



"I SHALL GO FISHING"

Piscatorial Preview - By "Irideus"

I AM looking forward to October 5. It will be a lovely day, and I shall go fishing. Those of you who read the Comic Papers (and who don't and what aren't, these days?), will be aware that the new fishing season starts on October 1. On that day, the fanatics and the extremists will be on the riverbank at dawn; they will be as the Sand of the Seashore for Multitude and they will get in one another's way and tangle their lines up and catch no fish and they will lose their hip-flasks and their tempers and by and by they will come home gnashing their dentures.

And by Saturday, October 5, they will all of them be in bed with cold, lumbago, influenza and temperatures and I shall have the river to myself. For I, being somewhat old and unathletic, have learned by force of circumstances the wisdom of Biding my Time and walk delicately where others less prudent rush on in brogues and waders.

So on Friday evening, October 4, I shall tune in the radio and the announcer will say "... the forecast is for light westerly winds, weather fair to fine, with occasional cloudy intervals," and I shall pack my creel, checking each necessary item, and fill my flask and give orders for the preparation of an adequate and tasty but compact lunch for the morrow.

It Shall Come to Pass

And when I arise on the morrow it will be even as the radio predicted. The air will be of the mildness of new milk and soft greys will veil the early iridescence in the east and the morning will be quick with the promise of abundance of sun. For I shall be up early, before Daventry, and I may even carol a stave in the bath at leaving once more behind me the winter of my discontent.

Then anon, with my belly well filled with bacon and eggs and toast and fresh butter and tea, I shall drive away up the valley to a place that I wot of. The eastern hills will then be bright with the first blushes of the morning and they will clap their hands and the little birds will shout and make a joyful noise, and I likewise. And beside the road the river will run as clear as that Which Proceedeth Out of the Throne. On its sleek tide, from which the ascending sun has sucked the last lingering shreds of mist, I shall see first a small whorl of water, no larger than a man's hand, and then another, and another, as the feeding trout chase and fret the sleeping pools with a myriad interlacing ripples.

At that I shall tear away my gaze and drive on, looking straight ahead of

me, for another six miles and then at the place which I wot of (but of which you wot not, nor shall wot), I shall pull off on to the grassy verge at the water's edge. And there the fish will be rising also, but they will be larger fish—gross fat fellows whom I have marked down against such a day as this, wallowing lazily upon the surface, sucking down the early sedges and the fat, helpless cicadas which, heavy-burdened with the dew, have climbed too far out along the overhanging broom stalks, drawing these and others down into their maws with loud "ker-plucks."

Delights in Anticipation

Nor will you find me gnawing the finger of impatience or throwing my gear together to be at them and into it. For you must know that I am one who



"... the little birds will shout and make a joyful noise and I likewise"

savours his delights in anticipation, and you will also recollect that I am somewhat old and unathletic. I shall therefore sit upon the running-board of the car and I shall smoke a pipe and I shall have a cup of tea from the thermos and I shall be watching the water the while. And when the time is ripe I shall put up the rod and wade in.

I shall catch no fish at the first cast, for it is not meet that one should begin the day too well, otherwise by the Law of Averages one is like to end it poorly. So, therefore, I shall not catch a fish at the first cast. Nor at the second, nor at the third. But when I have worked two-thirds of the way up the first pool and when the fly lands in the bubbling flurry behind the rock in the middle of the topmost rip of water there will be an answering tug. Then after watching it shuttle prettily from one side of the stream to the other, I shall draw the fish gently upon the bank, for it will be a small fish. And I, being full of the Spirit of Righteousness and Bacon and Eggs, shall have compassion on the

struggling creature and I shall lave my hands in cool water and then gently remove the hook and return the troutlet to the stream.

Singing into Battle

And by and by, just about half a pipe later and a third of the way up the next pool, I shall see, close in to the bank, a minute ring on the surface of the water and one solitary bubble will float down towards me, sparkling in the first warmth of the morning and then vanish, leaving a tiny white crescent on the water. And as I watch I shall see another ring and another bubble in the same spot, and another ... and another.

And because I am wise in such matters I shall know that there is a trout of warrant feeding below the bank. So, though I am somewhat old and unathletic, I shall get down on my belly and I shall crawl closer and at the third cast I shall have him. And as I fight him up and down and across the pool, I shall sing "A Safe Stronghold Our God is Still," which is a fine hymn to sing at any time and particularly when one is fighting a good fish, since one can sing it at the top of one's voice and it blends well with the river noises.

So I shall take this fish, and it will be a comely fish and will weigh 3lb. and 14oz., which, being neither 3½lb. nor yet 4lb., is a credible weight.

Remembering Absent Friends

And as the morning wears on, I shall catch a second and a third, and a fourth, and then I shall eat and shall sing the "Non Nobis," which will be proper, for I probably shall not remember to do so later when I encounter my old friend, Col. Gaffem (Ret'd), of the Royal Gherkins, who is at this moment in bed with influenza.

The afternoon will be as bountiful as the morning and when at last the blood cools and the veils of evening slip softly down there will be nine trout in my creel, packed lovingly in mint and rushes, and their weights will be: 3lb. 14oz., 2lb. 9oz., 2lb. 11oz., 1lb. 12oz., 4lb. 7oz., 2lb. 15oz., 3lb. 5oz., 3lb. 2oz., and 2lb. 6oz.

Down the darkening valley I shall drive quietly homeward as the moreporks begin to call and when I get home I shall tell my wife just how I caught each fish and shall recall for her enjoyment each smallest detail of the day. And on Monday morning my wife will go out and buy herself two new hats and I shall send the largest fish to the house of Percival Batecan who was unthinking enough to catch one more than I on April 30 last and then I shall go and commiserate with Gaffem. . .

And how I wish it could all be even so!

Grim Reality

But I know that of a surety it will be much otherwise. There will be no need for me to listen to the weather report on the Friday—indeed it will be difficult to hear it through the roar of the rain on the roof. Saturday will dawn bleak and cold and halfway along the road I shall have a puncture and get soaked through changing the wheel and I shall be late in getting to the appointed spot and I shall have forgotten my flask and there will be rain in my sandwiches. Stoically calm and patient to all outward appearances, but consumed within by the blackest choler, I shall fish doggedly several miles of water and catch nothing but miserably stunted troutlets which I shall hurl savagely back where they belong.

On the very edge of the dusk, I shall hook a noble fish and I shall play him with skill and patience and the deter-



My old friend Col. Gaffem

mination of despair and as he is about to roll helpless into the net the hook will pull out and he will sink like a wraith into the depths again.

Then as my trembling hands dismantle the rod and stow the gear away I shall hear a cheerful shout. It is my friend Gaffem, who has recovered sooner than I anticipated from his influenza. And he has, I shall gather, been just about half a mile ahead of me all day. He has, moreover, nine trout, weighing ... but why labour the tale?

A crimson mist descends, and when it has cleared the judge will have assumed the black cap and I shall be taken to the place from which I came and thereafter hanged by the neck until I am dead.

And perhaps it will be the best solution after all.