

SOME CAPE TROUT STREAMS

PART II

By ERNEST GLANVILLE

The hamper has been well packed, the rods are in their covers, the landing net and waders are ready, and we have just fallen asleep when an inhumanly cheery voice calls to work. We struggle into the great awkward waders, get into a soft shirt, slip on a coat with many pockets to take pipe, tobacco, matches, scissors, fly book, and a handful of muscatels, and step out into the uncanny stillness of the hour before dawn when the world is still. A small coloured boy who has been patiently waiting comes up with humped shoulders, takes the hamper, and off we go down the railway line for half a mile, then scramble under or over a barbed-wire fence, cross the Hex on a pole, strike a path through ploughed land come to flush of dark pink which matures into row of peach trees in full bloom, and presently pass through a plantation of blue gums. The boy sets down the hamper and remarks that we are "by die refer". True, there is the melody of swiftly running water, but there is a faint mist over the water, which looks uncommonly wet and cold. The excitement is on us. We put our rods up in hot haste,

tie on the cast, select the fly that is to have the honour of the first cast, and, telling the boy to boil the water and grill the chops, we creep down to the noisy stream. It is about thirty feet wide and looks shallow—so shallow that the rounded stones, in size like footballs, appear to be a few inches under the surface. Down goes a foot, feeling for the bottom, and the water creeps above the knee; down goes the other foot and the current foams against and between one's legs. We have arrived. Manning, best of comrades, goes up, and I move warily over the slippery boulders to where a feathery bush nods its branches over a foaming run. Fish don't feed before sun-up, and for an anxious quarter of an hour there is nothing to show that there are any fish in the water.

Then a familiar sound breaks the brooding stillness, the harsh call of the grey pheasant, telling his hens that he has called the sun up and they may begin feeding. On the towering heights across the valley there is a flare like fire, and a broad patch of snow gleams with such brilliancy that it startles every time the eyes wander that way. A quail whistles from a green patch of oats, and a pair of doves sweep out from the gums. The life is stirring, and there comes like a flash down the rod a message from a fish. The reel spins a joyful sound, and the fish flings himself out, rushes hither and thither, and as he comes in to the strain, protesting all the way, there is an anxious effort to get at the wretched landing net, which has crept round to my back. At last I have it, shift the rod to the left hand and drop the net under the water. The rush of the current nearly sweeps it away, and I gingerly back into quieter regions. He comes into the net and is matching his gleaming length against the sand, with the bar of pink like the peach blossom. When I catch one fish there is a powerful impulse to go in and try for another immediately. The fish is bagged, the fly is soon amid the glassy dimples where the fish lie, and the slender tip of the rod bends to another fish. I suffer from the pride that goes before a fall. The fish comes in after the first straight rush for liberty, and I shift the rod to the left hand and fumble with the net. The pressure is relaxed, and that fish makes a swift dart for liberty and the line has a sickening slackness! The world has changed, the water strikes cold through the rubbers, and I go heavily through the laughing current. The boy is turning the chops over with a sharp stick as they sizzle on a thin layer of apparently lifeless coals. The kettle is steaming, and I make the coffee, then go off to call my unconquerable comrade. I see him in the distance with rod bending to a heavy fish, and he nods his head; but even in the nodding the fish breaks his light hold! I feel as if I were intruding on a private grief, and I am hesitating whether to introduce the suggestion of chops when I hear the reel shrilling its message, and peeping round a bush find him busy with another! He has evidently come upon a family party, and I have the pleasure of seeing a gallant two-pounder come to the net after a fine fight. This makes his second bagged. We sit down to breakfast with magnificent appetites, to which the contents of the hamper play up grandly. Out come the pipes, on go the bags, the three fish go into a damp cloth to keep them shapely, and we flop into the water again.

There are other anglers afoot, and as they go up we go down. The sun applies his rays to paint my neck a deep red, horse flies work their lancets, and the right wrist begins to complain of the unaccustomed exercise. There comes a time to the angler who has been whipping the stream without the least sign of a fish, when he thinks he will never catch another fish, that he couldn't catch one if there were any to catch, and that as all the fish that were ever in the water have all departed he might as well stop. He doesn't stop, but his attention wanders, and at that precise moment a fish rises at his fly. Then he is once more full of energy, his jaded eyes brighten, his limp frame straightens, and he waits upon his cast with breathless anxiety. That spell of the dumps comes to me as I plod down stream, and the spell is broken by a tug. I miss the fish, but land the next shortly after, and lose a rainbow immediately by putting on too much strain, when all he wanted was a good run. These fish think. First they go off straight, then they leap high out of the water, then they roll, bore down to the

bottom and if that avails them nothing they come up to have a look at the angler and pause while they study the position. It is then they are to be watched and humoured. My fish was thinking when I put the strain on, and the hook came out like a drawn tooth, he offering resistance to bring off the trick. Manning found a regular Bacon of a fish who twice took out all his line and then rushed up to catch it slack. When this scheme failed he stopped as did my fish to think. Manning was thinking at the same time and waited patiently for the next move. Then the fish tried to break the line with a smashing blow of the tail, and as this effort missed he rolled into the net and now figures honourably as the father of those we already have. After my depressing experience with the fish who fought and thought I am restored to cheerfulness by taking two, including a nice brown trout, out of one run. Then we wade through a long strip of sand where Dr. Ford, the genial President of the Worcester Angling Club, has had good sport, to the banks of a deep hole beneath a krantz, where the boy is to meet us with the hamper. As a wind gets up, with a bit of east in it, we decide to camp; and as he boy has not come to the pool I scout for him and track him to his lair by the smell of chops. I think he is sorry I have found him.

In the afternoon I follow my partner up stream, and after going a mile beyond the camp I give him up as lost or as perhaps fallen victim to a cannibal rainbow. This is one of the smaller worries of angling. It is so easy to miss another rod on a winding river, and there must be a hard and fast rule about the meeting place. I go back to the camp wrapped in gloom and find him sound asleep. He says he has been waiting for me for months, and immediately takes to the water again like a duck. I have finished. I sit down to smoke, and presently there is a flash of wings and a falcon perches a few feet off with a mouse in his claws. He turns his head as a girl does when admiring a new hat, and then he sees me and is off to a more lonely spot where a gentleman can dine at his ease. A wild duck beats down stream and a pied kingfisher gives his loud laugh as he flashes above the water.

Come night we sleep well and are up at the same hour to fish till noon, when we cry enough and slip into the snow-cold water for a swim. At least I take to the water in sheer disgust at a small and greedy party of rainbow trout who are rising steadily at gnats. I have tried them with various flies, fished down to them, fished up to them, and across them, fished from behind a bush, fished with the sun ahead so that there was no shadow, but they have taken no notice of my offerings. When one of them deliberately tries to drown my already much dead fly of silk and feather by striking at it with his tail I fling off my clothes and join them in their frolic.

Of the rivers near Cape Town the Eerste is the soonest reached, and heavy fish have been taken out each year; but the water is overhung by branches, and the angler from its source down Jonker's Hoek, there are nice gravel runs also much overhung by has to use some cunning to get a line out. In the upper reaches, where the river flows oak branches. Here permission must be sought of Mr. Watermeyer, who is lord of the magnificent domain between the towering heights. The Berg over in the Drakenstein valley is a more open river, and it flows past the leafy orchards and the ordered vineyards of many a picturesque homestead. The Lourens in Hottentots' Holland hollow is another easily accessible stream, flowing through the property of Sir James Sievwright. Farther afield is the Palmiet on the highlands beyond Sir Lowry's Pass; the river Zonder Eend, reached from Caledon; and still farther off is the six-mile reach of the Breede at Michell's Pass, and the Dwars up in the beautiful village of Ceres. At the entrance of the famous Hex River Pass is the well-stocked Hex, and to the south-east is the Nuy.