

A DAY IN THE SHEPAUG.

BY G. B. DRAKE.



THREE days after the season opened for trout fishing this spring Mac came blundering into the studio and sung out:

"Say, old man, I've just received a letter from Harrison.

He has a cabin on the bank of the Shepaug River, and says the water is going down fast, and if we want sport to get there at once. No fish have been taken out yet. What do you say?"

"Well, I should say it is a go," I replied. "I've just been hoping something would turn up. Do we start to-day?"

"Yes; there's a train leaving at five, and I'll telegraph him to meet us at Litchfield with his mule and cart. We can make his cabin to-night, and get an early start in the morning."

"Great idea," I echoed from the bottom of an old trunk that I had devoted to my fishing outfit, and from which I was throwing things in a heap on the floor.

The train had just begun to move when we threw our bundles upon the platform of the smoker and climbed up after them. We were well out into the country when Mac confronted me with this problem:

"What if Tom doesn't get my telegram? It's just a chance, you know."

"Why, how's that?" I asked. "Don't they deliver telegrams up there?"

"Not usually, six miles in the country," he answered, with a grin that made me feel like pitching him out of the window. But as he was the larger of the two I merely suggested that we might walk six miles, to which he added, by way of consolation, that three of them would be up hill.

As we stepped on the Litchfield platform to our joy we saw Tom, who greeted us with, "Hello there, boys! I'm glad you've come, but it was just an accident, that I got your telegram. Old Pop Slocum happened to be at the station, and he fetched it out, or I

wouldn't 'a' got it. And I jest had time to hitch old Bald Face into the cart and git here." And without pausing to take breath he added, "You see this black-snake?" (a long whip made of braided leather thongs). "Well, I tried to wear it out on Baldy coming down, but 'twan't no use, for his hide is like sole-leather, and by the time I got through licking him I was used up wors'n he."

We threw our traps into the cart and climbed in. Tom turned old Bald Face's nose towards home, and gave him a couple of sounders with the raw-hide. This roused him to a sort of a dog-trot which he kept up until we reached the foot of the hill, then he subsided into a gait that was a compromise between a walk and a creep. Tom laid on the lash, while Mac and I shouted vigorously. When we finally gave up through exhaustion and a lack of words the mule stuck his ears forward and wound out one of his best brays—as though he expressed his approval of what we had said. He then went on minding his own business, but never changed pace.

The song of the long-eared siren was too much for me, so I got out and walked on ahead. At the top of the hill I sat down to wait, and was almost asleep when the cart came into view.

The mule now realized that the worst of the journey was over, so he braced up and jogged along at quite a lively pace. When we reached home Mac and I unhitched and fed old Bald Face, while Tom prepared supper, after which we arranged our tackle for the morning and sat down for a half hour's pull at our pipes. Mac's eyes soon closed and his head began to nod, which was the cue for all hands to turn in. Tom warned us to "sleep sound while we did sleep, for he would pull us out sharp at four."

I roused every half hour, and was only beginning to sleep when Tom sang out from the next room: "Say there, you fellows, hustle out of that; we're half an hour late. But luck is with us, fer I think it's going to rain before very long."

Nothing but visions of trout could have coaxed me out of bed at that moment,

but ten minutes later we all stood outside the hut getting things ready.

Tom looked at Mac assorting some flies, and with a quizzical smile asked him what he was "goin' to do with them purty things."

"Why, catch trout, of course."

Tom laughed aloud as he answered, "You could whip this stream from one end to 'tother and you'd never get a strike."

"What's the reason I wouldn't?"

"Well, the biggest reason is the water ain't clear, and another is I 'spose trout like the taste of worms better'n feathers." Then he lifted a board from off an old crock that stood at the foot of a tree and filled his bait box with worms, telling us to do the same.

The sky was overcast with dull, lead-colored clouds, and the air filled with a warm mist which might at any moment turn into rain. Indeed, the day could hardly have been improved.

A mile's walk through meadows and tangled underbrush brought us to a bridge. I crossed over to fish down one side of the stream, leaving Tom and Mac on the other. We were to fish back as far as the ford opposite the house, then go in and have some coffee and a biscuit. The water, still a little high, dashed and bubbled over the rocks, swirled around the drift-wood caught in the black, claw-like roots that stuck out from the bank, and formed deep, dark pools below. In these I was certain more than one good fish lurked.

I cast three times in vain, and Tom, who was almost up to his boot-tops in the water, had no better luck.

A shout of "First fish!" attracted our attention to Mac, who in his excitement had jerked a fingerling into the branches of a sapling that hung over the water. The wee trout dangled in mid-air, squirming and wriggling, until it finally dropped back into the water. Mac was disgusted, for in his impatient efforts to loosen his line he broke the tip of his rod.

It was Tom's good fortune to carry off the honor of the first fish. His prize was about six inches in length, but still it was a trout, and as he dropped it into his basket he called to Mac, who was busily splicing his broken tip:

"How about the first fish, old man?"

"Oh, that's all right," replied Mac, "I had the first one out of the water."

I moved slowly on down stream, leaving them to settle their dispute as best they could. Some distance ahead I saw an old log, one end of which was imbedded in the sand. The other end rested on a huge boulder, forming a dam over which the water poured in a swift, white current into a deep basin of rocks beneath, forming great circles of foam that grew wider and wider until they lodged against the outer edge. Creeping softly up behind a big sycamore that cast a shadow over the pool I threw my bait well out and about ten feet above. It was caught in the current and carried down until the last big swell took it over the log. Whir-r-r went the reel. The line shot down, and an electric current seemed to play along the rod as the silk cut through the dark water, first on one side, then the other, under a rock and out again. I did my best to keep him from tying me to a root or snag, while the split bamboo bent like a whip. The fight was fairly on, and in my anxiety to tire him out I slipped, and only saved myself from a ducking by grabbing hold of the tree. The accident, however, proved to be in my favor, for in my scramble I slackened the line. Whir-r-r went the reel again, and like a flash the fish slipped into deep water, which gave me a better chance to play him. He certainly was game, and his desperate lunges required every effort on my part to keep the line taut and yet not allow him to tear loose. It was some time before he showed any signs of weakness, but at last his efforts to get away grew less vigorous, and I gradually reeled in, coaxing him nearer and nearer shore. Finally he rose to the surface and summoned all his strength for a last struggle. The moment this was over I knew was my time, and I landed him safely. He was a beauty as he lay with his mouth open and his body shining on a bed of moss.

"Let's see him," called Mac, who with Tom had watched the battle from the opposite bank.

Holding him up I asked Tom what he would weigh.

"Oh, nigh onto two pounds," he answered, as he started on down stream.

I carefully lined my basket with fox-tail grass before putting the trout inside. I find that fish kept perfectly dry and separated from each other remain solid and hold their color longer.

I started in again, and for two hours reveled in the sport alone, my companions having gone on ahead. Frequently I waded in the stream up to my boot-tops. Sometimes I sneaked along the bank and through the underbrush. My bait would drift over roots or stones, with barely time to touch still water before there came a tug, a scurry, a little play, and a speckled fellow would be in my hand.

In about half an hour I reached the ford. I was a little tired and very hungry, so I concluded the best thing to do was to cross over and get coffee and a biscuit.

My basket held seven very nice fish, six of which would average half a pound. The first one was by far the largest, for it actually weighed two pounds and three ounces. Such trout are as rare now-a-days in Connecticut as wooden nutmegs.

Quite satisfied with the morning's sport, I sought a shallow place through which I could cross the river and return to the cabin. Carefully sliding from one stone to another I reached mid-stream all right, but found the current so strong that it was difficult to keep on my feet, and I only did so by using my rod as a brace. The water was up to the tops of my boots, and I had but one more stepping stone to reach to gain a shallow. I saw the stone three feet away under the rushing current. Measuring the depth with my rod I compared it with my boot, and found that by stepping true I might cross without getting wet. I hesitated a moment, then, pulling myself together for the effort, made the leap. The next minute I was floundering in the water up to my waist. I scrambled to the bank, sat down and emptied a gallon of water from my boots; then, with feelings far from hilarious, I hurried to the cabin to be welcomed by the boys with a volley of sarcastic remarks.

I took it all with as much grace as possible, for I counted on, my revenge later. To be soaked from head to foot was not very pleasant, but there were certain advantages to be derived from it, for I could wade out to any part of the river and drop my bait into the remotest nook. To their chaffing I replied, "He laughs best who laughs last."

After breakfast Tom left orders with a boy to have the mule and cart at the old covered bridge half an hour before

train time. This point was only a mile from the station, and after fishing down the brook we could easily catch the noon train.

After Tom had filled us each a flask of cider we again took to the water. The score now stood nine for Tom, three for Mac and seven for me.

I went boldly into the water up to my waist, and waded down stream to within a dozen feet of an old stump that stuck out of the bank. My line drifted slowly down, and then over it went. There was a splash, a vigorous tugging, a zig-zag rush under the roots, and I was fouled. After five minutes of hard work to save the fish I pulled up and lost thereby both trout and hook. The fish had taken a turn of the silk around a root or stone, and like every fisherman in such circumstances I felt sure that the lost one was a screamer.

After bending on a fresh hook I started down stream, keeping well out towards the middle, which enabled me to cover any spot between the banks. Owing to the depth of water the dry fellows had to keep pretty near the shore, and depend on easily reached places.

We fished within sight of each other for an hour, and that was time enough to show them the great advantage of my early plunge, for I was catching nearly as many as both of them.

Tom grew desperate, and plunged into the water waist deep to try and recover lost ground. But he was too late. My hour's advantage had placed me too far ahead to be overtaken easily. For the rest of the time we fished with luck about evenly divided, and neither had any cause to complain.

Poor old Mac, whom nature had never intended for a fisherman, became disgusted, and we lost all trace of him for the last two hours.

While Tom was climbing over a large tree that had fallen across the stream a little incident occurred that showed the nature of a brook trout. Tom had reeled in his line until about a foot of it hung from the tip, in order that it might not get entangled in the branches. Then thrusting the rod forward he allowed it to rest on the trunk of the tree, while he proceeded to climb over. It so happened that the hook hung to within about six inches of the water, and it hadn't stopped swinging when, like a flash, a trout leaped, caught the

bait, and hung wriggling and squirming entirely out of the water.

"Well! ejaculated Tom, with a grin. "How's that? I can ketch fish without puttin' my hook in the water!"

Another hour's fishing brought us in sight of the old covered bridge, the limit of our sport, and it was just as well, for the sun was shining brightly, and the trout were off the feed.

We found Mac propped up against a tree by the side of the bridge fast asleep, with his rod taken apart and done up ready for home.

We soon heard the familiar bray of old Bald Face, who, with a freckle-faced boy as driver, came jerking the cart

round a corner of the crooked lane.

"Boys," said Tom, looking at his watch, "you've got just twenty-three minutes to change your clothes and get to the station in time to ketch the train."

We hauled out dry clothes, and in seven minutes were on our way to the station, which was about a mile away. We reached it in time, and within five minutes I was taking a last glimpse of old Shepaug. The stream lay like a silver thread between its mossy banks, here and there lost to view in bordering foliage, then rushing wildly on, dash-
inn its foam-bedecked spray over rocks and roots, as unceasing and untiring as time or eternity.

BIRD LOVES.

BY TRABER GENONE.

ONE of the most fruitful matters of philosophic dispute is that concerning the difference between instinct and reason. The line that would exclude from heaven the serpent and the tiger perforce excludes with them Philomena, the matchless, the joyous one, at whose singing all nature hushes and the sweetest harper stills his strings. Lowly forms in human guise, in whose narrow souls on earth a dream of beauty never dawned, whose lives are darkened by lusts and wars and shadowy fears, spread their spirit wings when the twilight falls to span the main unto immortality. But the skylark, singing in the nether blue, the brave, happy robin in his own home tree, and the song-sparrow, with his love amid the bowers, fall dead to the grass as flowers fall, and sing no more forever. This may be so. It may be that reason is born into life everlasting; and instinct is born to live but a day. Still those of us unsworn to faith marvel that Philomena is no better than the serpent or the worm. We see the noble horse, the wise old elephant and the brave and faithful dog, and know that in their minds is instinct less and reason more than in the minds of hosts of savage men. To us the annihilation of nature's songsters, and the universal immortality of humanity, is an inconsistency hardly less than the immortality of serpents.

But let the future be what it may to birds and beasts and men—the question is, is there any essential difference between the affections of a man and those of a robin or bluebird, save in degree? The book-believing world says, yes; but now and then some forest-loving dreamer answers, no.

That birds love, after a fashion, the world does not deny; but its idea of such love is that it is a sort of dumb, self-acting instinct, implanted by God as a measure of necessity for the continuation of kind; unerring in its functions, complete to the purpose, with limitations denying individuality; giving a unanimity of action which makes any one a perfect representative of his kind; the same yesterday, now and forever. There are modifications of this principle of belief, increasing in extent and importance as time goes on and truths are demonstrated, but it is the prevailing belief, for it is the natural and logical reduction of what, for want of a better term, I shall call the religious hypothesis. This is why the pious wife-beater looks with such fine scorn upon the happiness of the robins in the maple by his door, seeing nothing in it that is analogous to his human passion, hearing nothing in the song that is not unconscious praise to the Deity, or heaven-sent music for his own ears—a sort of animated phonograph, benignly and considerately established here below by