

SHADOWS CALL OUR NAMES

By GARRETT EVANS

THE change of seasons always seems to make one reflect on time. Coming back down a valley with a heavy bag of birds and with the spaniels at heel was very like it had been in Devon. It was the last day of the season. There were cattle in the growing dark, a light rain and the smell of earth and crushed vegetation. I thought I'd lost the last francolin of the season, it had flown several hundred yards into the twilight with its landing gear down after I'd fired. "Teal", the little liver and white female, picked it up though, after a frantic ten-minute search. As we stood looking back up the valley, yellow and red bill were pitching into a small flight pond—a pond that had supplied many exciting moments this past season. One was alert for the sound of wings as the sunset faded and the stars began to appear. Again it was like flight pond shooting in England. It had been colder there on the closing day with a huge moon climbing from the horizon, ragged clouds moving quickly past, small parties of duck coming in regularly; and there were the loud, lonely calls of invisible snipe high overhead. But now I had enough duck.

Coming out of the woods to one of the best waters, the Dap Naude, one could see a mist of pollen being blown along in the spring winds near the tall pines on the opposite bank. We rowed to the top stream that feeds the lake and found fish rising well in the shallows there. Dabchicks, duck, heron and hadedas were moving through the grass and reeds. The fields upstream were filled with grasshoppers and we had several plump trout almost immediately on an Invicta. The smaller fish my little son lands. He insists on playing them on the reel in the traditional manner. There is no stocking in this area and the fish here are wild and full of fight. The water seemed to be dimpled almost everywhere at the evening rise and there were small insects, similar to a midge or greenfly, hatching. The hadedas were growing noisy calling up to the roost and two Piet-my-Vrous were going on as we started back in the growing shadows. We had a long line of mixed rainbows and browns lined up side by side in the stern of the small white boat. Coming in just at dark, we cleaned the fish by the water's edge.

It was like a deep summer evening in Devon when the banks are covered with Red Campion and fern. In the evening wood pigeons would be calling from the trees around an old ruined mill there, and later one moved downstream through the woods listening to the crash of sea trout and the song of the nightingales. Already by then, ten years ago, it was clear that time marched on relentlessly. The Pict-my-Vrou's call is not unlike the cuckoo heard so often then. How easily, by means of the imagination, one can drift into the shadows and return to the River Teign below Clifford Bridge in the woods, there among the dappled banks and the sound of water on stone.

Looking through a recent issue of the *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* I was delighted to read that the Upper Teign Fishing Association has managed to hold on to their 12 miles of fishing there. It was with great regret that I left the Exeter area and the Teign, Exe and Dart. Taking into account the slightly distorting quality of nostalgia, they really were nearly idyllic days of bimbly along the narrow lanes in a Morgan, the top down, a trout rod sticking out at the back. And now this will be the last season here on the Dap Naude for the family moves to Zululand. It's a pity to leave a good water and never really the same when returning just for a visit; one needs a month or two to get back into the rhythm of a place thoroughly. Returning through the forestry area in the small truck we saw several bushbuck—one I had practically to push out of the way as it walked off unconcerned into the dark woods.

Returning home we cleaned and put away the equipment and then did several of the smaller trout for dinner. Later in my rondavel with the spaniels and a stiff brandy I was able to enjoy the early hours of the night. Bats flitted past the open doorway and crickets and frogs were going full tilt; there was a light breeze, petals falling from the jacarandas. The clock was ticking loudly. At times like that evening one thinks of other places, other days, other companions. One could hardly forget the chance meeting with Jim Palmer in the Student Guild at Exeter or sitting out on the River Dart with him in the growing dark listening to anecdotes concerning Henry Williamson or a tigress on the Northwest frontier. This former soldier had been kind enough to introduce me to the Dart and later to the headwaters of the upper Teign where the two rivers rise to run off the moors and down to the sea. It was from Colonel Palmer that I learned to tie and cast flies and to love the moorland streams and the life in and around them.

One could hardly forget. Fishermen are often a type subject to nostalgia. One also learns patience and optimism from the sport. It certainly doesn't cause any grey hairs either. Allah truly doesn't seem to deduct from man's allotted time those hours spent in fishing.

I got up and put the dogs in their kennel on my way to the house. I laid out my trout rod so as to take it to the university the following morning. Lectures end early on a Monday. In fact they end early on several days during the week. On the River Exe there's a fishing priest named MacDonald who is one of the finest fly fishermen for miles around. He is also known for the fact that at the end of a service he's into his waders and out of the side door of the church whilst his congregation are just beginning to stand up. He's greatly admired by a number of people as a man who keeps his priorities right.

Going off to sleep I returned through shadowy time to the upper Exe where it ran off the moors and was joined by many streams. I was casting a fly to float on the surface in the shade of the streamside trees. There was a girl, Jane, who would sometimes meet me in the early evening to walk down along the river through the fields to the mill where she and her family lived. Time already was beginning to pass more quickly. There was an old man, with a collie, carrying a scythe who would frequently join us in the sound of the running moorland streams and of laughter.

(Of Henry Williamson we have, in our library, *A Clear Water Stream and Salar The Salmon*, both classics of their kind.—Ed.)