

## CLASSIC RODS AND ROD MAKERS

by *Martin J. Keane*

Winchester Press (in UK A. & C. Black)

The above volume, not yet in the Club Library, has appeared at a fortuitous time and can be reviewed in parallel with the Garrison and Carmichael volume, as they are closely related, with Garrison getting a substantial chapter. To start with, the title would be much more correct if it was "American Classic Rods and Rodmakers", as only the most passing mention of a few English makers occurs, usually in connection with some detail of fittings. If this seems perhaps a rather blunt criticism, your reviewer feels that it is to a large extent deserved, as the development of rods in England, and Scotland, was carried out quite independently. (It seems a pity that no large scale research has been published on this subject. Any volunteers?)

The book itself gives biographical details (and in many cases inter-linked family relationships) of over a dozen eminent and skilled makers, and of several lesser known names, some of the latter being almost unknown in this country. We all know of Leonard, Payne, Orvis, and possibly Winston, rods but who has heard of Devine, Gillum and Dickerson, among others? Their methods and particular specialities are all outlined, with special attention being given to the tempering and cutting of cane, and to the handles and fittings by which one can identify their work and date it in many cases. It is noteworthy that the majority of these rodmakers were substantially independent of the bigger tackle houses, apart from some agencies and marketing here and there, so a strong streak of independence of thought and action must have been in most of them. Also most seemed to have the skill and knowledge to construct, or have made for them, a cane cutter or "beveler" of some kind, and it is also interesting to note differing schools of thought, whether to mill or saw being a key one.

The author's apparent lack of knowledge of certain details of English workmanship comes out occasionally. In the chapter on

Walton Powell, a post war maker in California, it is very interesting to note that the author makes particular mention of the method of building up the hexagon with slivers of cane, so that in turning to fit the ferrule, the original hexagon is left intact. In other words the diameter of the inside of the ferrule is to be the circumscribed circle, rather than the inscribed one (or in engineering parlance, the across-corners, rather than the across-flats, dimension of the hexagon). This addition of slivers is detailed in the english literature prior to 1920, and certainly your reviewer has known of it for over 30 years, and in particular when refitting ferrules on several higher grade English cane rods just after the war, these rods being 20 or 30 years old then.

However, it must be said in fairness that the author has obviously researched his subject thoroughly, and uncovered many minutiae of detail that others would pass over, and in so doing does a considerable service to the dedicated collector, who, one feels, is a more numerous animal in the USA than anywhere else. The overall standard of detail is impressive, if a bit overpowering altogether, and this would tend to be better if it was taken in small doses. The preoccupation of American anglers with lightness and shortness of their rods, and use of fine lines, (AFTM 3 to 4 nowadays), and which influences their thinking and that of the custom rodmakers who supply their requirements, comes through clearly in the work of most of these men, with the exception of one or two of those who outfitted the Californian casting experts, Hedge and Tarantino for example.

To sum up, an interesting and valuable work, totally American in background, outlook, and presentation, offering to rod buffs a unique reference work.