

IN SCOTLAND  
WITH A FISHING ROD

R. MACDONALD ROBERTSON

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BY

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*The characters in this book are all imaginary and have no relation whatever to anyone bearing the same name.*

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## NOTICE

It should be clearly understood that with the exception of tidal and navigable waters in which *brown* trout fishing alone is free to the public, authority must always be obtained by anglers before fishing Scottish lochs and rivers whether mentioned in this book or not.



## PREFACE

GREATER love hath no man than this, that he laid down the rod for his wife.

There is an old Highland saying that "it is a great performance to write a book at all, bad as it possibly may be," and I feel it is only right to excuse myself for invading the market with another angling volume; but my reason for deliberately adding to the number of such publications is that several of the chapters which follow concern some little-known Scottish fishing paradises, and I trust my somewhat original "tips" on fishing there generally may prove useful to "kindred spirits."

At last I am in a position to solace myself by giving to my readers some truthful reminiscences—truthful because Scotland is a country with unlimited charm "not only for my perhaps too partial recollection, but for every true sportsman, not to be able to bear criticism and truth." In fact, it has been my endeavour to give in these chapters an accurate and impartial account of my angling and other experiences and methods.

I have written with a great love for the Scottish Highlands and my sincere desire is to recommend them. It is my duty to do so, not only in gratitude and respect of many happy occasions and thrilling experiences there, but on account of repeated acts of courtesy and kindness which I have received from many inhabitants throughout this country of unparalleled charm and beauty.

Ever since I caught my first trout, as a small boy at the age of six on the River Nairn, I have been so keen on this recreation that I have not only cast my line and filled baskets all over the mainland of Scotland, but in some of her isles as well. In view of this, I think I may safely venture to give my readers the benefit of the result of my adventures which now cover a period of well over a quarter of a century.

I feel it only right, however, to point out that this book is not written in a highly technical or too serious strain. In fact, rather the reverse in places, inasmuch as it is one which anyone may pick up and read with not only interest, amusement and tonic effect, but at the same time derive some benefit from my varied fishing theories and experiences ; for the intention has not been to bore my reader with intricate fishing data, nor to confine this book entirely to the subject of angling.

I do not profess to be a thoroughly expert angler, but I can usually prove, to those who

## PREFACE

accompany me on my fishing expeditions, that I can catch fish.

My companions of the wild sports of the Highlands have become my friends. I made them so because the Highlander is a kind-hearted, natural gentleman, who, so long as you respect yourself, never forgets his respect for you, especially if you have landed a salmon or grassed a stag in his presence; when he will go out of his way to support and admire you for the rest of your days.

Modern equipment, comprising a great array of new-fashioned gear to whet one's appetite, would seem to weigh the dice very heavily against the creatures of the wild. Nevertheless, a spirit of true sportsmanship (not to mention that peculiarly indigenous to "Bonnie Scotland") preserves the balance of fair play that renders necessary a constant level which alone comes from something hardly won; and there is the larger aspect. The sportsman to-day recognizes his responsibilities, his trusteeship of the wild, that he must kill cleanly without waste or woe in merely wounding game, and that desirable and modern equipment takes its part.

Association of angling ideas produces funny results, as witness the story in which figured a highly respectable Scot's wife, who was "black-affronted" on catching sight of a sportsman, little

after the break of day, which happened to be the Sabbath, eagerly scanning the horizon with his new binoculars. "Losh me!" she exclaimed in dismayed astonishment, "there's a man drinkin' oot a twa bottles at ance!"

On one occasion a certain London stockbroker who had never handled a rod in his life, succeeded, while fishing a famous Ross-shire stream, in landing a salmon of about ten pounds, which his gillie had skilfully hooked prior to handing over the rod to him. The fisherman was so delighted at seeing his prize being lifted out of the pool on the end of the gaff skilfully manipulated by the gillie, that he wasted no time in producing from his hip-pocket a flask of large dimensions with which to celebrate his first catch. Now this gentleman, having spared no cost in equipping himself with the very latest and best of angling devices, produced from his basket a special patent fish-carrier in the form of a hook for clipping together the head and the tail of the salmon, and, hanging the fish over his arm, scrambled up the bank, followed by his gillie, who shouldered the remainder of his fishing gear. On reaching the top of the bank he poured out a large dram for himself and, after drinking it to the very dregs, was in the act of handing one to the gillie, when he stumbled over a loose boulder and the fish slipped from his grip and bounded down and down the steep bank

like a motor-car tyre, every second increasing in speed, until finally with a mighty splash he lost sight of it for ever in the rapids far below! Ross-shire gillies are pretty seasoned people, but this gillie admitted never in all his life did he hear such language coming from the lips of any gentleman as he flung the greater part of his fishing gear into the river after the fish in disgust!

On another occasion I actually witnessed, with amazement, a fishing tenant who, after hooking a grilse, flung his rod down on the bank, seized the line in his hands and hauled the fish up the shingle. How the tackle stood the strain I do not know, but by what seemed to me to be a miracle, he captured his prize.

A day's clean sport on one of the many good Highland streams is hard to beat if the water is in condition. Most of the rivers in the north-west of Scotland are extremely picturesque, flowing, as they do, through delightful moor and mountain scenery, providing frequently long stretches of swift running water and deep swirling pools, flanked on either side by heather, pine trees and rocky slopes. These rivers themselves, for their size, rank among the most prolific and best stocked trout streams in Scotland without requiring to be periodically replenished by brown trout or rainbow yearlings.

Fishing can be reckoned as no mean sport and

certainly comparable in every way, if not more exciting, than shooting, in which pastime the element of uncertainty is not present to the same degree. With the modern express rifle commonly used for stalking, with its devastating effect and shattering power, provided the stalker who is within easy reach of his beast is not blind but is possessed with a modicum of common sense and skill acquired from experience, killing becomes almost as simple a process as pressing a button.

When shooting, one can always see one's objective, and one is familiar with the average size of the bird or the beast, but in fishing there is really no limit to the proportions of those denizens of the deep. The unexpected dimensions of the fish one might have the good fortune to catch wins the day, for fish of uncertain age may turn the scales at any weight—hence the thrill of angling for them.

Tennis and golf are games frequently seriously taken, and the essential common to both is to keep one's eye on the ball. Likewise in angling the hard work involved can usually yield quite amazing results, but in fishing the essential is to keep your eye on your line. To fish successfully one must concentrate on the sport. Best fishers are most temperate in their habits—hence the mistake some people make in contrasting the

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angler with the bottle, as the fisherman must essentially have all his wits about him in order to bring his maximum skill into operation when a strike is necessary. In nearly all forms of sport accuracy produces results, and in fishing a strike made at the psychological moment wins the prize.

Angling is no easy sport—it is hard work. I learned through experience from an old Highland worthy (who, it may be mentioned incidentally, pulled his own teeth) that the first requisite in successful fishing is to pay attention to the game, and that unless one does so the result is an empty basket. The great secret is not to be discouraged but to stick to it and keep your line in the water, even when "facing fearful odds." By doing so the result is nearly always a score unless you are mentally defective or blind. Encouragement combined with perseverance is the keynote of perfection in all forms of sport. Therefore, master the situation and become a past master at the art. "Rome was not built in a day."

The thrills of fishing a Highland stream consist largely of tramping through the heather in the refreshing mountain breezes, clambering over rocks and other obstacles, through deep gorges with the glorious feeling of freedom which one never experiences in the busy streets of the city.

I have heard fishing described in a nutshell as

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"a good tonic which prevents worry, cultivates optimism and rewards patience."

After heavy rain, when the burn comes down in a rushing torrent sweeping everything before it, the angler is almost certain of enjoying at least two days' sport in Scotland with a fishing rod.

To those who would wander amid the desolate charm of the lesser known bens and glens, as well as those whose familiarity with which has earned world-wide recognition of their beauty, this book is tendered. As I recall to my memory each of my companions in the Highlands, how gladly would I pen something about them individually as their shades pass through my thoughts, taking me back to those wild regions endeared by varied recollections. Just draw your chair up to the blaze and join in fun and tales, not only of fish, but of folk and little scenes which afford a living picture and lend meaning and background to many a spot known and loved by a brother sportsman.

I take this opportunity of returning my sincere thanks to the editors of several papers and magazines for their courtesy and kindness in agreeing to allow me scope to express my sentiments regarding sport with the rod in Scotland. I have also to thank a number of my friends for their kindly support and co-operation in this work.



## PREFACE

“Scotland’s story is the story of a long battle for Scotland’s life.”

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In my opinion there are two classic lochs in Scotland—Loch Watten in the north and Loch Leven in the south.

R. MACDONALD ROBERTSON.

Straloch,  
Liberton,  
Edinburgh.