Sport.

AN INTERRUPTED DAY'S FISHING.

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The long hot day is drawing to a close, and with the setting sun comes that time so looked forward to by those who live in the tropics. Our present home is a little Nile steamer, and now is the hour when the long chairs are usually placed in a semi-circle on the forward part of the deck. With the cool of the evening arrives that first whisky and soda, which seems so well earned, and with it the petty nibbles started by the mid-day heat are forgotten, and man is at peace with his fellows. This evening, however, the long chairs are deserted, and our little company is gathered together on the barge attached to the steamer. To-morrow morning we shall reach the fishing ground on Lake No, and each of us, banishing thoughts of possible disappointment, tries to foresee what luck the coming day may bring.

One can imagine, while we examine our rods and reels, and bring out with evident pride some favourite spoon or spinner, there is but one topic of conversation.

For nearly two months we have been travelling from Khartoum to Gondokoro, from Gondokoro to Dufile and the Fola rapids; on the way back we are attracted to Lake No by tales of fishing.

From the commencement of our journey we have fished assiduously whenever time gave us the chance; nevertheless, up to the present, our efforts have been attended with but little success. However, we are not disheartened; indeed, it would be difficult to dishearten us, for have we not already spent long hours in far-north Khartoum? A blazing tropical sun, a sweating Soudanese bearing crooked beams of wood for oars, a broad-beamed native boat adze-fashoned out of what look like stumps of trees—prehistoric, in keeping with this prehistoric land. Up and down we paddled where the White Nile meets the Blue, a stretch of some quarter of a mile. The native city of Omdurman to the north on the left, Khartoum behind us on the right. With rod and line and strong steel trace and, as a lure, a small silver cass, already have we toiled in the semi-muddied waters of the Blue Nile just at the junction of the two rivers. One has to be an enthusiast to stand the remorseless heat and burden of empty days. But here lies hope; here it is, in this penumbra of the waters, that the big fish—the silver cass or tiger of the river, and the aigle or cow of the river—have their hunting grounds. Recent trials and failures are forgotten, for to-morrow we reach the fishing Utopia of our dreams.
Morning on Lake No.—The sheet of water lies placid in the light of the rising sun. The rivers expand to form the lake and the edges of the latter are surrounded by mud stretching away in the distance as far as the eye can see. No—one cannot call it beautiful; just a flat sheet of water in a flat country without a tree to break the view. From the deck of our steamer there seems at first sight to be no motion on the surface of the water but, on looking a little more carefully, one can see in the distance a school of hippopotami at play. Little rings disturb the surface of the water and appear irregularly, or in groups. A few minute water spouts in some of the rings and then, but for eccentric ripplings, the water is still. A crop of rings show again at some distance from where the first appeared, and thus one can follow the track of the school at play. Around our steamer we can see little silver streaks darting hither and thither; this bodes well, for here at hand we have our bait. The most enthusiastic amongst us, with a former relic of home days—a trout fly stripped of its hackle on a gut cast and baited with native bread—are already busy over the side catching fish up to a quarter of a pound in weight. But this procedure is rather tedious, and the native Rêyss (Captain) of our steamer is soon out with his cast net. One throw brings in sufficient bait to last us for the day.

Everything is now in readiness, and the steamer’s little iron row-boat is alongside, so down we clamber with rod and tackle. Some one suggests we should bring a rifle, so a .45 is gently handed into the boat. A chance
crocodile basking on the bank may enliven matters should fishing be not fraught with success.

Away from the steamer and across the lake, our rods are ready; one a salmon trolling rod with silex reel, the other a short stout sea rod with plain reel. Both reels are mounted with 250 yards of stout salmon line, a steel trace, fine but strong, and an archer-spinner carrying a ½ lb. fish. We have not long to wait. An almighty tug and "Whirr!" runs a reel, down bends the rod, away goes something in a mad wild rush, and the line cuts through the water like a knife, 100 yards of line in one great effort. All at once the line falls slack and the reel is silent. A moment's anxiety and the question, "has he broken?". No, a few turns of the reel, some little resistance, and away he goes again; one wonders will he ever stop. Suddenly he turns and makes for the boat, the reel buzzing madly to keep pace with the slackening line. Steady a bit; the line goes taut, and with a surge through the water a great mass shakes itself on the surface. The luck, however, is not all with one rod; the second reel soon speaks. This time but thirty yards of line are taken, when right up in the air shoots a long shimmering streak. It is a cass, and one must mind him well, for a cass takes as much to the air as an aigel keeps to the water.

Another dash, and up comes the fish—a gleaming silvery bow, the line falls slack but alas! never to tighten again, for Mr. Cass is free once more in his native element. . . . Kismet.

When we come to examine our bait we find little indeed is left of the
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½ lb. fish. The shark-like teeth of the cusk has literally torn it to rags; the great hooks are bent and broken and the spinner's lead centre-bit is scored halfway through.

Soon we have three aigle in the boat when the oarsman calls out, "Satel Bey, Goriniti Gerib"—"Sir, hippopotami are near." Our attention is now temporarily diverted from the fishing as we watch a few rings breaking the surface of the water some quarter of a mile away, and we sit quietly engrossed by the movements of our neighbours.

But contentment consequent on the success of our fishing, and our lazy interest in the habits of the Nile fauna are soon to be disturbed, for we notice one ring detached from the remainder about 250 yards from our boat. This is altogether too near to be pleasant.

We quickly take stock of our situation, and find that we are now on the opposite side of the lake from the steamer and about 250 yards from the shore. Perhaps it would be wise to get in a little nearer. The necessary order is given to our oarsman, but hardly has the boat been turned when up comes a ring 200 yards from our stern. All thoughts of fishing are now abandoned and the rifle is passed to the stern, where anxious hands quickly load and hold it lightly ready, pointed in the direction of the approaching menace. Our unwelcome visitor must be some old bull, or cow with young, which has detached itself from the school and may be following us under the promptings of curiosity or anger, we wonder which. One fact is soon borne in upon us namely, that we are being followed.
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for, at 100 yards from the bank, the ring is 85 yards away and, at 50, but 50 yards behind us.

The time has now come to make up our minds about shooting. We are fully aware that a shot from a moving boat at a hippopotamus in the water, even at close range, is almost certain to have no killing effect, though it may have a stopping one; on the other hand a wounded hippo is a very dangerous antagonist. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that we are quite near the bank, and this spells safety for us. Soon we reach it, with our pursuer but twenty-five yards in our wake. Imagine our consternation when we find one point overlooked: our bank is not solid but substantial a mass of weeds perhaps six inches thick. We are still virtually on the water. Moreover, with the last disappearance of our enemy the chance of a shot has gone for ever, and powerless we await our fate, every moment expecting to be overtaken by what we know not what disaster. Curiously enough our anxiety in this crisis, instead of turning to thoughts of personal safety, is engrossed by the possible sad loss of the morning's catch. There is but one element left to us and that is luck. Our boat is now parallel with the bank, and perhaps some oar strokes at right angles to her original direction; we cannot claim this as premeditated but merely an accident, the result of custom. This saves us, for at this moment from behind our stern there is an upheaval in the water, the momentary vision of a great yellow back and a tearing of breaking weeds as our pursuer rips his way through the suds and under it, out of sight.

We now pull quickly round the margin of the lake, and though not actually followed, mentally we are still pursued till we reach the safety of our steamer. Fishing for the morning is now at an end. In the afternoon the steamer is moved over to a fishing ground that appears good, and though we do not go far, our bag at the end of the day totals five aigels, each from nineteen to forty-four pounds in weight.

As a single aigel may weigh as much as 300 pounds our catch may be considered small, but we are quite well satisfied. Unfortunately we have to proceed northward the following morning.

We vow, however, to return some other day. This seems hardly probable now, but, despite the hippos, I would risk my luck again tomorrow were I given the chance.