

“... BY SOME A GREYLING ...”

By GARRETT EVANS

“... But first, I will tell you there is a Fish, called by some an Umber, and by some a Greyling, a choice fish esteemed by many ...” (Walton)

DERBYSHIRE has some of England's finest streams, both the Wye and the Dove are world famous. The Wye has its unique and wild-bred rainbow trout. The Dove is possibly more beautiful. They both are magnificent flyfishing waters. As I prefer small, fast-moving streams, two ounce cane rods, the lightest silk lines, the lightest possible leaders, and generally miniaturising everything, the upper parts and headwaters of rivers interest me most. Both these waters supply fine fishing of this type. Another excellent little river in this area is the Manifold. All three are quite close together, all three provide beautiful settings, and in addition to trout all three contain grayling.

The setting is always an important factor in flyfishing, and the Dove-Wye-Manifold area generally forms a very pretty setting indeed. Around the village of Longnor, which has the upper Dove on one side and the upper Manifold on the other, the countryside is marvellous and the fishing for both grayling and trout as good as one could want. Longnor's inn, “The Crewe and Harpur”, owns some miles of the Manifold and welcomes flyfishermen from all over the country. It is unusual in that it remains quiet, reasonable, and completely unspoilt. In the area one still hears of Sir Harpur Crewe and such people as Lady Gaunt and Colonel Worthington of the early times. The Manifold Valley in the Peak District is unsurpassed for beauty. Because the river here is small the fish rarely exceed the pound mark, but there are large numbers between half and three-quarters of a pound. The grayling most frequently caught are just over a half pound in weight. These are the shoal fish so exciting to stalk as they feed together

in pools and long still stretches along the stream. The larger fish, as with grayling everywhere, are found in twos and threes; the largest are solitary.

The country is practically moorland and such land has a timeless quality to it. There are, too, a great many duck, hare and snipe along the banks and in the rich pastureland of the Manifold Valley. The contrast between winter and summer is dramatic, and though there is a certain barrenness in winter it in no way detracts from the country's great beauty.

Though I prefer the autumn for grayling, the winter has a great deal to offer too, not only in fishing but in scenery. Small pictures and impressions seem to remain most clear: the heavy ice along the stream's edge, wrens and small birds quietly moving along the hedges and lichen-covered stone walls. One evening in particular remains with me: then I stood by a riverside farm watching the cows returning home to be milked. It was nearly dark with a fine sunset and heavy frost; the animals moved past against the sky. Sheep were lying down in the white fields and snipe were calling high above with that sound of tearing silk. It is precisely this sort of thing that makes field sports distinctive from all others. Not only does this appeal to the aesthetic senses but to instincts and emotions with us since the beginning.

Autumn, too, has its attractions. A ripeness and fullness seem to bring out the discerning angler as well as the wise old grayling and trout. The autumn has a mellowness and richness that make one particularly conscious of time there by the running water. Along the stream at that time the pools and trees take on an almost oriental appearance. Then the mind, reflecting on time, easily dwells on other streams as well. But fishing in late autumn and winter is not an activity for the dilettante or the faint-hearted. Along the streams of winter one finds only the most hardened and inveterate.

It was in the autumn that I first put a grayling into the creel. I got him on a light olive in the top of a deep pool and the fish gave the impression of being a good, though foul-hooked trout. It was during that season that I learned the joy of stalking groups of these fish feeding in long stillish stretches of stream between fast water. Frequently in such places they rise gently, only just dimpling the surface. To take two or three fish out of such a formation is tremendous fun.

The grayling is one of the most attractive of stream fish. Its bluish iridescence must be seen immediately after it is taken from the water because its colourful beauty is so fleeting.

From the many grayling adherents I have learned a great deal, for they are generally the most experienced and consequently almost always the most open-minded. There is among these people an old water bailiff of the Manifold, a John Bonsall, now living by his stream in retirement. What a good film an hour of his reminiscences would make. The old man is one of those white-moustached, pink-faced individuals who bring to mind the beautiful years, the years at the beginning of the century. He seems steeped in lore and willingly demonstrates this, not only in conversation but on the river just outside his windows. Preferring a clear, crisp morning after a night's frost, he casts his fly with great skill and accuracy, applying all the accumulated craft of his 84 years. It is from such a person that one learns not only useful knowledge but the best traditions of the stream. What a fine fate to end up living so close to what one prefers to all else. The old grayling fisherman in slippers sits in his warm house by the River Manifold. Outside his windows in the evening there are black branches against a red sky. There is the loud ticking of a large clock and the soothing noise of the running stream. For him the fields will always be green and the shining streams go on forever.