

## C. ROSS-MUNRO

by Lawrie Kingma

It was during the fifties that I first met Ross. Those times seem very remote now, so long ago, so far away. So much has changed, so much lost, so much destroyed, yet the memories of those days are still strong in the minds of my generation who lived through them, especially those fortunate enough to have fished the Eerste River. For me, at least, they glow with after light.

Our first encounter was during autumnal days of the Eerste, though its bitter winter was hard upon it, although we did not know it. In those days the river produced its beautiful three and four pound rainbow trout season after season, and many came to the Club room to study the latest reports. Among them one day I saw Ross. One could hardly miss the short, broad-shouldered man in his uniform of sports jacket, shorts and long stockings, immaculate, but strange to my eyes. I discovered he was the new librarian, and I was to find him nearly always there on subsequent visits.

At first we did not take kindly to each other; we were two utterly different men. I judged him to be the most individual man that I had ever come across, and I have been told that I am somewhat strange myself. In addition, he came from the uncompromising North, while I had been bred in the more tolerant South. We could have clashed on many subjects, had I not had the good sense to hold my peace in the presence of my senior. However, my respect for him grew when I learned that he was a deeply cultured man, with a profound knowledge of literature, which was one of my major interests. Slowly I warmed to him as I got to know him, particularly when he remarked, after I had had some little success upon the river, that I was a good fisherman in the right place. But we never fished together, we had no contact save at the Club. I only got to understand him to some extent when he became editor of *Piscator*. But that was a great many years in the future.

As I have said, I had the good sense not to dispute when his observations did not please me, for I sensed that he would not change. He was Ross, shaped, the great personality set in its mould, with all the force of his nature. One could not be near him without being conscious of him, and of the great force in him. I thought of him as uncompromising as the sun coming up in the morning, outstandingly direct in his manner, utterly straightforward and honest, unalterable in his convictions, unless you convinced him, which was not easily done. He did not give praise easily, which is as it should be, one must earn it. At that time I was occasionally submitting articles to Harrison, but he never commented upon them. But I would have valued his opinion. His face would light up like a lamp when you pleased him, but would set stony and hard, the blue eyes flashing, when you displeased him. I think that the most apposite thing ever said about Ross was the title of W. Steenkamp's article: "He marched to the beat of his own drum". The only thing small about him was his stature.

After the destruction of the Eerste as a trout stream, I turned away from flyfishing for some years. Consequently, I did not have the same contact with Ross that I had before. The years passed, and my less frequent visits to the Club Room showed that a new generation of anglers had come into their own. They knew little of the Eerste, their hunting ground was the Smalblaar in Du Toits Kloof. The sixties and part of the Seventies was the great period for this beautiful and productive river, with its fine middle class rainbows. The effects of their very successful angling and development of new dry flies had a profound influence on the Society. Nevertheless, I knew that Ross's favourite river was still the upper Eerste, where small rainbows could still be caught.

Then everything changed. Particularly for Ross and myself. First, I found the Breede River and its largemouth and smallmouth bass, and, in time, was as fascinated by the River as I had been by the Eerste. It began to possess my mind and spirit as the Eerste had. It was like a new birth, and enabled me to start writing again for *Piscator*. This was to lead into far greater intimate contact between Ross and myself, for when Harrison entered into his last illness, Ross succeeded him as editor.

My "A Day on the River" prompted him to regard me as a possible source of "copy". But his was not the delicate way of Harrison, who, sometimes, gently reminded me that another article was perhaps overdue. There was very little delicate in Ross's nature. For the first article I wrote for him, he telephoned me, and asked for it outright. I was to write two of my best essays for him,

"Autumn on the Breede" and "The Eerste in Retrospect". The first he praised unreservedly, the second one was too "cultish", and he disagreed with the quotation. That disconcerted me somewhat, as I had poured all my feeling for the little river into it. Nevertheless it was a good time, and good contact continued.

If my willing co-operation helped him, I shall be pleased. I realise that I have been very fortunate in working with, in my minor way, two such men as A.C. Harrison and Ross, and have been much richer in my experience as a result. But I do not think that it is possible to use the full capacities of two such men at the time in one small society.

Ross took over the editorship of Piscator on the edge of his eighties, and held it for nine years. For him, it seemed as effortless as donning a new shirt, in actual fact it was a prodigious achievement. It was a very late flowering, but an unmistakable one, the full realisation of a potential. He put his own stamp on Piscator. I wish that I could have written more for him than I did. Did he realise that my writing was a result of a seed been planted in my mind, and ideas and thoughts being attracted to it like water vapour to a speck of dust in the air? I do not know.

But what I do know is at the last he was a happy man and that his daily attendance in the performance of his duties probably prolonged his life, even though he was often in pain. He knew he was needed, what more does any man need than that? He had a profound influence on the Society, and many of its members. I know he had on me. I shall always miss him, we shall not see his like again.

I bow my head in acknowledgment of the passing of a great spirit. May he safely make his way to the other side of the River, and find peace and contentment there.