

FRANCE LEWIS

B.

WITH ROD AND LINE IN
COLORADO WATERS

Lewis France
With Rod and Line
in Colorado Waters

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24727321

With Rod and Line in Colorado Waters:

Содержание

MANY YEARS AGO	5
OVER THE RANGE	12
FISHERMAN'S LUCK	20
AGAPAE	29
BLACK LAKE IN 1878	36
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	41

Lewis B. France

With Rod and Line in Colorado Waters

*“Poor drudge of the city! how happy he feels
With the burs on his legs and the grass at his heels;
No Dodger behind, his bandannas to share;
No Constable grumbling: ‘You must n’t walk there!’”*

– Holmes.

MANY YEARS AGO

Forty years ago – a big slice off the long end of one’s life! A broad river with its low-lying south shore heavily timbered and rich in early summer verdure; a long bridge with a multitude of low stone piers and trestle-work at top; in midstream, two miles away, the black hull and tall masts of a man-o’-war, lying idly; between and beyond, the smooth bosom of the blue expanse dotted with fishing sloops under weather-beaten wings, moving lazily hither and yon; to the north, but invisible save a straggling outer edge of tumble-down houses – a possibility then – now, “they tell me,” a magnificent city; a decayed wharf with no signs of life, and draped in tangled sea-weed that came in with the last tide, the jagged and blackened piles stand brooding over the solemn stillness like melancholy sentinels sorrowing over a dead ambition. The ripple of the waves is a melody and the air is fragrant with a brackish sweetness.

It has been a bright day, and the afternoon shadows are beginning to lengthen. They suggest to some another day’s work nearly finished, another week drawing to a close; Saturday night, home and rest. To others they suggest – well, let that pass. To a little fellow, barefoot, coatless and with a ragged straw hat, who crawls out from one of the center piers of the old bridge, these shadows of the closing May day are ominous, yet his forebodings are not unmixed with the rose-hued pleasure of a day well spent.

He did think of that river below him, twenty-five feet deep, but that was an attraction. He did think of the very near future and – but no matter; his thoughts were bright enough as he hauled up after him a string of perch as long as his precious body, and as a fit climax to his magnificent catch, an eel at least two and a half feet long and thick as his captor’s arm. What a struggle he had enjoyed with that eel before he got it to the top of the pier. His hand-line was a hopeless snarl; twice he had come within a hair’s-breadth of going overboard, but the unfortunate eel had succumbed to juvenile activity and zeal. What ten-year-old could boast comparison, as with the day’s trophies over his shoulder he plodded his way home? He felt himself an object of interest and envy to his fellows, and told with condescension, not arrogance, his experience with that eel.

Success will often take an old boy, let alone a young one, off his feet; it sometimes leads to indiscretion and results in worse than failure, and again is the cornerstone of a noble monument. That boy had fished with success off that pier more than once, but had kept his fishpole and had left the evidences of his disobedience at a friendly neighbor’s. This day he marched straight home, fishpole and all. The sable ruler of the kitchen confirmed, upon sight, the lurking apprehension that would not down in spite of triumph.

“Ah, honey! Whar’s you bin dis livelong day? Miss Mary’s gwine to give it to you. We’s been ahuntin’ an’ trapsin’ all ober dis here town, an’ yo’ pa – he was jes’ gwine – .”

But the “ambiguous givings out” of the sable goddess were cut short by the appearance of Miss Mary in person. She was a stately dame in those days, with a wealth of dark hair and with brown eyes that had in them, ah, such a world of love for that barefoot, white-haired urchin. And she had, too, a quiet way of talking that went right into the little fellow’s ears and down about his heart and lingered there. No need to ask him where he had been; she only looked at him and the fish, a serious, yet a loving look withal, took his hand and led him in to the head of the family. Court was at once convened.

“What *shall* we do with this boy?”

He to whom this inquiry was addressed took in the situation at a glance. The glance was a dark one, but it quickly showed the silver lining.

“Wash him, and give him some clean clothes.”

“But,” she remonstrated, “this will never do; he will be drowned some day. How often must I forbid you going near the river?”

“I dun’no, mother.”

“What is that round your leg?”

“An eel skin.”

“Why did you tie it there?”

“To keep off cramp.”

“Keep off cramp! What does the boy mean?” There was a look of wonderment in the brown eyes, and of merriment in the grey. The colored member of the court volunteered an explanation,

and wound up with the prophecy:

“Dat chile’ll neber be drowned, Miss Mary; I tell you so long as he wear dat eel skin he’ll nebber hab de cramp, an’ he kin swim; you ha’ar me, Miss Mary. Why, bless yo’ stars, honey, dat chile done swim dat ribber las’ Saturday, he did; I heerd ’em tellin’ it.”

“Heard who telling it?” broke in the president.

“Why, de chillun, ob cose. Dat Buckingham boy he bantered the chile an’ took his close ober in de skiff, and Mar’s Lou, he done follered, he did, an’ dat ribber a mile wide.”

The animated and confident manner of Jane did not lessen the anxious, even horrified, expression in the brown eyes, but the grey were a study as the owner drew the abashed urchin to him, with the inquiry:

“Is it true, my boy?”

“Yes, father.”

“Go bring me your fishing tackle.”

It was a sorry looking outfit – a fraction of a cane pole, about ten feet of a common line, and an indifferent hook looped on the end. The hand line was of better material, but a wreck – a very Gordian knot. They were dubiously but promptly passed over for inspection.

“Throw these into the stove – and, Jane, you make kindling wood of this pole.”

“Oh, father!” The boy’s lips quivered, the eyes filled, but the owner of the grey eyes gently held back the appealing hand that

would have rescued the precious treasures.

“Hold on, my boy; do not misunderstand; papa will trust you; you shall have the best tackle in town.”

“Why do you deal with the boy in this way?” remonstrated the mother.

“Why? Because I myself was a boy once, and I don’t want to forget it.”

The grey eyes were the first to close – it is many a long year since – and the old boy’s fill a little now, as he reverently thinks of that day.

But the boy drifted with the tide, over the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies, and twenty odd years ago he anchored in the wilderness, where Denver now stands, to surprise you folks from down East.

Do we have fishing in the Rocky Mountains? Aye, that we do, and right royal sport it is.

One day, nineteen years ago this summer, a neighbor came into my cabin and wanted to know of a young married woman there if she could not spare her Benedict for, say three days. He was fish hungry, this neighbor; was going off into the mountains, and wanted company. Of course she could; was glad to be rid of him. And so early next morning old Charlie was hitched to the buckboard. At five o’clock that same day there was a tent pitched in a little valley upon Bear creek, thirty-five miles from home, with two pairs of blankets, a coffee pot, two tin cups and a frying pan; not a soul or a habitation within twenty miles of

us; a beautiful mountain stream, clear as crystal, cold as ice, and teeming with trout. What would you have, money? Why, bless your soul, money was at a discount; there were acres of it a little way off, only for the digging.

In those days fishing tackle was scarce, and a plum-bush pole and linen line were the best in the land. Flies were a novelty to me, but my friend had a dozen or so, some that he had saved over from more civilized times, and that had got out here by mistake. He divided with me, told me to fasten one upon the end of my line and “skitter it over the water.” This was my first and only instruction in trout fishing. “Skittering” was as novel to me as the fish, but my Professor was a Cambridge man with glasses, and I did not want him to feel that my education had been entirely neglected. I took my pole and instruction in silence, and walked a quarter of a mile up the creek. Pure instinct? Yes, I walked up stream for the single purpose of fishing down; it came just as naturally as swimming in deep water. I found a place clear of bushes for a few rods, where the current swept directly into my shore and out again, forming an eddy. I thought it a “likely place.” I gave that plum sapling a swing and landed the fly, in which I had no confidence whatever, just at the edge of the swirl. It had no sooner touched the water than I saw a salmon-colored mouth, felt a tug, and the following second my first trout was flying over my head. I deliberately put down that pole and walked out to investigate. There was no doubt about it; there he lay, kicking and gasping his life out on the green grass, his bright

colors more beautiful by the contrast. He was near a foot long, and I put my hand upon him as gently as though he had been an immortal first born. It was not a dream. When he was dead I strung him upon a forked stick, went back to the eddy and caught three others, and wondered if all the trout in that stream were twins. I had already become gentler, too, even with the unwieldy plum sapling. I found their mouths were not made of cast iron nor copper lined. By the time I had fished down to camp, and with my ten trout, I felt equal to the business of the morrow. My friend, of course, had better luck, having passed his novitiate, but he complimented me in saying that I "took to it naturally."

Camping out was no novelty, but fresh trout was a revelation, and that night we had no bad dreams under our canvas. The next evening found us preparing nearly, what a Yankee would call, two patent pails, of trout to take home to our friends and neighbors.

And here I am moved to say that ours is a noble fellowship; it is a gentle craft we cultivate, one that should beget brotherly love and all things charitable; and if any of you have, as I hope you have, a little white-haired tot who seems inclined to follow you down stream upon summer days, do not say nay, but let your prayer be: "Lord, keep my memory green."

OVER THE RANGE

Of course it is never agreeable to go camping; it is not convenient to carry about with one bedsteads, chairs, bureaus, wash-stands, bath-tubs, and such like plunder deemed essential to comfort. And then again it is not comfortable to live out doors like a tramp. It is either too hot or too cold, too dry or too wet, – that is for a certain large class of human beings. They wonder why one will forego the comforts of our civilized ways for those of the Ute. But perhaps we may get to the solution of the problem further on.

It was dusty when our party left Idaho for a fifty-mile drive to Hot Sulphur Springs. Of course it was dusty; the dust was in the road, in our eyes and mouths, throats and lungs, just for our discomfort, and the toll-road companies were never known to keep sprinklers. So we traveled in a cloud for half an hour, then it began to rain. Of course it did; the first rain-storm for three weeks; we got damp, then we forgot the dust, and were doggedly satisfied that if pleasure had not been one of our objects in going camping it would not have rained. We got to Empire; it rained till dark, and everybody said the rainy season had begun in earnest; that it was liable to keep on raining for three weeks to get even with the “dry spell,” and we went to bed feeling very much encouraged. There is an exasperating sententiousness about the mountain weather prophet that prevails nowhere else

on the globe, I verily believe; when he tells you what the weather is, or is going to be, you must believe him. You dare not even express a hope that he may be mistaken. But even this gentry, one soon begins to believe, is essential to comfort; the weather prophet is the means of agreeable disappointment. Our weather prophet was the most entertaining old liar that ever contributed to the misery of a tenderfoot or the mortification of a moss-back. The sun never broke over the eastern hills more gloriously than on the eventful next morning; he seemed to come up in a spirit of exultation, as if aware that the prophet at Empire had been maligning him. But the prophet was not overcome; far from it; the appearance of the sun was a “weather breeder,” and the cheerful old atmospheric vaticinator swore that before we could reach the summit of the range it would and must rain, and snow and hail and freeze and thaw and blow and the – . We bade him good morning sadly, and took the road with a determination to wrest comfort, if necessary, from the worst “spell of weather” the range could boast.

The rain of the day before was the first element to lend its influence to the day’s enjoyment; it had sweetened the air, if Colorado mountain air is ever otherwise; it had laid the dust, and the road was a marvel of excellence – for a toll road; it had sharpened the fragrance of the pines, and the wild flowers, lacking in perfume, made amends by such a wealth of beauty that one became lost in the multitude of bright colors.

We were a happy party that rode up through the Devil’s

Gate to encounter punishment. Leaving the magnificent mass of granite cliffs reaching a thousand feet high, and wondering if he who should follow next would experience the same degree of veneration for the mighty pile, we began the ascent of Berthoud Pass. We did not climb; there is no climbing to be done, except one escapes over a precipice, and has an ambition to get back. Strolling leisurely along, the white-capped range would, from time to time, reveal itself through the green of the pines, while to the left of us plunged down from the snowy heights the beautiful mountain stream, here not degraded and a satire on its name. Its banks are fringed with rich-colored mosses and decked with flowers, and the beautiful firs, waved by the gentle breeze, seem to be bowing an accompaniment to the music of the crystal waters at their feet. As we go on, the sharp ridge of Red Mountain comes into view, guarded on the east by a monster hill, which none of our ingenious explorers, so generous in giving names, have condescended to dignify with a title. Its broad base washed by the rushing torrent, its sides clothed in a mantle of living green away up to the sharp line which marks the limit of the timber growth, and yet on and up the eye glances over the granite, with its azure background, until the vast pile is diademed with a fleecy cloud. It is a noble mountain, and involuntarily I took off my hat to it, wondering if the civil engineers, explorers, and the like, had really the monopoly of the love and veneration for the beautiful. Red Mountain! a carmine-colored excrescence dignified with a name, and this overtopping evidence of God's handiwork, like

a giant overlooking a pigmy, without anything to distinguish it from its surroundings, except its own magnificence. Well, that is enough.

But at this rate we will never get into that “infernal spell of weather” we are seeking. Up the gorge on the right, toward the summit, an ominous cloud begins to creep upon the blue, and we begin to think the prophet will, after all, command respect, but are doomed to disappointment. As the black mass rises over the summit we notice a rift in its center, soon it widens, goes to the right and left, the blue expands, and we are not deprived of a minute’s sunshine. We look down into the gorge and see the beautiful stream dancing through the firs, so far below its breadth is shrunk to a hand-span, looking now like an emerald ribbon flecked with white, and its rude noise dies into a gentle murmur as a turn in the road shuts it out from sight. On and up; disappointed about the storm nearing the summit, reaching out for the snow and the Alpine primrose, gorgeous in crimson and royal purple; finding the flowers, but the snow, alas that has been gone this three weeks, except a dirt-begrimed bushel or so a few rods from the station.

It is high noon, and, for the first time, I stand upon the “backbone of the continent,” and a good deal of a backbone it is, here only eleven thousand four hundred and odd feet high. There must have been trouble in the neighborhood when the continent got its back up to this extent; the agitation experienced in the framing and signing of the Declaration of Independence

was evidently trifling in comparison. I did not look down into the Pacific, but saw where the waters start that go that way. Never having seen any of them before, I took a mouthful, and from my recollection of those on the Atlantic side I thought I detected a resemblance. The mercury stood at 55° and we had lunch, taken with a healthy appetite sharpened by a three miles walk in the pure light air. Among the grand mountains of the snowy range to the north, I thought I recognized at least one familiar peak, but there was considerable difference of opinion in the party, including Gaskill, the only resident on the summit. This lack of absolute certainty struck me as a little extraordinary, because everybody is usually filled with correct information, and a mountaineer by instinct; I sighed for a tenderfoot.

Lunch concluded, we continued on our way. About three miles by the road, down the western slope, a pretty mountain brook comes tumbling down from the range, and on the bank, surrounded by wild flowers, I noticed an oblong heap of stones – the rude monument of an unfortunate Swede who perished near by early in the spring of the previous year. Frank, our driver, told us how the ill-fated Norseman had started with a companion from Billy Cozzens' at the head of the Park. They carried nothing save their blankets slung over their shoulders. It was afternoon, and they, had “struck out” for the summit, but were met by a blinding storm; how they succeeded in making their way to within a couple of miles of their destination and safety, when the unfortunate, exhausted and discouraged, sank down into the huge

drifts and to sleep; how the other, stronger and more resolute, yet powerless to arouse his dying friend, floundered back to a deserted cabin, built a fire and kept himself from freezing, unable to procure assistance till the following day. But when the news reached Cozzens' there was no lack of quick and experienced effort, though they felt, those strong hearts, as they labored on and up through the great masses of snow, that they were going not to the rescue of a life. They hoped he might have been wise and strong enough to burrow into the drifts, but they found him with one arm clasping a small dead pine, just where his companion had left him, covered partly by the white mantle that had proved his death and his winding sheet. They who loved him best would not have selected a more inviting spot for his sepulture than did those strangers.

From this Frank drifted off to an adventure of his own and his cousin Glenn, on this same range, a few winters before. They were both mere boys, of sixteen and eighteen, "shoeing it," each with a light pack, and determined to make the head of the Park before sundown. With the mercury rapidly going down with the sun, the lads started cheerfully over the crust and had got near the spot where the cabin was built, when, by some accident, one of Frank's shoes snapped in two, and he plunged into the drift. The loss of a snow shoe at such a time and place was a mishap that was by no means trivial. It was simply impossible to go on; to remain, of course, was almost certain death. The boys set their wits to work, without shedding any tears. Fortunately, one of

them had several balls of sacking twine, which he had bought and was carrying into the Park. Upon that slender thread hung the safety of one at least. Frank laid down on the snow, to get as much surface as possible upon the treacherous crust, and held on to the end of the string while his cousin went on till it was all paid out. Then the cousin slipped off the shoes, tied them to his end, Frank drew them up to himself, got on them, went on down past his cousin, leaving him an end of the line. When he reached his limit, he slipped off the shoes in turn, the cousin hauled them up, and so alternating, they worked their way down to the foot of the range, where the trail was partly broken.

“You bet, I was glad to see that trail,” he concluded, with a smile that had something serious in it.

On down the glorious mountain road we make our way at a lively trot, marking the increase in the volume of the Frazier as the range is left behind. After descending some four thousand feet or more, we enter upon an avenue over a mile in length, straight as an engineer can run a line, and adorned on either side with stately pines, that keep off the heat. At the other end we discern the comfortable cabin of Cozzens, and as we emerge from the shelter of the trees the head of the Park is spread out into a broad valley before us, guarded by low-lying hills, while here and there against the clear blue sky looms up an occasional snow-capped peak. Bright colors everywhere – the green of the meadow and the darker shade of the pine, the silver-lined leaf of the white-trunked aspen, and flowers countless as the stars,

reposing tranquilly under the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. A picture to defy the skill of the artist, but to fill him with admiration.

We must remain over night; of course; because the team needs a rest, and the twenty odd miles to our destination will be an easy day's drive for the morrow. And to stop means fresh trout for supper and breakfast, with nice cream in the coffee, helped out with light bread and sweet butter; perhaps an elk steak, or a tit-bit from a mule deer cooked to a turn – “a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.” Besides the fortieth parallel is to be crossed, before we reach the Springs, and the magnificence of that must be reserved for daylight inspection.

FISHERMAN'S LUCK

The distance between Cozzens' and Hot Sulphur Springs was accomplished without accident, and in time for dinner. Camp made, the Springs, in which my comrade, the Doctor, took much interest, were inspected. The curative properties of the waters have been much talked of and written about, but not overestimated; they are helpful and invigorating for the invalid, and a source of gratification, if not a novelty, to the pleasure seeker. The Indians hold them in great veneration; this of itself is a recommendation, for, as a rule, the Ute has no liking for water. The Doctor labored under the impression that I needed a bath; a hot bath, and said so unequivocally; besides, not to take a bath, even if the bath took your hide, would be a violation of the sacred rule of the place, and subject one to the charge of eccentricity. I do not fancy eccentric people nor enthusiastic folk; beside, every acquaintance I might meet would be sure to exclaim with marked astonishment: "What! didn't take a bath!" The thing would become monotonous. I consented to take the bath.

The Doctor went ahead like one accustomed to the treatment. It was night; the place was provided with a single lamp that made the darkness unearthly; the fumes of the sulphur were strong and suggestive; I looked down into the steaming pool with the trepidation that must come over a sinner in the heat of an orthodox revival. The Doctor waded out like a minister at the

ordinance of baptism, and called to me to “come down.” I said I was coming. I went. The steps were very firm, clean and provided with a strong rail, but I didn’t hurry. I put one foot in and took it out right away; when I found it was not raw I put it back, and concluded as the Doctor was not yet parboiled I might put in the other foot; but I did not go in a foot at a time, only about an inch. Then I asked the Doctor what church he belonged to, and started to go out when he said he was a Methodist. I sat down on the steps, inhaled the sulphur and looked at him floundering round in that pool like a school of porpoises out at sea. He told me to try it again. I said I was sleepy and wanted to go to bed. Then he said it would make my hair grow, and I told him I didn’t want any hair, that I had had it pulled out on purpose before I was married. Then he said it would make me fat; I told him I was dieting to take off superfluous flesh. Then he said he would tell what he insinuated was generally suspected, that I was afraid of water; I told him I didn’t care. Finally he swore that if I did not get off that perch and come down into the bath, he’d destroy the commissaries and refuse to show me any of the trout-pools in the Park. I was inspired to say I’d try it again; he had been there five minutes at least and was not cooked, and if he could stand it that long with his religious training, I thought I might venture on as many seconds. But I made haste slowly, got in by degrees and laid down. Then the Doctor got under the “shower bath,” where the water tumbles, six feet or more in a great stream, into the pool; he wanted me to try that. But I told him I was very

well satisfied where I was, and that I did not approve of shower baths, any way; then I went on to explain to him the deleterious effects of too much bathing, and of shower baths in particular. I talked to him as well as I could for ten minutes, sitting the while upon the bottom of the pool with the water up to my chin; but he would not be convinced. I think the situation and the noise of the water-fall may have detracted somewhat from the force of my argument. The Doctor said it was time to get out, but having become warmed up on the subject, I deemed this a mere evasion, and told him not to hurry; that I could convince him of the correctness of my theory inside a half hour. He said he had no doubt of it if I remained where I was for that length of time. He had, to some extent, won my confidence; by his combined advice and threats he had enabled me to realize an ideal, and at the same time be in the fashion, and this not in the days of miracles. When I got out of that bath I felt as I have heard men say they felt after a hard day's work. I took my blankets, laid on the ground and slept the sleep of godliness. Some of those fellows whose consciences are demoralized had better try this medicine instead of opium; it is at least a safer narcotic. One can go to bed with better assurance that in a day or so a servant will not be peering over the transom and finding a subject for the coroner. It is more satisfactory, too, in such emergencies, in that it removes the doubts of friends, if one has any, as well as of the public, as to "the cause," and entitles one to Christian burial.

Awakened the next day by that invaluable servant to us all

shining in my face, I reminded the Doctor of his promise concerning the trout pools. So we were up betimes, had breakfast, the horses saddled, and with creels capable of fourteen pounds each, and a stock of tackle sufficient to start a store, we were off across the Grand, and over the hills for the anticipated pleasure down stream, to a place where the Doctor was sure no one had been. The horses of tourists and amateur fishermen usually buck and raise the devil when starting out on such a jaunt, and I was disappointed that the Doctor's animal did not bow his back, go up, and come down stiff-legged. I like to see a horse buck when somebody else is on him, and I like to hear the man pray, if he is able, when he feels the ground and glances round to see who is laughing at him. An even-tempered gentleman like the Doctor would have afforded an enviable example of Christian fortitude under such circumstances – his horse did not buck, but led the way over the hills as quietly as a cow going out to pasture.

We kept away from the river, traveled over high ground, and through an upland of black sage brush that would rival the mesa between Pueblo and Cañon. We followed an Indian trail, and followed it so long that I began to inquire when we were to reach my much coveted destination. The Doctor called my attention to a belt of timber some distance ahead, and said we were “going up there.” I asked him if he expected that trout roosted like sage hens, and informed him that if such had been his experience, it had not been mine, and that I was going to find water. He told me to do as I pleased, so I struck off toward the Grand – I like to be

independent sometimes. My horse went scrambling through the thick sage brush, catching his toes in the roots and threatening to throw me over his head every few minutes, until finally he stopped at the bank of the river. It was fifty feet, at least, down to the water. I looked up stream half a mile, then down to the belt of timber, and that same bank presented itself at an aggravating angle of about ninety degrees. I don't like Indians, nor any of their belongings, as a general rule, but I went cheerfully back to that trail, and quietly followed in the Doctor's wake. When I caught up, the Doctor said in a mild sort of way that it was generally safe to keep on the trail. We walked our horses to the timber and into it, the Doctor in the lead. We got about half way round the mountain with a thousand or fifteen hundred feet of earth, rocks and trees below us, and as many above, when the Doctor discovered a "cut-off." He led the way for a few rods, when a tree about three feet in diameter barred further progress in that direction. We could not turn round, nor could we go on, so we got off, and persuaded the horses to climb perpendicularly fifty feet up to the trail. I was satisfied in my mind that the Doctor was more than ever convinced of the safety of keeping on the trail, but he did not say so to me.

We kept on to Williams' Fork, and picketed our horses about half a mile from the month. The Doctor then proposed that we "hoof it" over more hills. I began to be disgusted, but was away from home and at the mercy of this new-fangled fisherman. I didn't know an Indian trail from a cow path, and was as likely

to get into one as the other. A trail, like the road of a civilized brother, leads to some place, but a cow path, – . I puffed on behind, up a high ridge of rocks, and as soon as I could get the breath, told the Doctor I was obliged to him. We stood upon a Grand Cañon in miniature. I want to describe it, but I can't. After dreaming over it awhile, the Doctor told me an incident in his experience concerning the ledge where we had precarious foothold, looking down into the seething waters several hundred feet below. The Doctor, Wm. H. Beard, the artist, Bayard Taylor and a prospector and mining man came over the trail a few years before on horseback, the Doctor in the lead, then the prospector, and, finally, the artist and the great traveler bringing up the rear. When the prospector passed the narrow ledge, barely sufficient in width to allow a horseman to squeeze along, where one has to hang, as it were, like a fly on a wall, he became conscious that his saddle girths needed tightening. With the recklessness peculiar to his craft, he slipped off his mule, and was engaged in the necessary adjustment of his belly-band when Beard reached the narrow ledge and had to stop. The first intimation the Doctor had of anything wrong came in the way of an emphatic adjuration, that might have been heard half a mile, for the blessed prospector to get out of that. The Doctor said he was glad the artist was not given to profanity, though he said a great deal to the miner that the Doctor could not understand; it did not sound like English nor Dutch, nor any language the Doctor had ever heard, but hurled at the head of the miner from a two-foot trail hanging over five or

six hundred feet of perpendicular granite, it seemed to have an accelerating effect. The miner led his mule to more convenient quarters without finishing his task, and the artist followed, not in silence, however: he did not seem to be able to get through his business with that miner for an hour.

Looking down into the chasm, I suggested that it did not seem particularly "pokerish." The Doctor said it was well enough to say so when one was afoot, "but just try it horseback," in that ambiguous sort of way that always rouses one's determination to undertake it. I did a few days after, but in returning I led my horse.

Getting through with his anecdote, the Doctor pointed to another pile of rocks half a mile further up the stream, and called my especial attention to a pool beneath, which, even at that distance, placed me under conviction that I could see trout therein, two feet long at least. I started to get some of them. Arrived there, we shipped our tackle, and I selected a spot under a pine-tree on one side of this pregnant pool, while the Doctor took the other. I made a cast with an anxiety indescribable; I knew I would have the first strike, and I did; the fly caught in the luxuriant foliage overhead. I tried to coax the blasted thing loose, but the more I prayed and persuaded the more obstinately the line interlaced itself. If there is anything more exasperating than to get a line fastened in a pine-tree, I want to know what it is; a "picked-up dinner" on wash-day is bliss in comparison. Not being able to untangle the line, I tried to pull down the

tree; then I took a seat on the bank and patiently renewed my leader. Meanwhile the Doctor was threshing the peaceful waters industriously. I asked him if he had caught anything; he said he was going to very soon, and threshed away. When I got my line fixed I murmured, "but deliver us from evil," and got out of the reach of that pine, when I labored faithfully for full fifteen minutes, till finally we scared up a trout about six inches long. He came browsing around with his head half out of water and an inquiring expression plainly visible in his bright eyes, then he disappeared wiggling his tail in derision. We worked away in hope of bringing the scaly monster once more to the surface. A second sight of him would have been comforting; but his curiosity was evidently satisfied. I asked the Doctor if this was one of the trout pools he had been bragging about, and he said it was; he had always caught trout out of that hole, and the stories he told me of the numbers he had lifted out of that place "in the short space of an hour," were marvelous. While listening and trying to believe him I felt a sudden jerk at my rod. Up to that moment I had entertained no special antipathy to stop-reels. But with one leader unattainable in the profuse growth overhead, and another serving as a sort of submarine union-jack to an unknown denizen of the pool, with no prospect of satisfaction, I felt – not like Patience. The trout must have been a monster, of course, or he never would have snapped that gut with so little ceremony. I shall not soon forget the sensation; it was a single and sudden blow without pause for a second pull, as though his troutship in

passing that way had snapped up that fly and gone on about his business or pleasure, without realizing in the remotest degree that he had done anything more than take a midge floating on the surface of his habitation. To avoid a repetition of the calamity, I cheerfully tied the check to a crossbar of the reel, looped on another leader, and resumed, with an angler's vow registered in heaven, which I have religiously kept.

With that commendable resignation born of experience, I worked that pool for half an hour, gave up in disgust and started down stream – the Doctor followed in humiliation. We whipped every foot of the way down through the cañon to our horses, but not a fin rewarded our efforts. The forenoon was gone; I felt sorry for the Doctor; my sympathies went out to him as they always do for the under dog in the fight. I had no heart to express anything but unbounded satisfaction for the morning's enjoyment. But I believe he thinks to this day I was lying.

AGAPAE

Did you never go fishing when a boy, and come home at the close of a Saturday without so much as a single chub dangling on a string to console you for the anticipated dressing because of your interdicted absence? I have. But the chagrin of the ten-year-old is nothing in comparison to the mortification of the middle-aged boy under similar circumstances. However, there were no inquisitive bores in our camp. The Doctor was determined to again try his luck in Williams' Fork; nothing but the remembrance of my early experience could have induced me to join him.

The day after our successful failure, equipped as before, we took our way over the hills and through the sage brush, reaching our destination about nine o'clock. The tackle was quickly adjusted, and keeping out of the way of that infernal pine, I dropped a brown-bodied gray hackle gently upon the placid water. The fly had hardly touched the surface, when suddenly from out the depths there flashed an open-mouthed beauty, and that hackle disappeared as, turning head down and revealing his glittering side, its captor plunged again into the till then silent pool. It made my pulse throb a little quicker, but I was not paying as much attention to that as to the trout. He made a dart up stream with the hook firmly fixed; I brought him gradually round and coaxed him to the surface to ascertain what sort of

a leviathan I had encountered; then I got excited and felt that if I did not get him ashore very soon he was not my trout. Just below the pool, ten yards or so, was a shelving beach a few feet in length, and I gradually worked my way to it, keeping a taut line on my bonanza. While I was doing this I remembered having read a whole column of imagination, written by somebody named Murray, wherein he described his "happiness" under like circumstances; cracking bamboo and spinning silk, with a half dozen Johns with landing nets, were the burden of his effusion, and he wound the matter up after a three hours' fight, with a trout seventeen inches long, when I expected to learn at least of a ten-pound salmon lifted out by one of the Johns above mentioned. I wanted to hit the fellow with a club for making an ass of himself. I was hungry for trout, and inside five minutes I had drawn my prize up to and on that gravelly beach, had him by the gills, and he was seventeen inches flush, big as Mr. Murray's and no fuss about it. Just as I got my fish secured I heard the Doctor threshing round in the willows, about two rods away, and in a moment after he held up to my envious gaze more than a match for my capture. Our exchange of congratulations was hurried; the Doctor cast in his hopper; I stuck to the gray hackle, and inside half an hour I had landed a dozen good-sized trout, and the Doctor had "yanked out" as many more. The pool and the Doctor were redeemed; we had not quite "fished it out," had only taken those with sharp appetites. But that kind of success demoralizes one for the time being, so we moved off down the creek, trying the eddies and

below the riffles; now and again dropping the fly under the lee of the larger boulders in mid stream, with varying success, until we reached our horses. Our creels were full enough to carry with comfort and we started for camp, discussing the causes of the failure of the day before, but arriving at no satisfactory solution.

The rapidity with which news of success in trouting will travel through the various camps in one's vicinity is somewhat singular, and is only equaled by the celerity with which the reports of the quantity captured is multiplied. Having more than we could consume, we gave some to our nearest neighbor, who came over to see our catch. We learned the next day that we had caught anywhere from twenty-five pounds to a hundred, and I am unable to say how many went exploring for trout on the day following. That some were unsuccessful I know, because several swore to me that there was not even a minnow in Williams' Fork. There was one young gentleman in particular who appealed to me in a tone of remonstrance after a day spent in unsuccessful labor down the Grand. He was dressed in light drab pants, cheviot shirt, and a broad-brimmed felt hat, the band of which was stuck full of flies of all sizes and a multitude of colors. He had a fifty-dollar rod and a fifteen-dollar reel of wonderful combination; his eyes, emphatic with disgust, glaring through his glasses, he avowed there were no fish in the Park. He held up a crimson fly that would have driven crazy any fish except a sucker, and would have scared a sucker if sunk to his level, and wanted to know of me if I didn't think it a fine fly. I told him I did. He said he

had whipped five miles of water with that fly and could not get a rise. I told him that the trout was a queer fish, and that perhaps he had better try a blue flannel rag, and offered to give him a piece of my shirt, but he got mad, tore around, and threatened, in popular parlance, to take off the top of my head. Believing this to be a more painful operation than scalping, I apologized, and the difficulty was promptly adjusted. Then I gave him a gray hackle and told him that that was to the trout what bread was to civilized man, a staple article of which he seldom grew tired, or if he did, to try the brown hackle, which, still like the bread, was a wholesome change; that if he could get neither the gray nor the brown, then to take a grasshopper, pull off his legs and wings, and string it upon a number six Kirby; that such a hook would take a three ounce or a three pound trout with equal facility.

The next evening I saw my new acquaintance; his drab pants were ruined, his rod had been shivered into kindling wood, his reel lay in a pool of the Grand twenty feet deep. He had cast that gray hackle with a brown body into that pool; it had been seized upon by a trout something "near a yard long;" the angler had succeeded in landing its head upon the rocks, then his rod gave way and he fell on the fish, rolled into the river, lost the remains of his tackle and his hat with the flies, and some other tenderfoot who happened providentially that way, had pulled him out by the collar. He was happy, and said he would write to his mother, for which I commended him. This morning I saw him following a trail down the Grand; he had provided himself with

some hackles and had a pole cut from a plum bush. I predicted for him success or a watery grave.

In tender consideration of the tyro in these waters, I may be permitted to make a few suggestions as to tackle, based upon my own experience. In the matter of lures the taste of the trout must be considered; as to all else you may consult your own. It is well to have in your fly-books a *little* of everything, but of gray and brown hackles, as already intimated, coachmen and professors, an abundance. The best reel is one that combines lightness and durability, and is incapable of fouling your line, no matter how negligent you may be; a click reel of hard rubber and metal, with a revolving disk, the handle fixed upon the outer edge, and weighing, with thirty yards of line, about five ounces, will answer well. For lines there is, to my mind, nothing equal to the braided and tapered water-proof silk (size F); being the best, they are the cheapest, easily managed, and less liable to snarl or call for a tax upon your patience. For a rod always select one of three joints; they hang more evenly and have a "better feel." Ash butt and second joint, with lancewood tip; Greenheart or Bethabara; try any and all; break them on the least provocation, which means a ten-inch trout or less, but wreck two or three by the "yanking process," or otherwise. Then, when you feel that you can handle a rod with the same deftness a mother her first-born, save up your money and buy a first-class split bamboo. When you get it have faith in it, for if properly made it will bend, if necessity demands, till the tip touches the butt, yet do not needlessly try

that conclusion with it; neither must you attempt to lift your fish out of the water with it. When you have fairly exhausted your trout, take the line in your disengaged hand; there are moments between struggles when you can swing your catch safely to land, without a movement on his part; when he will come out as straight as the plumb line Amos saw. If in his struggles his troutship should clear the water, something I never saw a trout do, bow the rod to him, of course, as he returns, so that he may not get his unsupported weight upon the beautiful toy. Keep a taut line upon your prey – by this I do not mean that you should give him no line, but let the strain be steady, giving only when you must. After the first few rushes, you may generally with safety press your thumb upon the line, and let him feel the spring of your rod; that will kill him quickly. The climax in the poem of trouting is the spring of the split bamboo. In striking, remember you have not a plum bush sapling and that it is not incumbent upon you to bail the stream with an artificial fly; let it be done with a quick motion of the wrist; a motion which, if you should miss the game, would move your fly but a little way. If your catch is too large to lift out as I have suggested, in the absence of a landing net, you can generally find a place, always down stream, where you can safely, if you go about it gently, snake him out, or get your finger under his gills. Much more might be written, and what I have said is by no means new, but the purpose is to put you in the way merely of avoiding the calamity that befell the tackle of my acquaintance in the drab pants. Have a taste for the sport, “let your own discretion

be your tutor,” and you will work out your own salvation more surely than by a library of directions, remembering this for an axiom, that: The true sportsman does not go down stream and afield for the mere love of killing something.

BLACK LAKE IN 1878

Two or three years since, a couple of divines, imbued, doubtless, with a spirit of adventure, found their way up one of the tributaries of the Blue. They discovered a lake nestled away in the grand old hills, and in about the last place one would think of looking for a lake. They called it Black Lake, very appropriately, and when they made known their discovery there were found some of those disagreeable two-legged animals who are never surprised at anything, and who knew, of course, that "the lake had been there all the time." The ministers, however, took away with them the credit of the discovery, though but few people manifested any interest in the matter. As a result of the indifference, the merits of the lake have been but little talked about, and when mentioned at all, it has been treated with a sort of indefiniteness, as a place that had been heard of, but was not known, except that it was "up there, somewhere," in the rugged range of the Blue. One was, and is, always reminded by the would-be informant that "a couple of preachers found it;" in that particular sort of tone that at once conveys the impression that, because a preacher was instrumental in making the discovery, it must be a kind of slough of despond, or an eight-by-ten waterhole, or a beaver pond, with a few decayed water-lilies mourning round the margin. It may be that there is much skepticism hereaway concerning the general level-headedness of

gentlemen in orders, where our mountain scenery is involved. Your “rugged frontiersman” – to whom these grandeurs are every-day affairs, still new every day, and not the less revered – worships in silence, and is apt to think your enthusiast off his tender feet the moment he opens his mouth. “There is no use trying to do the subject justice by attempting to describe what you see. Just look about you, realize that you are not the greatest thing in creation, and, with a chastened spirit, go tell your friends to come and see and worship.” So your gentlemen in flannel shirt and foxed breeches would recommend, and they mean well. But if enthusiasm is pardonable at all, it may be overlooked in a man fresh from his books and his daily, dull routine, suddenly set down in the midst of such evidences of God’s handiwork as one finds here. The ordained discoverers of Black Lake did not, evidently, adopt the reticent method of expressing their veneration for the grand surroundings, and their delight at the beautiful lake so unexpectedly revealed to them. They were unquestionably very enthusiastic, and consequently more the object of doubt. If they had said simply: “We found a lake up there, just under the base of that cone-shaped peak,” and pointed out the mountain, there would have been a dozen visitors to the spot before the end of the summer. Your pioneer would have told it that way, and that would have been notoriety. As it was, Grand Lake, the Twin Lakes, and other known lakes in the mountains, made Black Lake a possibility. A few have taken the trouble to go in search of it, the Doctor, who is no tenderfoot,

and myself, a little younger, among the number.

The trip determined upon, the next step was to make preparation. The experience of my indefatigable Mentor enabled him to speedily devise all plans and complete them. A pack animal was at once forthcoming, and upon it were secured four days' provisions, a coffee pot, frying-pan, two tin cups, a pair of blankets and a rubber poncho; the limited number of utensils inculcating a lesson in economy – a practical illustration of what we need and what we think we must possess to be happy. With our four days lares and penates thus secured and armed with our fishing tackle, a bright August morning saw us in the saddle and on the road.

The first few miles of our route were by the Indian trail, already familiar as far as Williams' Fork, thence up the long mesa bordering that stream, toward Ute Mountain. Bands of antelope frequently starting up and scampering away refuted the insinuation of another young gentlemen in glasses and lavender pants who had been hunting up and down the high roads for a week, within half a mile of the Springs, and "couldn't find any game in the Park." The same young gentleman told me that he had seen what he understood to be sage hens, but could not kill them with a rifle – he must have something larger – and then wanted to know of me if there were no "sage roosters." I told him there were, lots of 'em; that they were web-footed, had ruffles round their necks and wore lavender-colored legs at this season; whereat he expressed himself satisfied and said he would

find one. I expect to see him chased into camp some day by a mountain woodchuck – then we'll have another bear story. While I am writing this, that same young man is fishing in the Grand in sight of my tent; he has waded out and is standing knee deep, whipping the stream just where a hot sulphur spring bubbles up throwing the steam above the surface. He, too, has a valuable rod. I wish he had to stay there enjoying his homeopathic sulphur bath till the fellow with the club could come along and kill him.

Looking round after the antelope resulted in our losing the trail. We started in the direction to cross it, but, with the exasperating contrariness peculiar to the country, traveled parallel with it for more than a mile, and until we ran into a body of timber which the Doctor knew the trail had nothing to do with. Then we struck off at right angles. I told the Doctor that he was heading for camp; he said he intended to make camp about six o'clock. I urged him not to be discouraged, that we might yet reach our destination, and that I did not like to be disappointed. But he trotted on, in silence, found the trail within two hundred yards and turned into it. By this time I did not know Ute Mountain from Gray's Peak. We jogged on to the timber clothing the hills on the north side of Ute Pass, crossed a little brook, left a blind trail to the right, recrossed the brook, and in about five minutes we were playing circus among a lot of fallen timber, with no more sign of a trail in sight than there was a prospect of our getting out of the blasted place inside a week. Had the devil been really a man of genius, instead of covering

Job with boils, destroying his flocks and killing his relatives, he would some forenoon have inveigled that much abused patriarch up a steep mountain side and deposited him in about forty acres of fallen timber. Then when Job's dinner-hour came round he would have tried to get out of that, and after about ten minutes of that kind of pastime he would have begun to realize that old Mrs. Job would be looking for him with the same kind of disposition they keep dinner waiting for us in these days. Just then the devil would have gained his point.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.