

CHARLES KINGSLEY

PROSE IDYLLS,
NEW AND OLD

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Charles Kingsley

Prose Idylls, New and Old

I

‘A CHARM OF BIRDS.’¹

Is it merely a fancy that we English, the educated people among us at least, are losing that love for spring which among our old forefathers rose almost to worship? That the perpetual miracle of the budding leaves and the returning song-birds awakes no longer in us the astonishment which it awoke yearly among the dwellers in the old world, when the sun was a god who was sick to death each winter, and returned in spring to life and health, and glory; when the death of Adonis, at the autumnal equinox, was wept over by the Syrian women, and the death of Baldur, in the colder north, by all living things, even to the dripping trees, and the rocks furrowed by the autumn rains; when Freya, the goddess of youth and love, went forth over the earth each spring, while the flowers broke forth under her tread over the brown moors, and the birds welcomed her with song; when, according to Olaus Magnus, the Goths and South Swedes had, on the return of spring, a mock battle between summer and winter, and welcomed the returning splendour of the sun with dancing and mutual feasting, rejoicing that a better season for fishing and hunting was approaching? To those simpler children of a simpler age, in more direct contact with the daily and yearly facts of Nature, and more dependent on them for their bodily food and life, winter and spring were the two great facts of existence; the symbols, the one of death, the other of life; and the battle between the two—the battle of the sun with darkness, of winter with spring, of death with life, of bereavement with love—lay at the root of all their myths and all their creeds. Surely a change has come over our fancies. The seasons are little to us now.

We are nearly as comfortable in winter as in summer, or in spring. Nay, we have begun, of late, to grumble at the two latter as much as at the former, and talk (and not without excuse at times) of ‘the treacherous month of May,’ and of ‘summer having set in with its usual severity.’ We work for the most part in cities and towns, and the seasons pass by us unheeded. May and June are spent by most educated people anywhere rather than among birds and flowers. They do not escape into the country till the elm hedges are growing black, and the song-birds silent, and the hay cut, and all the virgin bloom of the country has passed into a sober and matronly ripeness—if not into the sere and yellow leaf. Our very landscape painters, till Creswick arose and recalled to their minds the fact that trees were sometimes green, were wont to paint few but brown autumnal scenes. As for the song of birds, of which in the middle age no poet could say enough, our modern poets seem to be forgetting that birds ever sing.

It was not so of old. The climate, perhaps, was more severe than now; the transition from winter to spring more sudden, like that of Scandinavia now. Clearance of forests and drainage of land have equalized our seasons, or rather made them more uncertain. More broken winters are followed by more broken springs; and May-day is no longer a marked point to be kept as a festival by all childlike hearts. The merry month of May is merry only in stage songs. The May garlands and dances are all but gone: the borrowed plate, and the milkmaids who borrowed it, gone utterly. No more does Mrs. Pepys go to ‘lie at Woolwich, in order to a little ayre and to gather May-dew’ for her complexion, by Mrs. Turner’s advice. The Maypole is gone likewise; and never more shall the puritan soul of a Stubbs be aroused in indignation at seeing ‘against Maie, every parish, towne, and village assemble themselves together, both men, women, and children, olde and young, all indifferently, and goe into

¹ *Fraser’s Magazine*, June 1867.

the woodes and groves, hilles and mountaines, where they spend the night in pastyme, and in the morning they returne, bringing with them birch bowes and braunches of trees to deck their assembly withal. . . . They have twentie or fourtie yoke of oxen, every ox having a sweete nosegay of flowers tyed on the tippe of his hornes, and these draw home this Maypole (this stincking idol rather) which is covered all over with flowers and hearbes, with two or three hundred men, women, and children following it with great devotion. . . . And then they fall to banquet and feast, daunce and leap about it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles, whereof this is a perfect pattern, or the thing itself.'

This, and much more, says poor Stubbs, in his 'Anatomie of Abuses,' and had, no doubt, good reason enough for his virtuous indignation at May-day scandals. But people may be made dull without being made good; and the direct and only effect of putting down May games and such like was to cut off the dwellers in towns from all healthy communion with Nature, and leave them to mere sottishness and brutality.

Yet perhaps the May games died out, partly because the feelings which had given rise to them died out before improved personal comforts. Of old, men and women fared hardly, and slept cold; and were thankful to Almighty God for every beam of sunshine which roused them out of their long hybernation; thankful for every flower and every bird which reminded them that joy was stronger than sorrow, and life than death. With the spring came not only labour, but enjoyment:

'In the spring, the young man's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of love,'

as lads and lasses, who had been pining for each other by their winter firesides, met again, like Daphnis and Chloe, by shaugh and lea; and learnt to sing from the songs of birds, and to be faithful from their faithfulness.

Then went out troops of fair damsels to seek spring garlands in the forest, as Scheffel has lately sung once more in his 'Frau Aventiure;' and, while the dead leaves rattled beneath their feet, hymned 'La Regine Avrillouse' to the music of some Minnesinger, whose song was as the song of birds; to whom the birds were friends, fellow-lovers, teachers, mirrors of all which he felt within himself of joyful and tender, true and pure; friends to be fed hereafter (as Walther von der Vogelweide had them fed) with crumbs upon his grave.

True melody, it must be remembered, is unknown, at least at present, in the tropics, and peculiar to the races of those temperate climes, into which the song-birds come in spring. It is hard to say why. Exquisite songsters, and those, strangely, of an European type, may be heard anywhere in tropical American forests: but native races whose hearts their song can touch, are either extinct or yet to come. Some of the old German Minnelieder, on the other hand, seem actually copied from the songs of birds. 'Tanderadei' does not merely ask the nightingale to tell no tales; it repeats, in its cadences, the nightingale's song, as the old Minnesinger heard it when he nestled beneath the lime-tree with his love. They are often almost as inarticulate, these old singers, as the birds from whom they copied their notes; the thinnest chain of thought links together some bird-like refrain: but they make up for their want of logic and reflection by the depth of their passion, the perfectness of their harmony with nature. The inspired Swabian, wandering in the pine-forest, listens to the blackbird's voice till it becomes his own voice; and he breaks out, with the very carol of the blackbird

'Vogele im Tannenwald pfeifet so hell.
Pfeifet de Wald aus und ein, wo wird mein Schätze sein?
Vogele im Tannenwald pfeitet so hell.'

And he has nothing more to say. That is his whole soul for the time being; and, like a bird, he sings it over and over again, and never tires.

Another, a Nieder-Rheinischer, watches the moon rise over the Löwenburg, and thinks upon his love within the castle hall, till he breaks out in a strange, sad, tender melody—not without stateliness and manly confidence in himself and in his beloved—in the true strain of the nightingale:

‘Verstohlen geht der Mond auf,
Blau, blau, Blümelein,
Durch Silberwölkchen führt sein Lauf.
Rosen im Thal, Mädel im Saal, O schönste Rosa!

Und siehst du mich,
Und siehst du sie,
Blau, blau, Blümelein,
Zwei treu’re Herzen sah’st du nie;
Rosen im Thal u. s. w.’

There is little sense in the words, doubtless, according to our modern notions of poetry; but they are like enough to the long, plaintive notes of the nightingale to say all that the poet has to say, again and again through all his stanzas.

Thus the birds were, to the mediæval singers, their orchestra, or rather their chorus; from the birds they caught their melodies; the sounds which the birds gave them they rendered into words.

And the same bird keynote surely is to be traced in the early English and Scotch songs and ballads, with their often meaningless refrains, sung for the mere pleasure of singing:

‘Binnorie, O Binnorie.

Or—

‘With a hey lillelu and a how lo lan,
And the birk and the broom blooms bonnie.’

Or—

‘She sat down below a thorn,
Fine flowers in the valley,
And there has she her sweet babe born,
And the green leaves they grow rarely.’

Or even those ‘fal-la-las,’ and other nonsense refrains, which, if they were not meant to imitate bird-notes, for what were they meant?

In the old ballads, too, one may hear the bird keynote. He who wrote (and a great rhymer he was)

‘As I was walking all alane,
I heard twa corbies making a mane,’

had surely the ‘mane’ of the ‘corbies’ in his ears before it shaped itself into words in his mind: and he had listened to many a ‘woodwele’ who first thrummed on harp, or fiddled on crowd, how—

‘In summer, when the shawes be shene,
And leaves be large and long,
It is full merry in fair forest
To hear the fowlés’ song.

‘The wood-wele sang, and wolde not cease,
Sitting upon the spray;
So loud, it wakened Robin Hood
In the greenwood where he lay.’

And Shakespeare—are not his scraps of song saturated with these same bird-notes? ‘Where the bee sucks,’ ‘When daisies pied,’ ‘Under the greenwood tree,’ ‘It was a lover and his lass,’ ‘When daffodils begin to peer,’ ‘Ye spotted snakes,’ have all a ring in them which was caught not in the roar of London, or the babble of the Globe theatre, but in the woods of Charlecote, and along the banks of Avon, from

‘The ouzel-cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill;
The throstle with his note so true:
The wren with little quill;
The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo gray’—

and all the rest of the birds of the air.

Why is it, again, that so few of our modern songs are truly songful, and fit to be set to music? Is it not that the writers of them—persons often of much taste and poetic imagination—have gone for their inspiration to the intellect, rather than to the ear? That (as Shelley does by the skylark, and Wordsworth by the cuckoo), instead of trying to sing like the birds, they only think and talk about the birds, and therefore, however beautiful and true the thoughts and words may be, they are not song?

Surely they have not, like the mediæval songsters, studied the speech of the birds, the primæval teachers of melody; nor even melodies already extant, round which, as round a framework of pure music, their thoughts and images might crystallize themselves, certain thereby of becoming musical likewise. The best modern song writers, Burns and Moore, were inspired by their old national airs; and followed them, Moore at least, with a reverent fidelity, which has had its full reward. They wrote words to music and not, as modern poets are wont, wrote the words first, and left others to set music to the words. They were right; and we are wrong. As long as song is to be the expression of pure emotion, so long it must take its key from music,—which is already pure emotion, untranslated into the grosser medium of thought and speech—often (as in the case of Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words*) not to be translated into it at all.

And so it may be, that in some simpler age, poets may go back, like the old Minnesingers, to the birds of the forest, and learn of them to sing.

And little do most of them know how much there is to learn; what variety of character, as well as variety of emotion, may be distinguished by the practised ear, in a ‘charm of birds’ (to use the old southern phrase), from the wild cry of the missel-thrush, ringing from afar in the first bright days of March, a passage of one or two bars repeated three or four times, and then another and another, clear and sweet, and yet defiant—for the great ‘stormcock’ loves to sing when rain and wind is coming on,

and faces the elements as boldly as he faces hawk and crow—down to the delicate warble of the wren, who slips out of his hole in the brown bank, where he has huddled through the frost with wife and children, all folded in each other's arms like human beings, for the sake of warmth,—which, alas! does not always suffice; for many a lump of wrens may be found, frozen and shrivelled, after a severe winter. Yet even he, sitting at his house-door in the low sunlight, says grace for all mercies (as a little child once worded it) in a song so rapid, so shrill, so loud, and yet so delicately modulated, that you wonder at the amount of soul within that tiny body; and then stops suddenly, as a child who has said its lesson, or got to the end of the sermon, gives a self-satisfied flirt of his tail, and goes in again to sleep.

Character? I know not how much variety of character there may be between birds of the same species but between species and species the variety is endless, and is shown—as I fondly believe—in the difference of their notes. Each has its own speech, inarticulate, expressing not thought but hereditary feeling; save a few birds who, like those little dumb darlings, the spotted flycatchers, seem to have absolutely nothing to say, and accordingly have the wit to hold their tongues; and devote the whole of their small intellect to sitting on the iron rails, flitting off them a yard or two to catch a butterfly in air, and flitting back with it to their nest.

But listen to the charm of birds in any sequestered woodland, on a bright forenoon in June. As you try to disentangle the medley of sounds, the first, perhaps, which will strike your ear will be the loud, harsh, monotonous, flippant song of the chaffinch; and the metallic clinking of two or three sorts of titmice. But above the tree-tops, rising, hovering, sinking, the woodlark is fluting, tender and low. Above the pastures outside the skylark sings—as he alone can sing; and close by, from the hollies rings out the blackbird's tenor—rollicking, audacious, humorous, all but articulate. From the tree above him rises the treble of the thrush, pure as the song of angels: more pure, perhaps, in tone, though neither so varied nor so rich, as the song of the nightingale. And there, in the next holly, is the nightingale himself: now croaking like a frog; now talking aside to his wife on the nest below; and now bursting out into that song, or cycle of songs, in which if any man finds sorrow, he himself surely finds none. All the morning he will sing; and again at evening, till the small hours, and the chill before the dawn: but if his voice sounds melancholy at night, heard all alone, or only mocked by the ambitious black-cap, it sounds in the bright morning that which it is, the fulness of joy and love. Milton's

‘Sweet bird, that shun'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy,’

is untrue to fact. So far from shunning the noise of folly, the nightingale sings as boldly as anywhere close to a stage-coach road, or a public path, as anyone will testify who recollects the ‘Wrangler's Walk’ from Cambridge to Trumpington forty years ago, when the covert, which has now become hollow and shelterless, held, at every twenty yards, an unabashed and jubilant nightingale.

Coleridge surely was not far wrong when he guessed that—

‘Some night-wandering man, whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love
(And so, poor wretch, filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow)—he, and such as he,
First named these sounds a melancholy strain,
And many a poet echoes the conceit.’

That the old Greek poets were right, and had some grounds for the myth of Philomela, I do not dispute; though Sophocles, speaking of the nightingales of Colonos, certainly does not represent them

as lamenting. The Elizabethan poets, however, when they talked of Philomel, 'her breast against a thorn,' were unaware that they and the Greeks were talking of two different birds; that our English *Lusciola Luscinia* is not *Lusciola Philomela*, one of the various birds called Bulbul in the East. The true Philomel hardly enters Venetia, hardly crosses the Swiss Alps, ventures not into the Rhineland and Denmark, but penetrates (strangely enough) further into South Sweden than our own *Luscinia*: ranging meanwhile over all Central Europe, Persia, and the East, even to Egypt. Whether his song be really sad, let those who have heard him say. But as for our own *Luscinia*, who winters not in Egypt and Arabia, but in Morocco and Algeria, the only note of his which can be mistaken for sorrow, is rather one of too great joy; that cry, which is his highest feat of art; which he cannot utter when he first comes to our shores, but practises carefully, slowly, gradually, till he has it perfect by the beginning of June; that cry, long, repeated, loudening and sharpening in the intensity of rising passion, till it stops suddenly, exhausted at the point where pleasure, from very keenness, turns to pain; and—

'In the topmost height of joy
His passion clasps a secret grief.'

How different in character from his song is that of the gallant little black-cap in the tree above him. A gentleman he is of a most ancient house, perhaps the oldest of European singing birds. How perfect must have been the special organization which has spread seemingly without need of alteration or improvement, from Norway to the Cape of Good Hope, from Japan to the Azores. How many ages must have passed since his forefathers first got their black caps. And how intense and fruitful must have been the original vitality which, after so many generations, can still fill that little body with so strong a soul, and make him sing as Milton's new-created birds sang to Milton's Eve in Milton's Paradise. Sweet he is, and various, rich, and strong, beyond all English warblers, save the nightingale: but his speciality is his force, his rush, his overflow, not so much of love as of happiness. The spirit carries him away. He riots up and down the gamut till he cannot stop himself; his notes tumble over each other; he chuckles, laughs, shrieks with delight, throws back his head, droops his tail, sets up his back, and sings with every fibre of his body: and yet he never forgets his good manners. He is never coarse, never harsh, for a single note. Always graceful, always sweet, he keeps perfect delicacy in his most utter carelessness.

And why should we overlook, common though he be, yon hedge-sparrow, who is singing so modestly, and yet so firmly and so true? Or cock-robin himself, who is here, as everywhere, honest, self-confident, and cheerful? Most people are not aware, one sometimes fancies, how fine a singer is cock-robin now in the spring-time, when his song is drowned by, or at least confounded with, a dozen other songs. We know him and love him best in winter, when he takes up (as he does sometimes in cold wet summer days) that sudden wistful warble, struggling to be happy, half in vain, which surely contradicts Coleridge's verse:—

'In Nature there is nothing melancholy.'

But he who will listen carefully to the robin's breeding song on a bright day in May, will agree, I think, that he is no mean musician; and that for force, variety and character of melody, he is surpassed only by black-cap, thrush, and nightingale.

And what is that song, sudden, loud, sweet, yet faltering, as if half ashamed? Is it the willow wren or the garden warbler? The two birds, though very remotely allied to each other, are so alike in voice, that it is often difficult to distinguish them, unless we attend carefully to the expression. For the garden warbler, beginning in high and loud notes, runs down in cadence, lower and softer, till joy seems conquered by very weariness; while the willow wren, with a sudden outbreak of cheerfulness, though not quite sure (it is impossible to describe bird-songs without attributing to the birds human

passions and frailties) that he is not doing a silly thing, struggles on to the end of his story with a hesitating hilarity, in feeble imitation of the black-cap's bacchanalian dactyls.

And now, again—is it true that

‘In Nature there is nothing melancholy’

Mark that slender, graceful, yellow warbler, running along the high oak boughs like a perturbed spirit, seeking restlessly, anxiously, something which he seems never to find; and uttering every now and then a long anxious cry, four or five times repeated, which would be a squeal, were it not so sweet. Suddenly he flits away, and flutters round the pendant tips of the beech-sprays like a great yellow butterfly, picking the insects from the leaves; then flits back to a bare bough, and sings, with heaving breast and quivering wings, a short, shrill, feeble, tremulous song; and then returns to his old sadness, wandering and complaining all day long.

Is there no melancholy in that cry? It sounds sad: why should it not be meant to be sad? We recognize joyful notes, angry notes, fearful notes. They are very similar (strangely enough) in all birds. They are very similar (more strangely still) to the cries of human beings, especially children, when influenced by the same passions. And when we hear a note which to us expresses sadness, why should not the bird be sad? Yon wood wren has had enough to make him sad, if only he recollects it; and if he can recollect his road from Morocco hither, he may be recollects likewise what happened on the road—the long weary journey up the Portuguese coast, and through the gap between the Pyrenees and the Jaysquivel, and up the Landes of Bordeaux, and across Brittany, flitting by night, and hiding and feeding as he could by day; and how his mates flew against the lighthouses, and were killed by hundreds; and how he essayed the British Channel, and was blown back, shrivelled up by bitter blasts; and how he felt, nevertheless, that ‘that wan water he must cross,’ he knew not why: but something told him that his mother had done it before him, and he was flesh of her flesh, life of her life, and had inherited her ‘instinct’—as we call hereditary memory, in order to avoid the trouble of finding out what it is, and how it comes. A duty was laid on him to go back to the place where he was bred; and he must do it: and now it is done; and he is weary, and sad, and lonely; and, for aught we know, thinking already that when the leaves begin to turn yellow, he must go back again, over the Channel, over the Landes, over the Pyrenees, to Morocco once more. Why should he not be sad? He is a very delicate bird, as both his shape and his note testify. He can hardly keep up his race here in England; and is accordingly very uncommon, while his two cousins, the willow wren and the chiffchaff, who, like him, build for some mysterious reason domed nests upon the ground, are stout, and busy, and numerous, and thriving everywhere. And what he has gone through may be too much for the poor wood wren's nerves; and he gives way; while willow wren, black-cap, nightingale, who have gone by the same road and suffered the same dangers, have stoutness of heart enough to throw off the past, and give themselves up to present pleasure. Why not?—who knows? There is labour, danger, bereavement, death in nature; and why should not some, at least, of the so-called dumb things know it, and grieve at it as well as we?

Why not?—Unless we yield to the assumption (for it is nothing more) that these birds act by some unknown thing called instinct, as it might be called *x* or *y*; and are, in fact, just like the singing birds which spring out of snuff-boxes, only so much better made, that they can eat, grow, and propagate their species. The imputation of acting by instinct cuts both ways. We, too, are creatures of instinct. We breathe and eat by instinct: but we talk and build houses by reason. And so may the birds. It is more philosophical, surely, to attribute actions in them to the same causes to which we attribute them (from experience) in ourselves. ‘But if so,’ some will say, ‘birds must have souls.’

We must define what our own souls are, before we can define what kind of soul or no-soul a bird may or may not have. The truth is, that we want to set up some ‘dignity of human nature;’ some innate superiority to the animals, on which we may pride ourselves as our own possession, and not

return thanks with fear and trembling for it, as the special gift of Almighty God. So we have given the poor animals over to the mechanical philosophy, and allowed them to be considered as only mere cunningly devised pieces of watch-work, if philosophy would only spare us, and our fine human souls, of which we are so proud, though they are doing all the wrong and folly they can from one week's end to the other. And now our self-conceit has brought its own Nemesis; the mechanical philosophy is turning on us, and saying, 'The bird's "nature" and your "human nature" differ only in degree, but not in kind. If they are machines, so are you. They have no souls, you confess. You have none either.'

But there are those who neither yield to the mechanical philosophy nor desire to stifle it. While it is honest and industrious, as it is now, it can do nought but good, because it can do nought but discover facts. It will only help to divide the light from the darkness, truth from dreams, health from disease. Let it claim for itself all that it can prove to be of the flesh, fleshly. That which is spiritual will stand out more clearly as of the Spirit. Let it thrust scalpel and microscope into the most sacred penetralia of brain and nerve. It will only find everywhere beneath brain and beneath nerve, that substance and form which is not matter nor phenomenon, but the Divine cause thereof; and while it helps, with ruthless but wholesome severity, to purge our minds from idols of the cave and idols of the fane, it will leave untouched, more clearly defined, and therefore more sacred and important than ever—

'Those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet the master light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence; truths that wake
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor man nor boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy.

Then sing, ye birds, sing out with joyous sound,

as the poet-philosopher bids you. Victorious analysis will neither abolish you, nor the miraculous and unfathomable in you and in your song, which has stirred the hearts of poets since first man was man. And if anyone shall hint to us that we and the birds may have sprung originally from the same type; that the difference between our intellect and theirs is one of degree, and not of kind, we may believe or doubt: but in either case we shall not be greatly moved. 'So much the better for the birds,' we will say, 'and none the worse for us. You raise the birds towards us: but you do not lower us towards them. What we are, we are by the grace of God. Our own powers and the burden of them we know full well. It does not lessen their dignity or their beauty in our eyes to hear that the birds of the air partake, even a little, of the same gifts of God as we. Of old said St. Guthlac in Crowland, as the swallows sat upon his knee, "He who leads his life according to the will of God, to him the wild deer and the wild birds draw more near;" and this new theory of yours may prove

St. Guthlac right. St. Francis, too—he called the birds his brothers. Whether he was correct, either theologically or zoologically, he was plainly free from that fear of being mistaken for an ape, which haunts so many in these modern times. Perfectly sure that he himself was a spiritual being, he thought it at least possible that birds might be spiritual beings likewise, incarnate like himself in mortal flesh; and saw no degradation to the dignity of human nature in claiming kindred lovingly with creatures so beautiful, so wonderful, who (as he fancied in his old-fashioned way) praised God in the forest, even as angels did in heaven. In a word, the saint, though he was an ascetic, and certainly no man of science, was yet a poet, and somewhat of a philosopher; and would have possibly—so do extremes meet—have hailed as orthodox, while we hail as truly scientific, Wordsworth's great saying—

‘Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In Nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.’

II

CHALK-STREAM STUDIES. ²

Fishing is generally associated in men's minds with wild mountain scenery; if not with the alps and cataracts of Norway, still with the moors and lochs of Scotland, or at least with the rocky rivers, the wooded crags, the crumbling abbeys of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Hereford, or the Lowlands.

And it cannot be denied that much of the charm which angling exercises over cultivated minds, is due to the beauty and novelty of the landscapes which surround him; to the sense of freedom, the exhilarating upland air. Who would prefer the certainty of taking trout out of some sluggish preserve, to the chance of a brace out of Edno or Llyn Dilyn? The pleasure lies not in the prize itself, but in the pains which it has cost; in the upward climbs through the dark plantations, beside the rock-walled stream; the tramp over the upland pastures, one gay flower-bed of blue and purple butterwort; the steady breathless climb up the crags, which looked but one mile from you when you started, so clear against the sky stood out every knoll and slab; the first stars of the white saxifrage, golden-eyed, blood-bedropt, as if a fairy had pricked her finger in the cup, which shine upon some green cushion of wet moss, in a dripping crack of the cliff; the first grey tufts of the Alpine club-moss, the first shrub of crowberry, or sea-green rose-root, with its strange fleshy stems and leaves, which mark the two-thousand-feet-line, and the beginning of the Alpine world; the scramble over the arid waves of the porphyry sea aloft, as you beat round and round like a weary pointer dog in search of the hidden lake; the last despairing crawl to the summit of the Syenite pyramid on Moel Meirch; the hasty gaze around, far away into the green vale of Ffestiniog, and over wooded flats, and long silver river-reaches, and yellow sands, and blue sea flecked with flying clouds, and isles and capes, and wildernesses of mountain peaks, east, west, south, and north; one glance at the purple gulf out of which Snowdon rises, thence only seen in full majesty from base to peak: and then the joyful run, springing over bank and boulder, to the sad tarn beneath your feet: the loosening of the limbs, as you toss yourself, bathed in perspiration, on the turf; the almost awed pause as you recollect that you are alone on the mountain-tops, by the side of the desolate pool, out of all hope of speech or help of man; and, if you break your leg among those rocks, may lie there till the ravens pick your bones; the anxious glance round the lake to see if the fish are moving; the still more anxious glance through your book to guess what they will choose to take; what extravagant bundle of red, blue, and yellow feathers, like no insect save perhaps some jewelled monster from Amboyna or Brazil—may tempt those sulkiest and most capricious of trout to cease for once their life-long business of picking leeches from among those Syenite cubes which will twist your ankles and break your shins for the next three hours. What matter (to a minute philosopher, at least) if, after two hours of such enjoyment as that, he goes down again into the world of man with empty creel, or with a dozen pounders and two-pounders, shorter, gamer, and redder-fleshed than ever came out of Thames or Kennet? What matter? If he has not caught them, he might have caught them; he has been catching them in imagination all the way up; and if he be a minute philosopher, he holds that there is no falser proverb than that devil's beatitude—'Blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.'

Say, rather, Blessed is he who expecteth everything, for he enjoys everything once at least: and if it falls out true, twice also.

Yes. Pleasant enough is mountain fishing. But there is one objection against it, that it is hard work to get to it; and that the angler, often enough half-tired before he arrives at his stream or lake, has left for his day's work only the lees of his nervous energy.

² *Fraser's Magazine*, September 1858.

Another objection, more important perhaps to a minute philosopher than to the multitude, is, that there is in mountain-fishing an element of excitement: an element which is wholesome enough at times for every one; most wholesome at all times for the man pent up in London air and London work; but which takes away from the angler's most delicate enjoyment, that dreamy contemplative repose, broken by just enough amusement to keep his body active, while his mind is quietly taking in every sight and sound of nature. Let the Londoner have his six weeks every year among crag and heather, and return with lungs expanded and muscles braced to his nine months' prison. The countryman, who needs no such change of air and scene, will prefer more homelike, though more homely, pleasures. Dearer than wild cataracts or Alpine glens are the still hidden streams which Bewick has immortalized in his vignettes, and Creswick in his pictures; the long glassy shallow, paved with yellow gravel, where he wades up between low walls of fern-fringed rock, beneath nut, and oak, and alder, to the low bar over which the stream comes swirling and dimpling, as the water-ouzel flits piping before him, and the murmur of the ringdove comes soft and sleepy through the wood. There, as he wades, he sees a hundred sights and hears a hundred tones, which are hidden from the traveller on the dusty highway above. The traveller fancies that he has seen the country. So he has; the outside of it, at least: but the angler only sees the inside. The angler only is brought close face to face with the flower, and bird, and insect life of the rich river banks, the only part of the landscape where the hand of man has never interfered, and the only part in general which never feels the drought of summer, 'the trees planted by the waterside whose leaf shall not wither.'

Pleasant are those hidden waterways: but yet are they the more pleasant because the hand of man has not interfered with them?

It is a question, and one which the older one grows the less one is inclined to answer in the affirmative. The older one grows, the more there grows on one the sense of waste and incompleteness in all scenery where man has not fulfilled the commission of Eden, 'to dress it and to keep it;' and with that, a sense of loneliness which makes one long for home, and cultivation, and the speech of fellow men.

Surely the influence of mountain scenery is exaggerated now-a-days. In spite of the reverend name of Wordsworth (whose poetry, be it remembered, too often wants that element of hardihood and manliness which is supposed to be the birthright of mountaineers), one cannot help, as a lowlander, hoping that there is a little truth in the threnodes of a certain peevish friend who literally hates a mountain, and justifies his hatred in this fashion:—

'I do hate mountains. I would not live among them for ten thousand a year. If they look like paradise for three months in the summer, they are a veritable inferno for the other nine; and I should like to condemn my mountain-worshipping friends to pass a whole year under the shadow of Snowdon, with that great black head of his shutting out the sunlight, staring down into their garden, overlooking all they do in the most impertinent way, sneezing and spitting at them with rain, hail, snow, and bitter freezing blasts, even in the hottest sunshine. A mountain? He is a great stupid giant, with a perpetual cold in his head, whose highest ambition is to give you one also. As for his beauty, no natural object has so little of its own; he owes it to the earthquakes that reared him up, to the rains and storms which have furrowed him, to every gleam and cloud which pass over him. In himself he is a mere helpless stone-heap. Our old Scandinavian forefathers were right when they held the mountain Yotuns to be helpless pudding-headed giants, the sport of gods and men: and their English descendant, in spite of all his second-hand sentiment, holds the same opinion at his heart; for his first instinct, jolly honest fellow that he is, on seeing a snow alp, is to scramble up it and smoke his cigar upon the top. And this great stupid braggart, pretending to be a personage and an entity, which, like Pope's monument on Fish-street hill,

“Like a tall bully, lifts the head and lies,”

I am called upon now-a-days to worship, as my better, my teacher. Shall I, the son of Odin and Thor, worship Hrymir the frost giant, and his cows the waterfalls? Shall I bow down to the stock of a stone? My better? I have done an honest thing or two in my life, but I never saw a mountain do one yet. As for his superiority to me, in what does it consist? His strength? If he be stronger than I, let him cut stones out of my ribs, as I can out of his. His size? Am I to respect a mountain the more for being 10,000 feet high? As well ask me to respect Daniel Lambert for weighing five-and-twenty stone. His cunning construction? There is not a child which plays at his foot, not an insect which basks on his crags, which is not more fearfully and wonderfully made; while as for his grandeur of form, any college youth who scrambles up him, peel him out of his shooting jacket and trousers, is a hundred times more beautiful, and more grand too, by all laws of art. But so it is. In our prurient prudery, we have got to despise the human, and therefore the truly divine, element in art, and look for inspiration, not to living men and women, but to leaves and straws, stocks and stones. It is an idolatry baser than that of the old Canaanites; for they had the courage to go up to the mountain tops, and thence worship the host of heaven: but we are to stay at the bottom, and worship the mountains themselves. Byron began the folly with his misanthropic “Childe Harold.” Sermons in stones? I don’t believe in them. I have seen a better sermon in an old peasant woman’s face than in all the Alps and Apennines of Europe. Did you ever see any one who was the better for mountains? Have the Alps made * * * a whit honester, or * * * a whit more good-natured, or Lady * * * a whit cleverer?

Do they alter one hair’s breadth for the better the characters of the ten thousand male and female noodles who travel forth to stare at them every year? Do mountains make them lofty-minded and generous-hearted? No. *Cælum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt.* Don’t talk to me of the moral and physical superiority of mountain races, for I tell you it is a dream. Civilization, art, poetry, belong to the lowlands. Are the English mountaineers, pray, or the French, or the Germans? Were the Egyptians mountaineers, or the Romans, or the Assyrians, as soon as they became a people? The Greeks lived among mountains, but they took care to inhabit the plains; and it was the sea and not the hills which made them the people which they were. Does Scotland owe her life to the highlander, or to the lowlander? If you want an *experimentum crucis*, there is one. As for poetry, will you mention to me one mountain race which has written great poetry? You will quote the Hebrews. I answer that the life of Palestine always kept to the comparatively low lands to the west of Jordan, while the barbarous mountaineers of the eastern range never did anything,—had but one Elijah to show among them. Shakspeare never saw a hill higher than Malvern Beacon; and yet I suppose you will call him a poet? Mountaineers look well enough at a distance; seen close at hand you find their chief distinctions to be starvation and ignorance, fleas and goitre, with an utter unconsciousness—unless travellers put it into their heads—of the “soul-elevating glories” by which they have been surrounded all their lives.’

He was gently reminded of the existence of the Tyrolese.

‘You may just as wisely remind me of the Circassians. What can prove my theory more completely than the fact that in them you have the two finest races of the world, utterly unable to do anything for humanity, utterly unable to develop themselves, because, to their eternal misfortune, they have got caged among those abominable stoneheaps, and have not yet been able to escape?’

It was suggested that if mountain races were generally inferior ones, it was because they were the remnants of conquered tribes driven up into the highlands by invaders.

‘And what does that prove but that the stronger and cunninger races instinctively seize the lowlands, because they half know (and Providence knows altogether) that there alone they can become nations, and fulfil the primæval mission—to replenish the earth and subdue it? No, no, my good sir. Mountains are very well when they are doing their only duty—that of making rain and soil for the lowlands: but as for this newfangled admiration of them, it is a proof that our senses are dulled by luxury and books, and that we require to excite our palled organ of marvellousness by signs and wonders, æsthetic brandy and cayenne. No. I have remarked often that the most unimaginative people, who can see no beauty in a cultivated English field or in the features of a new-born babe,

are the loudest ravers about glorious sunsets and Alpine panoramas; just as the man with no music in his soul, to whom a fugue of Sebastian Bach, or one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words, means nothing, and is nothing thinks a monster concert of drums and trumpets uncommonly fine.'

This is certainly a sufficiently one-sided diatribe. Still it is one-sided: and we have heard so much of the other side of late, that it may be worth while to give this side also a fair and patient hearing.

At least he who writes wishes that it may have a fair hearing. He has a sort of sympathy with Lord Macaulay's traveller of a hundred and fifty years since, who amid the 'horrible desolation' of the Scotch highlands, sighs for 'the true mountain scenery of Richmond-hill.' The most beautiful landscape he has ever seen, or cares to see, is the vale of Thames from Taplow or from Cliefden, looking down towards Windsor, and up toward Reading; to him Bramshill, looking out far and wide over the rich lowland from its eyrie of dark pines, or Littlecote nestling between deer-spotted upland and rich water-meadow, is a finer sight than any robber castle of the Rhine. He would not complain, of course, were either of the views backed, like those glorious ones of Turin or Venice, by the white saw-edge of the distant Alps: but chiefly because the perpetual sight of that Alp-wall would increase the sense of home, of guarded security, which not the mountain, but the sea, or the very thought of the sea, gives to all true Englishmen.

Let others therefore (to come back to angling) tell of moor and loch. But let it be always remembered that the men who have told of them best have not been mountaineers, but lowlanders who carried up to the mountain the taste and knowledge which they had gained below. Let them remember that the great Sutherlandshire sportsman and sporting writer, the late Mr. St. John, was once a fine gentleman about town; that Christopher North was an Edinburgh Professor, a man of city learning and city cultivation; and, as one more plea for our cockney chalk-streams of the south, that Mr. Scrope (who passed many pleasant years respected and beloved by Kennet side, with Purdy at his heels) enjoyed, they say, the killing of a Littlecote trout as heartily as he did that of a Tweed salmon.

Come, then, you who want pleasant fishing-days without the waste of time and trouble and expense involved in two hundred miles of railway journey, and perhaps fifty more of highland road; and try what you can see and do among the fish not sixty miles from town. Come to pleasant country inns, where you can always get a good dinner; or, better still, to pleasant country houses, where you can always get good society; to rivers which will always fish, brimfull in the longest droughts of summer, instead of being, as those mountain ones are, very like a turnpike-road for three weeks, and then like bottled porter for three days; to streams on which you have strong south-west breezes for a week together on a clear fishing water, instead of having, as on those mountain ones, foul rain spate as long as the wind is south-west, and clearing water when the wind chops up to the north, and the chill blast of 'Clarus Aquio' sends all the fish shivering to the bottom; streams, in a word, where you may kill fish (and large ones) four days out of five from April to October, instead of having, as you will most probably in the mountain, just one day's sport in the whole of your month's holiday.

Deluded friend, who suffered in Scotland last year a month of Tantalus his torments, furnished by art and nature with rods, flies, whisky, scenery, keepers, salmon innumerable, and all that man can want, except water to fish in; and who returned, having hooked accidentally by the tail one salmon—which broke all and ween to sea—why did you not stay at home and take your two-pounders and three-pounders out of the quiet chalk brook which never sank an inch through all that drought, so deep in the caverns of the hills are hidden its mysterious wells? Truly, wise men bide at home, with George Riddler, while 'a fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth.'

Repent, then; and come with me, at least in fancy, at six o'clock upon some breezy morning in June, not by roaring railway nor by smoking steamer, but in the cosy four-wheel, along brown heather moors, down into green clay woodlands, over white chalk downs, past Roman camps and scattered blocks of Sarsden stone, till we descend into the long green vale where, among groves of poplar and abele, winds silver Whit. Come and breakfast at the neat white inn, of yore a posting-house of fame.

The stables are now turned into cottages; and instead of a dozen spruce ostlers and helpers, the last of the postboys totters sadly about the yard and looks up eagerly at the rare sight of a horse to feed.

But the house keeps up enough of its ancient virtue to give us a breakfast worthy of Pantagruel's self; and after it, while we are looking out our flies, you can go and chat with the old postboy, and hear his tales, told with a sort of chivalrous pride, of the noble lords and fair ladies before whom he has ridden in the good old times gone by—even, so he darkly hints, before 'His Royal Highness the Prince' himself. Poor old fellow, he recollects not, and he need not recollect, that these great posting-houses were centres of corruption, from whence the newest vices of the metropolis were poured into the too-willing ears of village lads and lasses; and that not even the New Poor Law itself has done more for the morality of the South of England than the substitution of the rail for coaches.

Now we will walk down through the meadows some half mile,

While all the land in flowery squares,
Beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind
Smells of the coming summer,'

to a scene which, as we may find its antitype anywhere for miles round, we may boldly invent for ourselves.

A red brick mill (not new red brick, of course) shall hum for ever below giant poplar-spires, which bend and shiver in the steady breeze. On its lawn laburnums shall feather down like dropping wells of gold, and from under them the stream shall hurry leaping and laughing into the light, and spread at our feet into a broad bright shallow, in which the kine are standing knee-deep already: a hint, alas! that the day means heat. And there, to the initiated eye, is another and a darker hint of glaring skies, perspiring limbs, and empty creels. Small fish are dimpling in the central eddies: but here, in six inches of water, on the very edge of the ford road, great tails and back-fins are showing above the surface, and swirling suddenly among the tufts of grass, sure sign that the large fish are picking up a minnow-breakfast at the same time that they warm their backs, and do not mean to look at a fly for many an hour to come.

Yet courage; for on the rail of yonder wooden bridge sits, chatting with a sun-browned nymph, her bonnet pushed over her face, her hayrake in her hand, a river-god in coat of velveteen, elbow on knee and pipe in mouth, who, rising when he sees us, lifts his wide-awake, and halloas back a roar of comfort to our mystic adjuration,—

‘Keeper! Is the fly up?’

‘Mortal strong last night, gentlemen.’

Wherewith he shall lounge up to us, landing-net in hand, and we will wander up stream and away.

We will wander—for though the sun be bright, here are good fish to be picked out of sharps and stop-holes—into the water-tables, ridged up centuries since into furrows forty feet broad and five feet high, over which the crystal water sparkles among the roots of the rich grass, and hurries down innumerable drains to find its parent stream between tufts of great blue geranium, and spires of purple loosestrife, and the delicate white and pink comfrey-bells, and the avens—fairest and most modest of all the waterside nymphs, who hangs her head all day long in pretty shame, with a soft blush upon her tawny check. But at the mouth of each of those drains, if we can get our flies in, and keep ourselves unseen, we will have one cast at least. For at each of them, in some sharp-rippling spot, lies a great trout or two, waiting for beetle, caterpillar, and whatsoever else may be washed from among the long grass above. Thence, and from brimming feeders, which slip along, weed-choked, under white hawthorn hedges, and beneath the great roots of oak and elm, shall we pick out full many a goodly trout. There, in yon stop-hole underneath that tree, not ten feet broad or twenty long, where just enough water trickles through the hatches to make a ripple, are a brace of noble fish, no doubt;

and one of them you may be sure of, if you will go the proper way to work, and fish scientifically with the brace of flies I have put on for you—a governor and a black alder. In the first place, you must throw up into the little pool, not down. If you throw down, they will see you in an instant; and besides, you will never get your fly close under the shade of the brickwork, where alone you have a chance. What use in throwing into the still shallow tail, shining like oil in the full glare of the sun?

‘But I cannot get below the pool without—’

Without crawling through that stiff stubbed hedge, well set with trees, and leaping that ten-foot feeder afterwards. Very well. It is this sort of thing which makes the stay-at-home cultivated chalk-fishing as much harder work than mountain angling, as a gallop over a stiffly enclosed country is harder than one over an open moor. You can do it or not, as you like: but if you wish to catch large trout on a bright day, I should advise you to employ the only method yet discovered.

There—you are through; and the keeper shall hand you your rod. You have torn your trousers, and got a couple of thorns in your shins. The one can be mended, the other pulled out. Now, jump the feeder. There is no run to it, so—you have jumped in. Never mind: but keep the point of your rod up. You are at least saved the lingering torture of getting wet inch by inch; and as for cold water hurting any one—Credat Judæus.

Now make a circuit through the meadow forty yards away. Stoop down when you are on the ridge of each table. A trout may be basking at the lower end of the pool, who will see you, rush up, and tell all his neighbours. Take off that absurd black chimney-pot, which you are wearing, I suppose, for the same reason as Homer’s heroes wore their koruthous and phalerous, to make yourself look taller and more terrible to your foes. Crawl up on three legs; and when you are in position, kneel down. So.

Shorten your line all you can—you cannot fish with too short a line up-stream; and throw, not into the oil-basin near you, but right up into the darkest corner. Make your fly strike the brickwork and drop in.—So? No rise? Then don’t work or draw it, or your deceit is discovered instantly. Lift it out, and repeat the throw.

What? You have hooked your fly in the hatches? Very good. Pull at it till the casting-line breaks; put on a fresh one, and to work again. There! you have him. Don’t rise! fight him kneeling; hold him hard, and give him no line, but shorten up anyhow. Tear and haul him down to you before he can make to his home, while the keeper runs round with the net . . . There, he is on shore. Two pounds, good weight. Creep back more cautiously than ever, and try again. . . . There. A second fish, over a pound weight. Now we will go and recover the flies off the hatches; and you will agree that there is more cunning, more science, and therefore more pleasant excitement, in ‘foxing’ a great fish out of a stop-hole, than in whipping far and wide over an open stream, where a half-pounder is a wonder and a triumph. As for physical exertion, you will be able to compute for yourself how much your back, knees, and fore-arm will ache by nine o’clock to-night, after some ten hours of this scrambling, splashing, leaping, and kneeling upon a hot June day. This item in the day’s work will of course be put to the side of loss or of gain, according to your temperament: but it will cure you of an inclination to laugh at us Wessex chalk-fishers as Cockneys.

So we will wander up the streams, taking a fish here and a fish there, till—Really it is very hot. We have the whole day before us; the fly will not be up till five o’clock at least; and then the real fishing will begin. Why tire ourselves beforehand? The squire will send us luncheon in the afternoon, and after that expect us to fish as long as we can see, and come up to the hall to sleep, regardless of the ceremony of dressing. For is not the green drake on? And while he reigns, all hours, meals, decencies, and respectabilities must yield to his caprice. See, here he sits, or rather tens of thousands of him, one on each stalk of grass—green drake, yellow drake, brown drake, white drake, each with his gauzy wings folded over his back, waiting for some unknown change of temperature, or something else, in the afternoon, to wake him from his sleep, and send him fluttering over the stream; while overhead the black drake, who has changed his skin and reproduced his species, dances

in the sunshine, empty, hard, and happy, like Festus Bailey's Great Black Crow, who all his life sings 'Ho, ho, ho,'

'For no one will eat him,' he well doth know.

However, as we have insides, and he has actually none, and what is more strange, not even a mouth wherewith to fill the said insides, we had better copy his brothers and sisters below whose insides are still left, and settle with them upon the grass awhile beneath you goodly elm.

Comfort yourself with a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and give the keeper one, and likewise a cigar. He will value it at five times its worth, not merely for the pleasure of it, but because it raises him in the social scale. 'Any cad,' so he holds, 'smokes pipes; but a good cigar is the mark of the quality,' and of them who 'keep company with the quality,' as keepers do. He puts it in his hat-crown, to smoke this evening in presence of his compeers at the public-house, retires modestly ten yards, lies down on his back in a dry feeder, under the shade of the long grass, and instantly falls fast asleep.

Poor fellow! he was up all last night in the covers, and will be again to-night. Let him sleep while he may, and we will chat over chalk-fishing.

The first thing, probably, on which you will be inclined to ask questions, is the size of the fish in these streams. We have killed this morning four fish averaging a pound weight each. All below that weight we throw in, as is our rule here; but you may have remarked that none of them exceeded half a pound; that they were almost all about herring size. The smaller ones I believe to be year-old fish, hatched last spring twelvemonth; the pound fish two-year-olds. At what rate these last would have increased depends very much, I suspect, on their chance of food. The limit of life and growth in cold-blooded animals seems to depend very much on their amount of food. The boa, alligator, shark, pike, and I suppose the trout also, will live to a great age, and attain an enormous size, give them but range enough; and the only cause why there are trout of ten pounds and more in the Thames lashers, while one of four pounds is rare here, is simply that the Thames fish has more to eat. Here, were the fish not sufficiently thinned out every year by anglers, they would soon become large-headed, brown, and flabby, and cease to grow. Many a good stream has been spoilt in this way, when a squire has unwisely preferred quantity to quality of fish.

And if it be not the quantity of feed, I know no clear reason why chalk and limestone trout should be so much larger and better flavoured than any others. The cause is not the greater swiftness of the streams; for (paradoxical as it may seem to many) a trout likes swift water no more than a pike does, except when spawning or cleaning afterwards. At those times his blood seems to require a very rapid oxygenation, and he goes to the 'sharps' to obtain it: but when he is feeding and fattening, the water cannot be too still for him. Streams which are rapid throughout never produce large fish; and a hand-long trout transferred from his native torrent to a still pond, will increase in size at a ten times faster rate. In chalk streams the largest fish are found oftener in the mill-heads than in the mill tails.

It is a mistake, though a common one, to fancy that the giant trout of the Thames lashers lie in swift water. On the contrary, they lie in the very stillest spot of the whole pool, which is just under the hatches. There the rush of the water shoots over their heads, and they look up through it for every eatable which may be swept down. At night they run down to the fan of the pool, to hunt minnow round the shallows; but their home by day is the still deep; and their preference of the lasher pool to the quiet water above is due merely to the greater abundance of food. Chalk trout, then, are large not merely because the water is swift.

Whether trout have not a specific fondness for lime; whether water of some dozen degrees of hardness is not necessary for their development? are questions which may be fairly asked. Yet is not the true reason this; that the soil on the banks of a chalk or limestone stream is almost always rich—red loam, carrying an abundant vegetation, and therefore an abundant crop of animal life, both in and out of the water? The countless insects which haunt a rich hay meadow, all know who have

eyes to see; and if they will look into the stream they will find that the water-world is even richer than the air-world.

Every still spot in a chalk stream becomes so choked with weed as to require moving at least thrice a year, to supply the mills with water. Grass, milfoil, water crowfoot, hornwort, starwort, horsetail, and a dozen other delicate plants, form one tangled forest, denser than those of the Amazon, and more densely peopled likewise.

To this list will soon be added our Transatlantic curse, *Babingtonia diabolica*, alias *Anacharis alsin astrum*. It has already ascended the Thames as high as Reading; and a few years more, owing to the present aqua-vivarium mania, will see it filling every mill-head in England, to the torment of all millers. Young ladies are assured that the only plant for their vivariums is a sprig of anacharis, for which they pay sixpence—the market value being that of a wasp, flea, or other scourge of the human race; and when the vivarium fails, its contents, *Anacharis* and all, are tost into the nearest ditch; for which the said young lady ought to be fined five pounds; and would be, if Governments governed. What an 'if'.

But come; for the sun burns bright, and fishing is impossible: lie down upon the bank, above this stop. There is a campshutting (a boarding in English) on which you can put your elbows. Lie down on your face, and look down through two or three feet of water clear as air into the water forest where the great trout feed.

Here; look into this opening in the milfoil and crowfoot bed. Do you see a grey film around that sprig? Examine it through the pocket lens. It is a forest of glass bells, on branching stalks. They are *Vorticellæ*; and every one of those bells, by the ciliary current on its rim, is scavenging the water—till a tadpole comes by and scavenges it. How many millions of living creatures are there on that one sprig? Look here!—a brown polype, with long waving arms—a gigantic monster, actually a full half-inch long. He is *Hydra fusca*, most famous, and earliest described (I think by Trembley). Ere we go home I may show you perhaps *Hydra viridis*, with long pea-green arms; and *rosea*, most beautiful in form and colour of all the strange family. You see that lump, just where his stalk joins his bell-head?

That is a budding baby. Ignorant of the joys and cares of wedlock, he increases by gemmation. See! here is another, with a full-sized young one growing on his back. You may tear it off if you will—he cares not. You may cut him into a dozen pieces, they say, and each one will grow, as a potato does.

I suppose, however, that he also sends out of his mouth little free ova—medusoids—call them what you will, swimming by ciliæ, which afterwards, unless the water beetles stop them on the way, will settle down as stalked polypes, and in their turn practise some mystery of Owenian parthenogenesis, or Steenstruppian alternation of generations, in which all traditional distinctions of plant and animal, male and female, are laughed to scorn by the magnificent fecundity of the Divine imaginations.

That dusty cloud which shakes off in the water as you move the weed, under the microscope would be one mass of exquisite forms—*Desmidiæ* and *Diatomaceæ*, and what not? Instead of running over long names, take home a little in a bottle, put it under your microscope, and if you think good verify the species from Hassall, Ehrenberg, or other wise book; but without doing that, one glance through the lens will show you why the chalk trout grow fat.

Do they, then, eat these infusoria?

That is not clear. But minnows and small fry eat them by millions; and so do tadpoles, and perhaps caddis baits and water crickets.

What are they?

Look on the soft muddy bottom. You see numberless bits of stick. Watch awhile, and those sticks are alive, crawling and tumbling over each other. The weed, too, is full of smaller ones. Those live sticks are the larva-cases of the Caperers—*Phryganeæ*—of which one family nearly two hundred species have been already found in Great Britain. Fish up one, and you find, amid sticks and pebbles, a comfortable silk case, tenanted by a goodly grub. Six legs he has, like all insects, and tufts of white horns on each ring of his abdomen, which are his gills. A goodly pair of jaws he has too,

and does good service with them: for he is the great water scavenger. Decaying vegetable matter is his food, and with those jaws he will bark a dead stick as neatly as you will with a penknife. But he does not refuse animal matter. A dead brother (his, not yours) makes a savoury meal for him; and a party of those Vorticellæ would stand a poor chance if he came across them. You may count these caddis baits by hundreds of thousands; whether the trout eat them case and all, is a question in these streams. In some rivers the trout do so; and what is curious, during the spring, have a regular gizzard, a temporary thickening of the coats of the stomach, to enable them to grind the pebbly cases of the caddises. See! here is one whose house is closed at both ends—‘grillé,’ as Pictet calls it, in his unrivalled monograph of the Genevese Phryganeæ, on which he spent four years of untiring labour.

The grub has stopped the mouth of his case by an open network of silk, defended by small pebbles, through which the water may pass freely, while he changes into his nymph state. Open the case; you find within not a grub, but a strange bird-beaked creature, with long legs and horns laid flat by its sides, and miniature wings on its back. Observe that the sides of the tail, and one pair of legs, are fringed with dark hairs. After a fortnight’s rest in this prison this ‘nymph’ will gnaw her way out and swim through the water on her back, by means of that fringed tail and paddles, till she reaches the bank and the upper air. There, under the genial light of day, her skin will burst, and a four-winged fly emerge, to buzz over the water as a fawn-coloured Caperer—deadliest of trout flies; if she be not snapped up beforehand under water by some spotted monarch in search of supper.

But look again among this tangled mass of weed. Here are more larvæ of water-flies. Some have the sides fringed with what look like paddles, but are gills. Of these one part have whiskers at the tail, and swim freely. They will change into ephemeræ, cock-winged ‘duns,’ with long whiskered tails. The larvæ of the famous green drake (*Ephemera vulgata*) are like these: but we shall not find them. They are all changed by now into the perfect fly; and if not, they burrow about the banks, and haunt the crayfish-holes, and are not easily found.

Some, again, have the gills on their sides larger and broader, and no whiskers at the tail. These are the larvæ of Sialis, the black alder, Lord Stowell’s fly, shorm fly, hunch-back of the Welsh, with which we have caught our best fish to-day.

And here is one of a delicate yellow-green, whose tail is furnished with three broad paddle-blades. These, I believe, are gills again. The larva is probably that of the Yellow Sally—*Chrysoperla viridis*—a famous fly on hot days in May and June. Among the pebbles there, below the fall, we should have found, a month since, a similar but much larger grub, with two paddles at his tail. He is the ‘creeper’ of the northern streams, and changes to the great crawling stone fly (May-fly of Tweed), *Perla bicaudata*, an ugly creature, which runs on stones and posts, and kills right well on stormy days, when he is beaten into the stream.

There. Now we have the larvæ of the four great trout-fly families, Phryganeæ, Ephemeræ, Sialidæ, Perlidæ; so you have no excuse for telling—as not only Cockneys, but really good sportsmen who write on fishing, have done—such fibs as that the green drake comes out of a caddis-bait, or giving such vague generalities as, ‘this fly comes from a water-larva.’

These are, surely, in their imperfect and perfect states, food enough to fatten many a good trout: but they are not all. See these transparent brown snails, Limnæ and Succinæ, climbing about the posts; and these other pretty ones, coil laid within coil as flat as a shilling, Planorbis. Many a million of these do the trout pick off the weed day by day; and no food, not even the leech, which swarms here, is more fattening. The finest trout of the high Snowdon lakes feed almost entirely on leech and snail—baits they have none—and fatten till they cut as red as a salmon.

Look here too, once more. You see a grey moving cloud about that pebble bed, and underneath that bank. It is a countless swarm of ‘sug,’ or water-shrimp; a bad food, but devoured greedily by the great trout in certain overstocked preserves.

Add to these plenty of minnow, stone-loach, and miller’s thumbs, a second course of young crayfish, and for one gormandizing week of bliss, thousands of the great green-drake fly: and you

have food enough for a stock of trout which surprise, by their size and number, an angler fresh from the mountain districts of the north and west. To such a fisherman, the tale of Mr. ** *, of Ramsbury, who is said to have killed in one day in his own streams on Kennet, seventy-six trout, all above a pound, sounds like a traveller's imagination: yet the fact is, I believe, accurately true.

This, however, is an extraordinary case upon an extraordinary stream. In general, if a man shall bring home (beside small fish) a couple of brace of from one to three pounds apiece, he may consider himself as a happy man, and that the heavens have not shone, but frowned, upon him very propitiously.

And now comes another and an important question. For which of all these dainty eatables, if for any, do the trout take our flies? and from that arises another. Why are the flies with which we have been fishing this morning so large—of the size which is usually employed on a Scotch lake?

You are a North-country fisher, and are wont, upon your clear streams, to fish with nothing but the smallest gnats. And yet our streams are as clear as yours: what can be clearer?

Whether fish really mistake our artificial flies for different species of natural ones, as Englishmen hold; or merely for something good to eat, the colour whereof strikes their fancy, as Scotchmen think—a theory which has been stated in detail, and with great semblance of truth, in Mr. Stewart's admirable 'Practical Angler,'—is a matter about which much good sense has been written on both sides.

Whosoever will, may find the great controversy fully discussed in the pages of Ephemera.

Perhaps (as in most cases) the truth lies between the two extremes; at least, in a chalk-stream.

Ephemera's list of flies may be very excellent, but it is about ten times as long as would be required for any of our southern streams. Six or seven sort of flies ought to suffice for any fisherman; if they will not kill, the thing which will kill is yet to seek.

To name them:—

1. The caperer.
2. The March-brown.
3. The governor.
4. The black alder.

And two or three large palmers, red, grizzled, and coch-a-bonddhu, each with a tuft of red floss silk at the tail. These are enough to show sport from March to October; and also like enough to certain natural flies to satisfy the somewhat dull memory of a trout.

But beyond this list there is little use in roaming, as far as my experience goes. A yellow dun kills sometimes marvellously on chalk-streams, and always upon rocky ones. A Turkey-brown ephemera, the wing made of the bright brown tail of the cock partridge, will, even just after the May-fly is off, show good sport in the forenoon, when he is on the water; and so will in the evening the claret spinner, to which he turns. Excellent patterns of these flies may be found in Ronalds: but, after all, they are uncertain flies; and, as Harry Verney used to say, 'they casualty flies be all havers;' which sentence the reader, if he understands good Wessex, can doubtless translate for himself.

And there are evenings on which the fish take greedily small transparent ephemera. But, did you ever see large fish rise at these ephemera? And even if you did, can you imitate the natural fly?

And after all, would it not be waste of time? For the experience of many good fishers is, that trout rise at these delicate duns, black gnats, and other microscopic trash, simply *faute de mieux*. They are hungry, as trout are six days in the week, just at sunset. A supper they must have, and they take what comes; but if you can give them anything better than the minute fairy, compact of equal parts of glass and wind, which naturalists call an Ephemera or Bætis, it will be most thankfully received, if there be ripple enough on the water (which there seldom is on a fine evening) to hide the line: and even though the water be still, take boldly your caperer or your white moth (either of them ten times as large as what the trout are rising at), hurl it boldly into a likely place, and let it lie quiet and sink,

not attempting to draw or work it; and if you do not catch anything by that means, comfort yourself with the thought that there are others who can.

And now to go through our list, beginning with—

1. The caperer.

This perhaps is the best of all flies; it is certainly the one which will kill earliest and latest in the year; and though I would hardly go as far as a friend of mine, who boasts of never fishing with anything else, I believe it will, from March to October, take more trout, and possibly more grayling, than any other fly. Its basis is the woodcock wing; red hackle legs, which should be long and pale; and a thin mohair body, of different shades of red-brown, from a dark claret to a pale sandy. It may thus, tied of different sizes, do duty for half-a-dozen of the commonest flies; for the early claret (red-brown of Ronalds; a Nemoura, according to him), which is the first spring-fly; for the red spinner, or perfect form of the March-brown ephemera; for the soldier, the soft-winged reddish beetle which haunts the umbelliferous flowers, and being as soft in spirit as in flesh, perpetually falls into the water, and comes to grief therein; and last but not least, for the true caperers, or whole tribe of Phryganidæ, of which a sketch was given just now. As a copy of them, the body should be of a pale red brown, all but sandy (but never snuff-coloured, as shop-girls often tie it), and its best hour is always in the evening.

It kills well when fish are gorged with their morning meal of green drakes; and after the green drake is off, it is almost the only fly at which large trout care to look; a fact not to be wondered at when one considers that nearly two hundred species of English Phryganidæ have been already described, and that at least half of them are of the fawn-tint of the caperer. Under the title of flame-brown, cinnamon, or red-hackle and rail's wing, a similar fly kills well in Ireland, and in Scotland also; and is sometimes the best sea-trout fly which can be laid on the water. Let this suffice for the caperer.

2. Of the March-brown ephemera there is little to be said, save to notice Ronalds' and Ephemera's excellent description, and Ephemera's good hint of fishing with more than one March-brown at once, viz., with a sandy-bodied male, and a greenish-bodied female. The fly is a worthy fly, and being easily imitated, gives great sport, in number rather than in size; for when the March-brown is out, the two or three pound fish are seldom on the move, preferring leeches, tom-toddies, and caddis-bait in the nether deeps, to slim ephemerae at the top; and if you should (as you may) get hold of a big fish on the fly, 'you'd best hit him in again,' as we say in Wessex; for he will be, like the Ancient Mariner—

'Long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.'

3. The 'governor.'—In most sandy banks, and dry poor lawns, will be found numberless burrows of ground bees who have a great trick of tumbling into the water. Perhaps, like the honey bee, they are thirsty souls, and must needs go down to the river and drink; perhaps, like the honey bee, they rise into the air with some difficulty, and so in crossing a stream are apt to strike the further bank, and fall in. Be that as it may, an imitation of these little ground bees is a deadly fly the whole year round; and if worked within six inches of the shore, will sometimes fill a basket when there is not a fly on the water or a fish rising. There are those who never put up a cast of flies without one; and those, too, who have killed large salmon on him in the north of Scotland, when the streams are low.

His tie is simple enough. A pale partridge or woodcock wing, short red hackle legs, a peacock-herl body, and a tail—on which too much artistic skill can hardly be expended—of yellow floss silk, and gold twist or tinsel. The orange-tailed governors 'of ye shops,' as the old drug-books would say, are all 'havers;' for the proper colour is a honey yellow. The mystery of this all-conquering tail seems to be, that it represents the yellow pollen, or 'bee bread' in the thighs or abdomen of the bee; whereof the bright colour, and perhaps the strong musky flavour, makes him an attractive and savoury morsel.

Be that as it may, there is no better rule for a chalk stream than this—when you don't know what to fish with, try the governor.

4. The black alder (*Sialis nigra*, or *Lutaria*).

What shall be said, or not be said, of this queen of flies? And what of Ephemera, who never mentions her? His alder fly is—I know not what; certainly not that black alder, shorn fly, Lord Stowell's fly, or hunch-back, which kills the monsters of the deep, surpassed only by the green drake for one fortnight; but surpassing him in this, that she will kill on till September, from that happy day on which

‘You find her out on every stalk
Whene'er you take a river walk,
When swifts at eve begin to hawk.’

O thou beloved member of the brute creation! Songs have been written in praise of thee; statues would ere now have been erected to thee, had that hunch back and those flabby wings of thine been ‘susceptible of artistic treatment.’ But ugly thou art in the eyes of the uninitiated vulgar; a little stumpy old maid toddling about the world in a black bonnet and a brown cloak, laughed at by naughty boys, but doing good wherever thou comest, and leaving sweet memories behind thee; so sweet that the trout will rise at the ghost or sham of thee, for pure love of thy past kindnesses to them, months after thou hast departed from this sublunary sphere. What hours of bliss do I not owe to thee! How have I seen, in the rich meads of Wey, after picking out wretched quarter-pounders all the morning on March-brown and red-hackle, the great trout rush from every hover to welcome thy first appearance among the sedges and buttercups! How often, late in August, on Thames, on Test, on Loddon heads, have I seen the three and four pound fish prefer thy dead image to any live reality. Have I not seen poor old Si. Wilder, king of Thames fishermen (now gone home to his rest), shaking his huge sides with delight over thy mighty deeds, as his fourteen-inch whiskers fluttered in the breeze like the horsetail standard of some great Bashaw, while crystal Thames murmured over the white flints on Monkey Island shallow, and the soft breeze sighed in the colossal poplar spires, and the great trout rose and rose, and would not cease, at thee, my alder-fly? Have I not seen, after a day in which the earth below was iron, and the heavens above as brass, as the three-pounders would have thee, and thee alone, in the purple August dusk, old Moody's red face grow redder with excitement, half proud at having advised me to ‘put on’ thee, half fearful lest we should catch all my lady's pet trout in one evening? Beloved alder-fly! would that I could give thee a soul (if indeed thou hast not one already, thou, and all things which live), and make thee happy in all æons to come! But as it is, such immortality as I can I bestow on thee here, in small return for all the pleasant days thou hast bestowed on me.

Bah! I am becoming poetical; let us think how to tie an alder-fly.

The common tie is good enough. A brown mallard, or dark hen-pheasant tail for wing, a black hackle for legs, and the necessary peacock-herl body. A better still is that of Jones Jones Beddgelert, the famous fishing clerk of Snowdonia, who makes the wing of dappled peacock-hen, and puts the black hackle on before the wings, in order to give the peculiar hunch-backed shape of the natural fly.

Many a good fish has this tie killed. But the best pattern of all is tied from the mottled wing-feather of an Indian bustard; generally used, when it can be obtained, only for salmon flies. The brown and fawn check pattern of this feather seems to be peculiarly tempting to trout, especially to the large trout of Thames; and in every river where I have tried the alder, I have found the bustard wing *facile princeps* among all patterns of the fly.

Of palmers (the hairy caterpillars) are many sorts. Ephemera gives by far the best list yet published. Ronalds has also three good ones, but whether they are really taken by trout instead of the particular natural insects which he mentions, is not very certain. The little coch-a-bonddhu palmer,

so killing upon moor streams, may probably be taken for young larvæ of the fox and oak-egger moths, abundant on all moors, upon trefoils, and other common plants; but the lowland caterpillars are so abundant and so various in colour that trout must be good entomologists to distinguish them. Some distinction they certainly make; for one palmer will kill where another does not: but this depends a good deal on the colour of the water; the red palmer, being easily seen, will kill almost anywhere and any when, simply because it is easily seen; and both the grizzle and brown palmer may be made to kill by adding to the tail a tuft of red floss silk; for red, it would seem, has the same exciting effect on fish which it has upon many quadrupeds, possibly because it is the colour of flesh. The mackerel will often run greedily at a strip of scarlet cloth; and the most killing pike-fly I ever used had a body made of remnants of the huntsman's new 'pink.' Still, there are local palmers. On Thames, for instance, I have seldom failed with the grizzled palmer, while the brown has seldom succeeded, and the usually infallible red never. There is one more palmer worth trying, which Scotsmen, I believe, call the Royal Charlie; a coch-a-bonddhu or furnace hackle, over a body of gold-coloured floss silk, ribbed with broad gold tinsel. Both in Devonshire and in Hampshire this will kill great quantities of fish, wherever furzy or otherwise wild banks or oak-woods afford food for the oak-egger and fox moths, which children call 'Devil's Gold Rings,' and Scotsmen 'Hairy Oubits.'

Two hints more about palmers. They must not be worked on the top of the water, but used as stretchers, and allowed to sink as living caterpillars do; and next, they can hardly be too large or rough, provided that you have skill enough to get them into the water without a splash. I have killed well on Thames with one full three inches long, armed of course with two small hooks. With palmers—and perhaps with all baits—the rule is, the bigger the bait the bigger the fish. A large fish does not care to move except for a good mouthful. The best pike-fisher I know prefers a half-pound chub when he goes after one of his fifteen-pound jack; and the largest pike I ever ran—and lost, alas!—who seemed of any weight above twenty pounds, was hooked on a live white fish of full three-quarters of a pound. Still, no good angler will despise the minute North-country flies. In Yorkshire they are said to kill the large chalk trout of Driffeld as well as the small limestone and grit fish of Craven; if so, the gentlemen of the Driffeld Club, who are said to think nothing of killing three-pound fish on midge flies and cobweb tackle, must be (as canny Yorkshiremen are likely enough to be) the best anglers in England.

In one spot only in Yorkshire, as far as I know, do our large chalk flies kill: namely, in the lofty limestone tarn of Malham. There palmers, caperers, and rough black flies, of the largest Thames and Kennet sizes, seem the only attractive baits; and for this reason, that they are the flies of the place. The cinnamon *Phryganea* comes up abundantly from among the stones; and the large peat moss to the west of the tarn abounds, as usual, in house-flies and bluebottles, and in the caterpillars of the fox and oak-egger moths: another proof that the most attractive flies are imitations of the real insects. On the other hand, there are said to be times when midges, and nothing else, will rise fish on some chalk streams. The delicate black hackle which Mr. Stewart praises so highly (and which should always be tied on a square sneck-bend hook) will kill in June and July; and on the Itchen, at Winchester, hardly any flies but small ones are used after the green drake is off. But there is one sad objection against these said midges—what becomes of your fish when hooked on one in a stream full of weeds (as all chalk streams are after June), save

‘One struggle more, and I am free
From pangs which rend my heart in twain’?

Winchester fishers have confessed to me that they lose three good fish out of every four in such cases; and as it seems pretty clear that chalk fish approve of no medium between very large flies and very small ones, I advise the young angler, whose temper is not yet schooled into perfect resignation, to spare his own feelings by fishing with a single large fly—say the governor in the forenoon, the

caperer in the evening, regardless of the clearness of the water. I have seen flies large enough for April, raise fish excellently in Test and other clear streams in July and August; and, what is more, drag them up out of the weeds and into the landing-net, where midges would have lost them in the first scuffle.

So much for our leading chalk flies; all copies of live insects. Of the entomology of mountain streams little as yet is known: but a few scattered hints may suffice to show that in them, as well as in the chalk rivers, a little natural science might help the angler.

The well-known fact that smaller flies are required on the moors than in the lowlands, is easily explained by the fact that poorer soils and swifter streams produce smaller insects. The large Phryganeæ, or true caperers, whose caddis-baits love still pools and stagnant ditches, are there rare; and the office of water-scavenger is fulfilled by the Rhyacophiles (torrent-lovers) and Hydropsyches, whose tiny pebble-houses are fixed to the stones to resist the violence of the summer floods. In and out of them the tiny larva runs to find food, making in addition, in some species, galleries of earth along the surface of the stones, in which he takes his walks abroad in full security. In any of the brown rivulets of Windsor forest, towards the middle of summer, the pebble-houses of these little creatures may be seen in millions, studding every stone. To the Hydropsyches (species *montana*? or *variegata*? of Pictet) belongs that curious little Welsh fly, known in Snowdon by the name of the Gwynnant, whose tessellated wing is best imitated by brown mallard feather, and who so swarms in the lower lakes of Snowdon, that it is often necessary to use three of them on the line at once, all other flies being useless. It is perhaps the abundance of these tessellated Hydropsyches which makes the mallard wing the most useful in mountain districts, as the abundance of the fawn and grey Phryganidæ in the south of England makes the woodcock wing justly the favourite. The Rhyacophiles, on the other hand, are mostly of a shining soot-grey, or almost black. These may be seen buzzing in hundreds over the pools on a wet evening, and with them the sooty Mystacides, called silverhorns in Scotland, from their antennæ, which are of preposterous length, and ringed prettily enough with black and white.

These delicate fairies make moveable cases, or rather pipes, of the finest sand, generally curved, and resembling in shape the Dentalium shell. Guarded by these, they hang in myriads on the smooth ledges of rock, where the water runs gently a few inches deep. These are abundant everywhere: but I never saw so many of them as in the exquisite Cother brook, near Middleham, in Yorkshire.

In that delicious glen, while wading up beneath the ash-fringed crags of limestone, out of which the great ring ouzel (too wild, it seemed, to be afraid of man) hopped down fearlessly to feed upon the strand, or past flower-banks where the golden globe-flower, and the great blue geranium, and the giant campanula bloomed beneath the white tassels of the bird-cherry, I could not tread upon the limestone slabs without crushing at every step hundreds of the delicate Mystacide tubes, which literally paved the shallow edge of the stream, and which would have been metamorphosed in due time into small sooty moth-like fairies, best represented, I should say, by the soft black-hackle which Mr. Stewart recommends as the most deadly of North-country flies. Not to these, however, but to the Phryganeæ (who, when sticks and pebbles fail, often make their tubes of sand, e.g. *P. flava*), should I refer the red-cow fly, which is almost the only autumn killer in the Dartmoor streams. A red cowhair body and a woodcock wing is his type, and let those who want West-country trout remember him.

Another fly, common on some rocky streams, but more scarce in the chalk, is the 'Yellow Sally,' which entomologists, with truer appreciation of its colour, call *Chrysoperla viridis*. It may be bought at the shops; at least a yellow something of that name, but bearing no more resemblance to the delicate yellow-green natural fly, with its warm grey wings, than a Pre-Raphaelite portrait to the human being for whom it is meant. Copied, like most trout flies, from some traditional copy by the hands of Cockney maidens, who never saw a fly in their lives, the mistake of a mistake, a sham raised to its tenth power, it stands a signal proof that anglers will never get good flies till they learn a little entomology themselves, and then teach it to the tackle makers. But if it cannot be bought, it can at least be made; and I should advise everyone who fishes rocky streams in May and June, to

dye for himself some hackles of a brilliant greenish-yellow, and in the most burning sunshine, when fish seem inclined to rise at no fly whatsoever, examine the boulders for the *Chrysoperla*, who runs over them, her wings laid flat on her back, her yellow legs moving as rapidly as a forest-fly's; try to imitate her, and use her on the stream, or on the nearest lake. Certain it is that in Snowdon this fly and the Gwynnant *Hydropsyche* will fill a creel in the most burning north-easter, when all other flies are useless; a sufficient disproof of the Scotch theory—that fish do not prefer the fly which is on the water.³

Another disproof may be found in the 'fern web,' 'bracken clock' of Scotland; the tiny cockchafer, with brown wing-cases and dark-green thorax, which abounds in some years in the hay-meadows, on the fern, or on the heads of umbelliferous flowers. The famous Loch-Awe fly, described as an alder-fly with a rail's wing, seems to be nothing but this fat little worthy: but the best plan is to make the wings, either buzz or hackle, of the bright neck-feather of the cock pheasant, thus gaining the metallic lustre of the beetle tribe. Tied thus, either in Devonshire or Snowdon, few flies surpass him when he is out. His fatness proves an attraction which the largest fish cannot resist.

The *Ephemeræ*, too, are far more important in rapid and rocky streams than in the deeper, stiller waters of the south. It is worth while for a good fish to rise at them there; the more luxurious chalk trout will seldom waste himself upon them, unless he be lying in shallow water, and has but to move a few inches upward.

But these *Ephemeræ*, like all other naiads, want working out. The species which Mr. Ronalds gives, are most of them, by his own confession, very uncertain. Of the *Phryganidæ* he seems to know little or nothing, mentioning but two species out of the two hundred which are said to inhabit Britain; and his land flies and beetles are in several cases quite wrongly named. However, the professed entomologists know but little of the mountain flies; and the angler who would help to work them out would confer a benefit on science, as well as on the 'gentle craft.' As yet the only approach to such a good work which I know of, is a little book on the trout flies of Ripon, with excellent engravings of the natural fly. The author's name is not given; but the book may be got at Ripon, and most valuable it must be to any North-country fisherman.

But come, we must not waste our time in talk, for here is a cloud over the sun, and plenty more coming up behind, before a ruffling south-west breeze, as Shelley has it—

'Calling white clouds like flocks to feed in air.'

Let us up and onward to that long still reach, which is now curling up fast before the breeze; there are large fish to be taken, one or two at least, even before the fly comes on. You need not change your flies; the cast which you have on—governor, and black alder—will take, if anything will.

Only do not waste your time and muscle, as you are beginning to do, by hurling your flies wildly into the middle of the stream, on the chance of a fish being there. Fish are there, no doubt, but not feeding ones. They are sailing about and enjoying the warmth; but nothing more. If you want to find the hungry fish and to kill them, you must stand well back from the bank—or kneel down, if you are really in earnest about sport; and throw within a foot of the shore, above you or below (but if possible above), with a line short enough to manage easily; by which I mean short enough to enable you to lift your flies out of the water at each throw without hooking them in the docks and comfrey which grow along the brink. You must learn to raise your hand at the end of each throw, and lift the flies clean over the land-weeds: or you will lose time, and frighten all the fish, by crawling to the bank to unhook them. Believe me, one of the commonest mistakes into which young anglers fall is that of fishing in 'skipjack broad;' in plain English, in mid-stream, where few fish, and those little

³ The Ripon list of natural flies contains several other species of small *Nemouridæ* unknown to me, save one brown one, which is seen in the South, though rarely, in June.

ones, are to be caught. Those who wish for large fish work close under the banks, and seldom take a mid-stream cast, unless they see a fish rise there.

The reason of this is simple. Walking up the Strand in search of a dinner, a reasonable man will keep to the trottoir, and look in at the windows close to him, instead of parading up the mid-street.

And even so do all wise and ancient trout. The banks are their shops; and thither they go for their dinners, driving their poor little children tyrannously out into the mid-river to fare as hap may hap.

Over these children the tyro wastes his time, flogging the stream across and across for weary hours, while the big papas and mammas are comfortably under the bank, close at his feet, grubbing about the sides for water crickets, and not refusing at times a leech or a young crayfish, but perfectly ready to take a fly if you offer one large and tempting enough. They do but act on experience. All the largest surface-food—beetles, bees, and palmers—comes off the shore; and all the caperers and alders, after emerging from their pupa-cases, swim to the shore in order to change into the perfect insect in the open air. The perfect insects haunt sunny sedges and tree-stems—whence the one is often called the sedge, the other the alder-fly—and from thence drop into the trouts' mouths; and within six inches of the bank will the good angler work, all the more sedulously and even hopefully if he sees no fish rising. I have known good men say that they had rather *not* see fish on the rise, if the day be good; that they can get surer sport, and are less troubled with small fish, by making them rise; and certain it is, that a day when the fish are rising all over the stream is generally one of disappointment.

Another advantage of bank fishing is, that the fish sees the fly only for a moment. He has no long gaze at it, as it comes to him across the water. It either drops exactly over his nose, or sweeps down the stream straight upon him. He expects it to escape on shore the next moment, and chops at it fiercely and hastily, instead of following and examining. Add to this the fact that when he is under the bank there is far less chance of his seeing you; and duly considering these things, you will throw away no more time in drawing, at least in chalk-streams, flies over the watery wastes, to be snapped at now and then by herring-sized pinkeens. In rocky streams, where the quantity of bank food is far smaller, this rule will perhaps not hold good; though who knows not that his best fish are generally taken under some tree from which the little caterpillars, having determined on slow and deliberate suicide are letting themselves down gently by a silken thread into the mouth of the spotted monarch, who has but to sail about and about, and pick them up one by one as they touch the stream?—A sight which makes one think—as does a herd of swine crunching acorns, each one of which might have become a 'builder oak'—how Nature is never more magnificent than in her waste.

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