



October 2011

Driftless Days . . .

Occasionally an old book of interest crops up, and one is able to while away a few pleasant late winter evenings reading some strange fragment of the past. The book may have been of some import at the time of its publication, though that time may have long since passed. Perhaps a dormant interest flares up simply because the old thing blossoms once again in someone's haphazard rereading. To some extent, that is

what charming old books do.

A month or so ago my friend Mark was reading an old Robert Benchley collection, *Love Conquers All*, first published in book form in 1922. Benchley wrote numerous short essays for periodicals of his era such as *Life Magazine* and the *New York Tribune* and was known preeminently in the early part of the twentieth century as a satirical social commentator, a bit in the same vein as Dave Barry is at this juncture, though Benchley was a considerably more reserved writer than Barry. Such were, and are, the times. Popular humor writers often have the misfortune of carrying the albatross of time around their necks, though a few of them escape that dilemma by the magic of their writing.

Mark's reading tastes are rather eccentric to me, which is one reason he makes for a good friend and book club companion. He likes poetry, for example, but none written after 1900. My most serious interest in poetry, on the other hand (at least in terms of reading volume), begins at about 1900, so there you have it. Each of us normally has very little idea what the other is talking about, and that sometimes makes things interesting, especially over a bison burger at T-Bock's Sports Bar & Grill. At least that has been the case for the past sixteen or seventeen years.

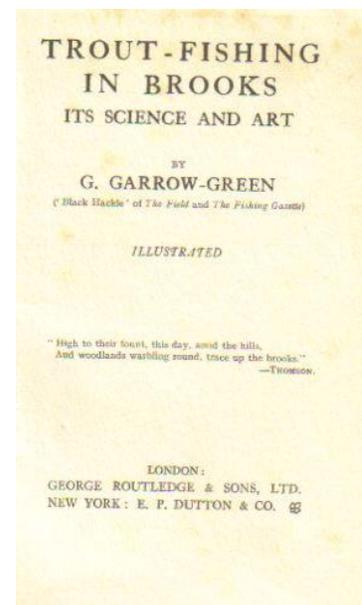
One of Benchley's essays in Mark's book is entitled "Trout Fishing". Robert Benchley was not a trout fisherman, which is probably why he so deftly lampoons the sport, at least from the perspective of a 1920 urbanite. Benchley is reviewing a book he claims to have read, *Trout Fishing In Brooks* by G. Garrow-Green, and that is the basis for all of his jokes and puns, "nymphing" of course being one of them. Concerning nymphs, Benchley says "And crash! away would go the trout before I could put my clothes back on". As I've mentioned, Benchley was not a fly fisherman.

Mark is a longtime fan of Robert Benchley and says that occasionally he's wondered whether Benchley made up some of the books he satirizes in his essays. Now and again Mark says he has not been able to find viable references to some of the books Benchley reviews, and he wondered about Garrow-Green's *Trout Fishing In Brooks*. I'd never heard of the book or the author before myself, so I decided to check it out one evening. G. Garrow-Green didn't make the cut in Nick Lyons' *The Gigantic Book Of Fishing Stories*, so I assumed that, if he indeed once existed, he must have been particularly obscure.

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As much as I hate to admit it, the internet is occasionally interesting. I was a late-comer to the computer era, though at this point I'm not sure I could function adequately without it. Even so, I found precious little information on the web concerning G. Garrow-Green. Perhaps a better sleuth could find more, or one who had (or made) more time to explore. *Trout Fishing In Brooks* appears to have been published in 1920 by Routledge in England, and the first US publication apparently was printed by Dunlop in that same year. In Garrow-Green's dedication of *Trout Fishing In Brooks*, he writes:

"To R.B. Marston, Esq., Editor of 'The Fishing Gazette,' this little work is dedicated in slight token of the author's appreciation of his invaluable assistance to anglers at home and abroad and of his unflinching courtesy, and as a small thank-offering for his kind encouragement in that my first literary effort, a short article upon Brook Trout Fishing, was published in 'The Fishing Gazette' twenty-six years ago".



That would place Garrow-Green's first published article in 'The Fishing Gazette' around 1894, assuming the 1920 book publishing date is correct. R.B. Marston's "Fishing Gazette" was a very popular outdoor periodical during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the earlier part of the twentieth, its famous US counterpoint being 'Forest and Stream'. Theodore Gordon published heavily in both periodicals, and much of that published work forms the basis of the book *The Notes and Letters of Theodore Gordon*.

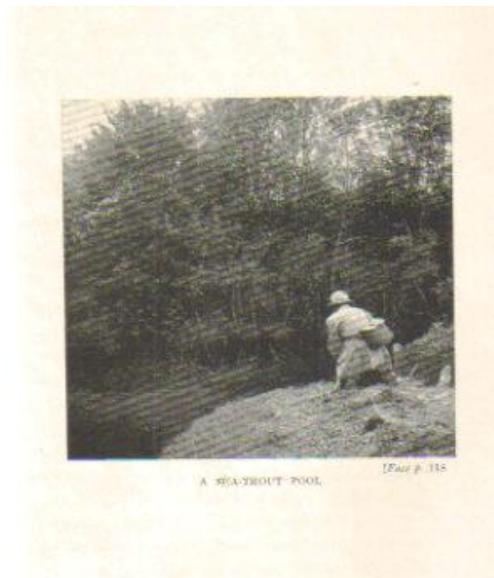
Interestingly enough, G. Garrow-Green was Irish and a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary, which in modern terminology would make him a police officer. He wrote at least one other book in 1905 concerning the Royal Irish Constabulary. In *Trout Fishing In Brooks*, he consistently refers to small stream and brook fishing, and there are allusions to these small waters as being tributaries to larger, and perhaps more famous, rivers. It is quietly apparent that G. Garrow-Green might have been a man of limited financial means and tended to fish smaller waters mainly because he could afford to, rather than larger waters where expensive fees might have

been required. He mentions the privilege of permission to do so on more than one occasion. It seems he might have been in the habit of gaining permission to fish smaller and more obscure brooks and streams by asking rural farmers and mill workers for it, which is in keeping with what most of us folks of average means generally experience. Thus he became an expert at small stream fishing, and wrote a book about it.

That is an admirable approach to trout fishing. It certainly would have been interesting to have met and fished with the man.

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When I looked for the book on the web, I chose a favorite used-book site. In the old days, I might have sent a postcard to a book finder and waited, perhaps forever, for a reply. I doubt I would ever have located it in a used book shop just by walking in the door, though I might have had success querying a collector and seller of fishing volumes.



When I checked the site and began examining book descriptions for *Trout Fishing In Brooks*, I found quite a variety of options, ranging from totally beat-up and water-stained copies to a single volume that still happened to have a dust-jacket. A dust-jacket on a one-hundred year old book is somewhat difficult and unusual to locate, though it's not impossible. Dust-jackets for old volumes tend to increase a book's value, and in this case *Trout Fishing In Brooks* could be had for around eighty dollars. The dust-jacket was said to be in poor condition but protected with a plastic wrapping. That was the 1920 Dunlop edition, however, and I was more interested in the original English

Routledge edition. I found one of those for sale in a small British book shop for around twenty dollars, including the shipping costs from England, so I decided to buy it, less the dust-jacket.

Sometimes book purchases from England take a long time to arrive, but this one came rather quickly, which was a pleasant surprise. My copy of *The Notes And Letters Of Theodore Gordon* came from England, too, but that one took almost three months to get to my doorstep in Iowa. In that case, I wondered whether the bookshop actually *had* the copy. Perhaps they had to locate and purchase one themselves before passing it along to me, though I'm not sure about that.

The book arrived in relatively good shape, definitely old and used but more than readable. The old "boards" are green and there is an embossed trout stamped on the front cover, a rather charming touch. To this day authors sometimes express relief that their most current book is finally "between the boards", or published at last.

Trout Fishing In Brooks looks and smells like it's been around for awhile. I wonder what English and Irish trout streams it has visited in its day.

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In 1920, G. Garrow-Green was anything but a dry fly purist. In a small book of one-hundred forty pages, he devotes nine pages only to dry fly fishing. Garrow-Green states that “Undoubtedly the more open waters of the moorland brooks offer better chances for indulging in this, the most interesting form of fishing the artificial fly, than do the bush-encumbered reaches of an ordinary English stream”. Either because of the size of the streams he fishes, his tackle or the weather, he seems to reserve dry fly fishing for optimum circumstances and otherwise fishes in whatever fashion best suits the moment. I know a lot of fishermen who do the same, and generally I consider them to be better all-round fishermen than I because of it. Aside from the short chapter on dry fly fishing, Garrow-Green writes knowledgeably about wet fly fishing as well. He spends a rather inordinate amount of time discussing bait fishing, or so it seems in this day and age. He appears to be very adept at it, particularly with various worms, though he also fishes in a variety of ways with minnows. He is very specific as to his preferences in worms. There is an interesting chapter on dapping, which technically involves fishing a live natural fly impaled upon the hook. Izaak Walton speaks of this too in the *Compleat Angler*.

As to fishing with minnows, most of those are carefully preserved with salt concoctions and are not fished live. It was difficult to preserve live minnows for any length of time in G. Garrow-Green's day.

Modern fishermen might be offended by lengthy discussions of bait fishing, but the concepts of conservation, fishing pressure and keeping the numbers of trout in a given stream up to acceptable levels were not issues in his day. And to be fair, Garrow-Green gives bait fishing the same amount of space, generally speaking, as he gives to fishing the artificial fly. It's just that he covers a great many bait fishing options, and that takes up some space.

The book is graced with a number of black and white photographs, mainly of the author, who is often crouched and in pursuit of trout on the smallest of streams. The photographer is never mentioned.

When Garrow-Green speaks about brook trout fishing, he is simply referring to trout caught in brooks. The photographs are nearly all of brown trout and not the “brook trout” char common to North America.

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And then there are a number of words throughout the text not common to fishermen on this side of the Atlantic.

A *spate* is a sudden downpour of rain, or perhaps even a flash-flood. *Dainties* are small flies and other hatching insects that trout feed upon. (Garrow-Green is not entomologically specific when talking about flies on the streams he fishes, which is to be expected from an early twentieth century fishing writer.) *Brandlings* are small red or yellowish worms used for fish bait, and Garrow-Green is very specific as to raising and caring for his favorite worms. *Sprats* are small, sardine-like European fish that apparently are as annoying to catch while trout fishing as our North American chub.

A *beck* is a very small stream, especially one with a rocky bottom. A *leat* is a trench or ditch that conveys water to a mill wheel, and Garrow-Green often finds trout in them that have migrated from bigger streams, fishing them, ostensibly, with permission from the mill owner. A *stickle* is shallow, turbulent water with rapid current that we would normally term a “riffle”. The terms *leat* and *stickle* are so obscure they are not found in Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary. A *hang* is a Scottish term for what we would call the “tail” of a pool.

And of course a *pannier* is the rather large fishing creel that all of Garrow-Green’s trout went into. His *pannier* had two perfectly situated loops through which the handle of his landing net fit, also rather large compared to those used nowadays, probably to reach further into the stream from a bank. The *pannier* and landing net fit over the fisherman’s back, with perhaps a cloth sack attached somewhere for other necessary items.



Fishing vests were invented by Lee Wulff somewhere near the middle of the twentieth century and were not available in Garrow-Green’s day.

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Inside of the book, I found an old newspaper article that had been cut out and saved. There is no date for the column, but the day is “Friday” and the month is “March”. There’s a photograph on the opposite side of the article showing two men in clothing common to perhaps the late 1930's or early 1940's, and there’s also part of a picture of a R.A.F. (Royal Air Force) propeller-driven bomber and troop carrier. The four flies featured in the short fishing article are the “March Brown”, the “Blue Upright”, “Greenwell’s Glory” and the “Cochybronddu”. The article suggests that these four flies are all that are necessary for a beginning fly fisher, though “later experience will possibly suggest additions” and “no one need be alarmed at the multitude of flies in shops”.

The book was a gift to its owner, and an inscription says that it was “presented to me by my colleague G.C. Horsfield, who first sent me in search of trout. May his pannier-strap always hang heavy!”

Below this inscription is printed “The Fisherman’s Prayer”:

*God grant that I may catch a fish
So large that even I
When speaking of it afterward
Shall have no need to lie.*

It goes without saying that both the inscription and “The Fisherman’s Prayer” are carefully printed with a fountain pen.

Be Vigilant!

*“Red” Canoe
Trout Unlimited
Iowa Driftless Chapter*

