Nottingham style of pike-fishing, the judicious selection of the rod, reel, and line has more to do with his success or non-success than he would imagine; I have known men who have been
Another Cheap and Useful Pike Gag.

Folding Line Dryer.

The "Archer" Jardine Spiral Pike Lead.

Spinning Leads with Swivels.

Useful Pike-Fishing Sundries.
disheartened by repeated failures, and then found out that the cause of failure lay more in the outfit than in the fisherman who used it.

During my wanderings after sport I have seen pike fishermen at work in many different styles, but none of these styles I considered equal to or more scientific than the Nottingham. As I have just pointed out, this style requires an undressed, or only slightly oiled plaited silk line, rather soft in its texture, and an easy-going reel to be successful with it. On the other hand, if the angler uses the live bait alone, and is not tempted to spin over the shallows, a waterproof line will be the best; or even if he does spin now and again, and prefers to do this with the line laid in coils at his feet, the waterproofed line will still be the best, and in this case he need not be particular as to the reel.

A good waterproof line is rather an expensive item, and even the most expensive cannot be guaranteed to float on the surface of the water; I only know of one brand of pike line that will float, and that is Messrs. Allcock's "Stag brand," dressed and waterproofed under the air pump; this is a costly line, fifty yards running up to something like ten shillings, which is a serious item, but the quality is irreproachable; an ordinary dressed line would run to about half that figure.

Many pike fishermen prefer to dress their own lines, using the white silk ones for the purpose, as they are softer and more pliable than some of the very stiff ones we see sometimes; in fact, some of the best spinners I know say that if you want a really reliable line you must dress it yourself. Now to properly dress a line is rather a lengthy operation; I don't mean as far as the actual dressing is concerned, but the length of time it takes to dry after being soaked in the solution; three or four months is none too long for this drying process. Good linseed oil that has been boiled, or, as it is known in the trade, "boiled linseed oil," mixed with half as much copal varnish, and a big
tablespoonful of gold size—say half a pint altogether—is a good dressing for a line. The line, board, and all that it is wound on, should be put in a shallow tin or dish, of only sufficient size to comfortably hold it, then pour some of the mixture, as given above, cold on the top of it, just enough to well cover the line. Let it remain there three or four days, then turn it upside-down, and soak it for a further three or four days, until the oil goes completely through it, board and all; then carefully remove it from the board, and have a frame, something like a picture-frame, handy, and let the line run through a bit of flannel held tightly in the hand, at the same time winding it carefully on the frame, which should be long enough to admit of the line being wound so that the coils do not overlap one another; this will be an aid to its rapid drying. Take care that no lumps are sticking to any part of the line. It can then be hung up in a dry, cool place, where the sun cannot shine on it; and possess your soul in patience, for several weeks must elapse before it is ready for use.

Before winding on the reel, it will be an improvement to stretch it down the garden path or any other convenient situation, tying either end to a gate-post or tree; and get a sixpenny packet of King's Ceroleum, and put a little bit of it, about the size of a small walnut, in a bit of dry flannel, and rub the line smartly with this from end to end, taking care that no lumps are left on—simply a surface dressing and that is all; then finish off with a little bit of chamois leather, smoothing the surface of line from end to end until it has a slight gloss.

This is the very best dressing to give a line; in fact, one of my old friends would not think of using a line of any sort, let alone a pike line, unless so treated, as he always maintained that it added a couple of seasons' hard wear to the life of the line.

Pike lines should always be plaited silk; the Nottingham or Derby twist is not so good. Many years ago we found the latter had such a tendency to kink and snarl up; and
when we were obliged to use them, as plaited lines were not in general use, we had to lay them out at full length on the grass of a big meadow, take hold of one end, and trail them behind us four or five times round that meadow. This was only a sorry plan for preventing kinking; but still it was better than nothing, and we had to frequently repeat the operation, as the constant throwing out and winding in soon twisted the kink in it as bad as ever.

I might add that these plaited silk lines are very cheap, one hundred yards costing from three-and-sixpence up to a matter of six shillings, according to weight of silk.

There are one or two sundries and oddments that a pike fisherman should always have, if he anyhow can afford them. One of the most important is a line dryer, because you must unwind your line from the reel and dry it on arriving home. If you neglect this many times you will most likely get a startling reminder sooner or later; lines will rot if not carefully and frequently dried. The brass line dryer, that is in the shape of a cross when opened, and can be closed into a small compass, I would recommend. The one I mean has a handle on one side and a screw clamp to the centre, which is used to fasten it to the edge of a bench or table. It takes only about a minute to wind the damp line from the reel on to the winder, and back again when dry; and as they are so useful and easily carried, one should always be in the bag when a holiday is likely to extend over several days. A line should never be dried on the top of the stove, or hung round and round the oven door, or even in too close proximity to a fire, as the heat has a tendency to blister the dressing.

A landing-net that screws firmly into a stout handle, and if a gaff-hook will also fit the same shaft, will also be found indispensable. The net I used all the years I lived in and fished the eastern counties was a strong eighteen-inch folding iron ring, screwed into a four-and-a-half-foot handle of East India cane, while the net was a strong black polished cotton one, nearly a yard deep. Mr. Pike was
all right when he once got fairly into that net. There was no jumping out again. I have seen anglers trying to land an eight-pound jack in a net that was not large enough, nor yet deep enough, for a three-pound bream, and the result was the pike rolled out, the hooks of his flight caught in the meshes, tore away its hold on the fish, and that jack was given his liberty, while our angler meditated on landing-nets in general and his own in particular. Sooner err on the other side, having it too big than too small. The cost complete would not exceed seven or eight shillings.

A japanned tin box is also another useful article in the pike fisherman's outfit, one a fairly good size, say seven inches long by four inches wide and one and a half inches deep, with several partitions, so that flights and snaps can be kept separate; and if the lid also has a couple of extra hinged lids fitting inside, traces can be conveniently carried there. If our angler goes in for a lot of spinning he will find a roomy and strong haversack the best medium to carry his tackle and fish in; he should select a pretty strong one with a partition or two in it, and the band that slings it round his shoulders should be substantial.

A small bottle of good carriage-maker's varnish is also useful; then the angler can periodically give his rod a coat, and so save expense and annoyance; while a six-penny bottle of fisherman's varnish with which to touch up the whippings and rings, and the silk bindings on his flights, is a valuable accessory; and finally I may add that if our pike fisherman values his health he should always have a mackintosh and a strong heavy pair of good waterproof boots, and keep them well dressed with Gishurstine or even Dale's dubbin.
CHAPTER VII

CASTING IN THE NOTTINGHAM STYLE

Different methods of casting—Casting with a coiled line—The Nottingham style—The right-handed cast—The cast from the left hand—How to cast from the reel—Summing up the salient points—Weights and distances—A cramped position, and the straightforward cast.

There are two or three different schools of pike fishermen, each throwing out the bait in their own particular fashion, each more or less proficient in their own peculiar style, that is, the style best suited to the requirements of the various waters in which the fishermen ply their craft.

As I mentioned before, there are those who coil the line at their feet, casting the bait from the rod point, and drawing it in with long, sweeping, one-handed drags; always a heap of line at their feet, and always having to play the fish with the hand. Inch by inch they move down the river, trailing their line behind them, ever and anon removing bits of thistles, thorns, and grass, that have been caught up and held fast, while with monotonous regularity tangles and snarls have to be attended to. This method of casting, in my opinion, is not an unqualified success, when it has to be tried in every conceivable situation, under every condition, and in all the difficulties to be encountered by the river side.

Then again there are others who never use the rod when casting; they simply coil the line on the ground, the rod on rests, hanging the bait over the crutch of a forked stick,
and hurling it out without the aid of the rod. The men of the Welsh Harp lake are experts in this branch of casting; it is marvellous the distance some of these men will throw the bait.

One of the best casters I ever saw was a Thames man spinning over one of the weir pools of that famous river. The line was hanging in coils from his left hand, his right hand grasped the rod, and the button on the butt was pressed to his body in such a manner that he could use it as a fulcrum and get the greatest power with the least expenditure of brute force; it was marvellous the way that man got out his line, and it was no less astonishing how the line was re-coiled on his hand as the bait was spinning home. His skill must have been arrived at by long and constant practice, as I never once saw him in difficulties.

The pike fishermen who cast from the reel in the style known as the "Nottingham" are an ever-increasing body; in my opinion—I have seen all sorts and conditions of casters at work—I consider it far and away the best, taking all things into consideration; places can be successfully spun over where it would be impossible, owing to all sorts of rank vegetation, to cast with the line coiled at the feet.

Some pike fishermen say that a bait wound home on the reel in this style is not so attractive as one worked home by the fingers with the coiled line, in hand or at feet. The long sweeping drags of the bait are absent when the line is simply wound up on the reel to spin the bait home. But if the rod point is raised and lowered alternately, and the pace is varied, even allowing it to sink, and then sweeping it forward a little more quickly, the sink-and-draw motion and the long zigzagging drags can be imitated as faithfully with the winding reel as by the hand.

Supposing we are casting from a boat, and the line is coiled at our feet, I know of no greater nuisance; it hanks round everything within reach, jerking overboard a favourite knife, or a box of tackle, or the whisky bottle;
strong remarks are passed, and our angler wishes he could
rid himself of all this trouble by casting direct from the reel.

We are told that an ounce of practice is worth a pound
of theory; and a few lessons by a practical caster would
do more good than pages of written matter. The greatest
difficulty that I have to contend with is the fact that it is
almost impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule as to
how the rod and reel should be manipulated in casting out
in what is known as the Nottingham style. Even our own
Trent men are by no means agreed on the subject; some
of them say the reel should be checked with the right hand,
others say the left. Some again say the hand that checks
the speed of the reel should be at the top edge, while others
maintain the bottom edge is the proper position. All men
are not alike, the plan that is free and easy to one may be
difficult and painful to another; he must hold the rod and
reel, and throw in the manner that is easiest to himself;
but this can only be acquired after very careful practice

I have seen men who have been most expert in that style
casting in opposite directions, one of them casting with the
right hand above the reel, and the fingers of the left guard-
ing the revolving barrel at the top edge; and the other one
with the left hand above the reel, and the right below it,
guarding the speed at the bottom edge. Each of these
methods is equally good; it is for the caster himself to
find out which is likely to be the better and easier for
himself.

Many of our best men throw from both shoulders, right
and left; there are men who graduated on the Trent, and
then left their native river to settle on the banks of other
waters, carrying their style to places where it was practi-
cally unknown. I have heard it said more than once that
the introduction of this style on certain well-known rivers
marked a new era in the history of their angling.

In casting from the reel the angler must find out exactly
where to hold his rod, so as to have the best command over
it. What we call the right-handed cast is made by grasping
the rod firmly with the right hand about eight inches above the narrow stop ring or top band of the winch fittings; and when the reel is fixed in its proper position the two handles should be pointing to the right. The right hand grasps the rod firmly, as already indicated, eight inches above the reel, the left hand is close over the reel or winch fittings. To be exact, the rod is in the hollow between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, close to the reel, so that the fingers of that hand can clasp the back of the reel, the second finger reaching over the barrel and lightly touching the rim of the front revolving plate (see frontispiece). In adopting this plan you are out of the way of the handles, and there is no danger of being rapped on the fingers by them. After seeing that only the bait and trace hang clear from the ring at end of the rod, and only the silk line itself travels through the rings, you face exactly the place on the water where you would like that bait to drop.

To make the cast you swing the rod point to your right-hand side and partly behind you; then with another, but much sharper, forward swing you bring the rod over the water. As soon as the bait swings forward you partly release the reel by easing the pressure of your finger on the revolving front rim, taking care, however, that this pressure is not altogether removed, or the reel will overrun; and also minding at the same time that this pressure is not too tight, or the cast will be checked, and the bait swing round behind you. Your fingers should just feel the rim of the reel, and that is all. Directly the bait drops into the water the finger can be pressed tight on the edge, so as to stop any further revolutions.

Still keeping hold of the rod and reel with the left hand close to the top of the reel, you press the knob or button of the rod into the hollow of the left thigh, and let go of the rod with the right hand, which hand is brought down and takes hold of the reel handles on purpose to wind the bait home again.

With a little practice these three operations can be per-
formed in a couple of seconds with the ease and regularity of clockwork; that is, stopping the reel by a pressure of the finger as soon as the bait drops into the water, pressing the butt end into the hollow of the thigh, and letting go with the right hand in order to wind in the bait. This may be called the right-handed cast. In this casting the most natural direction for the bait to travel is wide to the left hand, in a slanting direction across the river. It requires some practice before a given point in any direction can be successfully struck. Some spinners, as I have said, always throw in what I call a left-handed cast; they grasp the rod with the left hand above the reel, and the right hand below it, checking the speed of the reel with the end of a finger at the bottom edge. I consider this to be an awkward throw, because ere you can wind up your line to spin the bait home both hands have to be shifted, the left lower down and the right to wind in, and in a shallow, weedy place this little extra time might result in the bait sinking among the weeds.

It does not matter in which direction I want to cast my bait—left or right, or straight forward—it is always done by the right-handed swinging cast. I know one or two good Trent spinners who manipulate their rod and reel in a manner that nobody could imitate in a week. James Chatterton, a rare good man, always used to put the reel on his rod with the handles pointing to the left, and wind the line inwards towards him with his left hand; and he could throw out a bait with the best of them. In giving lessons on this style, I found by far the greater number of my pupils could manage the right-handed cast much quicker and easier than any other. I once taught a gentleman how to cast a bait in one hour’s lesson; and, as he remarked afterwards, if he had known it was so easy, he would have learned long before.

The whole thing can be summed up in a few lines, and the important points to remember are as follows. Grip the rod firmly with the right hand above the reel, and with the fingers of the left regulate the speed of the revolving
barrel. And here is where an important point comes in. While the bait is travelling through the air, the slight pressure of the finger on the edge of the reel must always be there, regulated according to size of bait and weight of the lead. If it is a heavy natural bait, say a three-ounce dace, a little more pressure of the finger will be required; but if it is only a very light bait, say like an artificial wagtail, then only a very slight pressure will be needed, as the latter bait takes more force to start it on its journey than does the former.

In using a natural bait, say of two ounces or a little more, it is not by any means desirable to exercise tremendous force. I have seen it gravely stated in a book on pike-fishing "that to throw a bait direct from the reel required a long rod, and great force." Now that is just the very opposite to actual fact, a short rod and a very easy swing being quite sufficient to get out at least thirty or even forty yards if the bait is a two-ounce dace.

On the other hand, a very light artificial bait requires the longer top to the rod, and a little smarter swing to start it upon its journey.

In making a cast, if the bait has gone very near to the place you aimed at, lower the rod point until it nearly touches the water, if the character of the place renders this possible. As soon as the bait strikes the water the rod can be raised; this will keep the bait near the surface, a most important matter in a shallow place choked up with weeds, as it will prevent the bait from sinking too soon.

I am often asked what is the lightest weight that can be cast direct from the reel. If that reel is a centre-pin, then three-quarters of an ounce can be cast twenty-five yards; a small dace weighing from two to two and a half ounces can be thrown by the ordinary spindle reel forty or more yards. Some exhibition casts reach fifty to sixty yards, but in actual fishing during a long day a man will make more casts under thirty yards than over that figure.

I once saw some professionals making exhibition casts in
The "Trent Otter's" Flight, showing Trace and Zinc Strip.

The "Dart" Tackle, mounted with Dead Bait.

The "Dart" Tackle, unmounted.

"Phantom" Pike Bait.

SPINNING FLIGHTS (Chap. viii).
what they were pleased to call the Nottingham style; they swung the rod over their heads behind them, the bait swinging behind their backs; the rod was grasped in both hands, and brought forward high in the air, and such was the force of this terrific cast that the bait travelled upwards in the air to a great height before falling to the ground. I should like to see that sort of casting applied to actual fishing; the bait would not stand the first throw, unless it happened to be a Clipper artificial; a sprat or a bleak would have been thrown to atoms in less than a minute. The gentle side-swing is quite good enough for me, and when my record with a two-ounce artificial has reached a distance of fifty-three yards, I am not likely to change my plan.

Sometimes in casting you may stand in a very awkward place, among trees and bushes, and must of necessity swing the bait, either to the right or to the left, or it may be so that you cannot even swing it upwards, let alone to either hand, there being only a very small space immediately in front.

Under these conditions a very creditable cast can be made by drawing down a length of line from between the rings of the rod as high up as you can reach, and letting the bait swing backwards and forwards as far as the circumstances of the place will allow. When the bait has acquired sufficient momentum and swings sharply forward, release the loop of line you have in the left hand, and at the same time ease the pressure of the finger on the edge of the reel, and away goes the bait, the weight of which will cause the reel to revolve sufficiently to get out twenty yards at the very least. In this cast the rod must be held with the right hand above the reel, with the edge or side of the little finger resting lightly on the top edge of the revolving barrel.

When this cast is made and the bait hits the water, change the rod from the right hand to the left as quickly as possible, and wind home again, repeating the process as often as required.
There is no doubt that an expert can throw a bait further when casting with a coiled line than can be thrown from the reel, but still I don’t consider the coiled line to be anything like so clean, neat, easy, and free as my own favourite style of casting from the reel.
CHAPTER VIII

SPINNING FLIGHTS AND THEIR USES

Spinning: what it is—An ancient spinning tackle—Trent flights—The author's spinning flight—Dead bait spinners—The Chapman spinner, and its contemporaries—What water to spin over—How to spin over the streams—How to play and land a pike on spinning tackle—Preserving dead baits.

SPINNING for pike has been a favourite pastime of mine for many years, and I look upon it as being the most sportsmanlike of all the methods adopted for the capture of the freshwater shark.

I will preface my remarks by saying that spinning is done by fixing a small fish on a set of hooks in such a manner that when worked in the water it looks like a disabled fish trying to escape from some fancied danger or foe. The spinning bait must be kept constantly on the move; that is, turning over more or less rapidly or slowly, as the circumstances of the place into which it is thrown demands. Spinning is good and warm exercise for a cold day, as you must of necessity keep in motion, throwing the bait into every clear opening, hole, eddy, or stream that takes your fancy.

One man that I dropped across one day had a very curious idea as to what spinning was like; he borrowed a rod, reel, line, trace, and a spoon bait from the farmhouse where he was staying, went down to the river, threw the bait in, and then lit his pipe and waited for something to pick that spoon from the bottom; needless to say he was
The "Coxon," Spinner.


The "Archer" Standard Spinner.

Spinners for Mounting Dead Bait.
still waiting when two hours later we joined him. He said he had not the smallest notion what was meant by spinning.

We will consider this question for a moment, and see what it really is, and discuss the point as briefly as we can. In the first place a set of hooks called a flight is necessary, and this flight should be of such a character that it will impart an attractive spin to the bait, as well as being fixed in such a position that the pike itself can be securely hooked as soon as it lays hold.

One of the earliest flights I ever saw was used by a certain school of very old-fashioned Trent spinners. It must be more than forty years since I saw it used for the first time. This was merely a very large-eyed treble, a hook nearly as large as we see on old-fashioned spoons sometimes; this large hook was mounted on a yard of stout brass gimp, with a big box-swivel about midway down the gimp. In baiting this flight with a dace, the gimp, by the aid of a stout needle, was passed completely through from the vent and out at the mouth, the hook itself being underneath, between the vent and the tail. Now this was undoubtedly a simple flight; but in the rapid waters of the Trent it was effective, because I found that pike were hooked much easier in that river than in the more sluggish Ouse.

Hardly any of the Trent men would use more than two trebles on a flight, and these were whipped on a length of gimp nearly close together and threaded completely through the bait, with the help of a baiting needle. I don’t think I ever saw a good and experienced Trent man spinning with more than two trebles on his flight; in eight cases out of ten the pike of that river would grab the bait near the tail, while in a lake, canal, or slow-running streams like the Ouse and Nene, they would seize it across the shoulders in a much more deliberate manner, necessitating a somewhat different flight for those waters.

Some men consider it the correct thing for a spinning bait to travel at a fast rate through the water, and to spin
evenly and in a straight line; my own experience is not in favour of this. A pike, although a greedy fish, does not like too much trouble in capturing his prey. A small fish in difficulties, or one wounded, is far more likely to be the victim than one full of power and virility. I found that a spinning bait travelling in all sorts of curious curves and twists was the most effective. Mr. Pike has got sense enough to know that a disabled fish is a much easier prey than one that can spring into safety like a flash.

One of the commonest and simplest flights in use is known as the Thames flight; this flight has three trebles whipped fast to sixteen inches of oo copper gimp, each treble being about three-quarters of an inch apart, and above them is a single movable lip hook; the whole length between lip hook and the end treble varies from three to five inches, according to size of bait and hooks employed. Nos. 3 and 4 are useful hook sizes. In baiting this flight, move the sliding lip hook to suit the length of the particular fish chosen, and firmly fix that hook well through both lips; the three trebles are then stuck down the side, one after the other, the tail-end one being driven through the root of the tail until the bait bends very slightly downwards and sideways.

My own flight is represented by the illustration on page 55—two trebles, whipped nearly together on sixteen inches of oo copper gimp; this gimp is threaded through the bait from vent to mouth, the end treble of all being used to bend the tail slightly sideways and downwards, then the loose looped treble is dropped over the gimp and stuck in the side, and finally the narrow zinc strip is passed completely down and through the bait from the mouth to the fork of the tail, and the narrow end bent back to grip the root of the tail. It is necessary that this zinc strip should be a little longer than the bait used. This is my favourite flight, and it will stand any amount of hard work, and I found it effective on every river, stream, or lake I spun over; and when a pike was once hooked on it, it very
seldom played me false. My experience with pike flights has taught me that to get the best results the gimp should be threaded through the bait, and not stuck outside.

A very good flight I saw in use one day was made with a single hook at end, a hook at least two and a half inches long in the shank, and more than an inch across the bend. Close to the end of shank was a flying treble, hanging from a short length of gimp, and above that was a movable lip hook; that large single tail hook bent the bait capitally, and it had some holding power when a pike was hooked.

This flight seemed to be an improvement on the old Pennell, the S-shaped pattern of the tail hook of the latter being much improved by the long-shanked wide-bent single of the other. The old flights and methods of mounting adopted by the Trent men are my ideal of how a bait should be used, the gimp threaded completely through from mouth to vent.

To save the pike fisherman trouble in mounting and arranging his own flights, spinners in endless variety have been made, all more or less effective for the work they have to do. Almost every manufacturer of fishing tackle in England has a pet spinner of his own, which he says is the very best and most killing of any. Now these spinners are all very well in their way, and likely to save trouble in baiting; but when you come to look at them, the huge fans at the head and the rank arming of hooks on either side of the bait are not calculated to reassure a suspicious jack who moves in a clear-water stream.

When you come to examine all these spinners, you will find that the model adopted by most of the makers is after the old-fashioned Chapman, a spinner that still holds its own with the best. The idea in nearly every instance is the same: a stiff wire to thrust down the belly of bait, a pair of spinning fans that fit close up to the head, and hooks ranging from three trebles to as many as six fixed on either side. Now all these varied spinners are useful
at times; a tender bait will last much longer on them, and
the young angler can hardly go wrong in his choice, as they
are all pretty much alike; but still for my own part I prefer
a simple flight and to mount my own baits.

To spin a bait properly you must have a trace and a drop
lead, that is, a lead that hangs below the line, not one that
turns over and over in the water, or else the line will twist
and kink owing to the motion of the bait. The illustration
gives a good idea of the spinning lead, and if it has a swivel
at either end it will be about right. The traces themselves
can be about a yard long, and can be copper gimp or strong
salmon gut. Do not have too many swivels in a trace, one
above and one below the lead being quite enough.

Small dace, roach, gudgeon, bleak, sprats, and smelt,
are all good spinning baits, and none of them should exceed
two and a half ounces in weight.

And now just a few words as to condition of water in
which to expect sport. I find on careful reference to my
notebook that the best sport was had when the water was
clouded, and the best fish when it reads, "Water very
much clouded." By this phrase I don't mean a tearing
pea-soup flood, but a fair colour, in which the bait would be
visible when sunk a foot below the surface. Bright water
is not conducive to good sport. I have thrown a bait
many thousands of times, and my invariable experience
was that the brighter the water the less success; cloudy
and running water made all the difference, and a bag of
good jack was had on many occasions under these con-
ditions.

In spinning over public, well-fished waters when the
streams have run down very sluggish, and are gin-bright,
a gudgeon is as good a bait as can be tried; and this should
be mounted on a flight of small hooks and a trace of salmon
gut. An eel-tail threaded on a very large single mackerel
hook with the lead wrapped round the shank is also a very
good clear-water bait.

In a clouded water the best spinning baits are bleak and
sprats, or smelts, while dace or roach come a good second if the more brilliant ones are not forthcoming.

In spinning for pike on a large lake or broad where the water is deep, and the fish sluggish, it is no good fishing too near the surface, let it sink deep down and sink and draw it very slowly, and chance hooking into a weed-bed. In spinning over a canal or small stream where a five-pounder is a big one, the tackle can scarcely be too fine, or the trebles too small, or too neatly mounted. Sometimes a jack will come at a bait and then suddenly turn tail and refuse; the best plan is to keep pegging away with the same bait for ten minutes, and then change to something exactly opposite in shape and colour, and the chances are that he will take it the very next throw.

In spinning over places where the water is shallow and weedy, and very little stream is running, it will be well to spin as near the surface as possible. Do not under any circumstances spin the bait home like lightning; in deeper water that is free from weeds, etc., let it sink deep down, and in winding it back again keep moving the rod point from right to left, and then upwards and downwards, and keep slowly winding home. All these movements and varying of the pace have a tendency to cause the bait to come through the water in a series of curious dives, wobbles, and twists, which in my opinion is the source of attraction. Just before the bait reaches the bank on which you stand, it will be as well to lower the rod point and fish the place clean out, right up to the very bank; for sometimes a good jack follows the bait the whole length of the cast, and then takes it close under your feet. When you see this, stop spinning for a second and let the bait slowly sink, and the chances are that he will dive down and take it with right good will. I have seen this more than once, but you must keep cool, and be ready at a moment's notice.

When you first begin to fish a likely-looking stretch of water, it is not the correct thing to throw your bait right out to the furthest extent of your cast, but just toss it into
The "Wagtail."

The "Clipper."

Collapsing Spoon.

ARTIFICIAL PIKE BAITS (Chap. ix).
the nearest opening at first, and gradually work further away in every direction until you cover all the water you can comfortably reach. In casting it is the usual thing to throw the bait across and down stream, and work it back against the current. Sometimes, after searching the water by that plan, I have had a run of luck by throwing the bait up stream, and letting it work down in the same direction as the current is running. I have picked up several good fish by adopting this method.

And now just a few words on a very vexed question, and that is: Should a pike be struck sharply and heavily when he takes a natural bait on spinning tackle? I say no, certainly; more pike are lost by striking too heavily than if you do not strike at all. A pike generally seizing the bait when it is revolving through the water. If you strike at once and heavily the chances are that you snatch bait and hooks out of his mouth, whereas if you simply hold on tight for the second of time until he turns, in all probability his own weight and force will be quite sufficient to bury the barbs of the hooks. I always like to keep my finger pressed on the edge of the reel, and make him pull hard for every foot of line he takes out. Anyhow, it is not advisable to strike heavily under any circumstances; that pike might be a big one, and the sudden jerk break the line.

In spinning over deep waters, or indeed any waters, and a hooked pike suddenly, as it were, stands on his tail with his head out of the water and his jaws and gills wide open, shaking like a terrier with a rat, you stand a very good chance of parting company. Drop the rod point a bit, and he may roll over on the instant; if you are flurried and haul on him tightly while his mouth is wide open, the chances are that you will assist him admirably in getting rid of those troublesome hooks. A hard and fast rule cannot be laid down as to how a pike should be played when it takes a spinning bait; the surroundings of each place should be noted, and measures taken accordingly. I always took prompt and energetic measures when dealing
with hooked pike in a dangerous and weedy place, and
gave them the butt with a vengeance.

In some waters that I am familiar with it is a frequent
occurrence for pike hooked on spinning tackle to leap a
couple of feet or more into the air. A tight line and a
heavy drag will lose him at the first jump. Lower the rod
point, and ease the pressure of your finger on the edge of
the reel, so that the line at any rate will respond to his
weight. I did not mind how heavy a fish was; if weed-
beds and dangerous obstructions were in close proximity
I never let him have his own way quite; I used to think
I might as well have my tackle broken one way as have it
broken another among the weeds and roots. Anyhow, I
always had a good fair try at stopping him before he got
very far towards a dangerous position.

Anglers who spin with a natural bait used to sigh for a
good and easily applied preservative in which to store baits
until wanted. We have tried salting them, putting them
in glycerine or in spirits of wine; but these methods were
anything but successful. The brightness soon vanished.
A mixture of formalin and water is much the best; sprats,
smelts, bleak, dace, gudgeon, or any small fish can be
preserved quickly, easily, and well. A tablespoonful of
formalin to a quart of clean water is about the proportion
to use. The baits should be put in a wide-necked jar or
bottle, and as fresh as possible, that is as quickly as ever
you can after catching them; put a dozen or two in each
bottle or jar, and well cover them with the mixture, and
cork them down securely. After being in this mixture for
a week or two, they will sometimes turn dirty and look
disagreeable. Remove the cork, pour away the liquid,
wash the baits well in cold water, rinse out the bottles,
put the baits back, and fill up with the fresh mixture as
before in about the same proportion of strength, or perhaps
a little weaker; cork them down again, and they will keep
good and bright for a year or more. Sprats are particularly
good treated in this way. A lever-stoppered bottle with a
band of expanding india-rubber, so that it can be taken out and replaced at leisure, is the very best thing to keep them in. Anyhow, I know I should have been extremely thankful for a tip of that kind in my old spinning days, for I generally found it to be the case that when I did not want any small baits I could get plenty; but when I did want them, why, they were not forthcoming.
CHAPTER IX

ARTIFICIAL BAITS

Artificial baits and their uses—Shape and colour—Contradictions pure and simple—How to use an artificial—Best water and time to try them—Wind and weather—Ice in the rod rings—Irish pike and the huge spoons—Pike flies and calf's-tail bait.

ARTIFICIAL baits for pike-fishing are made in almost endless variety, and in all sorts of materials, from German silver to vulcanite; even bunches of peacock's feathers, and the skin of the fish itself have been utilized for this purpose. Some of these artificials, like the famous old "Clipper," are so constructed that a light breeze is quite sufficient to set them spinning with great rapidity, and when drawn through the water they look like a glittering line of silver. These are good baits to use when the water is clouded. When the rivers have run down very low and bright, and every weed in four feet of water visible, a bright, silver-like artificial is of very little use; a dull-coloured soft india-rubber bait would then be more likely to kill. It hardly matters what colour or shape, or by what name it is known; an artificial will take jack sometimes when the conditions of the water are favourable, but water and weather must be right.

I have known an angler to use a certain artificial on a well-known water, when the river was running in the very pink of condition, and the pike fairly on the rampage, in fact, just about the chance of a lifetime, and in the course of a short afternoon to get half a dozen right good fish.
Instead of considering this matter from a common-sense point of view, and taking communion with himself, reasoning the matter fairly and squarely, and looking honestly at all the favourable circumstances, he is so elated at his success that he promptly sits down and writes a note to one of the sporting papers, cracking up the wonderful merits of Mr. So-and-so's artificial bait. And then the merry game goes on; Mr. So-and-so quotes that in advertisements in other papers, and so a score or two of other anglers are innocently deceived. That lucky angler might use the same bait again a score of times and never find the same favourable conditions, and never meet with like success on any subsequent visit. This sort of thing is not fair to the anxious novice.

One lucky afternoon, that will be engraved on my memory for years, I got forty-three pounds of jack on a spoon bait, from a half-mile stretch of the Great Ouse; but the wind and water and everything else were extremely favourable. Another day the "Clipper" accounted for nine fish; but I am not likely to strongly recommend those two baits because they happened to be lucky on one or two special occasions.

I am very partial to a spoon bait; I have one in my possession that has been in at the death of numbers of fine jack. This is one of the oldest forms of artificials, and in my opinion still equal to any new-fangled invention. Pike have been taken on spoons in every water where these fish are found; I have a record in my notebook of forty pike being killed with spoon baits in a single season.

This is a question that cannot be settled off-hand, because some of my pike-spinning experiences have been curious, and productive of strangely divergent results. One day the jack in a certain stretch would take a bait of one particular shape and colour, utterly ignoring anything else; while another day the rejected one of the previous occasion would be the killer, and the lucky one left alone. So looking at it by the eye of a long practical experience, I find it
ARTIFICIAL BAITS

a hopeless task to recommend any particular artificial in preference to any other. It is no use pinning your faith to any special kind.

Spinning with an artificial is a branch of sport that is clean and interesting, and I know it is productive of sport in certain conditions of water and wind. What I would strongly impress on my readers is this: use two or three artificials, and let them be as diverse as possible in appearance and design; the colour and shape should be different in each one, so that if a pike came and refused a certain pattern, he might take another one of a different shape.

This has been my experience more than once. Putting it broadly then, I should say have in your tin box three or four different patterns; I don't care what name they are known by, nor what reputation they have gained, so long as shape and colour are opposed, and the chances are that some time during the day one or other will arouse the curiosity of a pike, and that he will forget his usual caution and fall a victim, although the water may be as clear as gin and everything unfavourable for sport.

You can never tell your luck; keep pegging away, chopping and changing about; use every artificial you have in your box; now and again spinning quickly, then again slowly, sometimes deep down in the water, sometimes nearer the surface. It is only by perseverance that a jack will repose in the bag at night, that is, mind, when conditions are unfavourable. Remember the words of a well-known angler: "You cannot expect to catch many fish if your rod is all the time reared up against a tree." This advice is on a par with that of the Scotchman who said to a young pupil: "The man who has his bait in the water stands a better chance than he who has it out."

In rivers like the Trent, that are subject after heavy rains to sudden and thick floods, that come tearing down with terrific force, it is very little use trying an artificial of any kind while the water is in that state; wait a little
until it has fined down somewhat; if you can see your artificial when sunk a foot below the surface, then there is a chance. Try all the quieter corners and lay-byes, letting the bait sink deep down and spinning home no faster than is really necessary. Taking it all round, the Trent fishes very well with an artificial when it is moderately clear; but it is a wide river, and a good volume of water generally running.

In quieter waters like the Ouse and Nene, and similar rivers, I found it best for spinning an artificial when the water was on the rise, and once or twice I have had heavy bags when it has been too thick to see the spoon if sunk eighteen inches below the surface. During the late summer and early autumn, when the water is very clear, almost the only chance you have to pick up a fish by spinning an artificial is just after sunset, immediately before the dusk of evening creeps down on you. I have had some of my best fish under these conditions.

A splendid place to try an artificial is in the rough and broken water at the foot of a weir, particularly if large stones and sunken trees break the force of the stream, and eddies are formed behind. If the frothing waters keep churning round and round, and you think there is hardly room to get a bait in, have a try; there might be a specimen lurking under the shadow of those big stones. I was very partial to all those streams and eddies that curl round and round from the tail of a weir.

The same trace and drop lead that I recommend for spinning a natural bait will do for an artificial, only when the water is clouded, and weeds and roots are plentiful, I should use them rather stouter than usual.

Just a few words on another much-discussed question, and that is what wind and weather are likely to be the best for sport with an artificial. Some men prefer a gale of wind, when the water is rolled up in miniature waves, caused by the wind chopping up stream. Certainly I have had sport under these conditions, but then, on the
other hand, I have had far better luck when not even a ripple disturbed the surface of the water.

Once in particular I remember spinning all one afternoon when the water was clouded and a nice breeze blowing, but not a run did I get; towards evening the wind died away, and the surface of the water was like a mirror, and then the rain came down in earnest; altogether not an evening in which to expect sport with an artificial. However, I had a few casts over a place that several times before during the afternoon I had thrown over without success, but this time I got five fish within the next half-hour, averaging five pounds each.

I must admit that many bags have been had during a dead calm. It does not matter much when the water is clouded whether there is a good breeze or not; if the water is clear, then a little wind that ripples up the water acts as a blind to cover the spinner and his movements.

There is no rule that can be invariably applied in this matter. I have taken jack in all sorts of weathers—when a gale nearly blew me into the river, and when the softest zephyrs scarcely ruffled the surface of the water. Taking all things into consideration, clear water or clouded, a little breeze is desirable; with regard to the best quarter for the wind to be in, it matters very little. An east wind with a touch of frost that would drive the roach clean off the feed, might make the jack come on right manfully. Wind and weather when spinning an artificial are matters of little importance; condition of the water is more to be observed. One of the most favourable conditions in which to find the water is after a few frosts have rotted the weeds, then a heavy rain which causes a rapid rise and sweeps away the decayed weeds, and washes the jack out of their fastnesses into the more open waters. As soon as this flood water clears away a little, so that the bait can be seen, most assuredly that is the time to get sport.

I have had pike-spinning when the weather has been mild and summerlike; when a north-easter has been roar-
ing down the valleys; when the rain has been coming down in a deluge; when a heavy snowstorm has whitened the whole face of nature; and when the frost has been so keen that every few minutes I have been obliged to suck the ice from the rings of the rod. This will happen sometimes, and speedily spoil a spinning line if you are not careful; a few drops of castor-oil rubbed on the line will counteract this trouble somewhat; but it is an evil to contend with, and sucking the ice out of the rod rings on a cold day in winter is disagreeable, but absolutely necessary.

First and foremost as an artificial for pike I put a spoon, and this is made in varied patterns, perhaps the best being the collapsing or split one, mounted on a bar, with a tag of red worsted covering the somewhat mighty treble that arms the bar. Wagtails, Clippers, Devons, Phantoms, Spirals, and a host of others are made, and can be purchased nearly anywhere, from one shilling to two shillings each. I say again that I have no choice; weather and water are more important than shape or colour of your artificial.

A friend of mine, who goes to Ireland to fish the loughs there, tells me that no hard and fast rule can be laid down even there; he found the best plan was to get his boatman to zigzag the boat round the flags and weeds and islands, threading his way about so that the bait whisked into all sorts of odd corners—a trick that only an Irish boatman can do—and trail the bait some twenty or thirty yards astern. His best fish, a twenty-seven pounder, was got on a five-inch Phantom, and he got this after trailing over the place with one of a set of huge spoons I got made for him; these Irish lake spoons being about six inches long and three wide, with hooks on the end more like grappling-irons.

Some of these lake pike will take a huge peacock's-feather fly, dressed on a large single hook. I have seen some of these flies at least five or six inches long, and nearly as big as a sparrow; this is cast among the flags and weeds like a salmon fly, working it about in a series of
jumps and jerks. Another similar surface bait is made from the skin of a calf’s tail, fashioned like a water-rat, and under certain conditions of the water accounts for jack of some considerable size.

Before I close this chapter on spinning I might mention that the “Stag Brand” waterproofed and vacuum-dressed, that I mentioned in Chapter VI, is the only dressed line that can be thrown and cast from the reel in the Nottingham style; I find it works as easily and smoothly as an undressed silk.
CHAPTER X

TROLLING WITH A DEAD GORGE

What trolling is—The tackle for it—Baiting the dead gorge—How and where to use the dead gorge—Personal experiences in dead gorging—Harry Norledge and the big Trent pike.

THIS chapter deals with a branch of pike-fishing that I don’t hold with; but still it is a necessary evil sometimes, so it must be tolerated; but the chapter will be a very short one.

Certain waters contain good pike, but are so choked up with weeds that there is scarcely a clear space a yard square in which an ordinary pike tackle can be got, and so dead gorging must be indulged in.

The advantage of the dead gorge is that when moved up and down in a sink-and-draw movement, and a fish swallows it, there are no hooks, no lead, no float, to catch among the weeds, the gorge hooks being down the belly of the pike, and if he does thread himself among those weeds you stand a chance of getting him out, if line and tackle are strong and the weeds rotted down somewhat, and tender. I once saw a very large pike captured by this method, weighing close on twenty pounds, but he was so embedded in a mass of weeds that he could not be seen.

The rod for this fishing should be very strong; the best I ever saw was built from an old salmon fly rod, and was owned by the late Harry Norledge; this rod was nearly thirteen feet long, and I never handled such a punishing rod in my life.
You must not use your light spinning rod for this work. A strong four-inch plain wood reel will do, and the line can be fifty yards of strong tanned, plaited hemp, costing a couple of shillings or so; everything must be pretty strong. The usual gorge hook is simply a double hook of the shape known as a parrot beak, securely fastened to a short length of twisted brass wire; hook and wire should be about six inches long over all. A bit of lead is cast round the shank of hook and the wire, the whole thing weighing about one and a half ounces; the wire and all should be as long as the bait you propose to use, and very stiff and rigid. A two-foot length of No. 1 copper gimp, or a similar piece of the Hercules wire gimp, securely fastened to the wire eye at end of the gorge, will be quite enough for a trace, the main object of this tackle being to do away with any obstructions that are likely to catch hold of weeds and boughs. A plain brass swivel can be employed between the gimp and the main line, as this will prevent the line from kinking.

In baiting a gorge hook, use a baiting needle, and drive it down the throat of the bait, keeping it as near the backbone as possible, down the centre, so that the leaded wire will have a good and solid foundation. Bring the needle out between the forks of the tail, and draw the gimp after it until the lead and wire are completely hidden in the bait, with the bends of the hooks close up to the nose (some trollers tie the tail fast to the wire, others clip the tail off altogether with a pair of scissors), then join the gimp to the main line, and all is ready.

The best bait for trolling is a five-inch dace; a small roach will do, so will a large gudgeon, but a dace seems to be the best and most lasting.

Where trolling with a dead gorge differs from spinning with a dead bait is the fact that any preserved or pickled fish will do for the latter, the former must have a bait perfectly fresh. When a pike runs at a spinning bait and lays hold, he has not much chance as a rule to reject it, whereas if the taste of a dead gorge bait was not to his
liking, he could drop it at once. I have always found that if the bait was freshly caught and put on the hooks fresh and bleeding the chances were much better.

In trolling the angler selects the clearest place he can find, and draws down a length of line from between the rings of the rod and just tosses the bait towards that opening, at the same time letting go of the loop or length of line he holds in one hand. As soon as the bait touches the water it will dive down very quickly, the heavy lead inside causing this. Always keep a tight line, don’t have any slack hanging loose if you can help it. As soon as the bait begins to sink, lower the point of the rod until you think the bait has gone far enough, and then raise it slowly until it comes near the surface, then again drop the rod point quickly, so as to cause the bait to again shoot or dive towards the bottom, repeating this a few times until the bait works too near the weeds; then withdraw it as well as you can, clear the stray weeds from the hooks, and make a fresh cast.

I have seen a dead gorge worked with success in a very wide and deep stretch of a sluggish river, when neither live bait nor spinning tackle stood much chance; the bait thrown out to the utmost limit of a cast, allowed to sink to the bottom, and then inch by inch slowly worked home. But this plan is more for choked-up, weedy places; let it plump down as quickly as it likes, but bring it up again to the surface slowly; the action of the water, in conjunction with the shape of the bait, causing it to gyrate more in its upward journey than during its downward plunge. I always fancied a dead gorge looked more natural in the water than the very neatest spinning bait I ever mounted; anyhow, I know that a dead gorge worked as it should be among the weeds is the most deadly plan that can be tried.

When a pike takes the bait do not get flurried and strike at once, or most likely you will jerk it out of his mouth; this bait must be swallowed, and it all depends on the humour of the jack as to how long it will take him; he
might do it in two minutes or he might be fifteen. Don't check him in the slightest, let him go, and never mind the weeds; when he stops give him five minutes or so, and then wind him out the best way you can, weeds and all; and in this fishing you need not strike, as all the striking in the world won't drive the hooks in any better, as they are already down his stomach.

One very successful dead-gorge fisherman I attended more than once used to bait his tackle rather differently; he used to thread the gimp back again to the head of the bait; so that the bait went tail downwards instead of head downwards; by this plan, when the bait was jerked upwards among the weeds, the bends of the hooks were uppermost and not the points, and there was less chance of their catching the weeds. To accomplish this he had the wire of his hooks made very strong, and as long as the fish he used for a bait.

This gorge-fishing among the weeds is sometimes the only chance one has of getting a fish. I remember once seeing a lot of jack among the flags and weeds of a celebrated backwater that had an entrance into the Lower Trent. It looked about the most unlikely spot I ever saw, but there were the fish threading their way in and out, every now and then swirling over with a huge splash. I went and told Harry Norledge, one of the subscribers to that water, and we prepared some special dead-gorge tackle; and I remember what a job he had plumping the bait in and out and among those weeds, every now and then hanging on like grim death; sometimes hauling out a bunch of weeds, now and again getting a run from a good fish, and after all sorts of capers landing him. That old hickory cut-down salmon rod of his was just the very thing; anyhow, I helped him to get a dozen of those jack out, the largest fourteen pounds; and we were going to have another turn the next day; but when I saw him he said his fellow-subscribers of the water, who were the trustees and tenants of the fishery, had in the meantime called a meeting of the committee, who passed a
resolution that declared dead-gorge fishing in any of their waters illegal.

Well, I never did like that method of fishing, but when it was done among the weeds as friend Harry Norledge did it, its effectiveness was beyond question. Once after that, in the deep water of Houghton Wale, on the Great Ouse, I saw a man get four pike, two of them pretty large ones, by working a dead-gorge tackle all over the place. He would have it that it was more deadly than a paternoster, under certain conditions of water and season.
CHAPTER XI

A DAY WITH THE OUSE PIKE

The Great Ouse and its pike—Spinning round the bends—Paxton Hill and Wray House Island—How the big pike was hooked and lost—A rustic Phyllis—The young cuckoo and the reed-warblers—Down Houghton Wale, and round Batcock's Island—A glorious wind up.

DURING an eight years' residence on the banks of the Great Ouse, I obtained an intimate knowledge of the deeps and shallows, slacks and runs of that famous river, down the whole of that stretch that flows between the two small towns of St. Neots and St. Ives. This reach of the river lent itself admirably to the persevering spinner, although taking it on the whole the water ran clear and sluggish, and it was only after long-continued rains that a heavy stream and a flooded water could be looked for. Taking it all round, however, I did well on it with my spinning rod, the record season's catch mentioned in Chapter I being had in those very waters.

The miles of water that divide those two towns are very diversified in their character; here and there, fostered by the low, swampy bed, rise enormous masses of giant reeds; again a row of old pollard willows looks gaunt and grim in the distance; now a trim house and lawn peep invitingly from a fringe of shrubs; while ever and anon the river with its many bends and corners invites all and sundry to taste the pleasures of the sport that most certainly lies under its placid surface.
The pike of the Great Ouse were splendid, thick-set fish; I cannot call to mind any water that I fished in where the fish would equal, let alone beat them. That record year I speak about, I find that my best thirty fish, taken on spinning baits, weighed one hundred and sixty-five pounds, that is an average of five and a half pounds per fish; and my notebook says that I was out on twenty-five different days. One of those days, and where I went, I will try to describe in a short chapter of a very few pages.

When you reach the railway station at St. Neots, it is a pretty long walk to the paper mill at Little Paxton; but come along; a three miles' walk all through the little town and across the common will land us there all right. Before crossing the bridge to the further side of the river I always had a peep into the pool below, and if the water was clear and the sun shining some giant chub could be seen swimming near the surface; some of those chub must have weighed seven pounds apiece. After crossing the bridge turn down stream to the right hand, and march along to the first meadow; there is an old post about eighteen inches high there, with a flat top; this was a welcome resting-place after the walk from the station. Here we put our tackle together—my ten-foot spinning rod, the four-inch reel, and the undressed line described in previous chapters, with the salmon gut trace and my flight, also described in Chapter VIII. I had a dozen or more very fine and bright sprats in my bag, in addition to the usual artificials I carried. The landing net is put together, and all things are ready.

The bag or haversack that I carried for years down there had been made originally for a parcels postman; but it was awkwardly deep for him, so I purchased it, and it turned out one of the best investments I ever made. It was amazing what it would carry; more than twenty inches deep and about the same width, with a broad bottom, a seven-pound jack would go head first down it, and not much of his tail showing above the top. I put a stout par-
tion in it, so that tackle, luncheon, and fish could be separated. I have carried twenty pounds and more of jack in it several times, and always considered it worth more than I gave for it.

Very soon after leaving that old post, the river takes several short and abrupt turns. In most of these corners there was a deepish hole, fringed with reeds and flags, and generally tenanted by one or two decent jack. I always made it a rule to try every one of these corners well, and hardly ever tried them but what I got at least one decent fish from one or other of them.

The October day I am now describing was one of the best for spinning I was ever out in; a beautiful breeze rippled the surface of the river, and six inches of extra water with a nice colour was running, and shaking those reeds in dancing music. I threw those sprats many dozens of times into all the bends, tiddled them round and over the flag beds, and insinuated them into all the corners, for more than two hours, and got three of the best fish I ever obtained from the Great Ouse on spinning tackle during one afternoon. They weighed $8\frac{3}{4}$ lb., $7\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and $6\frac{3}{4}$ lb., respectively—23 lb., nearly 8 lb. each on the average.

I spun all down that stretch, which is always worth trying right away down to a big hill, which turns the course of the river to a complete right angle, and only got one more fish, a good three-pounder; and as the bag was heavy, and that small fish was likely to spoil my average for that day at any rate, I carefully returned it to the river.

That hill that fronts you on coming down stream from St. Neots paper mill is said to be the highest eminence in the county of Huntingdon, and is known as Paxton Hill. On the opposite side was a row of poplars, whose leaves during the summer, and when there did not seem to be any breeze, would shake and shiver, showing alternately white and green; a very curious effect, making the observer wonder if a breeze was not playing hide-and-seek with the tops of those trees.
The river from these poplars down to Wray House Island was wide, open, and fairly deep, and a capital spinning water. I could sink my bait well down without much danger. All round the island odd jack would lurk, but on this day not another fish rewarded my efforts. A week previous to this visit I tried a long cast up a backwater that came in under the shadow of the poplars just mentioned, and got a ten-pounder; he took the sprat the very instant it struck the water. I fancy that I must have thrown it right into his open mouth. All round that bend under the shadow of Paxton Hill there were some good perch, and a lot of them; many a nice dish I have had from there, using a paternoster baited with worms and tiny gudgeons. An old retired schoolmaster, who lived there and frequently fished the place, told me that he once saw a shoal of big perch in that corner, the leader of which must have gone more than five pounds. I never, however, saw one taken from that river that went more than two and a half pounds.

One day when fishing that stretch with a local postman we had an adventure. Close to the island there is a deep hole within a yard of the bank, and a shelf that reaches to the very edge of it. In the postman’s kettle was a ten-inch chub. He threaded this on a big gorge tackle, and just dropped it on the shallow water of the shelf above the hole while he unwound his old line and laid it in coils on the grass. All at once a huge head poked up above the edge of that shelf, and in an instant, with a splash that sent a shower of water over us, a giant pike seized the chub and made off across the river to a thick bed of weeds. All efforts to dislodge him proved unavailing. We got a boat and a long pole, but could do nothing, and at last the old line finally broke close to the trace, and another fish of a lifetime was lost. About a month afterwards the postman recovered that pike, but alas it was dead, and too far gone for anything. He took it to a farm near by and measured and weighed it; it was forty-three inches long, and scaled
nearly twenty-four pounds. A great pity that such a fish should have been hooked on such primitive tackle.

All round those meadows permission could easily have been obtained; although Mr. Topham and Mr. G. W. Ladds, the owners, had an objection to Sunday fishing, they never interfered with respectful weekday anglers. There are two or three villages hereabouts where strangers could make themselves comfortable.

After leaving Wray House Island I found a long stretch of wide and rather shallow water, but still worth spinning over; this time, although I tried it carefully, only a couple of very small ones sampled those sprats. Beyond this wide stretch the river contracts and is much deeper, with tall flags, bushes, and an overhanging bank, and some splendid streamy runs, that I always tried most carefully. On the right-hand bank, going down stream, the water belonged to Mr. Cardell, and that on the left was the property of Lord Wantage; permission was not hard to obtain.

That lovely October day I was considerably startled whilst admiring the surroundings of that beautiful spot. I heard a voice, high-pitched and shrill, that seemed to come from the depths of a bream hole under the flags on the opposite bank, asking me if I had had good sport. I was not thinking of anybody just then, and I never saw the glint of a rod nor heard any sound from among those reeds and flags. "Bless my heart," thought I, "there is either a mermaid or a fairy somewhere near," as the voice was decidedly of a feminine tone. However, it did not turn out to be anything so formidable or startling, but was simply a rustic Phyllis fishing away for bream with all the intentness and, I may add, skill of a club angler who is looking after his season's prize and has only got that afternoon in which to win it.

That damsels, clad in the coarsest dress, with a huge Zulu hat on her head, face and hands browned by the suns of many summers, her feet encased in a pair of huge water-
proof bluchers, several sizes too big, volunteered the information that "she kept the pan frizzling pretty regularly all through the season by the spoils of her rod; she reckoned to have a couple of hours nearly every day; the boys liked the bream, and she liked to catch 'em." I fancy she was the daughter, or the granddaughter, of the ancient shepherd who lived in a small cottage some few hundred yards away. I have often wondered if she still "keeps the pan a-frizzling" or has got higher and more aristocratic notions since then. Her sisters of the village went in for high-heeled boots and bicycles; but the damsel of the bream hole was content with huge blucher shoes, and a rough-and-ready fishing rod. Many times I saw her after that, and looked upon her as being nearly as great a landmark as the huge willow that stood and cast its shadow far over the water at the head of that famous swim.

Once I remember fastening my old boat in the swim exactly opposite that big willow; there had been some heavy rain and the water was tinged with colour, and running nearly twice as fast as it did in a dry summer. Seven feet of water and a lovely bottom! A big pailful of ground bait was expended, one kernel of stewed wheat on the hook, and at night an old mat basket was overflowing, and I kept nothing less than half a pound. That catch stands out as one of the best I ever made on that or any other river.

Once afterwards in the same swim I got a dozen good perch, fishing with the tail end of a lob on float tackle; and still again I can call to mind a bag of eight jack that friend Ducker and I got on snap tackle and float, running the bait all down those flags, eddies, and runs.

This is a long digression, but writing about that old spot woke up memories that refuse to be suppressed.

From that point down to Offord Church there was at least two miles of good water, containing a fair sprinkling of jack. That afternoon of which I write, I only just skimmed it over, getting a good plump five-pounder, and
A DAY WITH THE OUSE PIKE

returning three smaller ones; these fish were taken on my old and favourite spoon. On the right-hand bank the fishing then belonged to Mr. Cardell, of Great Paxton, who fitted up a couple of cottages that stand on a hill overlooking the river, for the convenience of visitors. On the left-hand side the water belonged to Squire Thornhill, of Diddington, and Mr. Priestley, of Offord Mill. The latter gentleman issues tickets at a small cost to strangers and visitors.

Once when I was fishing the swim opposite those old cottages just named, I found a reed-warbler's nest, built cunningly to the stems of three tall reeds; in the nest a young cuckoo gaped and grew amazingly; he sprawled over the top of the nest, completely hiding it from view. That wide-open yellow mouth took more filling than the two tiny foster-parents could cram into it. I never saw birds work so hard as did those reed-warblers; nearly every minute one or the other was bringing something; hour after hour this continued, and still that wide-open yellow mouth, like Oliver Twist, "asked for more." But it met with speedy destruction; a boy with a catapult strolled down, spotted that nest, and before I could stop him killed the inmate. The village schoolmaster happened to be there for a walk, so he cut out the nest, reeds and all, took it home and preserved it, using it as an object-lesson for his scholars.

The water below Offord Mill, and stretching to the Poplars, the railway bridge, and Brampton Mill, belongs to the Earl of Sandwich; but it is rented by the Huntingdon Angling Association, who grant tickets at a small cost. This is capital spinning water; every inch of it can be tried, some of the water is very deep, and holds pike of a large size. The water all down from our starting-point to, say, miles lower, past Huntingdon, Hartford, Houghton, and the Hemingfords, will give plenty of work for three days' spinning. If our angler starts from Godmanchester Bridge, he will find a boat more than useful; in fact, there
is a stretch of water reaching several miles, that the best places could not be got at without.

All round the islands at Hartford, and lower down towards Houghton Wale, and even beyond Wyton rectory, the water is very good indeed; I have spun it all over many times. I have drifted my boat down to Batcock's Island, and seen those giant chub under the boughs that every visitor has a go at, but never succeeds in getting. I have cast out my lure in my own Nottingham style; seen the glittering bait come shooting, wobbling, and diving, and then a mighty flash and a swirling splash sends our spirits up, and they rise still higher when a good eight-pounder—after a fight that we never forget, on our salmon gut trace—quivers and gleams in the waning sunlight as we measure with our eye his grand proportions, before putting him in the bag to join his fellows; and we row or walk slowly homeward at peace with all the world, and ready to say that nothing beats a good day's spinning for pike on the Great Ouse.
CHAPTER XII

WITH LIVE BAIT AND FLOAT

Different methods of live baiting—Pike floats and pilots—Traces and leads—Snap tackles ancient and modern—Snap-fishing down a stream—Snap-fishing in a lake—Deep or shallow fishing—Gorge tackle and its use.

LIVE baiting for pike can be divided into four heads, or rather sections, two of them practised with one or more floats, and the other two without any floats at all. No practical advantage will be gained if I go at length into this part of my subject, so I will content myself with two very brief chapters.

Putting it briefly, the four heads may be described as follows: First, snap tackle and an egg-shaped float, with a smaller float two feet away, and these so arranged that the live bait swims at any depth the angler pleases; and the snaps are hooks which allow the pike to be snapped or hooked the moment he seizes the bait. Second, with similar floats, but the hook is a double one threaded under the skin of the bait, so that in this case a pike must swallow it before it can be hooked. Third, with a paternoster and no float, but a lead sinker at the extreme end, and snap hooks at intervals above this lead. Fourth, with a leger at the bottom of deep holes; in this case the bait is below the lead, and either semi-snap or semi-gorge tackle is used.

Snap-fishing with float tackle is the plan now universally followed by anglers, that is, in waters fairly open, and is a
good, fair, and clean plan. Some owners of private waters object to any other plan, and in my opinion rightly so.

A pike float is in the shape of a hen's egg, and very nearly the same size; there is a hole lengthways through the centre, in which the line is threaded, and a plug stuck in fastens the float securely in its proper place. Some good pike floats are made rather longer and thinner than the usual pattern; some that I have seen are four or five inches long, and about as thick as your thumb. The tops of these floats should be coloured to suit the varying lights and shades, and to suit the eyes of the angler.

The "Fishing Gazette" float is one of the most useful; it has a slit down the side into which the line can be put, instead of removing trace and tackle.

Cork is the best material for a float, although I have seen them made from wood, celluloid, etc. etc., and once I saw one made like a small india-rubber bladder, that could be blown up to any size required; but that one came to grief on a thorn bush—the bubble was pricked—so I do not strongly recommend them. About two or three feet above the larger float there is a much smaller round one, not more than three-quarters of an inch in diameter. The object of this small float is to keep a certain quantity of line on the surface, and to prevent the main line from sinking down and getting mixed up with the tackle. Sometimes three and even four small pilots are used a yard from each other when fishing shallow places.

Red and green and white and green are good colours for a pike float. The angler should always study his own eyes.

Traces for live bait differ slightly from the one used for spinning. A drop lead is not a necessity. A couple of feet of strong salmon gut, o copper gimp, or oo Hercules wire gimp, is ample for a live bait trace; this should have a loop at one end to knot the reel line in, a buckle swivel at the other, and a barrel lead about as thick as a pipe stem, and one and three-quarter inches long; it should be
The "TRENT OTTER" OLD FAST HOOK LIVE BAIT SNAP (Page 92).
About correct size, or slightly enlarged.

Showing how Live Bait is fixed on a Snap.
threaded on between the loop and swivel. The lead and swivel should be about fourteen inches above the set of hooks. The object of this lead is not so much to cock the float as it is to keep the bait down, and to prevent it from rising to the surface.

Snap tackles are now legion; every maker has some fad of his own; but if you examine them well, you will find that most of them are designed after one of the oldest that ever was made. That old snap tackle we used more than forty years ago in the fens of Lincolnshire, but nowadays the gimp is much finer and the hooks smaller. The snap that I generally use, and I have no fault to find with it, is simply two No. 4-5 or 6 trebles whipped firmly about two and a half inches apart on a fifteen-inch length of 00 copper gimp or 00 Hercules wire gimp; these two hooks are ample for a snap tackle. In baiting this snap, one hook of the end treble is stuck firmly into the root of the shoulder or pectoral fin of the bait, and one hook of the other treble is driven under the back fin, so that it gets a good grip of the flesh.

Some of these snaps, which by the way are known as Jardine snaps, have the back-fin hook movable, so that it can be shifted up or down the gimp to suit the size of bait selected. Some also have only a large single hook for the back fin, others are rigged up with wires that thread through the gill covers, others have only a single square-bend hook simply put through both lips; while one of the latest snaps is simply a double spring hook that grips the back of the bait. Snap-fishing is apt to be bewildering to the novice; so many different kinds of snaps are put on the market and strongly recommended that our anxious young angler gets more anxious still; but he can take comfort from the statement of a very old angler like myself, who can always hook and play and land his fish on the ordinary two treble snaps of the days of long ago; besides, I always fancy some of these many-hooked and wired affairs are calculated to arouse the suspicions of cunning
WITH LIVE BAIT AND FLOAT

old pike; a couple of small hooks lying snug and tight on the bait are in my opinion ample.

There is the Bickerdyke snap, the Pennell snap, and a combination of two or three, all rolled into one. I give an illustration of my own snap, from which the reader may derive some idea of what snaps are like in general. For ordinary river fishing don’t have the hooks of the snap too large; but for deep lakes, where pike run big and large bait must be fished deep down, you can venture to try them two or three sizes larger.

In using a snap tackle down the current of a streamy river that curls round into an eddy, it is best to fix the float so that the bait is about two-thirds of the depth of water; this is preferable for fishing clear-running rivers, that have pikey-looking corners and eddies, into which a current gurgles and glides, with the bottom, generally speaking, clear from weeds, and if an overhanging row of bushes or sedges lines the spot all the better.

In this stream-fishing with a snap, fix the small pilot float about a foot above the larger one, and drop the bait on the outer edge of the stream and let it work gradually down the current at the further side of the eddy, letting it go fast enough to prevent it being swept towards the bank on which you stand. If this is properly done the bait will search that eddy well; and good pike often lurk on the outer edge of these umbrella-like curls. The quieter parts of these rivers, where a nice little current glides into an eddy, and then seems to divide into two, with a wedge-shaped pool between, should always be well tried, even if you have to toss the bait some distance to reach it.

In this style of fishing the bait may be lively and the float bob clean under; the inexperienced angler thinks he has a run and strikes too soon. The best plan is to wait until both floats disappear under the surface, and sometimes they go one after the other like a shot, and then tighten with a slight jerk. Heavy striking is to be condemned; the line is generally tight from finger to bait,
and the plunge of the hooked fish on the tightening line is sufficient to drive the hooks home. If you are careful it is an easy matter to kill a pike, but also take notice of what I have said on this subject in previous chapters. In using a snap down a sluggish river or lake you should fish as near the bottom as you can, and keep trying all over the place, altering your depth or plans to suit the changed conditions of each place. If the place is very deep a slider float can be made out of a plain jack float, or even a big old barrel bung, so long as you put a stop on your line at the proper distance above your float.

In fishing a deep lake with snap tackle my advice is to use large baits and fish them deep down. I am aware that big pike are sometimes taken on very small baits; I well remember a fourteen-pounder that fell to a live dace only weighing half an ounce.

During the early autumn the pike are among the weeds and flags, and shallow fishing must be attended to; but during the late autumn and winter I certainly recommend the baits to be deep down. I once rigged a gentleman out for a day on a private lake that was well stocked with pike of all sizes. He insisted on small bait, and I found he never was more than five feet deep, although the bulk of the water was twice that depth. He landed nine fish, going forty-one pounds, the largest not quite six pounds, and was very pleased with his day's sport. Another gentleman who got permission a week later took down a can of dace, the very largest size he could get; he hugged the bottom as near as he could, and also, strange as it may seem, landed nine fish, but his nine weighed more than a hundredweight, the largest over twenty pounds. The conditions of the two days were alike; I put it down to the difference in tactics adopted by the two anglers.

In some waters a live gorge hook has to be employed with a float instead of a snap; but this is a tackle that must not be tolerated if a snap can anyhow be used. This gorge hook is simply a double hook of the shape known as
a parrot-beak, and is whipped on to a length of gimp and threaded under the skin until the hooks lie on the side of the bait near the gill covers. Some of these gorge hooks have a supplementary hook without point or barb, that is just hanked in the hollow of the bait under the gill covers; this holds it better when the bait has to be hurled to a long distance. This is used with floats in the same manner as a snap.

No useful purpose will be served by going into this style of fishing at length, so I will leave it there.
CHAPTER XIII

WITH PATERNOSTER AND LEGER

Paternostering for pike—The tackle and trace for it—How to bait and work a paternoster—Leger tackle and the best hooks—Live bait kettles and store boxes.

PATERNOSTERING for pike is a very deadly method of using a live bait; pike of the very largest size have been killed on a paternoster, particularly those that live in deep holes, where the river bottom is very unequal in depth. Working this tackle round the piles and buttresses of an old bridge, or under old camp-shedding, or in the eddies, corners, and holes of a weir, is delightful work, and when you feel the sullen tugs of a twelve-pounder the pleasure is increased.

Now paternostering, as I have hinted before, is a method of angling that requires no float. A paternoster can be made from single salmon gut, Hercules wire gimp, or ordinary copper-coloured gimp; it does not particularly matter which. Some paternosters are made with bone beads, threaded at intervals on the main trace; the object of these beads being that the bait can work in a circle round and round the trace without kinking all up in a tangle. Others are made with what is called a cross-line swivel, that is, a swivel with a buckle or loop projecting at right angles from the centre of it, these loops being to hank the snap itself into easily. Still others of these paternosters have only a loop made and knotted from the trace itself, projecting at right angles. The main gut or gimp of the...
"Carver" or "Rolt" Pike Paternoster. This pattern of a sunk float paternoster was illustrated in the *Fishing Gazette* twenty years ago, under the title of "Count Moira's Tackle." The main idea is the same, small details being added to the above tackle. Useful to keep the tackle upright in deep and wide rivers or lakes, and the bait clear of the bottom.
paterenoster should be about four feet long, and a fair-sized loop should always be knotted and whipped at each end, one of these loops being to loop the lead in, and the other to tie to the reel line itself. It does not matter particularly which the angler uses, cross-line swivels, bone runners, or loops, and sometimes there are three, sometimes two, and sometimes only one on a paterenoster; for my own part I always found one quite plenty to look after, especially if bushes, boughs, and flags were very much in evidence; the spare hooks would persist in catching, and a hooked pike was bound to get the other bait round something or other.

Snaps for this fishing should be dressed on seven inches of 00 Hercules wire gimp, and the hooks should not be too large; I prefer a No. 5 treble at the end, and an eyed and movable lip hook some two and a half inches from it. The single lip hook, which should be larger than the treble, is put right through both lips of the bait, and one hook of the treble inserted lightly under the back fin; or, better still, it may be nearer the tail. This snap hook should have a loop at end of gimp, to loop into the buckle of the cross-line swivel. Some men use a single No. 1 sneck-bend hook instead of the snap; the single hook has to be swallowed before the pike is hooked, whereas with the snap you can draw on him at once as soon as you feel him run.

There is also a patent paterenoster tackle in use now that has a movable safety-pin sort of wire that goes in at the mouth and out at the gill covers of the bait. This may be useful if obstructions in the water are plentiful, and baits are scarce; but somehow I don't like those choking wires that go into the mouth of the bait and prop his gill covers up; he cannot move about with sufficient freedom. Some men simply put the single square-bend hook under the back fin, some put it through both lips. I prefer the small hook snap, single lip hook through both lips, and the treble half-way between the dorsal fin and the tail. The lead for this is a pear-shaped one with a wire eye at the small
end, and is, of course, at the extreme end of the tackle, about eighteen inches from the hooks; this lead need not weigh more than from one to one and a half ounces, under any circumstances, and in quiet water it can be a shade less; but I like a fairly heavy lead, as it keeps the bait down.

In paternostering always keep a tight line, whether you coil the line at your feet or cast direct from the reel. You should always be ready to tighten immediately the pike takes hold. A paternoster can be worked in almost an endless variety of ways; it can be thrown far down a weir pool and inch by inch worked back again, the lead only tripping the bottom; it can be worked round roots and bushes; in among the flag beds; inch by inch every available spot can be searched by this most deadly tackle. You can hardly be wrong where jack are to be found; and you can use a paternoster in no end of places where you could not use anything else.

During certain conditions of the water a leger is a deadly kind of tackle for pike. This also requires no float. When a heavy flood or the break up of a winter's frost has caused for a few weeks a strong flush of water, the pike are driven into the holes and eddies away from the main current; if these holes have a level and gravelly bottom, the leger is a first-class bit of tackle. A round bored bullet or a coffin-shaped lead about an ounce or an ounce and a half in weight will be required, and this bullet should have a two-foot length of rather stout gimp to itself; a loop on either end, and a small stop close to both loops, so that the bullet or lead can slide easily between these two stops and no further. Below the bullet you can have eighteen inches of strong salmon gut, copper gimp, or the Hercules wire gimp, according to fancy, with a stout, well-whipped loop at either end, and below that the tackle or snap; a buckle swivel between the snap and the length of gimp above it will be useful for detaching or putting on the bait, etc.
Hooks for legering are various; some of my friends favour one, some another, some simply use an ordinary double gorge hook, some use a single very large lip hook, while others have a modified snap; but whatever hook or hooks you use they should be neat and fit nicely to the bait. I generally used two very large single hooks, one passed through both lips of the bait, and the other hooked crossways under the back fin, so that a good portion of the point, barb, and even bend projected on the other side. I got a couple of very good jack one day in a flooded water with that tackle, and they were securely hooked, when struck lightly, after running no more than three or four yards; that big single hook under the back fin sideways had fairly got hold. This was my old friend Bentley’s tackle, and I generally used it on the very few occasions I have legered for pike; but Bentley was a daisy boy for a leger for any sort of fish, and he always maintained that a leger in a deep hole, when the river had been in heavy flood, was the most certain method of getting them.

It will be an advantage when using a leger for pike to have a very rough-and-ready float, and the more it is jagged about the better. This can be cork, and it should have a slit in it, and fixed on the gut or gimp about half-way between the lead and the bait; the cork has a tendency to rise, and prevents the bait from rooting into the bottom; in fact, I am of opinion that it keeps him an inch or two away from the bottom.

In live baiting, a kettle to carry the baits is a necessity; the oval one that has an inside strainer is far and away the best, one about eleven inches long being a good size. Some kettles have an air-pump attached to them to aerate the baits.

If the fisherman wants to keep a stock of baits in the river he will find an old hamper, with a closely-fitting lid, the best thing he can use; a wooden box is not a huge success. I remember at one place that I lived there was an old red sandstone trough in the yard; that trough
would keep baits for weeks in splendid condition. I never saw its like. I don’t know whether there was any special virtue in the old stone, but anyhow, baits would be kept much longer and in better condition in it than they would in the river.
CHAPTER XIV

A DAY ON THE OLD WEST RIVER

The city of Ely and its surroundings—Earith Bridge and the Old Bedford River—The Old West River—Paternostering for pike—Hooking and playing the fish—Things of interest that I saw.

To travel from Liverpool Street to Ely on the Great Eastern Railway is not a very serious item of expense, especially to those anglers who happen to hold the privilege tickets of the Anglers’ Association. By presenting that ticket they can travel the double journey for the single fare. This wide district of the Cambridge fens and the Great Ouse has been the bottom fisher’s and spinner’s paradise almost time out of mind. More years have ticked off Time’s dial since I first heard about it than I care to count up. The old-time character of the place, as far as sport is concerned, is not maintained, although, as things go nowadays, I have had no cause for complaint during the many seasons I have been there and cast my bait upon the waters.

The city of Ely, the immediate district round which Kingsley wove his romance of Hereward the Wake, is a very convenient station to make your head-quarters, or centre, shall I say. About seventy miles from town, the railway goes from Ely to nearly any water-side station you may select, and in nearly every direction. The fine old cathedral there is a very conspicuous object as it stands boldly forward on a bit of considerably rising ground. You get a fine view of it from the station. The country
on the whole is flat and fen-like in its character, but not by any means uninteresting, while the drains and old watercourses, with the old water-mills or pumps dotted about at intervals, lend a charming variety to the otherwise dull landscape. Those old sluggish drains and watercourses that are such a feature of this countryside are the homes of innumerable pike and perch; and many a good fish has been landed from there.

Out of the beaten track, where the general run of holiday anglers do not seem to penetrate much, is a little place some three or four stations beyond Ely, on the road to St. Ives. This little place, that rejoices in the name of Earith Bridge, is a capital centre for a wandering pike and perch angler to make his head-quarters; there are three or four considerable rivers hereabouts, one in which the tide ebbs and flows. Below the bridge this water, called the Hundred Foot, is rented by a Cambridge society; but they grant daily, weekly, or season tickets; at least I was told so. Further along the road you will find the village of Earith; and another river, deeper and more sluggish on the whole than is the Hundred Foot, flows about parallel with it. This is what is locally known as the Old Bedford River; and a right good watercourse it is, although nothing like so streamy as is the other one just named.

Pike and perch are fairly plentiful in both these rivers, and spinning, snap-fishing with a float, and paternostering can be indulged in. I believe there are miles of free water on the Old Bedford River.

Another smaller river, or drain it looks more like to me, is to be found on the other side of Earith Bridge. This stream is not generally known to anglers; it seems to be hidden away from the very start; it goes at nearly right angles to the other two I mentioned. The main road that leads from Earith to Willingham runs side by side for two miles or more with it; in spite of this, the bulk of anglers, except a few from Cambridge and Ely, seem to be ignorant of its very existence; at least that is my im-
pression. I have walked along it when Nature has been in her most joyous mood, and the birds singing from every hedgerow, and I have seen shoals of huge bream basking or swimming on the surface, bream that would put their brethren of the Ouse to shame as far as size is concerned. Then here and there one could see the darker stripe of our old friend the perch, as he made the bleak fly all over the place; and now and again the reeds and flags would suddenly move as a good jack struck away into deeper water, alarmed at my too close proximity. One or two of the knowing Ely roach fishermen, although they have a much larger stream close to their very doors, prefer to travel to this place; as one of them, a railway inspector, remarked to me about the last time I saw him, "When I want big roach I don't stop at home, no fear, I go to Earith Bridge, and fish the Old West." This river is called the Old West River, and seems, as far as I can see, to run in a sort of half-circle, leaving the Hundred Foot at Earith Bridge, and running back again into the Great Ouse somewhere between Ely and Cambridge.

Anyhow, the stretch from Earith to Haddenham engine house is long and good, and very few indeed were the anglers I ever saw at work on it. We will take a big can of dace and start by the roadside just beyond a little pool that is situated at the foot of a small cottage garden. We know this water well, and by experience can recommend a light ten-foot three-joint jack rod, a four-inch reel, and the fifty yards of undressed silk recommended in previous chapters. Yes, and the nature of the place for miles tells me that a paternoster is the tackle to employ, because the water in the first place is not very deep; in the second it is not out-of-the-way wide; and in the third there are reed beds, bunches of flags, old lily pads, and one thing or another in profusion. Those plants that grow along these fen streams, and have such a lovely crown of red flowers, are here in all their bewitching loveliness and in great plenty. Moorhens scutter from under your very feet,
and a swirl among the lily pads tells me that a prime rudd has just got alarmed and changed his retreat.

It is October; there has been a glorious autumn, and these late flowers have not as yet lost much of their beauty. It is rather late in the year, but still I keep my eyes open, on the rare off-chance of seeing one of those magnificent fenland butterflies, the swallow-tail, as the water-carrot, the plant that the larvæ feed on, is there in fair abundance. I did get one once long years ago, but now I see never a sign, although I look ever so carefully, even if it is only a belated yellow that dashes from the vegetation.

We will rig up a strong paternoster for this day's work among the jack; and so it shall be a yard of oo Hercules wire gimp, with a firm loop in the centre sticking out at right angles; a half-ounce lead at the extreme end will do, and, yes, one small snap fixed in that loop will be quite enough for this water; extra tackle and baits on a paternoster in a river like this will spell disaster, obstructions are too much in evidence. A small No. 6 treble, and three inches away from it a much larger single lip hook, a No. 1, dressed on seven inches of the wire gimp, is ample. Everything from rod top to lead should be strong, because, presto, a jack opens his mouth, seizes the glittering dace, and "thung." You hang on for all you are worth, as Mr. Jack tries his hand round that bed of lilies; failing this, he fancies that other flag bed might be a city of refuge; foiled in this, he tries a leap of a couple of feet into the air, on the off-chance of breaking you; but we hold on, unmercifully giving him the butt, as some anglers call it; I call it giving him the point. And now the sixteen-inch landing-net is lifted up in the right hand; yes, the right hand—the rod should always be worked in the left hand, with the reel handles pointing to the right—the far edge of the ring under his tail, while with rod you hold his head slightly above the surface; a sharp lift and he is in, and if you are careful yours; and the first five-pounder of our day's outing is landed.
Now here is a nice little dace about five inches long; we put the large lip hook through both lips, with the point uppermost, and then insert the small treble about half-way between the back fin and the tail; that dace kicks like a thing of life, so we go on twenty yards from the scene of our first success, and drop him just over the little bed of lily pads, in a clear space, then work him all over that space, and try another, searching all the water that is getatable. No luck, so on we go, tossing him to the far end of that long bit of clear water right down the middle and gradually working him back inch by inch; still no luck; so on to that flag bed a little lower down, where you noticed a swirl some few minutes ago. Carefully now, crouch down behind that huge bunch of red flowers, and take stock of the surroundings: behind the flag bed there is an underwater jungle, on the further side there is a nice little clear space; pop him carefully in just there, and bring him round to the front. Ah! a tug—what is it? We tighten up after a few seconds, and a perch one and three-quarter pounds is securely hooked by that small treble and safely landed. Now if that treble had been fixed anywhere else except about an inch or so from the tail of the bait, I should most certainly not have taken that perch; had it been an ordinary snap tackle just fixed under the back fin, the chances are he would never have got so much of the bait in his mouth as to be hooked, and if there had been only a single lip hook the chances would have been less. I am very fond of a paternoster tackle as described.

On we go by the roadside—river and road just here faithfully follow each other; we drop in here and there; disturb a little chestnut-coated vole now and again; try everywhere, but sport is slack. We can, however, look round and admire Nature, see the rooks busy on the freshly turned soil, from which such a bountiful harvest has lately been gathered, see the lonely farms dotted at long intervals here and there, sit down and enjoy the lunch packet, and thank the Giver of all good that we are permitted to enjoy
such luxuries. We go on until we reach an abrupt corner near a farmhouse, where a drain comes in. The shadows are lengthening, there is no time to explore the meadows where the river parts company from the road. The bag only contains three jack, twelve and a half pounds the three, and two perch; but the lucky man who has had a day on Lord B.'s private water and lugged out a hundred-weight has not enjoyed himself one whit more, in all likelihood not so much as the one who tells this story of a "Day on the Old West River."
CHAPTER XV

A NOVEMBER DAY WITH THE TRENT PIKE

The Trent as a pike river—Staythorpe meadows and Averham Weir—How the pike was landed—Snap-fishing down the eddies—Spinning the streamy runs—"A splendid challenge."

FROM the Old West River to the Middle and Lower Trent is a far cry; not only so, but the pike-fishing in the two waters is totally different. In this chapter I propose to take you for a day on the latter river, and give you a practical lesson on how a river like the Trent should be fished for pike. In our last we were on a small, sluggish river that at the best of times has no stream to speak of running down it, and weeds and flags growing everywhere.

This time we are on a wide and mighty current, that sometimes breaks out of all bounds and goes tearing seawards in a raging torrent, swirling out everything that is loose, and depositing huge banks of sand and flood-rack into all sorts of odd corners. Under these conditions it is not to be wondered at if certain places are swept as clean as a barn floor, and eddies and lay-byes, that afford shelter for the quiet-loving pike, are tenanted sometimes with three or four of those truculent rascals, who have been harried by the flood water from pillar to post; and just when things are quieting down and the stream is getting less turbulent, they are ready and waiting for any tit-bit sent down to them.

Of course I know there are long periods when even the Trent is extra sluggish; weed beds in plentiful abundance
nearly everywhere, and the jack lie lurking with one eye round the corner, waiting for something to swim along that does not appear to have any suspicious appendages attached to it. Anyhow, there it is, the Trent takes a lot of fishing for pike; and I have thought more than once that spinning, taking things all round, was likely to be the most successful.

The beautiful stretch of the Trent flowing from Averham Weir used to be in my younger days a capital pike water; then a lot more stream flowed down there, and some grand deep eddies could be found in several places. The meadow or two above the weir in Staythorpe parish also was extra good, water being deeper and more sluggish than it was below the weir.

I used occasionally to attend a reverend sportsman in those days, and he had the great good fortune to be able to go when everything was in a most favourable condition.

It was a keen but fine November day, when a can of good dace that Frank Sims had got during the darkness of the preceding evening by many throws of his cast-net were dumped down upon the grass close to Averham Weir. All this water in those days was more than usually good for that locality, and many good perch, barbel, and chub, as well as pike, lurked in the holes under the camp-shedding, and by the side of the trees all along that famous park. Of course this particular bit was private, but the gentleman just named had a roving commission, going when, where, and as he liked.

The sun had risen about half an hour, and was casting a curious and brilliant reflection on the windows of the rectory; and the quaint old river-side church gleamed under the shadows of those mighty trees, the sun-rays just hitting the eastern window, and illuminating one spot in the dark shadow with a flame of brilliant light. Half a dozen moorhens were scuttering across the grass in various directions, making for the shelter of the river. They liked not the manner of our approach, I fancy; and
no less than five herons were slowly winging their way across the valley. Those long-legged fishermen had been taking heavy toll from a small stream that flows down the meadows, and were now on their way to the security of an inland swamp. There used to be, so I was told, a heronry of considerable magnitude in the immediate locality, but I never found more than one or two herons' nests in those trees in any one season. There is plenty of time to note all these movements of nature, because I can see the long strides of my friend as he is hurrying across the meadows for his favourite sport, and he is ten minutes late.

While we are putting our tackle together we get the first hint of the good things that are to follow. We make a start at the big bend some distance above Averham Weir, where a considerable bay forms a quiet reed-fringed pool. Nearly in the centre of this bay there is a sudden splash and a huge rolling swirl, and three or four small roach leap above the surface, and scatter like willow blades in every direction. All right, my boy, we will be after you presently; and then, if all goes well, it will be a case of "the biter bit."

The rod my friend is using is the ordinary eleven-foot solid cane, with a four-inch centre-pin reel, check and line guard, and one hundred yards of white plaited silk, slightly oiled. My old and favourite snap is brought into requisition; and this is simply two No. 5 square-bend treble hooks whipped about three inches or a little less apart on sixteen inches of 00 copper gimp. This old snap in my opinion has no superior, as it lies nice and snug along the bait, and hooks your fish pretty securely at his first turn. The float, pilot, and trace are added, and a nice little five-and-a-half-inch dace is now exploring the depths of that pool. He likes it not, and keeps bobbing the big float under as he tries to get into midstream. We let him go where he likes, as the corner out there is open, and he cannot tie himself up into a bed of weeds. That dace
is very uneasy, if we can judge by the bobbing of the float; and presently under that article goes, followed in a flash by the small pilot. Winding in the yard or two of slack line that had been unwound from the reel and laid on the grass, in case we got a sudden run, a tightening of the line is followed by a heavy plunge, and our first jack is securely hooked. He fights well, and twice nearly reaches the submerged weeds at the corner of the flag bed, but his struggles are of no avail; he puts his head above the surface, and grins defiance; then a few savage shakes, and my long-shafted eighteen-inch net encloses him completely. My friend’s steelyard proclaims the fact that he reaches a good thirteen pounds; his, or to be correct, her markings are superb; we run the tape over her, and find thirty-three inches extreme length to be exact; the best fish by far of the day, and also in the best condition.

Another hour’s trial in that corner fails to entice another, so we gather up our traps and go to the weir, and follow the stream down to the eddy just below the railway bridge. That eddy we know is ten feet deep, and we fancy pike are at home, as this spot would be a sheltered bay for the fish when the flooded river of a few weeks before washed them into it. We will shift the float to eight feet from the bait for this place, and stick the snap hooks well into the root of the fins, as this cast is a pretty long one; because I want my patron to drop his bait on the furthest edge of that eddy and work it inch by inch all down and round. The float travels down the eddy at least seven or eight times, and there is no response, and we are wondering why, when down they both go almost at the same time, and a steady strain again fixes the hook. We never attempt to strike hard and heavy with this tackle; if the weight of the pike when the line gets tight is not sufficient to hook him, well, I give him a sporting chance and he is welcome to go. This fish tumbles into the heavier water below, and fights like a Trent salmon, more than once leaps into the air, then bolts back into the very depths
ON THE WILTSHIRE AVON.

"A Good Stretch."
of the hole; tries a little sulking; but the tackle won't allow these tactics to succeed; so he caves in after a gallant ten minutes' fight, and the landing-net encloses a fine nine-pounder male.

We get four fish out of this hole, but none of the others exceed my friend's limit of five pounds, so we are content with the sport, and return them to fight again on some other occasion.

Down stream we still go, alongside Kelham Hall estate, and after unsuccessfully trying another deepish eddy, we find the dogcart has arrived with our luncheon on board. We spend half an hour over this, and then decide to spin over a long length of slack water, the main stream just there going over to the opposite bank. This proves very nearly as unfruitful as the previous eddy did to the snap tackle, until we reach some old timber that had once been either a private wharf, or the ruins of some camp-shedding. This looks a likely place, so the spinning tackle is cast out right on the far side, and at the tail of the eddy just between the racing stream and the dimpling eddy the bait is allowed to sink fairly deep down, and then spun home in a series of sink-and-draw movements with the rod point and the reel. At the third cast there is a vicious tug deep down, and a heavy rolling draw, and as we tighten up, that jack gives us a splendid challenge; he hurls himself full length from the water, and rolls into the heavy current beyond. It is only a seven-pounder, but it fights as I think a pike of mine never fought before; he is game to the very backbone; and my friend and patron, who has handed me the rod while he rests a bit, and is a looker-on at the contest, vows if we land that pike it shall grace his dining-table dressed out in all the delicacies of frills and stuffing and sauces. He is as good as his word, and I have the pleasure later on of sharing in that repast.

Before the shades of evening settled down upon us we got one more, the smallest of the lot, a five-and-a-half-pound fish. This was also taken on spinning tackle, and
in that stretch of water fronting Kelham Hall, just where some old timbers out in the stream form an eddy. That day, one of the most enjoyable I ever had, was not by any means a day of a huge bag, five fish only, but they weighed forty-one pounds.

The pheasants in the park were uttering their harsh cries, a hare was loping slowly across the meadow, and a countryman guessed we should have a hard and long winter that year, as flocks of redwings were even then busy in the hedgerows, while a few storm-cocks, as he called the missel-thrushes, were about. And as if to put emphasis on his remarks, he pointed with a triumphant finger at a small flock of wild duck that wheeled and circled, rose and fell, then rose again in a rapid whirr, and finally dropped into a quiet lagoon some half-mile higher up the river as we shouldered the fish, and carried them to the rector’s waiting trap.
CHAPTER XVI

ABOUT THE PERCH

The veteran and his first perch—Habits and haunts of perch—Perch packing in the winter—A cruel slaughter—Description of the perch—Weight of perch—"His eyes bigger than his belly"—Perch in the frying-pan.

I WONDER how many grey-haired veterans among the vast army of Britain's anglers who, looking back and carefully considering a career spent by the side of river, lake, stream, and pond, cannot truthfully say that it was the capture of a few small perch in some wayside pond or canal that was the starting-point of their life as an angler, and this so fired them that, as each stage and grade was gradually unfolded to them, they stuck to it, till their old feet and tottering limbs refuse to carry them down to some favourite haunt, so perforce they must sit by the fire and think of all the days they have had, since those far-away boyhood times, when the first perch snatched down their float so sharply and suddenly as to upset their nerves. No fish that swims is better adapted to start a boy on his angling career than the hungry little perch that lives in a pond, because he is not particular as to what sort of tackle it is, nor yet what kind of a worm is offered him. It does not matter about plumbing the depth, or ground-baiting the swim, or shotting the float to the fraction of an inch, nor any of those little things that go towards making some fishing such a fine art.

It is all very well to talk about these perch; but how
about those that live in a good river, that are fat and well fed, and have any amount of small fry and natural food knocking about next door to them, as it were, and also know the angler, his ways and his tackle, almost as well as he knows himself. "These critical perch," I have heard exasperated anglers say more than once, "they know the shape of the hook, and even what shop the paternosterc was bought at."

Well, I won't put them as being quite so knowing as that, but a good river perch is a different thing from a pond one. A boy with a bent pin, a thick gut line, a home-made wooden float, and half an ounce of lead on his tackle, won't get many of them, although he might get one or two by accident during certain conditions of the water; but during August, September, and October, when the rivers have run down very clear and bright, and even the knots on the gut line are visible deep down in the water, Mr. Perch is a very wide-awake customer, and to get a dish of them you have to be, as an old friend once put it, as "artful as a wagon-load of monkeys."

Use tackle as fine as you can, and use it in the Notting-ham style—fine and far off. During the early part of the season, when they stray into the shallow runs to keep company with, and forage with, the dace, etc., that is, during the latter part of June and the beginning of July, they are not quite so careful as they are a little later on. Perch are often caught then on the red worms and cad-baits that you are swimming down the streams for dace; and frequently they annex the trout angler's artificial minnow. They are picking up after spawning and cleaning, and are empty and hungry; but wait a bit, say six or eight weeks later, when full up, in good condition and fighting trim; they leave those shallows and seek refuge in deeper water, under the roots and hollows of an overhanging bank, in the deeper, quieter eddies, round the woodwork of an old bridge, in the runs by the side of flags and rushes, and in those quiet eddies that flow by the side of a swirling
weir. They lurk under the boughs like chub, get right underneath the holes and hollows of old camp-shedding, and delight in the branches of a submerged tree. Then is the time that the big ones take some catching.

The very worst time for perch is after a long and sharp winter, when the frost is gone and the ice has broken up, the snow-drifts melted, and all this is tearing down the river in a high flood. Just now they pack themselves together, sometimes in large numbers, in any quiet corner away from the main stream, and if there is a handy dyke end that empties into the river, they congregate there sometimes as thickly as can be. Perhaps during all this time of flood water and stress they have been on short commons, maybe for weeks at a stretch, and as a natural consequence with a fish like a perch they are hungry. When the water clears down somewhat, and a surprised angler drops on one of these packed shoals, the fun grows fast and furious; a red worm on a No. 8 hook is taken as fast as it can be baited and put in, until very likely every perch is cleared out of the swim. And this is called sport; but it is not, it is simply pot-hunting slaughter.

I once got three dozen and three one afternoon many years ago, when I am afraid I did not know better, from a deep hole in a dyke end not far from Claypole in the county of Lincoln. It was in the river Witham, during the early days of February; that winter had been long and severe, but at last it broke up, and the yellow flood water was tearing down the main river in a high spate. Those perch went over twenty pounds, and I believe I cleared every one out of the hole inside an hour and a half, for during the remaining hour and a half I failed to add a single one to the bag. I cannot bear to think of that afternoon's exploit even now. I heard a man boast once that he had taken fourteen dozen in one day, under similar circumstances; but, thank goodness, my conscience is clear from a sin of that grave magnitude.

The perch is a member of the Percidæ family, and is a
representative of the spinous-finned fish—that means having spikes or sharp points on the end of the rays of some of his fins. One great feature of this fish is the second fin on his back nearer the tail. Scientifically he is known as *Perca fluviatilis*, and he is one of the handsomest fresh-water fishes that inhabits inland waters. I consider him a fresh-water gem of the first water, an emerald fit for a royal crown. Just look at him, and the beautiful scarlet of his fins, the golden rings of his eyes, the pale green of his sides, shaded and relieved by the darker bars that stripe his body from the shoulder to the tail. His scales are small, very hard, and extremely difficult to scrape off, but they are arranged in perfect order. Taking him all round, when in good condition he is about as perfect a form of fish life as it is possible to conceive. The dark stripes or bars down his sides, one of which is a forked one, number, I think, no more than seven, although I saw one once that had been preserved with nine, but the setter-up of that perch probably thought he could improve on Nature.

Perch spawn early, about the latter end of April or the beginning of May, and they select peculiar places for depositing the ova; they hang it on submerged boughs, on the reed and flag beds, over the stones, and old sunken woodwork, spreading it out like long festoons of lace. Now the water-fowl, tame and wild, reap a merry harvest, gobbling it up by the yard; a few rods of fine wire-netting, if anyhow possible, put round and over this spawn would do more good in perch preservation than many times the amount spent in restocking. They are wonderfully prolific; as many as three-quarters of a million eggs have been calculated, by weighing and counting a small portion, to be in the ovum of a pound perch. But considering the enemies this spawn has, and the danger of its being washed away by floods, etc., this great quantity never comes to maturity; probably not more than one egg out of every thousand reaches the stage of a takable fish.
The perch in a well-preserved and favourable water will reach a very fair size. I have heard of them reaching the great weight of six, eight, and one of nine pounds; and in the *Fishing Gazette* of last Christmas (1906) there was an account of Colonel Thornton's sporting tour of one hundred years ago, in which the gallant colonel speaks of catching two perch weighing seven pounds each; and also in the same issue of that paper there was a character sketch of a river-side worthy who maintains that he had taken a seven-pound perch. I don’t know whether those worthies ever did afterwards knock a few ounces off those perch, but, anyhow, I should be inclined to do so, for I never saw or heard of one that exceeded four and a half pounds, and very few of them, only four I fancy in the whole years of my career, and only one was a river perch. This came from the Dorsetshire Stour, and scaled four pounds six ounces; the other three were lake fish. From two and a half to three-pounders have been frequently caught in the Thames, the Avon, the Ouse, the Nene, and even the Trent, while the Wye also contains perch of a good size; and the New River must not be forgotten, some good and very handsome perch inhabiting that water. The Kennett too, in many of its reaches, produces perch that are second to none as far as shape, colour, and size are concerned.

Perch are blessed with large mouths, and it is marvellous sometimes what they will attempt to swallow. I think a perch must regulate the size of his quarry by the size of his mouth, and not by what his stomach will hold, for sometimes it is impossible to swallow the thing he runs at. I remember once getting two or three very large spoons for a gentleman to use for pike in Loughs Conn and Cullen in Ireland; these spoons were six inches long and three wide, with hooks at each end like mooring hooks, and yet the first fish he fairly and squarely hooked was a three-quarter-pound perch. Whatever that perch took it for passes my comprehension, for my friend said when it was worked in the water it gleamed like a dinner-plate.
Perch are among the first flight of fresh-water fish for the table; the flesh is white and firm, the small bones so numerous in chub and kindred fish being nothing like so abundant in perch; the scales should never be scraped off, but cleaned, and fried with all their juices in them, and served hot and crisp. A dish of good three-quarter-pound river perch is a meal that I am very partial to, and never neglect if by chance I happen to get a catch of them.
CHAPTER XVII

FISHING FOR PERCH

Preservation of perch—Rod, reel, and line for perch—Float and paternoster tackle—How and when to use it—Stream fishing for perch—Artificial flies and baits.

FISHING for perch used to be a very favourite sport of mine in the old days, when a dish of them was very nearly a certainty, because that old favourite river of mine, the Mid Witham, had a fairly good sprinkling of them in many of its reaches. I could generally depend on a bag of from eight to fifteen fish, all over the half-pound standard. That river lent itself to the well-being of the perch—nice little streamy runs, here and there deeper curling eddies, plenty of submerged boughs, and above all, tiny gudgeon were there in thousands; and fresh-water shrimps could be seen jerking themselves along the shallows nearly everywhere.

Of late years the perch seem to have got woefully thinned down; there was no system of protection in vogue that was likely to be of lasting benefit, and, as I pointed out in the last chapter, perch spawn was deposited in such places and in such a manner that all sorts of aquatic enemies could easily get at and destroy it.

Within the last few years, however, the preservation societies of various rivers, notably the Thames, have turned their attention to this, and I am happy to say that perch are most decidedly on the increase in that river at any rate. Mr. A. E. Hobbs of Henley is one of the
pioneers of this movement, and deserves the thanks of all Thames perch fishermen for his successful efforts in this direction.

There are two or three ways of fishing for perch, viz. with a float tackle, with a leger, and with a paternoster; all these methods being suited to the various places in which perch congregate. You don't require anything very special for this, an ordinary eleven-foot chub rod with two tops being as good as anything. One or two of the perch fishermen of the Cambridge fens use a fifteen-foot bream rod, but I consider that weapon too heavy and awkward; but they have one thing in their favour, and that is, openings over the weeds and runs among the bushes can be more easily got at by the longer rod. The ordinary three-and-a-half-inch wood reel, and the undressed silk line, that is used for Nottingham chub-fishing is quite good enough for perch. Almost any float will do, but the best are the stumpy swan quills, about six inches long, and carrying some half-dozen medium-sized split shot; these will be ample for nearly any swim where perch are likely to be found. Turkey-quill floats are very good, so are the smaller curved cork floats that are used by the Trent men for chub. The tackle itself need not be more than a yard in length and it need not be too extra fine, nor yet too coarse; undrawn natural refina gut will be about right, and this yard of gut should have a loop at either end. The hooks can be any shape that takes the fancy, but for baits like worms, cadbaits, and similar things, a No. 7 Carlisle round-bend will be found the best, and this hook should be neatly whipped to twelve inches of good and fine refina undrawn gut, with a small whipped loop at the other end, for attaching to the gut line itself.

The food of perch principally takes the form of the small fry of most fresh-water fish; he will also take worms of various sorts; and sometimes he will promptly annex a nubble of cheese paste, or a square of bread-crust, or a bunch of gentles, or cadbaits when fishing the shallow
streams for dace; or even a scrap of red worm, that you only intended a gudgeon to pick up. These oddments are not however his staple food; I look on him as a fish-eater in a general way. I have seen him on the quiet stretches of the Great Ouse getting on the track of a bleak, chasing it all over the place, every second nearly chopping at it with a splash, the poor bleak jumping continually, until finally it gets too exhausted to jump any more, and so speedily becomes a victim. I once saw a bleak succeed in escaping; but this was a very unusual thing. The perch chased it from one side of the river to the other, and finally it leaped on the bank; and there it lay jumping and kicking until I removed it to a place of safety. I thought that hunted bleak had thoroughly earned its liberty.

The tail end of a lob, or a succulent marsh worm, or a couple of small red worms pretty well scoured, and swum down the stream a couple of inches from the bottom, will be as good as anything; and let the swims be pretty long if you can, and a fair stream is running, for fine and far off is the tip for perching down the shallower streams.

In this fishing it is best to rove about; never stopping long in one place unless you happen to find a packed shoal; but during the summer and early autumn perch are on the rove, and are found in odd ones, sometimes by twos and threes. A few coarse lob-worms clipped up now and again, and cast in the track of the float, is as good a groundbait as can be used; or you can employ a ball or two of bread and bran kneaded up very stiff, and keep throwing a few scraps in every time you try a fresh place. This sort of fishing does not require the elaborate care that must be exercised with roach; the great thing is to fish fine and fish a long way off. Cast out your bait clean and well, and let it trip lightly over the bottom, anywhere and everywhere that you think is likely to hide a lurking perch. This stream fishing can also be done with minnows and tiny gudgeon for bait; just hooked on the same tackle as used for worms, only in using the small fish more time must
be given after your float bobs down before you pluck at him; with worms on the hook you can strike at once.

The above hints are for shallower streamy runs. In fishing deeper, quieter water, a paternoster is as good a piece of tackle as can be employed, and these paternosters are made in various ways; some have one, some two, some three, and I once saw one with no fewer than six separate and distinct hooked tackles on it; but this latter could only have been the device of a rank pot-hunter. One tackle at once on a paternoster is quite enough for me, unless the water is deep, sluggish, and open, when two are tolerated, one for minnows and the other for worms. Some are made with bone beads; some have small cross-line swivels, while others have simply an inch-long loop tied in the main gut line, so that this loop sticks out at right angles. I prefer the plain loop into which the hooked tackle can be easily attached; these loops stick out stiffer than a swivel; the bit of gut or bristle on which the hook or hooks are whipped should not be longer than three or four inches at the most. I always found in fishing the boughs, submerged roots, and weed beds, and other dangerous places where the best perch foregathered, that one set of hooks at once was quite sufficient, as a hooked fish is bound to hank the extra one round something or other.

The best minnow tackle is a No. 7 or 8 lip hook and a very small treble, say a No. 12, the latter at the extreme end; these hooks should be just as far apart as to allow the lip hook to be put through both lips, and the tiny treble in the root of the tail, about a quarter of an inch from where the tail begins. This is far better than using the single lip hook only for tiny fish baits, as you can venture to tighten on him as soon as he runs off.

Sometimes a small cork float is used with a paternoster, and a small pear-shaped lead at the extreme end; but I consider a float, when fishing bushes and weed beds and an unequal river bottom, to be a source of danger, and not
necessary. A paternoster can be tossed out and worked in places where a float tackle would be useless, or at best a nuisance. Always keep a tight line, the lead only resting on the bottom, and keep it on the move, tossing it out as far as you can and working it back inch by inch, searching all likely water.

I remember once fishing the stretch of water that flows from Long Bennington to Claypole on the Witham, insinuating my bait under all those old roots, and working the paternoster into all sorts of odd corners; and at night I had fifteen perch, going exactly as many pounds, largest one pound ten ounces; the bag also contained three very decent chub, and two four-pound jack. Altogether one of the best days I ever had, and one that I can never forget.

Minnows or tiny gudgeons can be carried in a soda-water bottle, three parts filled with water, and it can be safely corked down and slipped into the haversack or even the side pocket of the fishing-jacket; the actions of the angler will keep the water in motion, and the small inmates of that bottle will be none the worse for their journey. I prefer the bottle to a bait-can for these small baits, as it is a nuisance when stooping down to empty the can into one of your pockets, an accident that never happens to a well-corked bottle.

Spinning for perch is not a very successful operation. Some odd times one or two are taken by casting the minnow, or any one of the many artificials that are made for trout; and sometimes they will take a big Alexandra fly; but these look more like minnows than flies when drawn through the water. Using a costly artificial for perch is only a sorry business, and not to be recommended in a general way.

Sometimes perch will rise to a small artificial fly; but generally they are small fish. I don’t know that ever I saw a pound perch taken on a small dace or trout fly. A friend once got a couple of dozen that did not average more than four ounces apiece, on a small red tag; he
cast his fly from the cover of a bush, over a stream that ran round a small flag bed, and so rapidly did those perch rise that he had landed the lot inside half an hour; as fast as he returned one of the little rascals to the water and cast again, so surely would another hang on.
CHAPTER XVIII

A DAY WITH AN ARTIFICIAL

A retrospective vision of the Trent—The outfit I carried—A notable hailstorm—Joe Corah's big pike—Collingham Wharf and Carlton Ferry—The Sentry Box and what I found—"Grinning Girton" and Sutton Holmes—Marnham, Clifton, and Dunham Reach.

A wide stretch of the old Trent, that flows from Collingham Wharf down to Dunham Bridge, is where I would like you to accompany me for this trip with an artificial bait; to see if we cannot sample some of the excellent jack that used to hurl themselves from the water round that bend known as Footitts Corner; or in that swim nearly opposite Carlton Church; or lower down towards the Sentry Box and Meering Ferry.

I can call to mind just now a beautiful morning in early October. The early morning frosts had not as yet put in an appearance, or only slightly. The leaves on the trees were beginning to change from green to a variety of delicate browns and yellows, and autumn in all its loveliness was bursting into full-grown beauty. Swallows were not hawking by odd ones, but they were slowly flying backwards and forwards in a huge battalion, getting ready for their long southward migration. The harvest I remember that year had been late, and isolated wagons were still gathering in the golden grain.

My notebook says there had been a week or more of heavy rain, followed by a fast-rising water, and a swirling, brown-coloured torrent. All this had nearly cleared away,
leaving the river with that perfect tint so beloved of our spinner. I had not been out for several weeks owing to various circumstances, and considered the chance was most favourable and not to be missed, and as I wanted a long walk, and not much impedimenta and less trouble, I took my artificials; I fancy my luncheon was the most bulky package I had. The old haversack that had done duty many times was called into requisition, and into its recesses I simply dropped my four-inch Slater and the undressed silk line, together with a tin box containing three gimp spinning traces, with the two swivels and the drop lead that I always use for heavy water, and four artificials. There was my old and tried spoon, a three-inch silver Clipper, brilliant and bright, a four-and-a-half-inch Devon, with a brown back and a gold belly, and a much lighter five-inch blue Phantom. A gaff-hook that screwed into a short handle, and which could be comfortably slung over the shoulder, completed all I required for that day’s outing. When I wanted what I call a lazy day’s fishing, I simply rigged myself out as described. I had no live bait to lug about and look after, no basket that wanted shifting from swim to swim, no ground bait to trouble over, but simply to wander on with the lightest possible load, and perhaps grumble if an enterprising pike attacked the bait so savagely that perforce I had to put it in the bag, and so materially increase the weight of it. We pause at the Corporation swim at Winthorp, and think of the good old days we have had there—remember how one Sunday one of the most fearful hailstorms on record swept across that valley. The hailstones were lumps of ice, and they soon covered the ground. The noise they made on the roof of an old shed in which we took shelter was well-nigh deafening, while I can now see as if it were only yesterday, although long years have passed, the maddened horses, beasts, and sheep in the meadow opposite careering round and round in frightful terror. Hundreds of panes of glass in the greenhouses and conservatories of the gentry round
were smashed to atoms, and we were thankful when the storm abated. We remember a mighty jack that had its home in the deep hole there, and how many times it was hooked, but never landed, and how my old friend Joe Corah got a ten-pounder on his spoon, and landed it without net or gaff; but Joe's mangled hand, which he put under the gill-covers of that fish, and got the skin scraped off in long streaks and ribbons, haunts me even now.

We cast over the old place just for the sake of "auld lang syne," but the relatives of that departed pike had evidently moved into a new residence, or else meant to lay low and say nothing. So we will in imagination go on all down to the gap, and Denman's Marsh, where an abrupt bend of the river forms a deep, quiet pool, that good jack sometimes in the old days used to patronize. We go through the famous Holme fishery, where there is some capital spinning water, but we must not linger; so on and on, to the Jolly Bargeman Inn near Collingham Wharf, the scene of many angling contests; and it is here that we take stock of our surroundings, and wonder which of the four artificials is likely to suit the clouded water. After a trial we decide that the Clipper shows up the best, and so we make a start, and spin down to the corner, where an old turnpost stands. That corner on the opposite side is a right famous place; many an old Trent angler can remember the big bags of bream taken from it during the seasons that long since are passed and gone.

We like the look of the corner on this side, with the fringe of weeds, so carefully spin it over inch by inch. We spin that Clipper slowly, we spin it quickly, we let it sink deep down; we spin it near the surface; but nothing disturbs the even tenor of its way, and we are just thinking of going to the eddying swims nearly opposite Carlton Church, when in leisurely sinking and drawing that bait we feel a strong tug, and know that with luck the bag will soon have its first occupant. It is only a five-pounder, but it fights as only a Trent pike in a strong stream can
fight; twice it leaps its length out of the water, and once it runs at least thirty yards in one grand and glorious burst; but the fight is soon ended, and the Clipper’s first victim is duly honoured.

All round from Carlton Ferry to the Sentry Box hole we go, but pikey corners are not much in evidence, except in one or two isolated places. This stretch of the river wakes up old memories, and recalls old adventures. Many a night during the long years I roamed those waters did I snatch a few hours’ fitful sleep, partly covered by a hay-cock; many a time I woke up and listened with strained ears to the glorious song of the mock nightingale; and when his midnight summer song ceased for an instant, a stone or a lump of earth hurled into his bush would cause him to sing again with redoubled energy. Those were the days of vigorous youth, when life was young, and we worried not, so long as fish could be had for the catching, and mates were good and true.

We go along towards Meering Ferry and Sutton Holmes; but before crossing the ferry we will go round the bend a little distance and try the slack corner among the flags and willows that used to be there. We spin this place carefully, as previous experiences have taught us to expect something here. I have heard an old fisherman say that this corner years and years before my time was always a certain place for at least three or four pike. Its glories evidently have waned, for try we ever so cunningly, it is only after throwing many dozens of times that a jack, who evidently in that clouded water cannot discriminate between metal and the real article, kicks up no end of a bobbery because he has for once in a way made a mistake. That Clipper sticks closer than a brother, even after he has thrown it outside his mouth; but the big red tassel-ornamented treble hook is still inside, do as he will to get rid of it. This fish, a good half-pound heavier than the other, soon joins his comrade in the bag.

There was a queer tale told about the village of Girton,
that stands a little distance away from the river, but in the immediate locality. In the old days, since I can remember, the curfew bell used to be rung every evening in many country churches, Girton among the number. One cold winter's night, as midnight struck, the villagers near the church were more than startled and alarmed to hear the deep tolling of the curfew bell. Tradition says that every man jack of them cuddled under the bedclothes in mortal fear, nor dared stir an inch. Something dreadful was sure to happen; supernatural agency was at work sure enough. In the morning a few venturesome souls solved the mystery. The porch in which hung the bell-ropes was open to the churchyard and the adjoining meadow; the hemp sally of the bell rope had worn out, and the sexton had replaced it with a handful or two of good sweet and fresh hay, and a cottager's cow having strayed in, smelt out that tit-bit, and in dragging it away bit by bit from the rope tolled the bell; and so the saying was current for years and years at that village: "Grinning Girton; where the cow ate the bell-rope."

We now cross the ferry and go along by Sutton Holmes; and all this water is, or was, very fast running, and not at all suitable for the sport now on hand, so we keep along the bank until we get to Clifton and Marnham. There are one or two good places just above here that are worth trying; while the famous Putty Nob and Land-o'-Cakes swims appeal to the holiday barbel fishermen with no uncertain voice. We cross the river at Marnham Ferry, and soon after this there is a stretch of water that is worth spending a day on. The river here makes a huge semi-circular sweep, with more than one quiet lagoon and lay-by, while deep holes are more in evidence in those couple of miles than in more than twice the distance in the water above. We give this a fair trial, try the whole of our four artificials; chop and change them about, but no go; finally we go back to the old Clipper, and in the run of water between the turnpost and the cliff at the corner of
the Dubbs, we hit a good fish deep down. I calculated that bait must have been at least ten feet deep when he took it, and he went along the bottom with the steady, dogged pull of a cart-horse, making me think my heaviest jack of all was hooked; but the heavy water proved deceptive, and when I finally stuck the gaff-hook under his chin, I was pleased to find it was the biggest of the day, nearly eight pounds.

During the day I hooked two more, one on the Devon; but that jack jumped loose at his first spring, in spite of the four trebles that adorned that bait. I always fancied a quantity of trebles on a spinning bait was a source of disaster. It was a long day, and a long walk that we have been together this time, and the bag only contained three pike going eighteen pounds; but kindly Mrs. Dixon of the Bridge Inn will give me a good old country welcome, and a comfortable bed, and also see that my fish are put on the cold slab of the larder; and after supper, and five games of cribbage with old Charlie Hudson, we sleep the sleep of the just, well content with our day with an artificial among the pike of the Trent.
CHAPTER XIX

A LOOK ROUND

Looking back over the past—An appeal from many waters—Sporting recollections from far and wide—The Wiltshire Avon and its pike and perch—From Chippenham to Bradford—Good days and good bags—The Hampshire Avon—Lakes and reservoirs—Big pike—An amendment of the Fishing Laws wanted.

If I am asked the question as to which I consider the best rivers and districts for pike- and perch-fishing, I should pause considerably before replying. There would rise before my mental vision well-known scenes on river, lake, and stream; every bough and every tree, and every well-known landmark would appeal, and say as plain as words could say it, "This is the spot." But I should have to marshal all these forces and review them in open order, and see how we stand in this respect. We go up the Kennett, and the memory of that brace of fifteen-pound pike, and the dishes of perch up to fish of two and a quarter pounds, appeal with no small voice. Then we change the scene, and see those grand deeps, and boughs, and islands of the Upper Thames, where pike and perch lurk by the dozen, or peep under that old boat-house between Pangbourne and Goring, and see the scores and scores of perch, from six ounces to more than two pounds each, that set your fingers on the tingle, and when on the feed come out as fast as you like, two at a time on your paternoster. Or go down the Hampshire Avon, and see those monsters of both kinds; or penetrate down all the backwaters and

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stretches of the Great Ouse, and see the swirling jack, disturbed from their fastnesses, leave a trail behind them; and the perch on the track of a bleak shows himself time and again above the surface, until you are prepared to say there are none like them in all Britain’s broad domains. Then the Trent would have a look in, and I should see again in fancy that twenty-seven-pounder pike, and those perch that were the very pride of an old fisherman’s life. Then the Ivel would whisper with a still small voice, and say, “How about those bags of perch, and those splendid little jack?” Here and there a lake would thrust itself into the foreground and clamour for recognition. And so the merry game goes on; looking round over the experiences of a long life, we are in despair of ever singling out the best.

I remember some few years ago a gentleman renting a short stretch of the New River, between Forty Hill and Cheshunt, a stream right under the very shadow, as it were, of the big city; and among the fish of one season’s catch were the following: a pike of seventeen pounds, a trout of nine pounds, a chub of five pounds two ounces, and best of all a perch of four pounds fourteen ounces—one of the grandest fish I ever saw. Some of the finest perch preserved to-day came from that small stream.

After pausing to carefully consider this question, if there is a choice, the casting vote goes in favour of the Wiltshire Avon; and before coming to this conclusion I consulted my friend Sam Hayward of Trowbridge, as he had a much closer and a more extended knowledge of that river than I had. In a long and interesting letter that well-known Wiltshire angler gives me his experiences, going back many years, when the district seemed out of the beaten track, and when, as he expressly puts it, “I practically had it all to myself for several seasons, getting big bags of roach in the summer and autumn, and any amount of pike from eight to seventeen pounds each during the late autumn and open winter, and as many as fifty pounds in a short afternoon. Then the perch, not odd ones, but good bags;
individual fish up to two and a half pounds being by no means infrequent."

This river, which flows through a beautiful country scene in the neighbourhood of Locock Abbey, appeals to all and sundry as an ideal spot for a holiday. After it leaves the little town of Chippenham the scenery is very fine; but between Locock Abbey and Melksham the country is rather flat; this also can be said of Bradford-on-Avon, a town a little lower down. Generally speaking the Avon here is a slow stream, with plenty of deep water, and fringed along the sides with water lilies and other capital cover for the pike and perch. That stretch between Melksham and Holt has some good streamy shallows, the home of some splendid big trout and whacking chub.

Staverton, a small village two miles from Trowbridge, is a capital place; in fact, from there all the way down stream to Bradford-on-Avon the water is splendid for pike-fishing; water from eight to twelve feet deep, right under the bank in many places, with cover in abundance. My friend said a very favourite place was behind the Anglo-Swiss Milk Factory near Staverton; a weir pool formed a capital eddy, and a spinning or live bait worked over the rough water resulted in many a good pike being landed.

He could generally depend on pretty fair sport any time during the winter months, although the fish did not run large, sixteen pounds being his top weight just there. The pike- and perch-fishing hereabouts was good enough for any ordinary angler, as Sam would go on the Saturday afternoon and get half a dozen fish many times, going from five to eight pounds each, with an occasional ten, twelve, or fourteen-pounder. Some odd times he could hardly get the bait in quick enough; he found by a long experience that from one o’clock to four in the afternoon was the very best time.

There was one old pike who had his home under some overhanging bushes on the other side of the river, and every time a bait was put across he would seize and kill it,
but drive the hooks home my friend never could. He left many a snap and trace hanging on those bushes by trying to shoot the bait underneath them. One Saturday afternoon my friend got him; he tried a small dace on a well-mounted paternoster, and jerked the hook well home at the first grab; that fish fought like a tiger and leaped like a salmon; but a quarter of an hour saw the end of it, and one of the handsomest twelve-and-a-half-pounders that he ever saw was duly bagged. He always calculated that fish as at least a twenty-pounder, so was somewhat disappointed that he was so far out of the reckoning.

One of the largest pike he took from that river was landed in the quickest time; the situation was dangerous, so he took the bull by the horns and stuck the gaff into him at once, after hauling him quickly to the bank; the whole operation did not last four minutes, and the pike, a splendid, short, and well-fed one, pulled down the beam at seventeen pounds good. Another seventeen-pounder was landed near the same place by a novice, the first time he went, and with the first live bait he ever threaded on a hook; but I must say he would never have landed it without the help of my friend, who ran up in response to his cries for assistance. It is now preserved and adorns that angler's sanctum; and he can say what many of the keenest and most experienced pike fishermen cannot, that the first jack he ever hooked was worthy of a glass case.

Taking things on the whole, I fancy that river from Chippenham down to Bradford-on-Avon was as good as anything I ever heard about or fished in; and the same could be said of the perch. In those days, when they were on the feed, perch after perch have come on both float tackle and paternoster, from one pound to two and a half pounds each, and once my old friend topped the basket with a three-and-a-half-pounder. Even a boy that came down one day with the roughest of tackle, and worms freshly dug from the garden, got a lovely dish of perch that would have satisfied the most exacting of anglers.
I must give a word of warning: I fancy the fishing is not quite so good now; pike and perch fishermen have increased greatly in numbers, and any known good water is mercilessly fished; but still decent sport can be relied on.

The Hampshire Avon is also another good pike and perch river; and permission can be obtained at several good stations all the way down from Salisbury to Christchurch, taking in Downton, Breamore, Ringwood, Fordingbridge, etc. I saw a bag of seven fish only last season, taken at Breamore during a short afternoon, that tipped the beam at forty-five pounds, and the gentleman assured me that pike, and good ones, were still there in numbers.

Many of the reservoirs and lakes within easy distance of London used to be very good pike and perch waters; in fact, some of them are now very fair; but a constant fishing, in season and out of season, will in time ruin the very best of waters. The Welsh Harp at Hendon used many years ago to be one of the best, fish of twenty pounds being occasionally got, whilst most weeks during the season an odd ten- or twelve-pounder would be landed; but of late years, owing most likely to pollution and a scant re-stocking, it has got worse and worse, and a day in it now is not by any means the certainty of long ago.

The same can be said of Elstree, although this water is most decidedly better than the Welsh Harp; a pike going fourteen pounds, and a perch two and three-quarter pounds, being had there as late as 1906. Some few years ago a pike going thirty pounds was taken from Dagenham Lake in Essex. And a grand fish of no less than twenty-nine pounds was taken in January of this year in the Thames near Oxford; I believe this is the record pike for this river.

In some of the stretches of the Sussex Arun, the Rother, and the Ouse, good pike and perch are still taken; a friend of mine got some good ones only last season from the waters at Petworth. In taking a look round, as the heading of this chapter indicates, we find that pike- and perch-fishing are not nowadays what they were in the good old times;
but still an intelligent anticipation of this decrease can be counted on, and by judicious arrangements met. Close times for pike should be strictly enforced; I say most certainly from the fifteenth of February till the first of October they should not be disturbed; also a standard size should be adopted; and legal tackle and hooks should be clearly defined. This, together with a small restocking now and again, would improve things greatly. I feel very strongly on this question, in fact, the whole fishery laws as regards coarse fish want amending in various directions; confusion is rampant; but the establishment of the Anglers' Federation, which embraces in its membership tens of thousands of fishermen in every part of the kingdom, will in the near future do much to remedy the existing state of affairs.
CHAPTER XX

RANDOM CASTS

What I have gained in my contact with Nature—The pike and perch of the Dukeries—Clumber Lake and a big bag—Thoresby Lake and its pike and perch—Tring lakes and their fish—How the New River pike was landed—"Au revoir"

I find it is impossible within the limits mapped out for this volume to give a full account of notable days I have had with pike and perch, in waters far and wide, so I must perforce be content with just a small selection on three or four of my favourite rivers; winding up with this chapter, as a mixture of odds and ends. I expect my readers will have discovered the fact, from reading one or other of my books, that I am a rough-and-ready fisherman, just as much at home with the fly rod as I am with the spinning rod, while the chub rod and the barbel rod are as easy and familiar in my hands as the knife and fork at the dining-table.

There are men like Johnny Osborn, Bill Osment, Jimmie Moffatt, and others whose names are familiar, who make one fishing their sole aim, ambition, and lifelong study. Now in this particular branch, roach-fishing, I do not pretend to be as expert as they are. I would not attempt to compete with any of them in a day’s roaching, but I have enjoyed my fishing life, and found solid pleasure in all the varied styles I have tried; and I thank the Giver of all good that I have been blessed with the health and strength necessary, and for the life I have lived. Now, I
say again, that I am not boasting; don’t think it for a moment; but "my lines have been cast in pleasant places; I have had a goodly heritage.”

In all probability this will be my last volume, so be as kindly disposed to it and to me as you can, remembering that my schooldays were few, and my workdays many. I claim to be an all-round angler, one who has fished for the love of the thing, with never a thought of gain or profit, content when the day has been blank, content when the bag has been overweighted, content when the fierce and sudden winter storms have upset all calculations, content when I could hear "a noise, like a hidden brook, in the leafy month of June," when the trout were flapping on the surface in joyous freedom, and content when the fierce hail and snow storms beat full in my face, and altered in a few hours the whole face of Nature. Boasting, no! I am too thankful for the memory of it all to boast.

THE PIKE AND PERCH OF THE DUKERIES

In all my wanderings by river, lake, and stream, I never found any preserves that contained better pike and perch than the network of lakes, some of them connected by streams, that are to be found in the very midst of the stately homes of England known as the Dukeries.

Clumber Lake, under the very shadow of the Duke of Newcastle’s stately pile, has pike in its depths, the finest in the kingdom—and not a few of them either. A day on that lake only comes once in a privileged person’s lifetime; but generally it is a day never forgotten. The grand old woods and forests, with all their old associations, stretch away for miles; the well-stocked and preserved rivers flow down the valleys, the lakes gleam under a summer sun, or glisten with frost under that of the winter. The drive through the forest and wood is a treat to be dwelt on; while a day’s fishing is sublime.

What can I see in my mind’s eye just now? The sport-
ing vicar mentioned in one of the foregoing chapters, who happens to be a relative of the people at the big house, has had a day in the lake. We peep into the huge well of the big fishing-punt; a score of jack are there; and one of them goes twenty-five pounds, and another eighteen. What matters it if rules are stringent, and only a brace of fish allowed to be taken away, the brace selected is a load big enough in all conscience. We see the remaining eighteen, some of them fourteen and fifteen pounds each, dive down again to the very depths when set at liberty. We find that fifty live baits have been expended. The luncheon sent from the house was discussed from the top of the punt’s well; the wild duck were whirling in clouds down the lower end; and as we drive away in the dog-cart down the drives in the fast-gathering gloom we feel at peace with all mankind.

Thoresby Lake, close to Earl Manver’s place in the Dukeries, is another pike and perch preserve of the very first magnitude; those small islands and fancy rustic bridges that connect them look very picturesque; while the river that flows through the lake adds a charming variety to the scene. I saw a twenty-four pounder one day that had been taken from there; and walking along a small stream not far from the lake, just under the shadow of a wooden bridge, I saw a shoal of five perch that almost took away my breath. I gasped, they were easily the largest five I had ever seen together, and unconcernedly they swam in and out from under that bridge. Oh, for a paternoster and a dozen gudgeon—but I see a keeper has a suspicious eye, so I go on; but they were perch.

TRING LAKES

There are a series of lakes belonging to the Hon. Walter Rothschild at Tring, in Hertfordshire, that contain capital pike, perch, and other coarse fish. This place is about an hour’s ride by rail from Euston; but arriving at Tring a
conveyance of some kind is necessary to cover the three miles that separate the station from the water. These lakes have been noted for many years, excellent fish of all kinds being fairly plentiful, the middle one of the three being the best for roach, tench, and other coarse fish. Somehow or other those big roach, as they are called, do not strike me as being above suspicion. I have carefully examined a case of six very large ones that are preserved and now in the club room of the Gresham Angling Society; those roach weighed between two and three pounds each, one or two of them near the latter figure. Somehow or other those roach had the distinguishing feature of the rudd; the back fin was too near the tail for my liking; the mouth, however, was hardly the mouth of a rudd. They are perhaps what we may call a survival of the fittest—a strain of more than one fish in them.

The centre lake contains some good perch. I have heard of one that went nearly four pounds, and they have a tradition that a much larger one was once got on a pike bait, but this never seemed to be satisfactorily explained. That centre lake is very deep, when full up, as this is a reservoir or feeder for the Grand Junction Canal. The top lake at Marsworth is rather weedy and shallow, and is the home of innumerable ducks, which go wheeling out of the dense jungles of flags sometimes in clouds. I have fished that lake once or twice for pike; but never had a big day in it. It has a perfect jungle of under-water weeds, and is somewhat difficult to fish, as your bait and a hooked pike may get entangled.

I think the lake furthest away, at Wilston, is the best for pike and perch; personally I am acquainted with several gentlemen who go there, sending them frequently cans of Thames dace; and from what I hear, half a dozen fish up to ten or twelve pounds can be occasionally got. Mr. Richardson Carr, the estate agent at Tring, might, I don't say he would, grant permission.
HOW THE NEW RIVER PIKE WAS LANDED

One would not think that there are big pike within a minute's walk of a busy London thoroughfare; but I want to say a few words on an adventure that befell a friend, who I may say is very much an amateur. He has a house and garden at Palmer's Green, the garden abutting on the Metropolitan Water Board's New River. This friend put a live bait in, on a gorge hook, and a very strong cord line. On going down the garden path an hour or two later he found he had a fish on; but what to do with it he had not the remotest notion. In his own words I will describe what followed. He had no landing-net, nor anything suitable, except a home-made wire gaff-hook, and this was lashed to a small cane handle. He played that fish, or rather, he said, the fish played him, and after a very long time he got it near the bank, and thought if he jerked the gaff-hook under its chin he could succeed in getting it on the bank. He tried this dodge, but as soon as the gaff was driven home, the pike made a wild plunge, and dragged the wire-bound gaff away from the stick, and away it went thirty yards down stream, the hook sticking under his jaws, but the line held fast. He now thought of a garden rake that stood against a shed close by, so he cautiously let out more line, and seized that weapon; this he also tried to stick under the jaws of the fish, after he had once more carefully played it to the bank. This experiment was worse than the hook, for no sooner did the fish feel one of the teeth of the rake than he made a wilder rush than ever, going backwards with terrific force, and dragging the rake from his grasp. Our friend had about got to his wits' end by now, and wondered what next, when he suddenly remembered he had a long mat basket with two handles in the old shed; this he secured, and after playing the fish for a long time, he manoeuvred it somehow into the basket, and a sudden desperate lift sent the lot rolling on the grass. It weighed nineteen pounds good, was in splendid con-
dition, and I fancy was as big as any that were ever taken from that little stream. That was the luck of a novice; an expert fisherman would never have got it through all those dangers and difficulties.

"AU REVOIR"

And now I must conclude, my space of one hundred and fifty pages is exhausted; it is not much as you hold the volume in your hand, but it took me a long series of years on a score of different rivers to arrive at that point. I hope to emulate the example and precepts of one of my old masters and pastors, a man who loved Nature and Nature's God for themselves, an honest working-man, who loved sport for its own sake, and lived to a ripe old age. The last time I saw him he turned on the hillside to wave me a last farewell before I went away, and I afterwards thought as the sunlight shone full on that seamed and rugged face, he looked like some grand old ruined cathedral that had been kissed into magnificent loveliness by the glorious rays of the setting sun.
CHAPTER XXI

A MEMORABLE YEAR

Copy of the Author’s Notebook for the Season 1899-90

It has been suggested that a copy of my notebook, or at least that portion that records one of the very best seasons I ever had among the pike, would be not only interesting, but instructive.

The season 1899-90, when I lived on the banks of the Great Ouse, and had some considerable time on my hands, besides being within easy distance of many miles of good pike water, was undoubtedly a season to be recorded and carefully treasured.

On reference to that notebook I find I started the season on September the 2nd; and between that date and February 28 was out on forty-one different days, not more than ten of those days resulting in blanks. Spinning occupied my attention on more than thirty days, live baiting only being resorted to during the last week or two, when the jack were sluggish and hugged the deep water. I find a record of one hundred and twenty fish, all well over the three-pounds limit, besides very many that were returned. The largest of the season was taken near Ely on February 24th, when fishing with a London angler, and using a can of Thames dace. That fish weighed 14 lbs. 10 ozs. The largest on spinning tackle weighed exactly 10 lbs., and was killed opposite Paxton Hill near St. Neots on November 8th.
Sept. 2nd, 1889.—Made a start, rigged up a few of my two treble flights, with the extra side treble, and the long zinc strip (see p. 61), tried the pool at the foot of the Rymers flats near Houghton Wale, and got one fish only, 3 lbs. 14 ozs.

Sept. 19th. Did not go again till to-day; spun all the water from Hartford downwards, using both natural and artificial baits; got three on small dead roach and two on the Clipper; largest 4½ lbs., the five went 20 lbs. Water bright, but a nice breeze was blowing.

Sept. 21st. Again took out the spinning rod, as a good rain had coloured up the river; but pike were not on the feed; got two fish towards the evening; one on the Clipper, the other on my old spoons. They weighed 3½ lbs. each.

Oct. 6th.—Went down stream towards Hemingford, tried small roach on my favourite flight; got two fish, just 8 lbs. the two. Water was clouded, and wind blowing pretty strongly. Saw a bittern, which Harry Rout shot two days later; a wanton act that upset my usually placid temper.

Oct. 8th.—This day went round the Port Holme, Huntingdon; had eight runs, and landed six fish, small roach for bait, and my usual flight; weather calm and water a lot brighter; only two fish worth keeping, 7 lbs. the two.

Oct. 9th. Having another half-day to spare, I again visited Port Holme and the West Meadow, using same tackle and small roach for bait, spinning; wind blowing half a gale, water inclined to rise, and colour slightly. Landed four nice jack, largest 5 lbs.—16 lbs. in all.

Oct. 10th.—Was so pleased with the previous day's sport that I was again tempted to go out, but a 2½ lbs. fish, which was duly returned, only rewarded me.

Oct. 13th.—Still no luck; four hours' hard work with natural and artificial baits, only got one fish, and it was less than the one taken on the 10th; returned it.

Oct. 15th.—Went all round the Port Holme and the West Meadow; had seven runs; unlucky day in one sense, as
I lost my three best fish, landed the other four; water getting in good condition, but weeds very troublesome, hence cause of the lost fish; wind north-west, not much of it; the four fish weighed 22 lbs., largest 8½ lbs., smallest 3½ lbs.

Oct. 16th.—Went over the same water again to try the fish lost on the previous day; bait small roach, on my usual flight. Had a good day; landed five fish on the three baits I had; water clouded, and during the last two hours it rained heavily; those fish went 7 lbs. 10 ozs., 6 lbs. 8 ozs., 6 lbs., 4½ lbs., and 4 lbs.—28 lbs. good.

Oct. 19th.—The previous day's work tempted me to again court fortune three days later; found water very much clouded, and a fair north-wester blowing; small roach, spinning; got four fish, 8½ lbs., 7½ lbs., 4 lbs., and 3½ lbs.

Oct. 21st.—Went over on the Brampton side of the river towards the Poplar Trees, but only got three fish going 10 lbs., all about the same size; returned three smaller ones.

Oct. 22nd, 23rd, and 24th.—Went out on each of those days, but only got one fish, 3½ lbs.; wind a strong easter.

Nov. 7th.—Did not venture out till this date, when I found the water very much clouded, and running strongly; went down the river this time towards Hemingford; put up my usual flight; gentle north-westerly wind; had five runs, and landed four fish, 7½ lbs., 6½ lbs., 5 lbs., and 3½ lbs.

Nov. 8th.—Took train to St. Neots station, and walked to the paper mill, intending to spin down to Offord station; took the usual spinning tackle, and a dozen very fine fresh sprats, given me by Teddy Hearn the fishmonger; wind west, and rippled up the water well; enjoyable day; six fish landed, 10 lbs., 8½ lbs., 7½ lbs., 6½ lbs., 4½ lbs., 3½ lbs.—a little over 40 lbs.; one of the best days I ever had on a well-fished public river. Sprats accounted for all the fish.

Nov. 9th.—Encouraged by the grand day I had yesterday,
I went down stream, started at the Newtown Meadows, and spun down to Houghton; sprats and the usual artificials were selected as baits; a mild day, no wind to speak of, but the water was rising like mad; I had to wade knee-deep over a low-lying meadow to reach home. Pike on as I never saw them before or since. I ran no fewer than twenty-one, a spoon bait being as deadly as sprats. Fourteen I returned to the water, the seven kept weighing 44 lbs., as follows: 8½ lbs., 7¾ lbs., 6½ lbs., 6¼ lbs., 5¾ lbs., 4½ lbs., and 4 lbs. This bag I have always considered as my record in spinning on a well-fished public river. Three were killed on sprats, two on the Clipper, and two on the spoon. It was the largest of these fish that sprang at my wife's arm when she went to the tap for water; they had lain on the iron trough more than four hours. It only missed by a bare inch (page 6).

Nov. 11th to 16th.—Went out two or three times, and tried everything, as the fish had been feeding well; but four outings only yielded as many fish, and none were worth keeping.

Nov. 18th.—Went up Brampton Wale and had a curious experience. Used my usual dead-bait flight, baited with small roach, and got three fish, weighing 12¾ lbs., all three being exactly the same weight. A curious coincidence.

Nov. 22nd.—Again visited St. Neots, spinning down to Wray House Island, Great Paxton; water on the bright side, and wind north-west; only got three fish, this time two on sprats, and one on my old spoon; 5½ lbs., 4½ lbs., and 3½ lbs.

Nov. 23rd.—Had another try close at home; wind awfully bad; tried all down the Newtown Meadows, but only got one fish, 4½ lbs., on the old spoon.

Nov. 25th.—Went up Brampton Wale, and found water very much clouded, must have been heavy rains up country; small dead roach on my flight, and got five fish: 5½ lbs., 4¾ lbs., 4 lbs., 3¾ lbs., and 3¼ lbs.—21 lbs. in all.

Nov. 26th.—Had another very good day, spinning with
my usual flight and small dead roach; water still very clouded, and a nasty north-east biting wind; got six fish in all, three of them in successive casts from under the flags of the island below Hartford: 7 lbs., 5 3/4 lbs., 5 lbs., 4 1/4 lbs., 4 lbs., 3 1/2 lbs.—30 lbs. in all; and returned four smaller to the river.

Nov. 28th.—Again tried the same water, and the same bait; wind and water very much the same as on the previous occasion, but only got one fish, a little less than 4 lbs.

Nov. 30th.—Went up the river towards Offord, and tried for hours with both sprats and small roach; water still clouded, and a fair stream running; nice rippling breeze; not a run until dusk, when I put on my old spoon as a last hope and got a handsome six-pounder.

Dec. 18th.—Did not get out again until eighteen days later, when I again visited St. Neots, started below the paper mills, and spun down to Wray House Island. Water was now clearing a bit, but frost was in the air; wind northwest; spinning with small dace, on the old tackle; four fish kept, three others returned: 6 lbs. 12 ozs., 5 lbs., 4 1/4 lbs., and 3 lbs.

Dec. 19th.—Thought I would go again, as things seemed so promising on the previous day; wind not quite so keen and cold; natural bait again tried, but only two sizable fish came to bag, 7 lbs. the two.

Dec. 27th.—Had another go, as Christmas was over; so went round the Port Holme, spun all round, and only got one fish; wind keen and cutting; water on the bright side.

Jan. 1st, 1900.—New Year's Day; took out the spinning rod, and mounted indifferent roach on my old spinning flight; did not get a run until dusk, when I landed a brace of handsome fish, 12 1/4 lbs. the two; this is the New Year's bag described in my other book, Fishing Days and Ways.

Jan. 4th.—Went round the Port Holme again, using the same old spinning flight; got one fish, 4 1/2 lbs., out of Pike Bay.
Jan. 20th.—Went down the river Hartford way, in the boat this time, and spun all over the most likely-looking places; but a brace going 8 lbs. was all my reward; wind west, and a good lot of it.

Feb. 6th.—Nothing more recorded till this date, when a gentleman from London with a can of splendid Thames dace paid me a visit; water tinged with colour; weather not at all bad, seeing the very sharp frosts we had been having the previous week or two. Tried the deep water all down Houghton Wale; got six good fish and lost four: 8½ lbs., 7 lbs., 6½ lbs., 5 lbs., 3½ lbs., and 3¼ lbs., a bag weighing 34 lbs. all told.

Feb. 10th.—Again tried live bait and snap tackle, this time going to Brampton Wale; water in good order; wind north-west, and not much of it; only got one fish worth keeping, a six-pounder, which came from opposite the Poplar Trees, near the railway bridge.

Feb. 11th.—Went all round the Dole and the backwaters on the Godmanchester side opposite Hartford; live-baited and paternostered well among the weeds; got three nice fish, 7½ lbs., 5¾ lbs., 4¾ lbs.; wind cold, but water clear.

Feb. 24th.—There had been frost and bad weather, that prevented me from going out from the 11th to the 24th. This day I met a London gentleman at Ely station; weather not too uncomfortable; wind north-west; and a very nice colour in the water. Those Thames dace were evidently appreciated by the Ouse pike in that locality, for we got eight fish between us, including one that went 14 lbs. 10 ozs.; the others were as follows: 7 lbs. 14 ozs., 6½ lbs., 6 lbs., 6 lbs., 5¼ lbs., 4½ lbs., and 3¾ lbs.

Feb. 28th.—Had another gentleman down, who met me at St. Neots station with another can of good Thames dace; water all right, but wind a nasty north-east; tried my old square-bend snap, but four fish only rewarded us; we returned five; those kept went 6½ lbs., 6 lbs., 5½ lbs., and 5¾ lbs., averaging exactly 6 lbs. each.
This finished my season among the pike for that year at any rate, and I set it down as being one of the best I ever had, and a season that I shall always remember, not exactly for the size of its fish, but for the pleasurable memories that cling so lovingly round it. But after all, the total weight recorded is only five hundred pounds, and I have known two rods to equal that weight in one day, when the venu has been his lordship’s private lake.