

Letters to a Young Angler

No. 1—Choosing a Trout Fly Rod

By LAURIE HARDY

My dear fellow angler,

I am often asked by young fishermen, and indeed by others not so young, for advice as to the best method of choosing a fly rod for this or that style of fishing. In tendering this advice I am addressing myself solely to those who genuinely wish for some hints on the vexed question of choice amongst the many differing rods offered, and their styles, actions and uses, in order that the intending purchaser may be able to secure the highest possible value for his outlay or, in other words, the best rod for his purpose.

I trust my advice may be helpful to anyone who is in doubt as to the choice of that most important item of fishing gear—a new rod.

The first thing to bear in mind is the fact that there is no such thing, where rods are concerned, as a low-priced "bargain." Make up your mind then to secure the very best rod your means will allow.

There are, roughly, two basic factors to be considered—Length and Action, both of which will depend upon the type of water you intend to fish. If you fish a wide river where long casts are an advantage, you will require a rod which will handle the heavier line, for you cannot make a long cast, especially into a breeze, with a light one. For this reason your rod must be stiff enough, whatever its length, to deal with the right weight of line without distress. This also applies to lake fishing, especially from the bank. In a general way, length is a matter of personal preference. For small streams or brooks, the lightest possible rod of about 8 ft. in length will meet all requirements, and since you should fish a thinner, lighter line for the relatively short casts required, your rod should have a medium to easy action.

Again, if you favour the dry-fly, the action of your rod should be stiffish.

Should you require a rod for both dry- and wet-fly fishing on a river, such as many northern and west country streams, where your style of fishing should change to suit the prevailing conditions, or the

changing character of the water, an all-round rod having a medium action is the tool for you.

You will gather from the foregoing that, whatever length or action you decide upon, you must also use the correct line. Although all good rods have a point of balance at the correct place when the reel is in position, the balance of a complete outfit means the "balanced" manner in which the whole casting instrument, rod, reel, line, cast and fly behaves during the actual act of casting.

I learnt these important facts about the relationship between rod and line during my professional tournament casting days when competing, with expert performers from all parts of the world, in this country and on the Continent. Such points to which I have drawn your attention should form the basis upon which your choice of a rod is made.

If in the old days a "mule skinner" or "bull whacker" wanted a whip which could be cracked like a pistol shot above the ears of the leaders of a team or span of sixteen or more mules or oxen, he had to have a whip with a short stiff stock and a very long heavy lash, without which he could not make the distance. On the other hand, the driver of a single or pair of horses used a light whip with a stock something like an old-time fishing rod and a light lash of 8 to 10 ft. in length. Just as with fishing gear, his stock and lash



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were made to suit the distance the latter had to be propelled.

The present generation of expert anglers shows a marked preference for much lighter and shorter rods for all kinds of angling than did their forebears of forty or even thirty years ago. Surprisingly enough though, many of the famous rods made by us for, and in conjunction with, such celebrated anglers as Lord Grey, Halford, Hi Regan, Pennel, Marston, Pope, J. J. Hardy, etc., are still in good demand.

You never find poor tools in the hands of a skilled, experienced workman. He knows that they have to be forced to do the work, whereas fine tools only need guiding. A poor fishing rod handicaps you in just the same way. A good one helps you and develops a good style so that very soon you will find your casting becomes automatic, and your full attention can be concentrated where it should be, *i.e.*, on the spot where your fly must fall, and on the delicacy with which it alights upon the surface of the water.

If your choice should fall upon a rod of my firm's make (and I hope it does) we at Alnwick, our Branches or Agents, will find and supply you with "the rod of your dreams." Our purpose is to assist you in selecting a rod which will equal the satisfaction we shall feel in having made it for you.

Sincerely yours,
LAURIE HARDY.

