

# The Mayfly

By GEORGE SOUTHCOTE

A tale of angling with a barbless hook in the historic waters of Great Britain

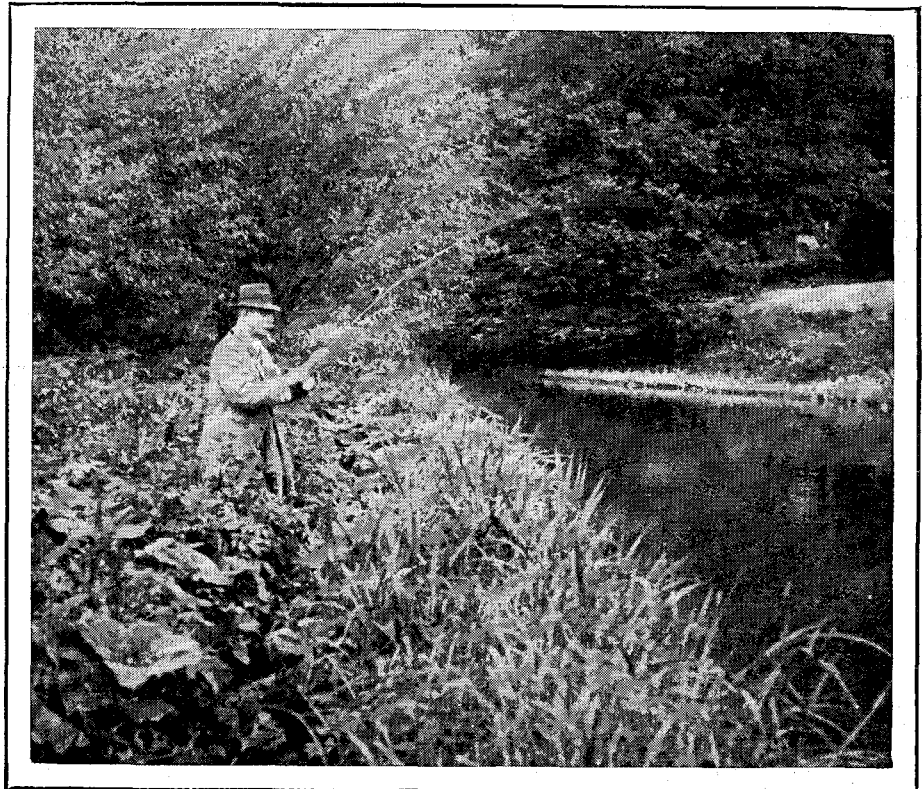
A FINE sunny morning in May, in the most beautiful setting in the world—a shady old garden in a chalk-stream valley in the South of England. An ancient lawn, drenched with sparkling dewdrops. “The moan doves” (wood-pigeons, in this case) “in immemorial elms, and murmuring of innumerable bees.” The whole valley is full of bees. We have a flourishing bee club in every village. “Myriads of rivulets running,” not through the lawn, as in Tennyson’s “Princess,” but through the rank grass of the water-meadows, where we get glimpses of marsh marigolds blazing yellow in the sunshine beyond the dark shadows of the garden.

The singing birds are in full chorus, glorying in the joys of parenthood and rejoicing in the strenuous labor of gathering supplies from an abundant store for their young nestlings. Most of our young blackbirds and thrushes are now fully fledged and flown; the anxieties attending their maintenance have passed, and the parent birds are enjoying their independence even more than their labor. We also have the nests of linnets, of warblers, of wrens, of pied wagtails (in an ivied wall), and, best of all, a pair of goldfinches have built among the blossoms of a horse-chestnut tree. About the cuckoo and its monotonous note the less said the better, excepting that it does recall scenes and surroundings treasured in a fly-fisher’s memory.

The white petals of pear blossom lie like snow at the foot of the trees in the orchard. Pink-tipped apple blossom is at its best. Pinker peach blossom is over. The peachlets are already swelling on the hot wall. Bluebells and pheasant-eye narcissi (the air heavy with their perfume) are in full bloom on the shady banks of the garden stream. There are lilacs galore, in full flower and scent, both the white and the “lilac” variety. There is no other name for the color unless, perhaps, the “puce” of our grandmothers’ silk gowns would answer the purpose.

Such is the setting for the sport of the most fortunate of mankind—fly-fishers—in the month of May in these parts, in early June elsewhere, with the very best of the season before them.

Let us pass through the meadow, under the mild gaze of sleek cows chewing



George Southcote drops a mayfly in an inviting pool

the cud contentedly, after grazing gluttonously on the rich grass bordering the river-bank. When we reach the stream, we can see every trout in it, close to the bottom, motionless, resting after last night’s orgy of mayfly diet. They seem visibly fatter than they were a day or two ago! “What,” asked an eminent friend of mine once, “is the place of the mayfly in creation?” I have since been seeking for the answer. It is difficult enough to discover one’s own place therein. You can moralize about it as much as you like. If the subject appeals to you, you can follow old Izaak, of angling fame, during these days in the year when “the fly” is up and trout forsake all caution in pursuit thereof, and you can ponder upon the sad results of gluttony:

And when the tim’rous trout I wait  
To take, and he devours my bait,  
How poor a thing I sometimes find  
Will captivate a greedy mind:

And when none bite I praise the  
wise,  
Whom vain allurements ne’er surprise.

Those trout at the bottom of the river may be moralizing, but if they have their deserts they are much more likely to be

suffering from acute indigestion. I shall never forget their behavior yesterday evening, gobbling up the delicacies from the overloaded supper table that passed over their heads when the first great fleets of mayfly were going down. One fish that I caught was filled with large juicy flies to the very lips. He had not had time to swallow any more when he gulped at my counterfeit. That is the word for which I have been searching, “gulping.” The rise of a trout at a mayfly can only be described as a gulp, and a noisy one at that; very different from the gentle opening and closing of the jaws to take in one of the tiny dry flies with which one tries to tempt him at other times and seasons.

I fear that some of those trout must have other matters to ponder over besides the result of overfeeding. I landed several of them last night, and returned them to the water. This is not a form of procedure to be commended to true sportsmen, but sometimes it is unavoidable. On nearly all dry-fly rivers there is a limit of size, and below that limit all fish must be returned. In this particular water I work to a limit of two-pound weight. When trout can be seen from the side, it is fairly easy to judge their

size and to avoid casting over the smaller ones. When only the rises are visible, especially when they are rises to mayfly, it is impossible to avoid hooking fish below the standard weight. Then, especially after a long and severe struggle in the landing, it is almost impossible to detach a hook, embedded over the barb, quickly enough to avoid injury to the unfortunate trout concerned. Grasping the fish in the hand must cause damage. The solution is a simple one. Use hooks without barbs.

The use of the barbless hook in fly-fishing comes to us from American sportsmen, who have been in the same quandary as we have when fishing preserved water on which a limit in the size of takable fish obtains. After having experienced great difficulty in obtaining them, either from America or from Japan (in both of which countries they are in use), I have at last prevailed upon my tackle dealer to tie flies on them for me, in two sizes, and after a thorough trial of the barbed and the barbless hook, culminating in last night's experience, I have decided to stick to the barbless on the score both of mercy and of effectiveness.

I have found that the small barbless hooks (Size 00) penetrate more easily, causing less strain on fine gut. They hold admirably while the fish is being played, and they are more easily detached when releasing undersized fish, which need not be touched with the hand at all, as a rule. This, from the point of view both of the fish and of the angler, is a great advantage. (I have not mentioned the ease with which a barbless hook can be detached from one's garments or other obstructions to sport on days when the "hostility of inanimate objects" is especially trying to the harassed fly-fisher, above all, in a high wind.) When it came to using the barbless hook with larger, mayfly, sizes, I confess to having embarked upon the experiment with some trepidation. I found that my fears had been without foundation. The large barbless hooks proved to be just as effective as the smaller sizes.

The culminating trial has just taken place, in an interval of writing this account. I hooked a large trout on a mayfly (barbless hook). He played every trick known to his kind. He ran out line and jumped high out of the water twice. He pulled hard. He dived into a bed of weeds. He shook his head. He bolted both up-stream and down-stream, where I could not follow him. Once he came straight at me, slackening the line. While the line was slack he shook his head again, making a disturbance in the water, a supreme test of the holding power of a hook without a barb. The hold held. When he seemed to be ready

for the landing-net, I felt for it, and found, to my horror, that I had dropped it in some undiscoverable spot. High rushes and sedges grew along my bank. I tried to land him between their stems, in my hat. I failed. He escaped and dived about among the rushes, bending my rod nearly double and straining it badly. I threw it away, hand-lined the fish on the gut, at the same time using the other hand to disentangle it from the rushes. After some minutes of acute anxiety I managed to get hold of the trout with my hand and to heave him on to the bank beyond the rushes. It was not the fault of the barbless hook that I was obliged to play him for so long, beyond hope of his recovery. It was mine, for dropping my landing-net. Fortunately, he was only two ounces below the two-pound limit. This experience has finally converted me to the barbless hook for dry-fly fishing. I hope that others who try it, either on the score of mercy or on the score of effectiveness, will come to a similar conclusion. There is one essential proviso: the point must be filed as sharp as a needle.

To revert to the old and new methods of fishing with a fly, whether the hook therein be barbed or barbless. "You see it rains May butter," said Piscator to his pupil. And then: "First for a Mayfly; you may make his body with greenish colored crewel, or willowish color; darkening it in most places with waxed silk or ribbed with black hair or some of them ribbed with silver thread, and such wings for the color as you see the fly to have at that season, nay, at that very day on the water." Such instructions might pass muster to-day, except for the omission of all mention of a hackle, and excepting that, for myself, I should like the wings to be omitted altogether, unless of the sort that lie flat on the water like those of the "spent gnat." I wonder, in that connection, whether Izaak Walton, observant as he was, ever noticed the difference between the mayfly *subimago*, with its upward fluttering flight, and the *imago* or spinner, dancing up and down in its hosts in the evening, and drifting down as a spent gnat after the object of its being is accomplished?

When we come to methods, we find ourselves at variance with him. We can agree to this passage: "Let me again tell you, that you keep as far from the water" (or the fish?) "as you can possibly, whether you fish with a fly or a worm." But then comes this: "Fish down the stream; and when you fish with a fly, let no part of your line touch the water, but your fly only." What a scuttling of the trout to their shelters would result if one tried such methods to-day! One thinks of the modern method of fishing up-

stream, yards of well-greased line floating on the water below the trout, which sees only a few inches of the fine end of the cast attached thereto, and the fly by which he is expected to be deceived. Only by fishing up-stream can such results be achieved, and repeated if the fly is not taken at the first offer. In one matter, however, the Compleat Angler of old has never been surpassed—in his appreciation of the beauty of his surroundings.

That brings us back to the mayfly and to its place in creation. Conceding that it causes trout to gulp and to gorge themselves, and that it tends to spoil dry-fly fishing as a sport by making things too easy for the fisherman, there remains one quality, its beauty. This we can find best when it appears in hordes in its natural surroundings, especially about the hour of sunset. Never was this beauty impressed upon me more than it was last evening, just as the sun was dropping behind the downs which shelter our little valley. Only a few great artists could have done justice to that scene with a brush, and none—except, perhaps, Ruskin—with a pen. I cannot.

The peaceful flow of the wide gleaming stream, reflecting the glories of the sunset sky. The whole heaven from the zenith to the horizon one molten mantling sea of color and fire. Every black bar turning to massy gold, every ripple and wave into unsullied shadowless crimson, and purple, and scarlet, and colors for which there are no words in language, and no ideas in the mind—things which can only be conceived when they are visible. (Most of that is Ruskin, of course; I did not want to spoil it by sprinkling it with inverted commas.) All these glories are reflected in the surface, the outlines softened and blurred by the drifting filmy mists which are gathering under the banks. The scene so far is lacking in life, which must touch the right note. The whole air is teeming with clouds of mayfly. There is an endless beating of gauzy wings, showing the after-glow of the sky through their delicate transparency, their soft fluttering almost audible by reason of their multitude.

Fishing has become too easy. Widening silver rings, made by rising trout, show all over the stream as the light fades away. Lay down the rod, and rest content with the strenuous battles of the evening and of the earlier day. It is worth while to linger a little to smoke a last pipe and to watch the last of the daylight, before we stroll home "rich in self-contentedness" through the purple night.

The mayfly has its uses. Trout, swallows, and martins have had a splendid supper. Now I want mine.



# Hooch de Luxe

By SAMUEL WILSON

**H**IS bootlegger had just delivered to a Wall Street broker a consignment of holiday liquors warranted to be fresh from the rum fleet, with immaculate labels, and caps and seals unbroken, each bottle wrapped in tissue paper bearing the private imprint of the distiller or vintner. As he packed his contraband treasures away in his wine closet he chuckled at his cleverness in beating the United States Government and the Eighteenth Amendment. Here was "Black and White," Scotch whisky, with immaculate white labels from the distillery of James Buchanan & Co., Glasgow, proudly bearing the notice: "By appointment, Distillers to H. M. the King, and H. R. H. the Prince of Wales;" and still another certificate of the British and Foreign Select Committee, with white seal cap and everything regular to prove age and purity.

Here, with swelling paunch, was Benedictine, just as it came from the monastery, vouched for by numerous labels and the insignia of the Cross, with a narrow ribbon of sheet lead about the neck with the title "Veritable Benedictine" pressed into the metal band, which also extended across the cork and down the neck to the shoulder, where it ended in a big splash of red sealing wax in which was impressed the private seal of the monastery.

Then for madame's private silver flask there was James Hennessy & Co., cognac

with elaborate gilded label, and about the neck another label with facsimile signature of Martini and Rossi in Italian script which, translated, reads, "A guaranty of our product, Bottled at our establishment at Passione (Torino)." Across the top is a revenue stamp of the Italian Government.

An intimation to our Wall Street friend that the treasures over which he gloated had never crossed the ocean, and were merely a compound of redistilled, denatured alcohol and Croton water, with artificial flavorings, mixed, bottled, labeled, and sealed on Manhattan Island, would be regarded as a supreme insult; yet it would be true. When the Master said, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness," he might well have been describing the "hooch de luxe," such as is served along the Great White Way in New York City and by bell-boys in many fashionable hotels in New York, Chicago, Washington, and other cities.

Before me as I write are nearly a hundred labels of various brands of spirits, wines, and cordials, from which I select at random the following titles: "King George IV Scotch Whisky. The Distillers Company, Ltd., Edinburgh;" "White Label. Finest Scotch Whisky of Great Age. John Dewar & Sons, Ltd., Perth,

Scotland;" "White Horse Cellar. From the original Recipe, 1746;" "Old Highland Whisky. John Walker & Sons, Ltd.," in flaming red and gold, with small label reading, "Johnnie Walker, Red Label."

Here is "Gordon & Co.'s Dry Gin, London," in familiar square bottle, with yellow label and boar's head trade-mark, and juniper boughs and berries pictured on the margin.

A brown-stone bottle carries a label inscribed in German text: "Schlichte von H. W. Schlichte, Steinhagen in Westfalen Grundungsjahr, 1766," with facsimile of numerous gold medals and marginal statement reading: "Höchster Preis, Weltausstellung, Chicago, 1893, and Weltausstellung Brussels 1910, Gold Medaille." An additional label certifies to the drinker that the contents are "Original Schlichte 1766."

Purporting to contain original Holland gin is another stone bottle with the words "Halstkamp & Zoon & Molyn" stamped in the clay before baking, bearing a red label with picture of a bibulous Dutchman holding aloft a glass of gin. For the information of American tipplers a separate label gives the following warning printed in English: "When opening this bottle please examine whether our stamped capsule and cork with our brand are intact, and have not been tampered with, Sept. 1908."

From France we have Moët and Chan-

## New Wine in New Bottles

**FROM the United States Attorney, Southern District of New York:**

I am convinced that there is a great deal of counterfeiting of liquor labels going on. Agents have brought in from time to time large batches of such spurious labels, together with counterfeit Government stamps and so forth.

There is no question from evidence which comes to me daily that the great bulk of the liquor being sold in New York is made from redistilled denatured alcohol. Some of the prohibition people put the percentage of all liquors so made as high as seventy-five or ninety per cent.

I believe that the publication of this article will help to place clearly before the public

the dangerous character of most of the bootleg liquor now on sale.

WILLIAM HAYWARD.

**FROM the State Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of New York:**

This article accurately represents the situation in regard to bootleg liquor. During my service in Massachusetts I personally examined several large packing-cases filled with counterfeit liquor labels. At the United States Appraiser's Office in Boston I saw a very large assortment of liquors that, judging from the labels, bottles, and revenue stamps, seemed to be genuine. Nearly every bottle, I was informed, contained synthetic liquor.

ARTHUR J. DAVIS.