Fishing Experiences

Major F. P. Hopkins

FISHING EXPERIENCES

MY FIRST TROUT

FISHING EXPERIENCES

OF

HALF A CENTURY

WITH INSTRUCTIONS IN THE USE OF THE FAST REEL

BY

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ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR

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CHAPTER I

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

THE TROUT

I HAVE chosen the above as an appropriate heading for my first chapter, preferring to start anything I undertake on a sound and scriptural basis. The three cardinal virtues above mentioned are essential qualifications for all fishermen and for my readers (if any).

'I'll tell 'ee for why,' as they say in this sweet county of Devon.

For fishermen.—Faith: in the lure they use to capture their finny prey, for without it there will be no heart in their work.

Hope: that they may catch a fish at every cast.

Charity: to enable them to forgive the *beast* on the other side whom you find fast in the fish you have just risen.

For my readers.—Faith: to believe the wonderful *facts* related in this book.

Hope: that they may enjoy as many pleasant hours by loch and stream as the writer has done.

Charity: to forgive the literary blunders contained in the text.

Born at Cambridge, alas! many years ago, and surrounded with ditches and that most unsavoury of rivers, the Cam, it seems strange that I should have become so fond of fishing as a boy, with such miserable adjuncts of the sport; a pike 2 lbs. in weight, or a few dace or gudgeon, sending me home chuckling with ecstasy.

My love for the sport was kept alive by a

clergyman who was a great fisher, and, as a friend of my father's, frequently at our house. He used to regale my senses, ears, eyes, and gaping mouth with his wondrous performances in deceiving the few trout to be found in the county. In a tributary of the Cam, at a village called Shelford, there were a few of that beautiful species, most of them heavy fellows and terribly cute. To get one of these was the dream of my life. The question was how to set about it, and my friend the clergyman was so crippled by gout that he could not accompany me. However, with his usual kindness he furnished me with the necessary tackle and lessons in the art of baiting with a minnow, as he informed me it was useless to try for them with an artificial fly. So one lovely morning off I started on my five-mile walk to the village of Shelford, and Sir Charles Wale, the owner of the stream there, having kindly given me leave, I made my way with all haste to the mill-pool, which my friend the clergyman had told me was the home of several fine trout.

After trying for some time with a minnow, and losing one of my precious flights in a beast of a

jack, I was almost in despair of making the acquaintance of one of these fine trout. However, with the patience which is the characteristic of most fishermen, I persevered, and with the help of my last gudgeon (for a minnow they would not condescend to look at) I actually succeeded in hooking a fish which kept me dancing round that mill-pool for a quarter of an hour before I could see what kind of fish he was. My frantic yells for help eventually brought the miller out of his mill, armed with a prodigious landing-net, with which he seemed excessively handy; after a terrible battle and much fervent advice from the miller, I succeeded, with his help, in grassing a beautiful trout of upward of three pounds. Ah! no pen can describe that ecstatic moment. To give you some faint idea of my feelings on that occasion I placed in the floury palm of that miller a *sixpence*, the last of my allowance for the month, though it left me penniless for fourteen days.

The miller expectorated on it, I presume for luck, seemed rather disappointed, I thought, at the amount, and abruptly left me for his mill, muttering something about 'luck' and 'young beggar.'

I heard afterwards that he was a sad poacher, and had for some time fixed his alcoholic eye on that very trout.

It was not till entering the army, which I did as an Ensign in Her Majesty's 15th Regiment, that I saw any fishing worth recording. I was ordered to join at Brecon, South Wales, the very home of the trout and salmon, where, owing to kind friends and good introductions, I had as much water to fish as I could wish. As time went on, I acquired a certain amount of skill and experience, and, bragging I fear at mess about my performances during the day among the trout, a brother officer offered to bet me five pounds that I would not kill fourteen pounds weight of trout in twelve hours. I promptly booked the bet, only stipulating for the company of a poaching rascal, living in the town, who knew every inch of everybody's water, and could furnish the best flies and bait; but he was not to touch the rod himself.

The next day I sent for him to my quarters, where he duly appeared, prickly with flies and smelling of worms and whisky. I told him of the bet, and promised him a sovereign if I could win

it. He expressed his belief that with his valuable assistance I could easily do it, 'yes, indeed.' I then asked him when we should start, naming an early hour next morning, and whose water we should select; he laughed at the idea of an early start, and said four o'clock in the afternoon would be plenty early enough, selecting, unfortunately for my poor friend Mr. W——, his water for the scene of our operations.

We started the next day at the hour mentioned, though I thought it left us but little daylight to get so many fish. We arrived after our five miles drive out of Brecon, on what he considered the best part of the Usk. The water was in good order, though the weather was too bright and hot, being near the end of May, and I began to tremble for my fiver.

Until it got well on to the evening, and the white moth appeared, I did not do much. With that useful fly, however, I managed to secure two or three brace of nice trout, weighing perhaps in all six or seven pounds; it then began to get dark, and I presumed it was all up. 'Oh no,' says M——, 'now's the time for business;' at the same

time taking off the fly cast and putting on a shorter one of stout gut, with a small-sized salmon-hook attached to it. On the shank of the hook was fastened a pin, with the point up the line; he then produced from one of his numerous pockets a bag of worms, which I can assure you did not smell of violets; taking one out the size of a lob-worm, he broke off about two inches, threaded it on the hook, and hitched the head of the worm on the point of the pin, which I then saw was intended to keep the worm in its position. 'What the deuce am I to do with this?' said I. M—— replied, 'Step this way, sir;' and blundering over stones and roots, being now very dark, we arrived at what I knew to be a still, deep pool. He then directed me to cast it as far in as I could, and draw it gently across the surface of the water; it went in with a flop, which I should have thought would have scared half the fish out of the pool. I had not got it half way across the stream before I felt a slight tug, of which, in a whisper, I informed M——. 'Strike, sir!' he says; which I did, and to my excessive delight and bewilderment found myself fast in something heavy.

'Hold on,' said M——, as the fish rushed across the black space below, making my reel screech again; knowing, however, that the tackle was strong, I put a fearful strain upon him, which eventually brought a huge something splashing about at my feet. M—— with wonderful dexterity, from long practice I fear, placed a large landing net he had under the fish, and pulled out a splendid trout of nearly four pounds weight.

After a pipe and a dram of the 'cratur,' which M—— appeared to think an inestimable blessing, I suggested a move on. 'Bless you, sir,' says M——, 'there's plenty more in that pool,' and sure enough I got two more, both fine fish, but not quite so large as the first.

Before eleven P.M. I had more than fourteen pounds of fish, and seeing a light in the study of my friend Mr. W——, being now near his house, it struck me I would look him up, induced to do so, perhaps, by a wish to replenish my flask, which I found M—— had in the dark and excitement emptied.

I gently rung the bell; M——, who was evidently anxious not to be seen, retiring to the seclusion of

a laurel bush. With my friend's usual hospitality, he gave me the best, refilled my flask, and, bidding me 'good-night,' said he should like to see the fish, of which I had informed him I had '*a few*.' I had left my basket in the hall with all the smallest fish packed on the top. Alas! a beast of a terrier, sniffing around, had upset the basket, and of course inverted the contents; my four-pounder turning up at the top. 'Oh! Lord,' said W——, 'you *have* had sport; how the deuce did you get them?'

I regret to say that I then gave utterance to some fictitious statements about *dry flies*, *coachmen*, &c., which I fear did not quite satisfy my friend. Our fishing relations becoming somewhat strained, it was some time before I received another invitation to fish his water.

I whistled M—— out of his bush, got the trap at the little pub. in the village, and drove home in triumph. Sixteen pounds and a half of trout did I produce the next morning for the edification of my brother officer who had laid me the bet, and who did not appear to enjoy the lovely spectacle as much as I did. I got the fiver, most of which, after paying

M—— his pound, went in commemorating the event.

A few months after I received an invitation from a grand lady to pay her a visit at her beautiful place on the Wye. Packing up my things, not forgetting my diamond studs (fancy an ensign having such things), off I started on my drive of some fifteen miles to the castle. I arrived shortly before dinner, and was shown into a grand bedroom, with a noble four-poster, arm-chairs, and all sorts of luxuries.

'My stars!' thought I, 'if they treat an ensign like this, how would a colonel fare?' I was soon in my war-paint and entered the drawing-room—a noble room, supported with marble pillars, where I was pleased to find several of my kind friends from the neighbourhood of Brecon assembled, and amongst them Mr. W——, whose water I had so shamefully denuded. He appeared to have forgiven me, and only remarked that I was a *confoundedly* good fisherman!

After spending a charming evening, one of my rather numerous favourites, a Miss B——, being present, I retired to my sumptuous apartment,

and, after surveying my person and glittering bosom in a huge pier-glass with much satisfaction, turned in. The next morning a gentleman staying in the house, and myself, were to try for a salmon in the river below the castle—my first attempt to capture this grand fish. My rod, reel, line, flies, and hook were all brand new for so momentous an occasion, expense being no object to a man with 200*l.* a year!

My companion was evidently an old hand at it, and was soon fast in a nice fish, which I tried to gaff for him, but, with excitement and anxiety, missed and only pricked the fish. I regret to say the gentleman forgot himself. The keeper then snatched the gaff from me in a manner that seriously reduced his *tip*, and safely landed a fish of 12 lbs.

How I did work, heaving and casting with my heavy 18-foot rod, till the perspiration poured off me, but with no results; so, giving it up as a bad job, I watched my companion, and envied him the apparent ease with which he sent out some thirty yards of line as straight as a dart, with a rod (Castle Connell) which was smaller than mine.

With the exception of a small sewin, he had no more sport; so, winding up, we went back to the castle.

Here a sad change awaited me. I was proceeding up the grand staircase to my splendid apartment, when a gorgeous menial accosted me. 'This way, please, sir,' he said, leading me up some back stairs to a small room, which must have been somewhat near the roof, and its best recommendation the view it commanded from the window.

'Why this change?' I said, rather indignantly. 'Vice-Chancellor Sir L. S—— has arrived, sir,' was the reply.

Then did it strike me unpleasantly that I had been used as a species of warming-pan to air the bed and room for this great dignitary of the law. I had the honour of sitting near him at dinner that evening, and took care to inform him, in an audible voice, how my hostess had made use of my person. The old gentleman *did* laugh; my hostess tried to do so, but it was rather a feeble effort, and I fancy did not much like the *exposé*. The next day I was obliged to return to duty and Brecon, to prepare for

that dreaded event in the service, General's inspection. My pleasant quarters were soon, alas! to know me no more.

The route for Ceylon arrived, and off I was packed with a draft of 100 men for headquarters. We embarked at Gravesend in an old tub of a sailing vessel, and five-and-a-half months did it take us to get to our destination. On our passage, some ten degrees south of the line, we lost a poor fellow, one of the sailors, who fell from the yard arm, and fractured his skull on the deck. A huge shark had been hanging about the ship for days previously, and, though we had hooked him once, he broke away and got so knowing he would never show himself near enough to the surface for us to shoot him, although we had made numerous attempts to do so.

In that climate our poor sailor would not keep; so one morning, as we could see nothing of the shark, we hurriedly read the service over him, and propelled him, feet foremost, with a couple of shot to his feet, from the bulwarks. No sooner did the splash of the body reach our ears than out darted the brute from under the ship and cut the remains

in half. We vowed vengeance; but how to get hold of him was the question. At last the captain hit on a novel plan: he ordered a brick to be heated in the galley fire, and had it brought aft nearly red hot; it was then quickly wrapped in a piece of sailcloth, saturated with water, and a huge piece of condemned pork fastened on the top. A thin cord was rapidly attached to it, and it was thrown into the sea with a heavy splash over the stern.

No sooner did our friend hear the splash than out he came from his quarters underneath, carefully examined the lump, and, finding no nasty hook in it, and the smell of the hot pork being, I presume, inviting, he turned on his back, opened his horrid jaws, and swallowed the lot.

I had gone down to the saloon, and looked out at the stern ports, the better to see the fun. I saw him take the bait; the thin cord was let go supporting it, and I could just make him out in the clear water, some ten or twelve feet below the surface, digesting his meal. The next moment there was a flourish of his tail, as much as to say, 'There is something disagreeing with me,' and the next such a bound out of the water, within a few feet of my

head, that I nearly stove the back of it in against the top of the port in tucking in my tuppenny.

An acrobatic performance now took place that made the calm sea boil again: the shark dashing, plunging, gnashing his ugly jaws, and vomiting out all kinds of horrors, till at last, with one final bound, many feet in the air, he disappeared.

'Ah, ha!' said the captain, with a fearful chuckle, 'that blooming brick will burn right through his infernal belly.'

I sincerely hope it did. We never saw the brute again.

Dear reader,—I think one of my cardinal virtues, 'Faith,' will be useful here, though, upon honour, it is a fact.

We got to Ceylon at last, heartily sick of our long voyage, the last fortnight of which we were all dead cuts, and it was only on sighting Ceylon that we one and all agreed in the hideous toughness of the last relic of our poultry—a terrible old cock.

AN ALLIGATOR

CHAPTER II

CEYLON

The fishing in the island is very poor, though many of the streams, especially in the hills, are pictures of trout streams, but hold nothing but a coarse kind of barbel.

One day in a river near Kandy, I saw these fish rising at a berry which was falling from the bushes which lined the banks of the stream. I baited my

hook with them and soon had between thirty and forty of the brutes on the bank. Not fancying much their appearance I presented the lot to my company, with the result that out of seventy men I had only half a dozen on parade; the berry being poisonous, though it did not affect the fish, it seriously did my company.

I gave up that fishing.

For my many sins I was ordered to Trincomalee, the hottest station in the island. Shortly after my arrival, and a severe go of dysentery, which did not add to my affection for the place and nearly disposed of me altogether, it entered the heart of H.E. the Governor to appoint me as his A.D.C.; this appointment I naturally accepted with avidity, and, being recovered from my attack, prepared to proceed to Kandy, where H.E. was then residing. My way lay through the enormous forest which intervenes between it and Trincomalee, and as neither H.E. nor myself were in any hurry, I determined to have some sport on my way up.

A brother officer was easily persuaded to join me, and we started on our ponies, the coolies having gone on in front with a tent and our baggage, with

directions to await our arrival near a large tank in the jungle, some twenty miles from Trincomalee. These enormous tanks are curious relics of a country which must have been far more populous and prosperous than it was at the time I speak of.

Water in a climate like Ceylon, especially in the low-lying part of it, is absolutely essential for the cultivation of the soil. This fact must have been recognised by the ruling powers of bygone years, and, in consequence, whole valleys were blocked up at their narrowest end with enormous blocks of stone. A stream entering at the other end of the valley in the course of years produced prodigious lakes, or, as they were called in Ceylon, 'tanks,' the water of which was drawn off as required for the cultivation of rice. The enormous force applied to get these huge boulders in position shows that labour must have been very plentiful, and a scientific knowledge which the present native of Ceylon has certainly not, then existed. These tanks are now greatly reduced in size, owing to leakage at their dammed-up ends.

The one near which we were to encamp still showed a surface of water some three miles by one,

which was the home of wild fowl of every description, and visited morning and evening by what I may shortly describe as the contents of Noah's Ark.

We duly arrived at the spot towards evening, found our tent erected, and our little camp beds and mosquito curtains—the latter being rendered essential by the swarms of that curse of a tropical climate, the mosquito—ready for our reception. After an excellent dinner of curry and snipe, capitally cooked by our native servant, who was a first-rate *chef*, a smoke and a talk over our proceedings for the next day, tired with our ride in the heat, we turned in, with instructions to be called shortly before daylight.

We had just finished dressing the next morning, getting a cup of coffee and looking over our guns—our purpose being to shoot on the edges of the tank—and were on the point of starting when our attention was attracted by the wailing cry of some natives, running towards us from a neighbouring village. On inquiry we found that the head man of the village had lost a boy of some four or five years old, who had been carried off by a large alligator in a tank, which, I have no doubt, at one

period formed a portion of the larger one which we were about to visit. I immediately looked up some tackle which, knowing that the monsters abounded in these tanks, I had fortunately brought with me.

It consisted of several large hooks, to which were attached numerous pieces of whipcord. These are far better than a chain, which is commonly used, as the latter is too heavy for the bait to float, and the larger species of alligator will snap them like packthread; whereas, of the numerous strands of whipcord, though some may be cut by the sharp teeth, sufficient will be left to bear a very heavy strain.

To these strands of whipcord was attached a thin but strong rope, many yards in length.

Armed with this tackle and our guns, off we started in great haste for the scene of the poor little fellow's murder. On inquiry, we found that the child had been paddling at the edge of the tank, and that the monster had seized him while so doing. The poor father, who was in sad distress, speedily produced a piece of a goat as a bait, pointing out as nearly as possible where the brute had disappeared and was generally supposed to lie.

This bait we threw into the tank, in hopes that the monster would take it; but, after waiting patiently for some time and not getting a bite, at the fiendish suggestion of a knowing old native hunter, whom we had taken with us, we procured a puppy-dog, one of the numerous pariahs that infest every native village. We made the poor little brute fast to a piece of bark, which floated him, with the hook attached. We then dragged this attractive lure over the alligator's lair. The puppy soon tuned up, not liking his position, but had given vent to but few yelps, when a hideous swirl and the great brown nose of a large alligator broke the surface of the water, and, to our great delight, swallowed puppy-dog, bark, and hook.

Giving him a few moments to enjoy his meal and get it well down, we seized the rope on the muddy bank of the tank, and began to rush inland with it. I passed it over my shoulder, and took a turn round my wrist to have a surer hold, several coolies and the grieving father doing the same.

We had not gone above a few paces from the water when the rope received a jerk, which

laid us all flat on our backs in the slippery mud of the tank. I was myself nearest to the water, and for a moment imagined that the alligator had got me, and, dropping the rope in all haste, I made splendid time to sound ground. Whiz went the rope over the mud, under the frantic efforts of the brute to get free, and I sadly feared he would walk off with the lot; but my cute old hunter had taken the precaution to take a turn round a cocoanut tree. This stopped the alligator with a fearful jerk, which made the old cocoanut shake again and me tremble for the strength of the tackle.

We again seized the rope, and then began a pull-devil, pull-baker business, which made the perspiration stream off us. After a desperate battle of some half an hour's duration, the monster gave signs of fatigue, and we eventually hauled him up, with his great ugly head and short bandy fore legs, on the bank, and a hideous spectacle he was. Having made him fast in this position, we emptied into him our two fowling pieces loaded with ball; his scales, however, being singularly thick, our fusillade I hardly think did him any vital harm, till my companion, on his opening his

jaws, let him have the contents of his fusee clean down his throat. This dose evidently disagreed with him, and, half turning over on his side, he lay dormant on the bank.

My old hunter, armed with his axe for cutting wood, advanced, full of confidence and glee, to sever his head from his body, as I was anxious to procure the former as a trophy of our success. He made one vigorous cut at the back of his neck, and the alligator, revived by the indignity, whipped his tail round, across the old fellow's legs, and sent him spinning in the air like a catharine wheel.

Though greatly amused, I sadly feared my poor hunter would never walk again, but he made such a good use of his legs on regaining his equilibrium that all doubts upon that subject were speedily removed.

'Oh massa, massa!' he cried, 'that plenty bad alligator, he not deadee, plenty shoot!'

And 'plenty shoot' we did. After emptying several barrels into his head, we succeeded eventually in killing him. On opening the brute we found the remains of the boy in his stomach, of

course sadly mangled: the puppy-dog and his raft he had managed to eject.

He must have measured fifteen to twenty feet in length, and was the largest of the species that I had ever seen. The head, which I intended for a present to my chief, I was obliged to relinquish, the smell emanating from it being too dreadful. On my informing His Excellency of my inability to present it to him, he seemed greatly relieved.

Our sport on the large tank-shooting it is not the province of this book to describe; and beyond stating that our three days' bag comprised a singular assortment of creatures—viz. one elephant, two buffalo, a huge snake, and many couple of duck and snipe, I will not detain my reader.

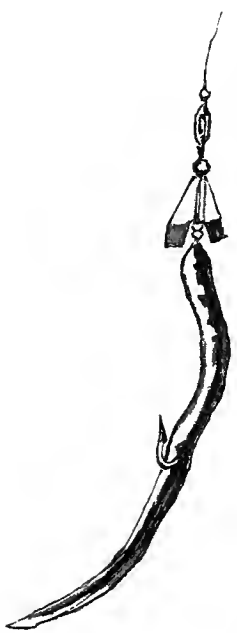
I spent three years on His Excellency's staff, and a high old time I had, with little to do and well paid for doing it. Owing to the serious illness of my father, I returned to England on leave, where I was to await the arrival of my regiment, ordered home for service in the Crimea. On their arrival at Cork I rejoined them, anxiously expecting our route for the scene of the war.

Peace was declared and our hopes of service at an end.

Shortly afterwards I was sent in charge of a detachment to Carlisle Fort—one of the two that commanded the entrance to the harbour at Queenstown.

CHAPTER III

POLLOCK FISHING



ARTIFICIAL SAND-EEL

Having settled down in my new quarters, I proceeded to look about and ascertain what fishing could be found in the neighbourhood. I soon found there was excellent pollock fishing in the harbour, close to the fort. A boat and man were soon procured; getting the necessary tackle, a brother officer and myself speedily determined to try our luck with them. The tackle for this kind of fishing should consist of a stout spinning rod, large reel, holding 100 yards of salmon line, 2 yards of strong

gut, with swivels attached, and for bait a sand-eel, of which plenty can be procured in the harbour, amongst the rocks and seaweed; this should be fixed on a hook, the size of a good-sized salmon hook, but longer in the shank, which is slightly curved, the object of this curve being to make the bait spin. Fastened to this hook is a small spinner of bright metal, which revolves clear of the bait and adds a great attraction to it.

Thread the eel on the hook, bringing it out about half-way down the fish; a few laps of waxed thread round the head will keep all in its place, and you will have a bait which no pollock can resist.

Should there be any difficulty in procuring sand-eels, an imitation one made of india-rubber will do very well.

With two of these placed one behind the other, the head of the second one being close to the tail of the first, and of different colours, one red, the other white or black, I have had splendid sport. This bait I call tickle-toby, and am, I believe, the proud inventor of it, having discovered its wondrous killing powers fishing for bass in the harbour at Appledore. At the time, however, of which

I am writing, neither tickle nor toby existed, and the sand-eel was the best bait.

In fishing for pollock you must sink the bait as near the bottom as possible, and move very slowly—a mile an hour is quite fast enough; this necessitates the use of a piece of lead of a quarter-pound weight, fixed to the end of your main line where it joins the gut. This weight is trying to the rod, so don't take your best out pollock fishing.

About four P.M. one lovely afternoon in May, we started from the Fort in our boat, Mike the boatman pulling us over to some rocks a few yards off, where he said, 'Shure the pollock will tormint your honours.' A couple of lovely sand-eels were soon over the side, and with rods in hand, one on each side of the boat, we awaited results.

I had put mine down for a second whilst I lit a pipe, when Mike shouted, 'Look out, your honour!' and there was my rod bent nearly double. I seized hold of it, and found that I was fast in something big.

Great Scott! how the beggar did dive and bore down to the bottom, and without the give and take of rod and reel no tackle could have stood those fearful plunges. After some ten minutes of

this game he came to the surface; and my companion, slipping our huge landing net under him, quickly laid in the bottom of the boat a fine pollock of 16 lbs. weight. This *was* a beginning, and no mistake. We were busy getting the hook out, when a yell from Mike informed us that another fish was fast on my brother officer's rod, which was shaking and bending in a most refreshing way.

After another battle of much the same period, a pollock of 12 lbs. was brought to book. 'Getting on,' said I, delighted with our luck. After landing several more of varying weights, and losing, of course, a very heavy one, we determined to make for the Fort, the evening closing in and mess time approaching.

There was one very large sand-eel left, and as my bait was rather the worse for wear I put it on for the chance of a big one on our way to the Fort, some half-mile distant.

We had not gone far, and I was chatting with my friend on the fun we had had, with my rod across my knees and the bait some yards astern, when I received a severe blow in the stomach

from the butt of my rod, which made me feel as if what remained of an excellent luncheon was being propelled into my hat.

Getting a firm hold of the rod, and keeping well clear of the reel handle, which was going like an express train, I shouted to Mike to pull the boat's head round and follow the fish, as I had got hold of either the sea serpent or a whale! the reel still screeching away, making that music so dear to all fishermen, but which on this occasion I found I could have too much of. 'Pull like the devil! He'll break me!' 'Pull right!' 'Pull left!' 'Easy! He's coming back a bit,' I said, reeling up for dear life. 'Give way. He's off again.' As to holding or getting any command of him, I couldn't. This little game went on for another ten minutes, till my arms ached to such an extent I asked my friend to take a turn at the rod whilst I took his place at the oar.

The same style of thing continued for another quarter of an hour, when I again relieved my companion of the rod.

We were all this time steadily proceeding out to sea, and nearly two miles from the Fort. It was

getting dark, and the thought of our good dinner at mess getting stone cold suggested the idea of getting rid of this monster.

My friend and Mike, being both as tired of pulling as I was of hauling and winding, I put such a strain on the line that the gut parted, and with a hearty '*d—— him*,' I subsided into the boat, thankful for the first time in my life to get rid of a fish.

I never got a sight of him, and to this day have no idea what he was; Mike opined it was a grampus, some of whom had been seen in the harbour. Their weight being from 250 to 300 lbs. would account for our difficulty in doing anything with him. If he is still going, the brute must be off New York.

Getting rather tired of pollock fishing, and the fish being poor eating, I determined to prospect the country near the Fort with a view to some trout fishing.

In one of my walks I came across a large pond in which fish, apparently trout, were rising freely. I entered the grounds, and, walking up an ill-kept drive by the side of the pond, soon

saw a house in front of me which had the appearance of having seen much better days. I boldly rang the bell, the handle of which hung out some six inches from the plate, and after some delay the door was opened by a dirty, slatternly old woman.

'Can I see the master?' said I.

'You can, your honour,' said she.

'Then please give him this card,' on which was my name, vocation, and where I was quartered.

She soon returned, saying, 'Shure the master will be *plased* to see you.'

I entered, and found an elderly gentleman smoking a short black clay pipe, with a huge tumbler of hot toddy on the table before him. He seemed fonder of whisky than soap and water, for he was dirty and shabbily dressed—in fact, a painful specimen of an old Irish gentleman on his last legs.

The room and furniture, though handsome in size and form, were all in keeping with his costume, speaking most eloquently of a scarcity of cash.

On telling him my errand, and apologising for the liberty I had taken in calling, I soon found he was *very* deaf, for he shook his head with a sad

smile, and, proceeding to the mantelpiece, unhitched from the wall a huge instrument, which I at first took, with some alarm, for the barrel of an old blunderbuss; this proved, greatly to my relief, to be an ear-trumpet, which he clapped to his ear, and, with a nod to me, rammed the huge bell into my face. With my mouth well inside, and forgetting the power of the tube to convey sound, I began to roar out at the top of my voice apologies for troubling him; but I had not proceeded further than a stentorious 'I must,' when, with a jerk of disgust, he pulled the trumpet from his ear, nearly sending my front teeth down my throat.

The accident set us both laughing, and after a while, upon my repeating my remarks in a more moderate tone, he nodded, requesting me to sit down. He then opened the door and shouted for Biddy to bring another tumbler and a lemon—these she speedily brought—when he proceeded to fill my glass with a large quantity of whisky, and, shoving a huge lead tobacco jar, capable of holding two or three pounds of tobacco, told me to make myself at home. I did so.

We discussed several topics of interest, the

principal one being the absence of rents. Whilst talking he was constantly adding to my supply of whisky, of which I had by this time taken more than I could conveniently carry. Thinking it time to go, I got up, with the aid of the table, to bid him 'good-bye,' and, in somewhat indistinct tones down the tube, alluded again to my request for permission to fish.

With a serious face he said, 'Ah, now, if ever I catch you fishing in my pond, and not coming here for a drop o' whisky, I'll run ye in for poaching.' I laughed and thanked him; managed to find the handle of the door, opened it, and landed with a crash into the umbrella-stand in the hall.

Biddy, hearing the noise, came to see what was up; helped me out of the *débris* of old sticks and umbrellas, and opened the front door. Managing to hit off the opening, I shot down the weed-covered steps on to the drive with unintentional velocity. I turned to give her an *au revoir* kind of a smile, when, losing my balance, I went head foremost into a rhododendron bush. Finding it easier to sit than to stand, I sat there for some time, gazing

in a lachrymose way at what I justly thought was the sad wreck of an old family home.

After a bit, pulling myself together, I proceeded to the Fort.

A few days later found me at the side of the pond, armed with my trout rod, some artificial flies, and a bag of worms. With these I began to fish, and soon succeeded in grassing three brace of very nice trout.

I was just leaving the banks, with the view of taking the fish to the house, and to insure not being run in for poaching, when I was accosted by one of the finest young women I had ever seen. She had dark brown hair, with blue eyes, so lovely a characteristic of Irish beauty, a superb figure, and stood fully five feet eleven or six feet in height. I never saw such a splendid creature, and I fondly wished for another twelve inches of stature, which would have made me six feet seven, just the size for her.

It has often struck me as strange that small men should so often marry tall women ; it reverses the order of things. A woman should look up to a man, not a man to a woman, and I consider it

conveys an idea of inferiority in the male, besides the physical difficulty of indulging in occult and sudden osculation, so excessively pleasant with such a female as I have described.

'Ah, now,' she said with a lovely brogue, 'will I be after carrying your basket up to the house for ye? Shure I'm going there,' said my beauty.

Beaming up at her from my miserable five feet seven, I thanked her and said I could not think of troubling her.

Fancy loading that superb creature with my wretched fish!

We went together up to the house, where we found the old gentleman on the steps waiting for us. To my surprise he kissed her, with the help of the doorstep, and told her to go inside and get something to eat.

On following him into the hall I saw Biddy, and asked her who the girl was. She said, 'Is it Kathleen, ye mane? Ah, shure she is a *chance* daughter of the ould squire's.' Naughty old squire!

Many a good evening's sport had I in the old

KATHLEEN

boy's pond, and I fear the chance daughter had as much to say to my frequent visits as the trout.

My wretched stature, however, protected me, for to make love to a woman whom I required a ladder to show any practical sign of affection for was out of the question.

The authorities did not long leave me in peace; the *route* came for Dublin; so I had to bid farewell to pond, pollock, old squire, and Kathleen.

The farewell to the squire was a very wet one; to Kathleen as affectionate as I could reach.

My third cardinal virtue, 'Charity,' I must draw the reader's attention to for this last chapter.

MIKE

CHAPTER IV

PIKE FISHING

Soon after arriving in Dublin I received a letter from Sir A. W——, who resided in a charming old place some twelve miles from Cork, asking me to stay with him, and to bring my spurs and pike rod for some hunting and fishing in the Inchegeela Lake, the source of the River Lee.

It being now November, the only fishing was that for pike—not bad fun when they run large

enough—and I knew the lake held some whackers. 'Delighted to accept your kind invitation,' was sent by next post; and, having obtained leave, off I started for Cork, and from there by a small line which ran to the lakes, and passed within a mile or two of Sir A——'s place. He promised to meet me with a conveyance at the small station nearest his house, where I duly arrived on a moist evening in November.

I rather expected to find a landau, pair of horses, or something of that style of thing, but found a shabby old outside car, with a well-shaped but ill-groomed little grey horse in the shafts, and a driver who would have disgraced a growler in appearance.

'Are you the gintleman for the Court, your honour?' he said, accosting me. On informing him I was, he quickly had my luggage on the car, and off we started at such a pace that I gripped the well of the car with all my might, to prevent being jerked off.

Some two miles saw us at the great iron gates at the entrance to the drive. These being slowly opened by an old woman, we entered,

and soon came in sight of a fine old house nearly covered with ivy, with a large sheet of water beneath it.

On entering the hall, the first thing that struck me was a peculiar smell, and a not particularly nice one, which pervaded the house. On asking the butler, who had opened the door, what it was, he informed me he supposed it was the fox he kept in his pantry!

The next moment my host appeared with that warm welcome so pleasant to the incoming guest. The beautiful old hall, covered with old oak, black with age, and ornamented with trophies of the chase, being but dimly lighted, I could hardly make out the appearance of my kind host. What I could see was that he was a tall, elderly man of about sixty years of age, shabbily dressed in a well-worn shooting suit, and the odd thing about him was that the hair, cut very short, was of a dark purple shade, which struck me as deuced queer. I found out afterwards this strange appearance was produced by the dye he used once a week, and my arrival happening on a dyeing day, the colour had not time to tone down.

As dinner time was close at hand, I had no time to lose; so, tumbling as quickly as I could into my war-paint, without much time to inspect my bedroom, which was large and rather funereal in aspect, but with a good turf fire, the smell of which I am very fond of, burning in the grate, I ran downstairs, and meeting a relative of mine—C. M——, who I was glad to find was staying in the house—he piloted me to the drawing-room, where I found several gentlemen assembled, and one lady, a niece of my host.

After being duly introduced to the guests and Miss W——, a terrific blast on a hunting horn took the place of a gong in summoning us to dinner. I had the honour of taking in the only lady, and we sat down in a grand old oak-panelled dining-room to a very good, but rather too plenteous, dinner. After dinner Miss W—— soon retired, and we left the dining-table for one in the shape of a horse-shoe, which was placed round the huge fireplace and turf fire. Along the centre of this narrow table ran two thin plated lines of rails. The decanters, being placed on a little carriage which ran on the rails, were pushed from one end

to the other for the use of those assembled. I can assure you they kept them moving, the claret especially having many stations to stop at.

The favourite tipple of old Ireland soon ousted the claret, and fearing similar results to those that occurred with my deaf friend, I managed to slip away during a heated discussion on badger hunting and joined Miss W—— in the drawing-room.

In common with most Irish young ladies, she was rather shy at starting, but hitting on a topic which interested her—drawing and sketching—we were soon deep in conversation on materials and subjects, when I was startled nearly out of my skin by the most awful roar of sound—proceeding, apparently, from an adjoining room—I had ever heard.

'Good Lord!' I exclaimed, 'what's that?'

Miss W—— calmly replied: 'Only Pat on the keys.'

Running into the next room, which proved to be the library, with a fine organ at one end, I found a disreputable old party, evidently very screwed, sitting on the keys, and with a bland smile attempting to play on the music-stool! a small

boy working the bellows behind like mad, and doing his best to keep up the f.f. of the piece.

Pat, whom it proved to be, being Dutch built in the stern, covered a good many keys, and unfortunately had selected the bass end, which included the key-note of the building, making the house vibrate again and again.

Having disposed of organist and boy, I returned, convulsed with laughter, to my fair companion, who was placidly knitting away as if nothing had happened. Miss W—— soon retired, and left me to don a smoking jacket and join the gentlemen in the smoking-room.

C. M—— and I soon got on fishing, he being a capital hand at it, and discussed the chance of sport with the pike in Inchegeela Lake. The size of bait for pike we differed on greatly, C. M—— advocating medium-sized trout, ¼ to ½ lb., whereas my theory was, and is, the bigger the bait the bigger the fish. He succumbed a little to my Fen experiences, and agreed to send to Cork for some slightly salted herrings, which I told him would beat his small trout into cocked hats.

After several capital stories from different

guests, the *queerest* of which emanated from a jovial old fellow, who proved to be the Roman Catholic priest of the parish, we all retired to bed, where, buried in a huge feather bed and down pillows of prodigious dimensions, I was soon fast asleep.

The next morning I was awoke by a heavy blow on the door—a knock would give you no idea of the sound.

'Come in,' I said, and in came my shabby old coachy of the evening before.

'The top of the morning to you, Captain,' he said, placing a huge can of cold water on the floor. 'Breakfast will be ready at nine, Captain, and the hounds meet at tin.'

So hunting was the sport to-day, not fishing, and being equally fond of it, I was soon out of bed and into breeches and boots and a black coat (I did not sport scarlet).

On entering the breakfast-room I found all the party assembled, including the worthy father, apparently none the worse for their copious libations of the night before. We had nearly finished a most extensive breakfast when somebody said, 'There's Mike with the hounds.' I ran to the

window, and to my surprise saw my old charioteer arrayed in black cap and red coat—well, red it was not, for, with the exception of one patch in the back, it was a dirty purple—cord breeches, and *mahogany* tops, evidently huntsman to the pack.

The pack consisted of some sixteen couple of hounds. I could not call them a level lot, for they were all sizes, with some fine dogs among them. Whilst waiting for the master and his guests (Sir A—— never advertising his meets) I saw evident signs of riot in the pack. They first amused themselves with a smart two minutes with an old tom cat, whom they speedily treed. They then hustled some rooks who were hopping about the grass, and ended by starting full cry after a luckless carpenter on his way to the house to carry out some repairs.

Heavens! how that carpenter did go! Down went his bag of tools, and off he set down the drive as hard as he could leg it, disappearing with a crash into the laurels that lined the side of it.

The boy, in stable jacket and gaiters, who acted as whipper-in, got round them in time to save the carpenter's skin, and brought them back to Mike,

who was steadily imbibing all he could get and ignoring the riot going on. I was naturally anxious to see the mount Sir A—— was to give me; so, going to the front door, I asked C. M—— if he knew what I was to ride. He pointed to a grey about 14.3, whom I recognised at once as the little horse who had brought me from the station the night before. Matters did not look very rosy, and were not improved by my seeing on my mount's back a saddle with no knee pads, which I abominate and never could ride in.

C. M—— came to the rescue.

'Don't like the saddle?' he said; 'take mine. I'm not going to ride to-day. Hunter's laid up.'

His was a charming Whippey, which I knew at a glance would be comfort itself.

Changing saddles, off we started for a spinney, a sure find for a fox, a mile from the Court. Our field did not exceed a dozen or fourteen—a treat after the crowds of horsemen who attended the meets of the Cambridgeshire and Fitzwilliam pack. We all drew up in a road near the spinney in question, when Sir A—— said to me:

'Captain, get over the gap and go to the far side of the wood; he's sure to break there.'

I looked about for the gap, but could see no signs of anything approaching one, nothing but a nasty-looking rough stone wall, four feet high, with a few stones knocked off the coping.

'Where is it, Sir A —— ?' I said.

'There!' he said, pointing to the wall, with a smile.

C. M——, who was close by, whispered me:

'Go at it, old fellow, if you break your neck.'

It struck me he would not have been quite so free with his advice if his own neck had been in question!

Looking round and seeing a sardonic grin on most of my companions' faces, I backed my little grey as far as the road and fence would allow and set him at it, hoping someone would be hung for my murder.

At it my gallant little nag went without a moment's hesitation; in another second there was a rattling of stones and I was over.

Sitting somewhat loose, for what I thought was a certain fall, I was thrown well on to my horse's

neck, showing a considerable amount of daylight between a certain portion of my person and the saddle.

I soon recovered my seat, and, delighted at finding myself safely over, I playfully slapped the portions I had exposed, and, amid a roar of laughter, galloped off to the spinney. The fox broke just where my host had said, and I got a splendid start.

How those hounds did go! It certainly would have required a good many sheets to cover them; but with a grand scent, over nearly all grass, nothing could live long in front of them. After twenty minutes' hammer and tongs, with but two slight checks in wet ground, I caught a glimpse of our fox crawling up, dead beat, a long grass field on the other side of a big bank. I was then leading old Mike, the huntsman, by a few yards; and, proud of my forward position, I put my horse at the lowest place in the bank I could see, where it apparently had been recently repaired. My little grey did not appear to like my selection, and tried to bear off to the left, where the bank was higher. Unfortunately I kept him to my line, and knowing,

poor little fellow, that the fresh earth would not bear his weight, he tried to fly the lot, and, catching his foreleg on the bank, turned a complete somersault. I *travelled*, and came with a fearful bang flat on my back on the field, knocking every particle of wind out of my body.

The hounds pulled down the fox a few yards in front of me, and Mike was cutting off his brush before I could recover my wind and pick myself up.

Both my nag and I were rather shaken by our fall, and, strongly suspecting it was my own ignorance that had caused it, I led him to the gate and joined Sir A——, whose rusty old hat I could see on the top of the hill. How the old gentleman got there I could not make out, he never rode a yard of the run; but his knowledge of the country and roads enabled him generally to be there or thereabouts at the finish.

'Ah, my dear Captain,' he said, 'never ride at a mended place in a bank; if you had let him take his own line, Bobby (the name of my plucky little mount) would have cleared it right enough.'

Confound the old boy! he seemed to have seen

every incident of the run. A few of our small field now coming up with Mike and the hounds, and the brush of our fox being kindly presented to me by Sir A——, he determined to make for home, the rain beginning to fall in thoroughly Irish fashion.

So, wet and stiff, but rejoicing, we jogged on our way to the Court. A hot bath and a good dinner soon set me to rights; but oh, the next morning, when Mike called me, I could hardly move, so stiff and sore was I, and our fishing trip to the lakes had to be postponed to the following day.

'Confound it!' I hear my reader say, 'what the deuce has all this to do with fishing?'

I apologise; but could not resist giving a short account of my first run with an Irish pack. Now for our trip to Inchegeela Lake.

I joined C. M—— at his place two miles from the Court, and drove on with him to the lakes, distant some eight miles.

It was a lovely morning, and mild as summer. On our arrival at the little inn, we found two of the gentlemen who had dined at the Court awaiting us. The boat and man were in readiness on

the lake near the inn, with some trout, and the herrings from Cork, for bait.

We all got in, and Malloney, the boatman, pulled us up the narrow part of the lake to more open water. The scenery was lovely, and weather perfect. On our way we saw several fine salmon jump, but, it being close time for those fish, we could only look and long.

C. M—— had brought some trimmers with him, which, after landing two of our party (one being, by-the-bye, our jovial father confessor) on one of the islands in the lake, we set, baiting four or five with small trout, and two with my big herrings from Cork. We then proceeded to get our rods ready, C. M—— baiting with trout, whilst I selected a herring nearly 1 lb. weight for my bait. This I towed after the boat from the stern, whilst C. M—— cast right and left from the bows. For some time we had no sport, but at last C. M—— had a run and landed a pike of 5 lbs.

'Trout for ever!' he said; 'hang your herrings! they are no good.'

'Wait a bit,' said I.

C. M—— soon had another, of about the same

weight, and I began to fear he was right, and that my large bait would fail me.

It was now nearly lunch time, so we pulled leisurely to the island where we had left our two friends, and agreed to meet for that meal. The boat had just grounded on the island, when I heard my reel give a screech, and, thinking the bait had caught in the bottom of the lake, I took up the rod, when, to my delight, the line sailed off towards the middle of the lake.

'In him,' I shouted, 'a whacker, by Jove!' He felt something like my old friend, the grampus, and was evidently a very heavy fish. Maloney soon had the boat off and followed the fish, whilst I got all the line in I could. After playing him for some time, he turned suddenly towards the boat, when a terrible thing happened.

C. M—— had lent me a reel with a handle which shut inwards for convenience in carrying. The spring, being weak, gave way, when I seized it to wind up the line, and I had nothing to wind with, and the fish getting slack line, the bait came away and he was gone.

'Cuss all patent handles,' say I.

On looking at my bait, I could see the marks of the teeth of the pike across the shoulder and near the tail, and, as the herring was fully ten inches long, you can imagine what a size that pike must have been.

'What price herrings now?' I said to C. M——.

On landing again on the island, we found the priest had got a fine pike of 11 lbs., casting from the shore.

Getting the lunch out, we set to work with a will. After a hearty meal and a drop of whisky and water, out pipes, and story-telling was the order of the day. The rev. father being singularly funny in his selection, I must record one of them:

'An elderly lady, on arrival at her house after a cold drive in a car, said to the driver:

'"Pat, would you like a glass of whisky?"

'"I would so, mam," said Pat. Upon which she brought a *liqueur* glass of the spirit, saying, "It's very good, and fifteen years old."

'"Ah, by Gor!" said Pat, "it's mighty good; but shure it's very *small* for its age, I'm thinking."'

It was now time to see what sport the trimmers we had set in the morning would give us, and all

getting into the boat, we pulled off to look for them.

Having dropped them to windward, they of course drifted across the lake before the slight breeze that blew.

We had not gone far from the island when C. M——, who was posted in the bows, said, 'I see one;' but nothing had taken the bait, the trimmer not having turned over; so, taking it in, we pulled away on our search.

'Here's one,' said C. M——. 'By Jove! it's red side up; a fish for a monkey!'

He hooked it towards him with the boat-hook, took hold of the cork, and was drawing in the line which had run off the trimmer, when he received a violent hint, in the shape of a severe tug, to drop that, which he wisely did, and we saw the cork spinning along under water like the mischief. Up it bobbed again some fifty yards off.

Got hold of it again, but had to drop it a second time. Off it went, Maloney pulling after it as fast as he could propel the rather heavy boat.

We soon sighted it again. C. M—— got hold of it, and managed to get in a few feet of line, when

he saw the dim outline of an enormous pike, which, on seeing the boat, darted off for a great clump of reeds close by. The cork soon showed us his whereabouts, and, getting hold of it again, C. M—— pulled him by degrees towards the boat. The landing net, large as it was, we could not get him into, but I fortunately had brought my gaff, so inserted it with a jerk into his great carcass, and with the help of both hands pulled into the boat a splendid fellow of twenty-seven pounds weight, in pink of condition. When in the boat, we found his stomach contained one of his own species of about two pounds weight, and many parr (the young of salmon) ; so the ravenous brute was far better out of than in the water.

On examining the trimmer I found to my delight that it was one I had marked as being baited with herring, which went far to proving my theory of 'big bait, big fish.'

We had still several more to pick up, and not much time to spare. The next trimmer was a blank. The next was on his belly, red side showing up.

This victim to our poaching method of killing

fish did not give C. M—— and his boat-hook a chance of getting near the trimmer, for on the boat getting within some five yards of it, off it sailed like lightning, and did not appear again for several minutes, when up it bobbed 100 yards off. These were not the usual tactics with pike, and rather puzzled us.

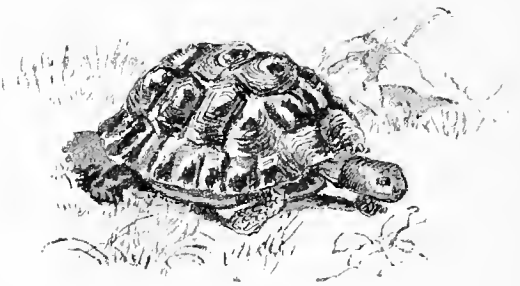
After it again as hard as we could pull, and, when within a few yards, off went the cork, but had not gone far when, with a bound in the air and heavy splash, appeared a large salmon, which had taken a parr, possibly one of his own offspring, with which C. M—— had baited one of the trimmers. Though out of season, we could not resist trying to have a nearer view of him.

At last, getting hold of the cork, C. M—— deftly fastened one of the rod lines on it, and, after an exciting battle, safely deposited in the landing net a salmon of fifteen pounds. He, or rather she, was very red and far advanced in pregnancy; so, having admired her as she lay in the bottom of the boat, and carefully removed the hook, we returned her to the lake, where I trust she did her duty in propagating her valuable species. We

succeeded in picking up all the trimmers but one, getting another pike of four pounds on the last. Telling Mahoney to try and recover it next day, we started for the inn, where, after duly drinking the health of our twenty-seven pounder, we got into the trap and drove to the Court, greatly pleased with our day's fun.

After a month's stay at my pleasant quarters at the Court, and with many a good run on Bobby, I was returning from my last hunt with Sir A——, when I told him what a delightful visit I had had, and apologising for the length of it. 'Ah, my dear boy,' he said, 'the last d——d fellow that came to stay with me stopped five years!'

With this queer characteristic of my kind host's nature, I will wind up this chapter.



A TURTLE

CHAPTER V

BARBEL AND RANGER FISHING

I must now transport my reader to Gibraltar. The south of Spain is a poor country for fish. The rivers, though lovely in form, are invariably thick in the colour of the water, and run almost dry during the heat of summer.

Should any of my readers be in the service and happen to be quartered in the old Rock, they will find some sport amongst the rangers in the sea and barbel in the rivers which run into the Mediterranean, between Gibraltar and Malaga.

I found the best spot for a ranger was on the

rocks under the wall of the fortress at Europa point, the south end of the Rock.

A large drain from the barracks emptied itself into the sea at this point, and I have no doubt its unsavoury contents attracted the fish.

The most killing way of fishing for a ranger entails some cruelty in the treatment of the bait, which is a fish the size of a small dace and easily procurable. I forget the name. Your equipment must consist of a strong spinning rod, the longer the better, the reel holding at least a hundred yards of stout line and six feet of twisted gut. This should be attached to a fair-sized triple hook. A long-handled gaff will also be necessary.

To bait: take the triple hook, and pass one of the hooks under the back fin of the bait; then with your finger or knife remove *one* of the poor little brute's eyes (this is the worst part of the business); then, standing on the rocks as near the water as possible, cast the bait into the broken water caused by the breaking waves. The small fish will then swim round and round on the surface, or near it, in a helpless kind of way, very attractive to any ranger in the neighbourhood,

which will come with a rush at the bait, like a salmon.

They will frequently, on feeling the hook, go straight out to sea, and as they weigh frequently fourteen or fifteen pounds, or even more, it is advisable to have plenty of line.

This, no doubt, is the most killing way of baiting for rangers, but, owing to its cruelty, I generally preferred using a float consisting of a large cork, and sinking the fish with a piece of lead, having hooked him on as above described, letting him swim about—mind, the bait must be alive.

It was not a pleasant spot to fish, or to get at, as it entailed the descent of a wobbling rope ladder, and a scramble over some huge slippery rocks.

Being close to my quarters, it was better than nothing, and, though the sport was very uncertain, I contrived on several occasions to get hold of some fine fellows.

I had not been long on the Rock before a brother-officer, whom I will call G——, and myself determined to see what the barbel fishing was like.

Mounting our nags early one morning in May, and having what we required in our saddle-bags,

we started over the neutral ground and along the Eastern beach on our way to a Venta (public-house) some twelve miles from the Rock. The house was situated near the river we were going to fish, and, though affording miserable accommodation, it was handy. We arrived about noon, and soon had our rods and tackle ready; we had brought for bait some paste, composed of flour and cheese, with a little cotton-wool worked up in it, to make it adhere better to the hook. Worms, no doubt, would have been a better bait, but they are at a heavy premium in the south of Spain during the summer months.

Almost any kind of rod will do, so that it is not too limp, forty or fifty yards of strong line, two or three strands of salmon gut, with a small salmon hook attached; a bottle cork for a float, and a few shot to sink the bait, is all that is necessary.

After a little refreshment we proceeded to the river, and, throwing in our baits, soon succeeded, between us, in getting a basketful of barbel; but the largest did not exceed two pounds.

Now I knew there were much larger fish in the river, and, having run out of paste, I returned to

the Venta in search of bait. All I could get were the entrails of a fowl which had been killed for our dinner. Knowing barbel were a coarse-feeding fish, I thought perhaps it might do. An old Spaniard, who seemed to know something about it, told me of a pool near, which never dried up, and held very large barbel; so there we proceeded, and with our unpleasant bait commenced to fish.

It was not long before my companion shouted out, 'I'm into one, a regular buster.' And sure enough it was; for, after a stiffish battle, I fished up in the landing net a huge brute of eight pounds.

Delighted with the prospect of some more of such customers, I ran back to my rod, and looked about for the cork which I had left peacefully floating on the surface of the water. Nowhere to be seen. I seized hold of the rod and found I was fast in something heavy; I struck to drive home the hook, and away went, whatever it was, slowly first up, and then down the stream. This tame performance continued for several minutes, when, getting tired of it, I put a heavy strain on the rod, to see what was at the other end, and in a few moments slowly lugged to the surface a huge fresh-

water turtle, who looked at me with a reproachful glance, as much as to say, 'Where are you pulling a fellow to?'

How the deuce to get him out? The landing net was far too small; so, pulling him along the surface of the water, I got him to a shelving bank where the cattle came to drink, and getting him as near the edge as I could, G —— got behind him and bodily carried him clear of the water.

No sooner on *terra firma* than in went his head under his shell, and with it the hook and six inches of gut. Anxious to secure the hook, of which we were short, we turned him head downwards, hammered on his shell, shook him; but nothing would induce him to look out.

Happy thought! Pulling out my knife, and directing my companion to stand ready with his and keep the gut tight, I gently inserted the blade in the end opposite his head, upon which indignity he poked out his tuppenny to see what was up. No sooner out than off, for with one stroke of his huge knife G—— beheaded him, and we recovered our tackle.

These turtle being no good for food, we left his

mutilated remains on the bank, and, as evening was closing in, we started for the Venta. With the help of eggs and the fowl, whose inside we found so useful as bait, and that best of sauces, hunger, we made a fair dinner.

After a pipe and a glass of grog, we retired to the other side of a large partition, which divided the room, to inspect the beds provided for us.

They were not inviting, but, seeming tolerably clean, we turned in, on two narrow and curiously hard beds, stuffed apparently with potatoes, which the stuffer, confound him, had neglected to boil.

In those young days I could sleep on anything, so was soon fast in the arms of Morpheus. I was awoke early the next morning by the crowing of an old cock whom I found perched on my toes. During the intervals of his infernal solo he appeared to be busy in picking up something off the counterpane of the bed. Getting hold of one of my boots, I speedily induced my friend, the cock, to move on. Feeling something tickling my head, I put up my hand and found, to my horror, that my hair and whiskers were full of maggots, and in the dim light

of the early morning discovered the bed was covered with them.

The fact was that a quantity of grain had been stored in the loft above our heads, and the little beasts had fallen through the interstices of the floor. Jumping out and shouting to G——, who was in much the same pickle, to come out of that, we both made tracks for the stream which ran near the Venta, where we got rid of the nasty things, and, shaking our flannel shirts, got dressed as quickly as we could.

Determining that the fishing would not run to it, after a hasty breakfast we mounted our steeds and rode off to the Rock.

I must now give a short account of a sad accident, which, though little connected with fishing, embittered with its painful memories many a day of my sojourn at Gibraltar.

B——, a brother officer of mine, and myself, determined to have a day's snipe shooting between the two rivers which run into the bay between the village of Campo and the town of Algeciras.

The night before starting, the officers of a French gun-boat were dining with us at mess, and

on my saying that I was going shooting in Spain the next day, one of them said, 'I hope you will have *beau temps*; I am rather doubtful of it.' On my asking his reason he said they had a theory in their navy, viz., that the weather, whether good or bad, would repeat itself after a certain interval of years (what that interval was, I am sorry to say I forget). If this theory was correct, the next day on that coast there would be a fearful storm of wind and rain.

I rather ridiculed the idea, but it proved too true. The next morning broke dull and grey without a breath of wind, but raining heavily. Neither B—— nor myself caring twopence about rain, we started in a boat to cross the bay, a distance of about two and a half miles.

We ascended the second river a short distance to a village on its bank, and, getting out, told our boatmen to await our return at the Venta. We had not been shooting long, with but little sport, when it began to blow as well as rain, and so bad did the weather become that we had to knock off and return to the village.

On interviewing our boatmen as to the surf on

the bar of the river, raised by the tempest which was now blowing, they said it would not be bad as the wind was off shore, and fair for the Rock. B——, however, who said he could not swim, did not like the idea of returning by water, and asked me to walk home with him along the beach, a distance of some eight or nine miles.

I gave in to his wishes, and started with him for the first river, the one nearest the Rock and not far from the village of Campo.

After a very rough and disagreeable walk we arrived at the river, and after some difficulty, from its flooded state, got across in a small boat, the usual ferry being unable to ply.

On the other side, to our delight, we found an outside car with two horses harnessed to it, tandem fashion, a postillion on the leading horse, a driver on the box.

They were waiting for two officers of another regiment quartered at Gibraltar, who had been shooting in the vicinity.

They soon appeared and kindly offered us a lift; this we gladly accepted, B—— and I mounting on the side facing the sea, V—— and H——,

the officers who had hired the car, on the other.

There being no roads in that benighted country, we proceeded along the sands close to the bay. B—— and I were discussing the big drink of hot grog we would get on reaching our quarters, and *blessing* all French theories of storms, when bump went the car into a stream that crossed the sands and fell into the bay close to Campo.

This stream in summer was hardly visible as it trickled over the sand, but with the heavy fall of rain was now swollen to a torrent some forty feet broad.

Looking round and seeing we were in for it, I shouted to the driver on the box to head a little down stream, and not straight across as he was endeavouring to do. Down went the leading horse with the boy, washed off his legs, and, the car beginning to tilt over with the pressure of the stream, B—— and I jumped off into the water, which was nearly up to our middle. B—— was only a few feet from the bank we had left. 'Give and take a bit,' I said to him, my fishing experiences in stemming a strong stream coming in use-

ful, for when I last saw him he was up to his waist, trying to stem the current direct. I remember seeing the driver get off his box, and V—— and H—— both jump off their side of the car.

Knowing the stream must be shallower on the other side, I made for the opposite bank, my difficulty being to avoid the horse in the shafts which was on his back frantically struggling to free himself. I just managed to clear him as he swept past me, but with so near a shave that one of his fore feet knocked off my cap.

Thankful for this escape, I struggled on across the stream, till I found to my delight I was out of the current, and had nothing to contend with but the surf which was breaking at the mouth. The first wave I jumped as high as I could to avoid, and it broke on my legs; but the next one bowled me over, and for the first time visions of being drowned in this wretched ditch came across my mind.

A Spaniard on the beach now waded in to my assistance, and together we got safe on shore. I looked about me expecting to see my companions laughing at me from the opposite bank; nothing

could I see but the driving-box of the car, sticking out of the water some fifty yards out in the bay, and the head of a white horse, our leader, swimming for his life.

Horrified and bewildered, hardly knowing what to think, I ran to the nearest boat pulled up on the beach, and, with the help of some Spaniards from the village, got it afloat, jumped in and pulled off to the floating car, hoping that some of my companions might be clinging to it.

There was nothing on the car.

We got hold of the swimming horse, made fast his head to the boat and towed him ashore, together with the car, and the drowned horse in the shafts.

Half frantic with grief and anxiety for the poor fellows so lately my pleasant companions, I rushed to the side of the stream, calling for a rope to tie round my waist, that I might wade in, with the hope that one of them might catch hold of me and both be dragged out.

My knowledge of Spanish being very limited, I could not make the villagers understand what I wanted, and, instead of helping me in any

way, they began to drag me away from the water.

Suddenly, a shout from the opposite bank announced some discovery, and, running to the bridge only a few yards off, where we ought to have crossed the stream, I speedily gained the other side and saw something rolling about in the surf. I rushed into the water, and, seizing the object, dragged poor B——'s body on to the sand.

He had only been about ten minutes in the water, so I had some hopes of restoring animation. With the help of some Spaniards we carried him to a hut near, where I did all I could to recover him; but with the miserable means at my disposal and the absence of any artificial heat, I had but little hope that my efforts would be successful. A Spaniard running into the hut said there was another body on the beach; so, leaving instructions with an intelligent Spaniard to continue my efforts to restore respiration in poor B——'s body, I made all haste to the beach, and there found the body of poor H——, thrown up in the same place. He had been in the water fully twenty-five minutes,

and any hope of restoration in his case could not be expected. I had his body brought to the hut and laid beside poor B——, and a lieutenant of Carabiniroes (or Spanish Coast Guard) having arrived, he placed one of his men on guard over the bodies. I waited another half-hour, in the hope that we might recover more of the poor fellows who were lost, three being still missing. I then started for the Rock on the grey horse which had been our leader, and which we had saved from a watery grave.

On arriving at the gates at the North Front, I found they had been kept open, the news of some terrible accident having by some mysterious way reached the Rock, the gates being always closed at sunset.

I proceeded with all despatch to the Convent, the residence of the Governor in the town, to make my report, and then hastened to my own house in the fear that some exaggerated account might have reached my wife's ears, as I was now a married man; happily, she had heard nothing of what had occurred. The next morning I started with an ambulance waggon to bring in the bodies

of my poor friends; which, after an inquest at St. Roque, a Spanish town near, we did.

The bodies of the driver and postillion were found on the rocks near Campo two days after, but nothing was seen of V——'s body.

Some three weeks after the accident, I was fishing in the bay with a friend of mine, when a dark mass of something surged up in the water close to the boat; the boatman got hold of it with the boat-hook, and, pulling it into the boat, we discovered to our horror it was the mutilated remains of a human being—a mere trunk—head, arms, and legs being almost entirely gone.

I thought I recognised the torn remains of the coat, and on examining one of the pockets found a handkerchief with poor V——'s name on it, which clearly proved that this was his body. We raised a subscription in the garrison, and erected a handsome cross over the grave where the three poor fellows were buried, which can now be seen in the cemetery on the North Front.

PAT

CHAPTER VI

BACK AGAIN

Having obtained my majority I was again quartered in Ireland, where I was sent in command of a wing of the regiment to Queenstown Harbour, my headquarters being Spike Island, from which I had a good view of my old residence, Carlisle Fort.

I had not been long there when a brother officer, Captain G——, and I, received an invitation to stay at my pleasant old quarters, the Court.

My dear old host, Sir A——, had, alas! joined the majority, and his nephew reigned in his stead.

The wording of the invitation told me I must expect a change of management; it ran thus: 'The pleasure of Major Hopkins' company from Monday to Thursday,'—no five years about this. However, it was very kind of the present baronet to think of us, so off G—— and I started with our salmon rods, which we were requested to bring, it being the height of the season for the spring fishing, about the end of April.

On arrival at the gates of the drive up to the Court, the first thing that struck me was that all the fine laurels which grew on each side had been cut down close to the ground, to remove (as I found out afterwards) the shelter they would afford for the numerous gentlemen who objected to landlords as a class, and took measures to remove them by shooting them.

This was a sad change for the worse, to begin with; the fine old house was unaltered, and the grounds about it in much better order than formerly.

But where, oh! where was the smell of the fox

in the hall? Where our kind old host with his genial face and purple head? Where old Mike with his weather-beaten face and shabby get-up? Where his pack of hounds? Where old Pat on the keys? All gone! and in their place a large establishment, with English footmen, and a grand lady presiding over it all. But I must do some fishing or shall be voted an impostor.

C. M——, I was happy to find, was staying with his wife at the Court, and the next morning, our host being engaged in business matters, C. M——, G——, and I started off on a car for the river, which ran about a mile and a half from the house. The Court water was a capital stretch of the river, some two miles in extent, and contained some excellent salmon pools.

C. M—— was an old hand at salmon fishing, but dealt largely in worms as a bait—a style of fishing I never cared much for, though in good hands it is very deadly. G—— was a beginner, never having killed a salmon. My experiences did not run to many, but I had tasted the delights of being 'in him' on several occasions in Wales.

My views on tackle, rods, &c., in those days are

not worth recording, everything of that description being now so improved. Of these necessary adjuncts I will discourse later on.

We tossed up for pools, one called the Punch-bowl, from its circular form, falling to my lot, G—— going lower down, and C. M—— above, with his worm.

The water was in fine order, and of a rich porter colour, but inclined to the big side. The best flies were, and I believe are still, sombre brown-looking fellows; the keeper, a good fisherman himself, choosing one from my large assortment, and rejecting many a nicer-looking fly to my fancy, fastened it on my trace, and I commenced business.

My first cast—anything but a good one—rose a large fish; surprised, I struck with a quick, nervous jerk, which pricked the fish and broke the slight hold the hook may have had; away he went with a flourish of his mighty tail.

'Ah, shure,' said Dick, 'you must be more tinder with them, major.'

I fished the pool out, but could not get another touch, and was just going to try it over again with

a change of fly, when I heard a shrill whistle from G—— at the pool below, the signal that he was fast in a fish.

Seizing the gaff, Dick and I ran to his assistance, when we found him holding on like grim death to a large salmon, his rod being absolutely double.

'Give him line, for God's sake! He will smash you to bits.' 'Oh, certainly,' he replied, at the same time reeling off some yards of line on the bank with an 'anything-to-oblige' kind of air.

Of course the salmon had a lot of slack line, and went careering down the pool with a loop of line on the water that was horrible to look at.

Strange to say, when, influenced by some very *earnest* words from me and Dick, G—— had wound up over him, he was still fast, and a springer of 14 lbs. was soon on the bank, assisted thereon by Dick and his gaff. G—— had killed his first salmon, his delight was great, and the freedom with which he pressed on us our host's excellent whisky was beyond all praise.

G—— sat down and lit his pipe, to give his pool a rest.

I went back to my Punch-bowl to try it down

again. When near it I found, to my disgust, C. M—— dancing up and down the bank, with his infernal worms fast in the fish I had risen; at least, I believe it to have been the same, as he had hooked it just where I had risen it.

I had to look as pleasant as I could under the circumstances.

C. M——'s tackle being very strong, he gave him but little law, and in a few minutes had a fine springer on the bank.

'Oh, that's the way you murder fish, is it, in this country?' said I, with stern irony, wishing most heartily that I had been the assassin myself.

'Devil a doubt,' was C. M——'s curt reply.

We none of us had any success for some time, with the exception of a huge kelt, which kept C. M—— employed for upwards of half an hour, boring up and down a long pool before he could tail him, and thus be able to return him comparatively uninjured to the water.

No good sportsman should use a gaff to get a kelt out, as the wound will generally kill the fish and render his return to the river useless.

It was nearly time to return home, when, fish-

ing over the last pool on the beat, I hooked a fresh fish, which, after a lively battle, I brought to the side ready for Dick and his gaff. He had taken mine, a telescopic one, and, not pulling it full out, the hook turned, when it touched the fish, and three times did Dick miss him, much to his disgust, which was not alleviated by the jeering remarks of a keeper on the other side of the river.

Guessing the cause of his failure, I told him to pull the last joint of the gaff full out.

I then brought the fish up again, but the long play and his frightened rushes had so loosened the hold of the fly that, to my horror, I saw it fall from his mouth on to the bank.

Dick had just got the gaff under him, and did not see the fish was free. I said nothing, but in fearful anxiety watched the result.

This time the gaff acted all right, and Dick anded his fish.

His astonishment at being unable to see any fly in his mouth was a picture.

Important.—Always gaff under, and not over, if possible, holding the handle with the knuckles of the hand up and not down; it leaves the arm freer

for lifting out of the water. Try it with a 10-lb. weight on your gaff, and you will take my advice.

The following day we found, on reaching the river, that, owing to rain in the night, it was very big, though not much discoloured, so I determined to try what I could do spinning, Dick having got some loach from a small brook, a capital bait for salmon.

I got ready the spinning rod.

The banks of the river were pretty clear of bushes, so that casting from the bank was pleasant work, and having some experience in spinning, I was soon covering the best part of the pool with my loach.

When in the water the only method then in use was to loop the line in the left hand before casting, when it frequently kinked and stopped the cast, particularly when the line had got twisted with the action of the bait. I then was frequently obliged to run some thirty or forty yards of line off the reel on the bank, and, with a piece of rag covered with fat, rub the line downwards to the trace, taking out the twist and slightly greasing it, which made it run more freely.

I only wish I had been acquainted with the use of the fast or Nottingham reel in those days—what murder I should have committed!—as it was difficult to cover much of the water in many places by casting from the hand. Of this blessing to spinners, 'the fast reel,' more anon.

Before the day was out I had three lovely springers to book, whilst G——, with the usual luck of beginners, had got two. C. M—— had only a kelt to his credit, so we had the crow over the old hand, and chaffed him and his worms most unmercifully.

Our short visit drawing to a close, we returned to duty in the harbour. Having to inspect the different detachments stationed in the forts and islands of the harbour, one of which was my old Fort Carlisle, I took the opportunity, after my work was over, of walking out to see if my poor old friend the Squire was still residing at his place, and actuated also by a faint hope of renewing my acquaintance with Kathleen.

On arriving at the entrance to the grounds, I found the gate hanging feebly by one hinge, the

drive hardly discernible from the grass on each side of it, and the pond, where I had had such good sport, so choked with weeds and rushes that there was hardly a clear spot of water to be seen. A dilapidated board was fixed to one of the gate-posts, stating that the house and property was for sale. I strolled up to the house, and there saw a picture of ruin and decay that told most forcibly the sad story of a lost and forsaken home. Getting no response to my applications on the front door, the bell having long ceased to ring, I worked my way through a tangled shrubbery to the back of the house, where I found an old man planting some potatoes. I asked him what had become of the Squire.

'Shure, your honour, he is dead,' he replied.

'I am sorry to hear it,' I said; 'when did he die?'

'Ah, y're honour, if he lived till to-morrow he'd be dead a year.'

This conveyed to me in a queer way the exact date of his demise. I then asked after Biddy, his old housekeeper. She also had gone, not long surviving her old master.

'Did you ever know a girl called Kathleen, a chance daughter of the old gentleman's?'

'Yes, shure,' he said, 'and a fine lass she was.'

'Do you know what has become of her?'

'Ah! she married a corporal at the fort, and went to foreign lands with him.'

'Lucky corporal,' thought I; and after giving him a trifle for his information, I left him showering blessings upon my head.

Leaving the old place with many regrets for the happy hours I had spent in it, and for the ruin and decay which surrounded it, Tennyson's pathetic lines came into my head:—

> Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand,
> For the sound of a voice that is still!

Whether it was the ancient palm of the old Squire, or the young one of sweet Kathleen, whose touch I most regretted, I will leave my reader to decide.

Having got over our annual inspection by the General commanding the district, G—— and I thought we would try the Inchegeela lakes and the head of the River Lee for salmon—not pike this time. Owing to the expanse of water in these

lakes casting from the banks covers so small a portion of them as to be of little use; and, hearing that no boat was available, we invested in a two-pound licence for a cross-line, and purchased from Hackett, in Cork, one to carry eight flies.

A cross-line—and a good one is rather expensive, 15*s*. I think ours cost us—consists of a main line of strong but fine silk, from 35 to 40 feet long, according to the number of flies used. To this is attached the droppers carrying the flies; at intervals corresponding with the length of these droppers, or rather slightly exceeding them, are fixed two glass beads threaded on the main line, and about half an inch separate one from the other, the line between them being lapped with thin wire; working on this, and kept in its place by the beads in question, is the top loop of a swivel, to the bottom of which is fastened some four feet of strong single salmon gut, and on the end of this the fly. The interval between these droppers being slightly in excess of their length prevents their tangling one with the other. The droppers themselves should be slightly longer at the two ends of the cross-line than in the centre, to allow for the

droop of the line when in use. A small white feather is fixed in the middle—in our case between the fourth and fifth dropper, there being eight in all. The object of this is that, if a fish takes a fly on your side of the feather, *you* play the fish, and your companion on the other side pays out line as required, and *vice versâ*. If any of my readers should try to make a cross-line, don't forget the beads and swivels for the droppers; if you merely make them fast to the main line with a knot as I did on my first attempt, when the strain comes on the main line, every dropper will twist round it and of course become useless. Your cross-line should be wound on a frame with some cork on one side for fixing your flies to, and made for the purpose.

When you arrive at the water you intend to cross-fish, one goes on one side and one on the other, each with a salmon rod and a hundred yards of line. Taking a stone tied to one of the rod lines, and having drawn sufficient from the reel to cover the water, throw it across, when the opposite sportsman (or, as some narrow-minded people would call, 'poacher') unties the stone, and

makes the line fast to the cross-line, which is then drawn over the water with its eight flies dancing on the surface. A truly beautiful spectacle!

Lowering the points of the two rods over the water till the flies trail along the surface, keeping the main line tight, off you walk up-stream, the action of walking giving a most fascinating motion to the flies. It is a method of fishing which, *when necessary*, I am very fond of, as the combination of interest between your partner and self is so pleasant.

On a lovely evening towards the end of May we duly arrived at the little inn at Inchegeela, which was much the same as it was when I last visited it some years before—Mr. Murphy, the landlord, and his wife being still to the fore.

Having ordered dinner, our first business was to secure the services of a man to gaff our fish, if any, a *sine quâ non* in cross-fishing; and engaged a thirsty-looking chap called Pat Oolahan, whom our landlord recommended; Maloney, who accompanied us on our pike-fishing expedition, having emigrated some time before.

Getting our two salmon rods up, threaded with

their lines, and choosing with the help of Pat and our landlord a choice selection of salmon flies, we fixed them to the droppers on the cross-line in readiness for an early start the next morning, viz. four A.M.; we then turned in.

I awoke just as day was breaking, and anxiously went to the window to see what the weather was like. It was fine, but blowing a fresh breeze from the west, which would be right down the lake, and just what we wanted.

I awoke G—— and we were both speedily dressed. Going to our sitting-room downstairs, we imbibed some rum-and-milk placed in readiness for us over night. Capital thing to work on, rum-and-milk! Where was that beast Pat with his gaff? Not a sign of him to be seen. So, after waiting a quarter of an hour, we started without him. I had fortunately my gaff with me, G—— having given his to Pat.

Proceeding to the bridge which crosses the Lee at its outlet from the lake, we got our cross-line over the stream, and, it being only some forty yards across for about half a mile above the bridge, was admirably adapted for our purpose.

There was a splendid ripple on the water and matters looked promising, but where was that villain Pat with the other gaff? We could not wait any longer, so blessing him freely we started. We fished the narrows, as they were called, without a rise.

On getting to the top of them the lake took a turn to the left, increasing considerably in width, and, seeing a large fish rise near my side, I shouted to G—— to give me the flies over. He paid out line whilst I wound up and drew them over where the fish had risen.

Up he came, seizing a fly next to the feather on G——'s side, and consequently close to the centre of the cross-line. My wigs! what a battle then commenced; but the play of the two rods and long line soon tired him, and he began to roll about on the top of the water.

I called out to G—— to let me have the fish, as I possessed the only gaff, so wound up with a view of getting him close enough to gaff. I had not got in much line when my winding was put a final end to by finding I could not, of course, get the first dropper through the rings of the rod.

Here was a go! With Pat at hand I could have walked backwards, kept the droppers clear of the ground, and brought the fish near enough to gaff; as it was, all I could do was to fix the rod by the spike upright in the peaty soil of the bank, and handle the line—a most ticklish proceeding with a fish that looked all thirty pounds weight. There was nothing else for it; so, assigning Pat to eternal perdition, I laid hold of the line and began gently to haul it in, G—— of course paying out.

I got the first dropper in all right, and laid it behind me on the bank, ditto second, third, and fourth. On the fifth the fish was fast. I got to the top of it, took off the gaff from my shoulder in readiness, and was carefully drawing his huge carcass towards me when, seeing me, he gave a fearful rush, and I was obliged to let go.

Then a dreadful thing happened. The line with its droppers whizzed over the grass, and I was in hopes that all would run clear, when—agony! I received a terrible prick in my centre of gravity, and found that a huge fly, called a 'butcher,' was fast in, not only my trousers but their contents, and there was I playing this huge fish on this very

A FEARFUL OCCURRENCE

unsatisfactory basis. Several nasty tugs ensued, during which my bendings and bowings with my back to the water, and clawing at the dropper to ease the strain, must have been extremely funny as viewed from the opposite side.

G—— called out:

'What the devil are you up to?'

I faintly replied:

'The beggar has got me by the stern!'

With a final excruciating tug the dropper which held the salmon broke; I was free, and for the second time glad to get rid of a fish.

At this moment up came Pat with the gaff. Exasperated with the loss of the fish and the pain I was in, I seized the rod and gave him one in the mid-riff, which nearly disembowelled him.

'Arrah, ye murdering divil,' he cried, 'you've kilt me intirely,' and, clapping his hand to his stomach, subsided into a gorse bush.

I then begged G—— to run round by the bridge as quickly as he could to help me to get the fly out, for I was bleeding like a pig. G—— was soon with me, and by cutting off the feathers and

drawing the hook through, removed it from my person, and left me feeling very sick.

A good tot of whisky comforted both myself and Pat, who was only too glad to condone my attack on him for a liberal quantity of that fluid. Beyond boring a hole in his waistcoat, the blow had not done him much harm.

Some little time elapsed before I felt inclined for more cross-fishing, during which G—— set the broken dropper to rights.

We did not get another fish, though rising several, till towards evening, when something took one of the flies on my side of the feather. After playing him for some time, G—— called out:

'It isn't a pike, is it?'

'Don't know,' I said. 'I don't like his play. Let us have a look at him.' So, putting a heavy strain on the main line, up came the head of a large pike.

We soon had the beggar out, and, disgusted with his species, I gave him a kick on the head, when he proceeded to eject numerous parr on which he had been regaling himself. Out of condition as he was, he turned the scale at sixteen pounds,

and the brute had cut one of our best salmon flies to ribbons. Making a handsome present of him to Pat, we reeled up and made for the inn.

The next morning we tried it again, but the day was still and bright, so we did nothing but wear quite a path on each side of the lake, in our solemn walks up and down its banks.

Rather tired of the game, we determined to try the river for a fish the next day. Some rain in the night had slightly coloured the water, so I put up the spinning-rod, using a small parr as a bait—a favourite of mine.

At the first weir below the bridge I got a nice fish of nine pounds, which gave me great diversion in the rapid water, but, with Pat's help, landed him all right. Lower down I got another of much the same weight.

G—— with the fly could do nothing.

Coming to the last pool of the beat, a beauty with a rush of water at its head, I noticed a ragged-looking fellow, bending over the stream, rubbing his hands together.

I concealed myself behind a rock, and beckon-

ing up Pat, asked him in a whisper what the chap was doing.

'Ah! the blackguard,' said Pat, 'shure, he's pisining the water.'

This was done by rubbing between the palms of the hands a noxious weed growing here and there on the bank, and throwing it into the water. The effect of this was to turn the fish sick and dizzy, when they would come to the surface in a helpless way, and thus become an easy prey to the poacher. Cocculus Indicus has the same effect.

G—— now coming up, we watched him for a short time. G—— then quietly advanced over the grass, his footsteps being unheard in the noise of the falling water, and gave the gentleman *one* with his heavy fishing-boots, which toppled him neck and crop into the pool.

This party's language, on reappearing some ten yards lower down, was not culled from the Scriptures!

Seeing the beggar could swim, we did not trouble ourselves about his safety, but left him to scramble out as best he could, which he did at the end of the pool, and made off as fast as he could go.

We found a great bunch of the weed on the grass where he had been at work, so do not think he had time to throw much in ; but this was enough to turn up three peel, several trout, and some coarse fish, which we captured at the outlet of the pool. An ill-wind that blows nobody any good !

We intended spending a week amongst our pleasant surroundings, but the next morning I received a telegram from Queenstown, saying the General was coming, and that I must return ; so our visit came to an abrupt termination.

THE PRIEST SUBSIDED

CHAPTER VII

ACHILL ISLAND

I soon found that the service was not the place for a married man and family; so, with much regret, I sent in my papers.

Another inducement to do so was the fact of my having spent a good deal of money in the purchase of my different steps, which, with the prospect of purchase being abolished, might be lost

As leave is always granted to an officer leaving the service till his papers are accepted, I determined to visit the Island of Achill, on the north-west coast of Ireland, with a brother officer, whose father, a clergyman, had been the saving of the poor people on the island during the famine a few years previously, by importing meal and potatoes. He was recognised as the uncrowned king of the island.

There are several large lakes in this island, full of trout, and in one a few peel got into it from the sea.

Fully armed for slaughter, we started by train from Dublin to Westport on a Saturday. We slept at that town that night, and the next day, Sunday, I'm sorry to say, started on a car for a forty-mile drive to Achill. We reached the little inn at 'Doogort,' the principal village in the island, towards evening, and found, rather to the dismay of my brother officer N——, his reverend father standing at the door.

After being duly introduced by the son to his grand old father—for he was a man, though advanced in years, of splendid physique—N—— senior said in solemn tones, 'There are six days

in the week: why travel on the Lord's Day?' and, retiring with his son to an inner chamber, shut the door, and my poor friend had a nasty fifteen minutes of it, I fancy.

Before giving an account of our fishing, I must relate an occurrence that had taken place in the island some few years before.

Mr. N—— senior visited the island with a view of organising a relief fund for the starving people during the terrible famine which devastated Ireland on the failure of the potato crop. It was then the hotbed of Roman Catholicism, and the people were entirely in the hands of the ignorant and bigoted priests.

As N—— senior told me himself, his life for many months was not worth five minutes' purchase; but, as he described it, 'I was a chosen vessel of the Lord, and was preserved to complete the work He had set me to do.'

After being on the island some time, and gaining some proselytes, he issued a challenge to the Roman Catholic clergy to defend their views in a public disputation. This was accepted, and a priest chosen to confute the heretic.

Two rough pulpits were erected on the sloping side of the mountain behind the village—one for the Roman Catholic priest, and one for the Protestant N——. Every man, woman, and child who could manage it was there.

The priest opened the discussion, but was evidently out of form; and, either overcome by the stern majesty of his opponent, the effect of the sun, *or some other cause*, after a violent and ineffective sermon, subsided into the bottom of his box.

Then, with stentorian voice and threatening gesture, did the Rev. N—— pour forth the vials of his wrath on his opponent's shaven crown; consigned him to any number of bottomless pits, and innumerable worms; burnt him to a cinder; and finally requested the Lord to *root* out what was left of him!

Whether it was the effect of the sermon, or the prospect of another ship-load of meal and potatoes, daily expected, or a combination of the two, I can't say, but the result was a large increase to the Protestant community.

The Rev. N—— was too good a man to deny to the Roman Catholics a share of his benefits, but

his flock certainly had first pick, and consequently fared considerably the best of the two.

The Rev. N—— was a man of great eloquence and a wonderful flow of language, and, but for the excessive length of his orations and the narrow-minded bigotry of his opinions, could be listened to with pleasure.

Walking with him one day, we met one of the few priests left on the island, a pleasant, inoffensive little man. He took off his broad-brimmed hat to us, but the Rev. N—— cut him as dead as a stone. On my expressing regret that he had done so, he said, 'Young man, have nothing to do with the stool of wickedness.

I often thought how surprised he would be when he got to heaven at the company he would meet there. The old gentleman has long since gone there, and I trust his views are by this time somewhat enlarged.

N—— junior and I started the next morning, with the caretaker of the property (a kind of general factotum), for the lake nearest the village. It was a fine sheet of water, and only divided from the sea by a narrow strip of land at one end, over

LAKE DOOGORT, ISLE OF ACHILL

which towered the grand cliffs of the coast. The lake emptied itself into the sea by a narrow brook perhaps a quarter of a mile long. This brook, if deepened, would have let any number of salmon into the lake, but in its shallow state peel alone could get up it. A low bridge crossed it at its outlet from the lake.

Finding the boat ready for us, we were soon afloat, with *Tim* (the caretaker) pulling us quietly along. The day was perfection, with a nice breeze to ripple the water, and we were soon at work pulling out the trout. We were rather disappointed in their size, none exceeding $\frac{3}{4}$ lb., but there were plenty of them. As we were passing some rushes, depicted on the right of my sketch, I hooked a much better fish, and, as he jumped high in the air, saw to my delight it was a peel of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. I saved him all right—a picture of condition he was, evidently fresh from the sea. Tim said he had seldom seen them in the lake so early—August 2. We did not succeed in getting any more. On counting the spoil, our bag consisted of twenty-three brace of trout and the peel. As there had been no rain for some time, the brook

from the lake must have been too low to let many up.

The next day we determined to try it. We started on the sea side of the bridge, and in the first pool close to it I hooked, with a grey and silver fly, a nice peel, who bolted through one of the arches of the bridge and cut me. N—— was busy lower down, and had secured a fish of nearly 2 lbs. Fishing away with but little success, we arrived at the last pool before reaching the sea. I had fished half-way down it, when a big swirl of the water beneath my fly and a heavy tug told me I had got a big one; in a moment a fine salmon darted out of the water and made straight for the sea. I shouted to N—— to run and cut him off, but my fish beat him easy, and soon disposed of my trout cast and some ten yards of line in that extensive pit, the Atlantic.

Returning to the lake, we saw somebody at one end fishing from a canoe. Tim informed us it was Captain Boycott, who resided about a mile off. Pulling to him, we found him fishing with a grasshopper, and with good success, his trout averaging larger than ours.

'I find I get the best trout with them,' he said. This was our first introduction to one whose name, as applied to a vile system of coercion, became so notorious.

A few days afterwards we lunched with him and Mrs. Boycott at his house, half-way up the side of a huge mountain.

It seemed pleasant enough in the sunny bright weather we had on our visit, and the view from it was grand—a combination of rocks, mountains, sea and lake one seldom sees; but, Lord! what a place in winter, and for a lady! I pitied her. Capt. B. farmed several hundred acres of land, but from what he said I fancy it did not pay, and it was not long after our visit that he gave it up.

The next few days we spent in exploring the island, which contained several beautiful lakes, one of which, L. Anach, Tim informed us, contained *no* fish of any description: a most extraordinary fact, and which I am quite unable to account for. I tasted the water and found it perfectly sweet, but presume there must have been some ingredient that fish did not like, as there was no sign of piscatorial life on its smooth surface.

Another lake, the name I forget, held fish that had never been known to take the fly. A worm they would take readily, and we killed some beautiful trout in it with that bait and a minnow; but of our choice specimens of flies not one would they look at.

One evening, an invitation arrived from the Rev. Mr. N——'s curate to breakfast with him at the parsonage. I was much inclined to refuse it, but N—— said we must go, as our refusal would offend his father, who was asked to meet us.

With many misgivings on the duration of our stay and the loss of the best part of a good fishing morning, we duly appeared at 9 A.M. at the parsonage, and to our relief, without delay, sat down to a capital breakfast; but, oh dear! we were not out of the wood yet. After we had finished, and I was nudging N—— to get up and say good-bye, our host laid on the table a huge Bible and book of prayers in front of the Rev. Mr. N——. Two servants then appeared, and with a groan of resignation N—— and I ranged ourselves along the wall and awaited results. The Rev. Mr. N—— then selected the last nine verses of the Epistle of St.

Jude, read them, and closed the book. I was rising to kneel down, when I received a hint from N—— to sit fast, and, looking at the Rev. N——, found him with hands clasped, gazing with a wrapped expression at the ceiling. Then began a long discourse which, eloquent as it was, I fear was not much appreciated by either N—— or myself.

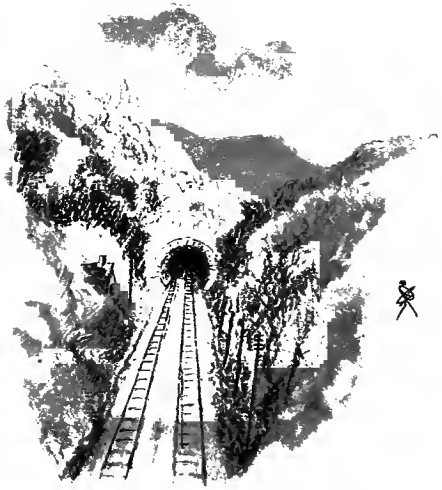
It came to an end at last, and, with somewhat hurried adieus to our host, we escaped.

N——'s comment on his father's performance made me laugh.

'Snakes! that *was* a twister,' he said.

On reaching the lake, it was blowing fresh; so, discarding the boat, I waded in as far as I could, and with a small peel fly had some capital sport, including three peel and several brace of fine trout, N—— doing nearly as well from the boat.

The weather now breaking up and becoming wet and stormy, we determined to leave and return to Dublin, when I bade farewell to my old corps, and retired into private life.



THE TUNNEL

CHAPTER VIII

SOUTH WALES

Receiving an invitation to visit a friend at my old quarters, Brecon, I started from Waterford to Milford Haven.

I was not due at Brecon for a week, so determined to try the Cothi and Towy, near Carmarthen, as well as a small river called the 'Taff,' near Haverford West.

Making this town my headquarters, I took the

Great Western Railway for a small station a few miles up the line.

The Taff flowed close by the station, and I was soon hard at work trying for a salmon, which the station-master said he had seen in a pit near.

It was a rough day, blowing harder than was pleasant, and tough work it was getting my line out with a bran new 'butcher' at the end of it.

A most useful, general fly is that same 'butcher,' and I had fished half-way down the pit when I fancied I saw a fish rise and have a look at my fly.

A little large, perhaps, for the water, I thought; so, changing it for a smaller one of the same pattern, I began the pit again.

At the spot where I had fancied a fish had turned, I felt that delicious pull that tells its pleasant tale, and I was fast in a good fish, which raced up and down the pit in grand style.

The banks were clear of bushes, and it was a capital spot to play a fish; but having nobody to gaff for me, I had to play him longer than I liked, before I could get him near enough to gaff him myself.

I succeeded at last, and landed a nice fish of

twelve pounds. He had been rather too long in fresh water, and consequently not quite so bright as I should have liked. I fished down to the Railway Bridge with no success. Lighting my pipe, I laid the fish on the parapet of the bridge, and was admiring him, when I suddenly heard a whistle, and, looking up, saw to my dismay an engine racing along within thirty yards of me, the noise of its approach being entirely lost in the wind.

What was I to do? Stay where I was I dare not, the space between the rail and parapet being so narrow. No time to get round; nothing for it but jump on the top of the low wall of the bridge. This I did, but with such vigour that, losing my balance, I went head over heels into the river, dragging the salmon after me. The bridge was fortunately a low one, and the fall did not exceed ten feet. The water being deep enough to prevent my touching the bottom, nothing but a terrible ducking was the result.

Scrambling through the arch after my fish, which was floating down-stream, I got out on the other side, feeling only too thankful for my near escape.

Emptying out my waders, and getting rid of as much water as I could from my clothes, I started off for the station with my salmon across my back.

My shortest way by a good bit was through a short railway tunnel; as there were no trains due, so far as I knew, at this time of the day, I decided to walk through it, in spite of a notice threatening me with all kinds of penalties if I did so. I had got to near the middle of it, when I found it curved slightly to the left, shutting out the light from both ends, and leaving me in darkness.

Goodness! what's that? a roaring noise striking my ears, but from which end of the tunnel it came I could not make out. I knew at once it must be an approaching train.

On which line of rails? Good Lord, this was worse than the bridge business!

The space between the wall and line of rails seemed to me terribly narrow; no time to look for a man-hole if there was one; so I thought the best thing to do was to count two rails, and then lie down flat between the up and down rails. This I did. Oh, never shall I forget the few seconds that ensued as I lay there on my stomach, waiting for

the train to pass, my most fearful thought being that I had miscounted the rails, and in consequence lay between one set and not in the centre, in which case the cinder-box of the engine would cut me to pieces.

Nearer and nearer came the hideous roar, and as the train rushed past me I felt a drop of boiling water on the back of my neck.

In a second it had passed on, and I was for the second time saved from a fearful death. Picking up the salmon beside me and my rod, I got out of that tunnel as hard as I could go, and sat down on the bank to recover my shaking nerves. A good pull at my flask and a rest soon made me feel better. I then discovered that I had only two joints of my salmon rod left, the rest being clean cut off by the wheels of the engine. The salmon was all right. No more tunnels for me.

I had had enough of the Taff, so left for Carmarthen to try the Towy, and a tributary, the Cothi. Getting my rod repaired in the town, I drove out to a small inn, situated at the junction of the two rivers. I stayed there two days, but, having poor sport, decided to go to a sweet Welsh

village called 'Breckfa,' some six miles up the Cothi. I started early, walking, and arrived about 9 A.M. at a nice clean little inn in the village. I was astonished at the way it was furnished, and the refined look of all about it. I soon discovered it was the frequent resort of married couples from Carmarthen, who came to spend their honeymoon there. Fortunately for me, no loving couples were occupying it on my arrival, so I had the best accommodation it afforded. After a most delightful breakfast, for which my walk had given me a capital appetite, I started rod in hand for the river, where I was told there were some salmon and plenty of peel, or, as they call them in Wales, 'sewin.'

Putting up a couple of sewin flies, I was fishing my way down-stream, when I came across a man sitting on the bank with his rod beside him, apparently in great distress.

'What's the matter?'

'Oh,' he said, in tearful tones, 'I've just lost such a whopper!'

I speedily found out that he was the landlord of the little inn I was staying at, and, on his learn-

ing that I was his guest, he volunteered to show me the best spots in the river.

I accepted his offer with much pleasure, as it is a great advantage to have somebody with you to point out where the fish generally lie. This is absolutely essential in fishing for salmon, for you may otherwise spend many hours in fishing-water, which, though looking likely, seldom holds fish. At a certain pit a little lower down he told me he had seen a salmon rise that morning. We proceeded at once to the spot. It was a charming pool with a sharp turn at the end of it, where the water swirled round in a fishy-looking eddy, a sure hold for a salmon.

The weather was rather too bright for salmon fishing, though the water was in good order.

The eddy in question was somewhat in shade from the trees overhanging the bank on the opposite side; so, taking off my peel flies, and putting on a 'silver doctor,' a most useful fly, from its bright body, in sunny weather, I proceeded to cast over the pool.

There was a considerable rush of water into the head of it; so, casting somewhat across, I allowed

the fly to float down with the stream till it got into the eddy at the bottom; following its direction down the water with the point of my rod, and moving it gently up and down, I gave that motion to the fly which is so attractive to salmon.

I had not done so more than once or twice, when a heavy swirl in the water and a tight line told me that I was 'in him.'

'You've got him!' shouted my landlord.

'Yes, indeed,' I remarked. I had hooked him, but in this strong water it was not quite so sure that I had got him.

The fish, however, was not a heavy one, and made but a feeble effort to leave the pit; if he had succeeded in doing so I must have lost him, as there was a strong run at the bottom of it, and I could not follow him an inch for the trees.

He showed me good sport for five or ten minutes, when he gave it up as a bad job, and I drew him to the bank, when my landlord quickly stuck the gaff into him, and landed a 9-lb. fresh-run fish.

Though not large, he was a picture of shape and condition, with several of those small insects called sea-lice adhering to him.

We duly drank the health of the first fish I had killed in the Cothi.

Drawing near the middle of the day, which I have always considered the worst time for fishing, we sat down in a lovely spot on the bank under some overhanging trees, and partook of the excellent lunch provided for me by my landlady. Not wishing to disturb the next pool, which my landlord informed me was a first-rate one for both salmon and sewin, I drew out my small sketch-book and made a sketch of the pool where I had killed the fish, including a not very flattering likeness of my host; at least, he did not appear to think it so.

We managed to while away a couple of hours, dozing and talking, when we thought it was time to resume fishing.

We walked down to the pool that he had mentioned, which was a long one, and well shaded from a declining sun. Ah! it was a lovely spot, with enough gravelly bank on my side to enable me to cast without annoyance from the trees, the water being deep on the opposite side under a steep bank.

'That's where they lie,' said my host, pointing to a rock cropping up near the other side.

I began casting a few yards above it, and after a few throws the fly passed close by the edge of the rock.

It had hardly done so when with a rush came a fish, and took the fly in a very business-like manner. I soon found that it was not a big one, though he showed grand sport for his size, jumping out of the water in a way that made me shake in my shoes. The hold of the hook was a firm one, and after a short battle of a few minutes' duration, I pulled up on the gravel bank a sewin of $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs., and a perfect picture in its silvery beauty.

After giving the pool a rest, the late 'Mr. Sewin' having considerably disturbed it, I began at the top of it again, as my companion informed me that there were plenty more there. 'Yes, indeed!'

He was right, for I had not got more than a few yards beyond the rock when up came another fish, apparently of much the same size as the last. He was not quite so lively in his motions, preferring his native element to the air. The battle

was consequently somewhat longer in duration, but ended in the same way as the last.

On looking him over as he lay on the gravel I remarked a difference between the two fish, the scales of this one being somewhat coarser and the tail rather different in form to the first.

We laid the two side by side, and though they were both as near as possible the same weight, the difference was easily discernible.

On my pointing this out to my landlord, he immediately said that the last was a salmon and the first a sewin. This I could hardly believe, as I had never heard of a salmon weighing so little as $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.

As is well known, the young of salmon go down to the sea, weighing from $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. to $\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and seldom so much as the latter weight, and in five or six months they will return to the river as one-year-old salmon, or grilse, weighing from 6 lbs. to 9 lbs.

This astonishing increase of weight in so short a time has been proved to be a fact by experiments in, I think, the Brighton Aquarium, where the 'parr,' or young salmon, were placed in tanks, and fed with shrimps, upon which diet, though con-

fined in a tank, they increased, in four months' time, 3 lbs. or 4 lbs. in weight.

How, then, could a fish fare so badly in its native element, the sea, as to return to its river only weighing $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.?

On my return to Carmarthen, anxious to determine the question as to the difference of species between the two fish, I consulted a gentleman who was well versed in such matters, and he decided at once that one was a salmon and the other a peel, or sewin.

After spending a very pleasant three days at Breckfa, the water getting low and fine, I determined to try the larger stream, the Towy, at Llandovery.

Getting into the coach (no rail then) at Carmarthen, after a lovely drive, I duly arrived at the former town. I was joined there by a friend; we secured the services of a fisherman in the place, who knew the river well, and who advised us to go some twelve miles up the stream, where there was a small inn which had the right of fishing for some two miles of the river.

The road ran for some distance by the side of

the water, and we had not proceeded far when we saw a fisherman fast on some large fish, and roaring most lustily for help. Taking out one of the gaffs, we ran down the bank to his assistance. He had been fishing for trout with a minnow, and a huge salmon had taken the bait. What I could see of him told me he must be fully 40 lbs. weight. The pool was a long one, and the bank fairly clear of impediments, so up and down did that luckless fisherman race. After staying with him half an hour, the monster sulked, and remained fast as a rock in the bottom of the pool. Not wishing to lose our day's fishing, we left him with good wishes for his success in landing him. He was fishing with a small trout rod and some 30 yards of line, so his chance of grassing that fish was extremely doubtful.

Having arrived at the inn, we soon had our rods up, and were hard at work, S——, my friend, going down-stream, and myself up. The water, though rather low, was a good colour. I fished over several lovely pools with no sign; so, after trying all my old favourite flies with no effect, I changed for one which had been given me as a

killer in Welsh rivers. I used to call it 'The Fire King;' what its real name was I never knew. The fly was made—body, bright brown mohair, ribbed with broad gold tinsel, flat; tail, golden pheasant topping, hackle red cock's wing, the bronzed feathers of a peacock's tail, with a portion of the eye included. With a small pattern of this uninviting-looking fly, I tried the pool I had last fished over again, and with my first cast was, to my delight, fast in a fish, and a lively customer he proved. His sole motive seemed to be the ascent of a fall at the top of the pool, surrounded with sharp-edged rocks. This, of course, could not be allowed. After making several attempts, he gave in, and bolted down the pool to try the bottom end. It also had a sharp fall, with the bank covered with bushes. This proceeding I also objected to, but had to put a heavy strain on him to induce him to agree with me. 'The Fire King' had fortunately a good grip of him, and I had him shortly dead beat at my feet, when I got the gaff to work, and, unassisted, landed a fish of 11 lbs.—a bit brown in colour, but, as I afterwards found, was one of the best fish I ever ate. There was then a considerable

quantity of mine water in the river, which may perhaps account for his colour.

With the same fly I soon after got a fine sewin of 5 lbs.; so, blessing the monarch, I made tracks for the inn. S——, not having any 'Fire Kings,' had done nothing.

After taking off our waders, turning them inside out, and placing them to dry near the fire (always attend to your waders *yourself*), and winding the wet parts of our line on the back of a chair (never neglect this), we sat down to a *very nasty* dinner, which even our good appetites could not make palatable. We made the best of a bad business, and with the help of some good whisky we had brought with us, and our pipes, managed to pass the evening.

S—— retired early, saying he feared he was in for a go of asthma, from which he frequently suffered. My aversion is *fleas*. I can't sleep a wink where the brutes are, and Welsh inns, from painful past experiences, I knew to be often infested with them. I did not like the look of my bed; it had an *f♯* appearance about it, and, on turning down the sheets, I discovered a whole army

of the brutes issuing from a straw mattress at the bottom. A packet of flea-powder somewhat disconcerted them. I emptied the remainder into the bed, and, tired out, turned in, hoping for the best. Whilst the candle lasted I got some rest, but when that burnt out the brutes began their little game, a juicy major being a tit-bit! Poor S—— with his asthma, and I with my fleas, had a poor time of it, and greeted the daylight with joy.

It had been raining heavily in the night, and the river was the colour of pea-soup, so the 'Fire King's' reign was over. I consulted with our fisherman as to what we should do, suggesting our return to Llandovery.

'No,' he said, 'now is the time for sport. Yes, indeed;' and, proceeding to the garden behind the inn, he procured a lot of worms, which he put into a tin with some moss, for use as bait.

My fly-book, nearly the size of a Gladstone bag, had all sorts of tackle in it, and, I knew, contained some worm-tackle. Stewart's useful arrangement of hooks for that style of fishing was then not known, but I had adopted my poach-

ing friend M——'s plan of fastening a pin on the end of the shank to keep the worm in its place. Picking out two or three strong traces, to which were attached hooks so arranged, I started off with our fisherman to a likely spot he knew of.

S—— declined to accompany us, being afraid of the damp for his asthma. We soon reached a comparatively still bit of back-water, where, baiting with a lobworm, and fixing a few shot to sink the bait, I commenced fishing as near the bottom as I could without fouling it, and letting the worm go gently down the little stream there was.

I had not been at this game long when I felt a good pull, and, sinking my point, gave the fish time to swallow the bait. I then struck, and found to my delight I had hold of a fine sewin, which proved to be upwards of 4 lbs. weight.

The spot for the fishing was happily selected, for it seemed as if we had got into a large family party of these fish. In half an hour I had four sewin and two fine trout on the bank.

Not liking to leave my companion longer alone, I returned to the inn with my spoil, the sight of

which made him bitterly regret his not being able to accompany me.

As he was still feeling far from well, and the accommodation of the dirty inn was so bad, we decided to return to Llandovery, much to the disappointment of our fisherman, who thought he was in for a good thing in the shape of 5*s*. a day and all found.

On arriving at Llandovery we inquired for our friend with the trout-rod and the big salmon, and was told that he was fast in that fish from the time we had seen him, about eight A.M., till two P.M., when the salmon, declining to afford him any more sport, rushed down the pit and out at the bottom, walking off with Piscator's thirty yards of line and two top joints of his rod; it was a result which could only be expected.

The size that salmon attained before the end of the week was something marvellous. My friend S—— here left me for home, and I went on to visit my old friends and quarters at Brecon.

The rain had been very partial, and the Usk but little affected by it. It being now September,

there was but little trout-fishing, and, the autumn being a dry one, the sea fish had been unable to get up so far. Giving up all idea of fishing, I spent my time in visiting the numerous old friends in the neighbourhood.

TACKLE FOR LIVE MINNOW

CHAPTER IX

THE ITCHEN

On leaving Dublin my wife and family had gone on a visit to stay with relatives in Hampshire, where I rejoined them. The Itchen, that most prolific of trout streams, ran close to the house, and my rela- [illegible] ve me permission to [illegible] there were in that stream, to be sure; and, late in the season as it was, I contrived, principally I must admit with a minnow, to get several splendid fellows.

Now I will give you a hint how to fish with a minnow in *clear* water.

The tackle consists of a strong fine trace of the best gut you can procure; it should have a couple of swivels, one in the middle, and one close to the top where the line is attached. Tie to this a small triple hook, and half an inch above it a small

single one. Taking a *live* silver-coloured minnow, fix the small hook to the lips of the bait, leaving the triple hook loose; fastening one or two shot, according to the strength of the stream, to the trace, put the bait gently in the water, and let it be carried down into any favourite lie of a fish, slightly moving the rod horizontally to keep the minnow with its head up-stream. The bait, incommoded by the hooks, will swim gaily about, and thus form an irresistible attraction to any big trout in the neighbourhood.

A capital spot for this game is under the arches of low bridges that cross the stream, and where the big trout seek shelter during the day; the stream will take the minnow well under the arches, and it will not be many seconds there before being seized by the biggest trout on the spot.

The trace, as I have already said, must be a strong one, as fishing in this kind of place one must hold on like grim death in order to prevent the trout from rushing out at the far end of the arch, which, if he should succeed in doing, would probably cut the trace against the brickwork.

What tugs and battles I have had under the

numerous arches which span the Itchen! I was fishing in this way under a favourite arch of mine, when I felt a heavy pull at the bait, and, holding on as usual, found that my trace was cut in some unaccountable manner. On peering over the parapet, I saw the head of a large pike projecting slightly from under the arch. 'Oh! my boy,' I said, 'you're the thief, are you?'

Running to a cottage close by, I borrowed a spade, and, cautiously looking over the side of the bridge, saw my friend was still there. It was a very low one, not above five feet from the water; so, poising the spade with its blade downwards over the pike's head, I sent it down with all my force, and cut his ugly nob clean off; the rest of him went gaily down-stream through the arch.

Running down the stream, I secured his mutilated carcass from the first shallow, where it had grounded. The body without the head weighed five pounds, so that brute was well disposed of.

These pike get into the Itchen from a lake at the 'Grange,' Lord A——'s place, and do much mischief amongst the trout.

There was an old moat on one side of Colone L——'s house, supplied with water from the Itchen. In this were some enormous trout, seven or eight pounds in weight, and it was one of my amusements to feed these monsters with any spare minnows I had, sometimes substituting a stickleback, which, on being seized by the trout, they used immediately to eject, with a look at me of the most comical expression, as much as to say, 'Don't make such a stupid mistake again;' the stickleback, being a bony, prickly little beast, was a poor substitute for the soft and succulent minnow—at least, so the trout seemed to think.

While staying with Colonel L——, I met the celebrated Sir R—— T—— at dinner; he sat immediately under the portrait of his supposed mother, whom he certainly strongly resembled, as far as a great fat man could be like a handsome woman.

I was at this time a firm believer in him from various circumstances, especially from what the farm bailiff had told me. I asked him what his opinion was; he said, 'Are you certain that you are Major Hopkins?' I replied, 'Oh, yes.' 'Then

I'm as sure that he is Sir R—— T——.' Knowing him from a boy as he did, that evidence satisfied me; and I backed the beast to be the right man for certain moneys, which, of course, I eventually lost. The extraordinary difference of opinion with regard to him in the county, and even in families, was one of the most curious features of the case. I have still a sneaking belief that he is the man; but, whether the right or the wrong man, he is no loss to the aristocracy.

It was now high time to settle down somewhere; so, selecting the sweet county of Devon, I took a house near B——, where there was a good school for the boys, fishing in two rivers, as well as the harbour at A——, and golf on one of the finest links in the world, though at this time I was sadly ignorant of that first-class game.

How well I remember disgusting my friend Colonel H——, when on a visit to Westward Ho! by saying, on seeing two elderly gentlemen with clubs under their arms going to golf, 'Why, bless me, those two old fools are going to play hockey!'

Joining an association that then existed on the

rivers Taw and Mole, I secured quarters at a small inn near S—— M—— station, some fifteen miles up the line from B——.

The F—— Arms did not certainly come under the head of a first-class hotel, but the beds were scrupulously clean, and the cooking fair, the great objection being the beery, bad baccy smell, which from the contiguity of the tap-room pervaded the house.

The Mole joined the Taw not far from the inn, and formed a grand pool called the Junction Pit, of which I shall have much to tell later on.

The association gave its members several miles on both rivers, so there was plenty of water to fish. The season for salmon fishing opened at that time in February, and I took up my quarters at the inn early in the month, for a week's stay.

Bitter cold work it was fishing so early in the year; but it was worth trying, more for the knowledge it would give me of the water than for any sport I was likely to get.

I commenced business in the Mole below K—— bridge, and putting up a fly which was thoroughly impressed on my memory as at any rate a good

holding fly (*vide* cross-fishing at Inchegeela lakes), the 'butcher,' I was soon hard at work.

To my delight the river seemed full of salmon; they were rising all over it. I had not made many casts, when I was fast in a large fish which proceeded to stroll along the bottom in a slow and determined way, which was not exciting. I did not like his style of proceedings; so, lugging him down the stream to the shallow end of the pool, I soon caught sight of a fish, bright in colour, but rather long and lanky.

After several more 'constitutionals,' my boy slipped a large landing-net under him, and, with difficulty from his weight, lifted out a fish of 21 lbs. By the rules of the association the use of the gaff was not allowed till May.

Not being so cognisant at that time of what constituted a 'kelt,' and his colour being so bright and silvery, I thought to myself, 'Hang it, it's my first fish in the Mole, I will send it to the inn,' and a passing cart took it there.

Not long after I was accosted by the water-bailiff, who asked me to be careful not to kill any back fish or kelts. 'Oh, certainly not,' said I;

with a smile he replied, 'I didn't much like the look of the fish you sent to the inn, 'e bean't quite the thing, surely.' This view of the subject I found quite correct, on trying to eat some of him at dinner the next night.

I continued my fishing down the Mole, and before evening had six more great beasts of all shapes and colours; no mistake could be made as to what *they* were, so back they went into the water.

In returning a fish to the river, exhausted as he must be with the treatment he has received, the best plan is to clasp him gently with both hands round the centre of the body, and, turning his head up-stream, keep him in that position till he shows some signs of returning vigour; then, with a gentle push into deeper water, let him go.

Seeing nothing of any fresh fish, and hooking only kelt, I determined to return home, and renew my visit later in the spring.

The inn I found also very dull at night, the usual fishermen not having made their appearance so soon. A long continuation of wet weather and constant floods obliged me to defer my second visit

to the end of March. I was then accompanied by a relative, who had written to me to know whether I could get him some trout fishing in the neighbourhood.

The association of which I was a member issued day tickets for trout and salmon, so I wrote and told him that he could get some in this way.

He had little experience, I knew, in trout fishing, his principal sport being with pike and barbel in the Thames. I started him with his trout rod and a cast of flies I had given him, in the Mole, fishing behind him for salmon. After some time, having no sport myself, I strolled down to see how he was getting on, and, to my surprise, saw him very busy in pulling out something.

Going up to him, I said, 'What sport, C——?'

'Oh, capital!' he said, 'but they run rather small.'

On looking into his basket, I found to my horror that it was half full of parr.

At this moment, unfortunately, up comes the water-bailiff, who, I suspect, had been viewing his proceedings from a neighbouring hill with some curiosity.

'Good sport, sir,' he said to C——; 'I should like to 'ave a look at 'em;' upon which C—— proudly opened his basket and showed its contents.

'Dear, dear,' said the bailiff, 'I bean't much of a scholar; 'ow much do 'ee think they'd come to at half-a-crown apiece?'—the fine exacted for killing parr.

'Half-a-crown apiece!' said C——, perfectly mystified; 'what for?'

'Why, sir,' said the bailiff, 'they be all parr you've got, and you bean't allowed to kill 'em.'

'Aren't these trout?' asked C——.

'No,' I said, 'I'm afraid not; I don't think there is one amongst them.'

Emptying out his basket on the grass, we found he had got between thirty and forty parr, and not a single trout.

Returning to the water those that were alive, the keeper collared the rest, saying he was much afeard he must report it to the Board, and left us with poor C——'s spoils in his handkerchief. Being fortunately myself a member of the Board, I pleaded my relative's entire ignorance of what he was doing, and he escaped without penalty.

C——'s disgust at such ridiculous laws induced him to walk off to the inn, and shortly return to his pike and barbel.

On this visit to the F—— Arms, I made the acquaintance of several fishermen, two of whom were staying at the inn, S—— and M——: the former somewhat past his work, but still devoted to the sport; the latter quite first-class with the fly. I also met a Captain P——, who lived near, and with whom I had afterwards many a jolly day.

The sport was not good, very few fresh fish being yet up. There were a few killed, but not by our party. I, however, enjoyed my stay—the pleasant society, the talks over old fishing days, past victories, and fearful defeats made the evenings pass off very pleasantly. One day Captain P—— kindly asked M—— and myself to dine with him that night. There being a lady in the question, his wife, I was desirous of making as decent an appearance as possible, my rough shooting suit being ill-adapted for a dinner party, so borrowed a suit of black which our landlord, H——, had purchased to wear at the funeral of a relative. H—— was long and thin, I was short and thick, and my

appearance when fully arrayed must have been funny in the extreme. The collar of the coat half-way up the back of my head, its swallow-tails nearly on the ground, its sleeves turned up some six inches at the wrist, and the trousers with the knee bulge over my ankles turned up, showing some twelve inches of lining. Thus equipped, M—— and I arrived at the hospitable mansion of our friend. On being introduced to Mrs. P——, I assured her that though outside I was H——, the landlord, *inside* I was Major Hopkins.

We had a very pleasant evening, and the port was excellent.

On getting outside to return to the inn we found the night very dark, the lantern we had brought with us blew out, and we were left to grope our way down a very tortuous path to the high road. Arm-in-arm we had just cleared the garden gate, when down we both tumbled into something, which, though soft enough, was not pleasant to the olfactory nerves.

'Where be 'ee?' said I. 'Can't say to a parish or two,' cried M——. 'Anyhow, it's not the Taw, thank God.'

We had tumbled into a large manure pit, having missed the path which ran near it. Picking ourselves out, and getting a fresh light from the house, we safely reached the high road and the inn. H——'s face on interviewing his best suit the next morning was a caution.

It was some months before I did any more fishing, being much occupied in superintending the building of a house near B——. Towards the end of August, however, hearing that the peel were up in considerable numbers, I could not resist the temptation of having a try for them.

The peel in both rivers, Taw and Torridge, begin to run in August, and, if sufficient water, somewhat earlier. Finding to my disgust that there was no room for me at the F—— Arms, I put up at a small pub. some three miles from it down the line. The accommodation there was *not nice*, but now I believe greatly improved, and my old enemies, the fleas, had a rare treat. I made it do, however, for the night, as I was to get a room at my old quarters next day.

Arriving at the station, which was close to the inn and the water, by the early train, I walked up

the stream to see what it was like, as I did not know that part of the river. I had not got far before I saw an elderly gentleman fishing a pool for salmon.

'Any sport, sir?' said I.

'No, sir,' he replied in stern tones.

'Nice outing?' said I.

'Yes,' was the curt reply.

The next morning I met him again.

'Any sport, sir?'

'Sport! I don't think there's a fish in this infernal river,' he said.

'Well, it's a nice outing,' I said; on which he gave a grunt.

A few mornings after I again met him.

'I hope you've had better sport to-day, sir.'

'I've been flogging this beastly ditch for a week, and have not touched a fish,' he replied.

'The fishing is bad, I fear, but it's a pleasant outing,' I said.

'D—— your outing, sir,' he roared out; then, smiling grimly, apologised for his language and bad temper.

This was my first introduction to one who is

now an old friend, and who afterwards came to reside in my neighbourhood. But I must return to my fishing.

Finding I could do nothing with the fly, I sent my boy back to the pub. for my spinning rod, and, putting up a 1½-inch Devon minnow, I soon got a couple of nice peel, and a little lower down got broke in a salmon, the trace giving way. I was always fond of fishing as fine as possible, which requires great care in the selection of the gut forming the trace; this, when put together, should be tested with a five-pounds weight for peel, and up to seven pounds when expecting heavier fish. Do not use a trace a second time without testing it again. The Devon minnow, when taken by the fish, is violently ejected up it, thus frequently fraying the gut. Goodness me! how many fish have I lost by neglecting to test!

The next day I thankfully left my quarters at the pub. and went to the F—— Arms, where I found my two friends, S—— and M——, just starting to fish as I arrived.

Leaving S—— his favourite spot, called the Flat, which was easy to fish, and where he used to

stand day after day casting away with but little result (his bag for the year in question being only one salmon), and M—— to fish lower down, I went higher up the Mole, crossing at K—— bridge to go to the weir some quarter of a mile above it, having a ticket for the other side of the stream, which was far the best.

I began with a minnow at the weir, some rain having fallen during the night and colouring the water: just right for the minnow. In the weir pool itself I ran a small salmon, but missed him, and he would not come again.

I must have then got into a school of peel, for between the weir and the bridge, a distance of a few hundred yards, I got thirteen peel, averaging nearly 2 lbs. apiece, besides being broke three times in others.

These breakages were all caused by my neglecting or being too lazy to test my tackle in the way I have previously described. The water clearing a little, I put up the fly-rod.

I then selected for a fly one called a 'bloody butcher'; but I must describe what that is. The fly differs from the 'butcher' proper in having a

bright crimson hackle at the head, instead of the guinea-fowl feather, but in other respects is the same. With this more showy fly I proceeded to fish below K—— bridge.

I had got to the wood at the opposite side and within a quarter of a mile of the Junction Pit, when, fishing rather carelessly in water that I thought was hardly deep enough to hold a salmon, something took the fly and darted up-stream like lightning. I ran after him, giving him line, when he suddenly turned and came as fast down-stream. Not being able to wind up quick enough to keep a tight line on him, I ran backwards into the field, and went head over heels into a furze bush. 'Oh Lord!' thought I; 'all's up now.' I had fortunately kept my rod up in the fall, and, getting up as quickly as I could, found to my delight the fish was still fast, and going down-stream like the deuce. I ran down the bank till stopped by some trees which I could not pass. I then tried to check him, but not a bit of it; and, my line getting very low in the reel, there was nothing for it but to take to the water.

The stream was very strong just there, though

not much deeper than my knees. In I went, when I was at once washed off my legs, and down I came on my back, the reel still screeching away, with the fish some fifty yards off. I bumped along on the stones, sometimes on, but generally off, my legs, and gained the shallow water on the other side; my waders, of course, were full of water, blown out like huge sausages and terribly heavy. The fish had by this time reached a small pit which preceded a long run into the Junction Pool, where he, fortunately for me, sulked a bit. Hustling along as fast as I could, I wound up over him. No rest for the wicked; off he went again like a shot.

The wading here was very bad, over sharp and uneven rocks; the bank also was high and covered with bushes, so getting out was impossible.

I followed the fish as fast as I could, till, nearing the huge dark pit at the end of the run, I had to put as heavy a strain as my tackle would bear to stop him getting into it. I succeeded in bringing him up some twenty yards above the run into the pit. I could not raise my rod on account of the overhanging trees, and my only chance of

securing him was to cross the stream. At this moment the keeper appeared on the other side. I asked him whether I could cross. 'Don't think you can, major,' he said; 'too deep, and the stream too strong.'

'Can't lose this beauty,' I thought; so, directing him to cut a long stick to help me in getting out, I started.

I got near the middle all right, when—horrors! I felt one leg go, and then the other. 'Into the Junction Pit, for a monkey,' I thought, the beast of a fish doing his best to get me there.

Throwing myself forward, I made a frantic dash for the stick which the keeper held out to me as far as he could. I got hold of the end, when it broke short off, and back I went into the stream. In my desperate kicks to regain my footing, I fortunately struck a rock, which at low water showed itself above the surface. This gave me a purchase in the right direction, and, again seizing the stick, the keeper succeeded in dragging me to the bank.

The fish had by this time reached the pit, and was resting after his labours in the deep water; so, giving the keeper the rod, I emptied out some of

the contents of my waders, crawled up the bank, and, taking it again, wound up over the fish. He was pretty well done by this time; so, giving the keeper my gaff, he speedily landed a fish of 22½ lbs., and such a picture too!

'Well,' said the keeper, 'I'm blowed if there's another gent as would 'ave done that.' I didn't think there was.

It was a nasty risk to run, and I would not do it now: that is very certain. Never have I before or since had such a battle as that. It was fully half an hour before I got that fish out. The 'butcher' had still further established his character as a good holding fly, the hook being on this occasion firmly fixed in the tongue of the salmon.

Wet to the skin, I took off my clothes, and with nothing more than my flannel shirt over my back, and hat, ran up and down on the grass, whilst the rest of my garments were hanging to dry on the notice post of the Hon. M—— R——.

By Jove, here's the train coming! The line crossed the river just above the pit, and I was in full view of the occupants of the carriages; so,

LIMITED SHELTER

wishing the post of the notice board was a little thicker, I made myself as small as I could behind it. I must have been seen, however, for a fellow from a window called out: 'Washing day, gov'nor?'

The peel being well up, we all had fair sport with that game fish.

I found that the minnow beat the fly all to sticks; in the evening, however, when not too tired to go out, I got a few with a fly. They will rise freely when nearly quite dark, but the fishing is rather different at that time.

Throw rather up-stream with only *one* fly, and pull down and across rather quickly, making a slight ripple on the water; this apparently attracts the fish, and they will rush at it eagerly. The best fly for this purpose was a large-sized trout-fly of a dusky-brown colour, made 'buzz' (that is, without wings); or a dark grey, with a little silver twist round the body.

The tail of the Junction Pit was an excellent place for them; still, rather shallow, water being best. I think it was on this visit that I killed with a minnow a fish that looked like a beautiful brown trout, but being nearly five pounds weight; and

never having heard of a trout in the Taw of anything like that size, I was dubious. I showed it to several fishermen, who thought it was a bull-trout.

From its flavour when cooked, which was excellent, it must have been a sea-fish, and my opinion is that it was a cross between a brown trout and a peel. Several, I believe, were killed in the river of much heavier weight.

The next year the association came to an end, being unpopular with the farmers, and the water was taken by different gentlemen, a Mr. C—— having the best of it. His beat included a weir on the Mole, called 'the Brush,' and, as a narrow pass for fish was on his side, it was a good place for a salmon if they would take.

I never think myself a weir, inviting as it looks, is worth spending much time over, except perhaps when the water is low, and the fish unable to get over the obstacle; usually, they are too busy to feed.

C—— was an excellent hand with the minnow, though, oddly enough, he never learnt the use of the fast reel, and till the day of his death, which to the regret of many old friends occurred some years

ago, went on hauling and coiling. The Mole, being a small stream, a long cast was seldom required, so his style did well enough.

Towards the end of one season I was at the F—— Arms, and C—— was frequently bringing to the inn, to go by train, salmon, sometimes three at a time. It puzzled me how in the world he got them, as the water was thick, and beyond a few peel, not in the best condition, I had not touched a fish.

I must try and solve this mystery; so next morning, leaving my rod behind, and with my sketch-book in my pocket, I started for the 'Brush' weir, where I fancied he must have got the fish.

Ensconcing myself in the wood on the high bank over it, I peered out. There I saw C—— and a friend below, hard at work.

I observed that they did not throw their minnows any distance from the bank, but across the mouth of the side pass, close to which they were standing; when letting the bait sink a bit, it jerked violently towards their feet.

'A touch of snatching about this,' thinks I.

Presently the friend called out, 'I've got him!'

and, holding on like grim death, nearly pulled the fish clean out; but the hold gave way, and I saw on the tail hook of his minnow several large scales, which certainly did not come from the salmon's mouth.

The next minute C—— was in one, and, after a short but desperate fight, actually hauled in, tail first, a fish of some eight or nine pounds weight. One of the triple hooks I could see was fast in the small leathery fin near the tail.

'Oh,' I said, advancing, 'I see!'

'What the deuce are you doing here?' said C——.

'Sketching,' says I.

'Don't like being sketched,' said C——

'I dare say not, at this work,' I replied.

The mystery was solved!

Now, poaching I define as not giving a fish an option. In this case the minnow, as representing the option, was there, but it was like saying to the fish: 'Here's a minnow, you had better take it kindly, you are bound to have it somewhere!'

Being a man of liberal views, I gave the subject the benefit of the doubt, and tried it afterwards

myself with some success, but should think it my duty to report any fellow I caught at it.

At the foot of that narrow fish-pass, the salmon were as thick as peas, and it was most amusing to watch them trying to get up, the side walls being covered with scales which had been knocked off in their failures.

A poor fellow had lost his life there some years previously, being, it was said, knocked into the water by a salmon jumping across his feet, which were hanging over the side of the wall. This was quite possible.

During the few years I fished the Taw, the largest fish I got was near U——, lower down the river. I caught her (she was a female fish) with a minnow, and she weighed twenty-nine-and-a-half pounds. I shall not forget in a hurry the run I had to catch the train with that monster on my back.

My friend Captain P——, who being on the spot fished much more frequently than I did, succeeded in killing, with a fly, one of thirty-one pounds.

A SALMON

CHAPTER X

THE TORRIDGE

It being difficult to get fishing in the Taw, and the F—— Arms water sadly reduced in quantity, besides being heavily fished, I determined to see what I could do on the Torridge.

An old friend kindly gave me the right to fish some three miles of water near Hatherleigh, a little over twenty miles from my house.

It was an awkward place to get at, the rail only taking me to T——, and leaving a thirteen miles' drive.

On my first visit I lodged with a retired police-sergeant and his wife, who was a capital cook and manager in every respect. I was sitting after dinner on the evening of my arrival, when I heard two sharp knocks on the door.

'Come in,' I said. The door was opened an inch or so, and a voice, apparently from the floor, said 'Holloa! what are you up to?' Jumping up to see where it came from, I found it proceeded from a parrot, a great pet of my landlady's, and certainly one of the cleverest birds I ever heard. Only a few days previously he had started an omnibus standing at the door, by imitating from his favourite perch, on a tree in the garden, the voice of the boy behind, 'Right away!' and the gruff 'Come hup!' of the driver.

It had been raining hard all the day of my arrival, and I feared that we should find the river in heavy flood.

The next morning the sergeant and myself started off to have a look at the Torridge, a mile and a quarter from my lodgings. On getting to the top of the hill, near the river, we found a sea of water, and could hardly tell where the river ran. My companion then suggested trying the Looe, a small tributary of the Torridge. The water in it was not so high, but far too thick for fishing, so we returned, and I spent the day in calling on a gentleman who resided near the town, and who owned the best

part of the Looe, a lovely little trout stream, and who kindly gave me permission to fish during my stay.

I then inspected the fine old church and quaint old inn in the town, where I afterwards spent many a pleasant day.

The river I knew could not fish for at least a couple of days, during which interval I amused myself by sketching some of the many lovely views of the Dartmoor hills.

S——, a friend, having joined me, we started with the sergeant and our rods for the river, which, though very big, was fishable; so, putting on a minnow, I began business at the Turn Pool below the bridge, which appeared a likely spot.

In my second cast I hooked either a small salmon or large peel, but lost him. 'Never mind,' I said, 'there are fish up,' the month being August.

I do not think we did much beyond a few trout which S—— caught, but discovered it was a lovely bit of water, and delightful to fish.

The next day being Sunday, I walked to Meeth to attend Divine Service there, and deliver a letter of introduction I had to the clergyman of the vil-

lage, the Rev. L——, who was noted as a celebrated fisherman in the Torridge.

After leaving my letter at his house, I entered the small, shabby-looking church, the congregation in which did not exceed fourteen or fifteen persons.

The Rev. L—— shortly entered by a side door, accompanied by Mary, his housekeeper. He was an old man of some eighty-three or eighty-four years, and should have retired some time before.

There being no vestry, he took off his black wideawake, and dexterously pitched it on to the altar. Mary then helped him off with his overcoat, which she deposited on the altar-rail, and, putting on a skull-cap and his surplice, took him by the arm and hoisted him into the reading-desk, and the poor old fellow began to mumble out the service, half sitting, half standing.

It was a terrible performance, and I could not wonder at the smallness of the congregation.

After church I went back to lunch with him, and a kindly, genial old gentleman I found him, quite delighted to get anybody with whom he could talk fishing, in which he was now too old to take an active part. He showed me his fly-book, in

which were many flies marked with the date of their different captures; also his diary, which was spread over a period of sixty years, during which time he had killed nearly two thousand fish, not including kelts, which he always scrupulously put back again. These were all taken with a fly, he never using a minnow.

I was sketching him after lunch in his old fishing things, which he readily donned, when he remarked, 'Hope the Bishop won't look in.'

Amongst the flies he gave me was one he called the 'Prima Donna,' the best fly, he said, he ever used.

This fly I unfortunately lost in a fish before having it copied, and all I could remember of it was that it was a very yellow fly.

I never saw the poor old gentleman again, as he died before my next visit.

A year or so after this, Sergeant T—— dying, and his wife leaving the town, I lost my pleasant lodgings, and adjourned to the 'George' Hotel, where I was very comfortable in its quaint old apartments.

The landlord, G—— R——, was a capital fellow,

and a first-rate fisherman and sportsman all round. His wife was, as I often told him, miles too good for him; the only fault one could find with him was that, grant him a day's fishing, the day in question had generally forty-eight hours in it; he frequently accompanied me in my fishing excursions, and a more unselfish, genial companion you could not wish for.

The morning after my arrival, having secured a boy to carry my spare rod and basket, off I started for a cottage near H—— Bridge, which crosses the Torridge, and our nearest point.

At this cottage I kept my waders and boots, where they were always carefully dried, and boots greased by Mrs. R——, a prolific wife of a hard-working man: the brown old-fashioned cradle never being empty.

Putting on my things and getting the rods ready, I walked up the river, half a mile from the cottage to the junction of the Looe and the Torridge.

The run below this was always a favourite spot of mine, and, with the water the right height, generally held fish.

I worked it over with a fly first; no results. Returning to the top, I took the minnow rod, and put up a two-inch Devon.

I had got near the bottom of the run, and as far as I could wade, when up came a fine salmon, paused a second, during which I applied the check to my fast reel, which I now always use, and away he went down-stream at a fearful pace. I could not follow him, the water being too deep, or mount the bank for the trees, so had nothing for it but to let him go. Out went forty yards of line, followed by another forty of my backing. This nearly all disappeared, and I began to see the barrel of my reel (fearful sight!) before I could stop him. I could see him a long way down the stream, rolling over and over, with a portion of my line across a nasty bank of stones which jutted out from the opposite side.

'I shall never save him, I fear.'

The fish, however, not being able to bear the heavy strain I put on him, came slowly back, and, winding up, I got on terms with him again.

Not half done yet, for in a few seconds he was off again nearly as far down the stream, and my

arms ached so with the strain to keep the rod up that I could hardly do so.

Back again, thank God, he came at last, and this time pretty well beat; he tried one feeble effort up-stream, then turned over on his side; I pulled him towards Billy, my boy, who had gaffed one or two fish for me before, and was a handy little chap.

He was standing on the trunk of a half submerged tree which had fallen from the bank, expectorating on his hands, and saying, 'I'll stick 'un into 'un!' I warned him to be careful not to slip, as he was a heavy fish, and the water pretty deep.

Round came the fish. 'Now, then, Billy,' I said. In went the gaff right enough, and so did Billy, and the next thing that represented him to my view was the soles of his boots. Dropping my rod, I had just time to grab his left leg, and pulled out Billy, gaff, and fish, on to the stones, for that plucky little beggar had never let go. I presented him with half-a-crown on the spot. The fish was a beauty of 19 lbs., and fresh run. The fish in the Torridge, though fewer in number, are, I think, better in the spring than the autumn.

Having put matters to rights—testing tackle, &c.—Billy, with the fish over his back, walked off to deposit it at the cottage, telling everybody he met, 'I killed 'un,' ignoring my share in the capture altogether.

Whilst Mrs. R——, at the cottage, was drying the boy's things, I went down to the Bridge to try a hole near one of the parapets, which occasionally held a fish. It did so on this occasion, for I had hardly got my minnow in before at it he came, and I was into another one. Though pretty lively in his motions, he was not a patch on the first one, and, after playing him for five or six minutes, I was preparing to land him myself, when I heard the voice of Billy shouting out, 'Shall I coom to 'ee, maister?'

'Yes,' I said, 'but mind the stream under the bank,' which, though shallow, was running pretty sharp, I being at the time on a bank of stones which here cropped up for some little distance down the river.

The bank on which Billy was standing was high and steep. Whilst busy with the fish, I heard a crash, and, looking round, found poor Billy

had descended the bank with greater velocity than he intended, and, landing in the stream, was washed off his legs.

'Elp, 'elp, I'm drownin'!' he roared.

Knowing the stream he was in shallowed to a few inches lower down, I gave more attention to getting the fish out than Billy.

He soon picked himself out, and came running up, wet through again, of course. I gave him the gaff, and he soon had the fish on the stones. He weighed 14 lbs., and looked fairly well, but on examining the gills I found them full of maggots, and partially eaten away. The nasty things must have killed the fish before long, so I saved them the trouble, and presented him to a farmer, who told me afterwards it was 'beeautiful, sure*ly*.' I should have been sorry to have eaten him.

I had no further sport for some time, and seeing the trout rising freely to the 'March brown,' which were coming down in large numbers, I sent Billy back to the cottage for my trout rod.

Putting up a March brown and a blue upright, I began at the trout. I did not do much on the surface, and, fancying that they must be taking the

fly beneath the water, which they frequently will do in the spring, I took off the dropper and allowed the March brown to sink. This method proved successful, and in a short time I had four brace of nice trout.

The artificial flies I use are made by Eaton & Deller, of London, and are wonderful imitations of the real thing, having detached bodies—that is, the body of the fly only extends half-way down the hook and then curves upwards, leaving the hook bare beneath. For dry-fly fishing they are first-rate.

Working my way down-stream, I got to a spot where, the year before, I had hooked and lost a fine trout. Hoping he might be there still, and somewhat grown, I fished carefully over his old haunt, when whizz went my little trout reel. 'Good Lord,' I thought to myself, 'he *has* grown,' for in one rush he nearly emptied the reel. To my dismay I found I was fast in a large kelt, who, after a few seconds, gave a 'Take that!' kind of a slap with his huge tail, and removed my March brown and the best part of a fine cast.

'Rot him!' said I, and left for the cottage.

On my way back along the side of the river I was carelessly trailing my flies on the water as I walked along, when a deuce of a splash behind informed me that a salmon had taken a look at them. Fortunately he had missed them, and had not been pricked.

Calling up Billy, I got out a small Devon minnow, put it on to a salmon trace, and worked it over the spot. He took it directly, and a lively time ensued; for, though a small fish, he was terribly *merry*, and my poor little trout rod was cruelly treated. Being able to follow him about, I did not much fear the result, and, after some ten minutes' play, Billy, with his usual skill, pulled out a fish of 7 lbs., fresh run. This was a capital wind-up to one of the best days' sport I ever had on the Torridge.

Billy's triumphant entry into Hatherleigh with the two fish which he persisted in carrying, though a passing cart would have taken them, was most amusing. He was surrounded by a crowd of admiring boys and girls, and a little fellow, well known in the town for his breakdown performances, was dancing in front of him in humble

imitation of David before the Ark. The next day, though apparently a good one, I never got a fin, so gave up salmon fishing and took to the trout.

Billy, though a brilliant gaffer, was not an equally good scholar, so his attendance at school was particularly requested, and I was obliged to engage another boy. This young gentleman—James by name—had the courage of his opinions, and expressed them somewhat freely.

On one occasion, when out with me, after we had got over a stiff bank and fence, which I had negotiated with some difficulty, we sat down for a rest on the other side.

'James,' I said, 'how old are you?'

'I be fourteen,' he said.

'How old do you think I am?'

After looking me carefully over, he said with great firmness, 'You be zeventy.'

'Oh, you young rascal, I'm not so much as that, though I am a bit stiff in getting over these banks.'

'So I be thinkin',' he said; 'I don't think you'll be gettin' over many more on 'em.'

Nasty boy, that!

Having brought back the trout rod from the cottage to the inn, I started next morning down the Looe, which ran within a quarter of a mile of the town, and, with James in attendance, began with a March brown and a blue upright.

I knew directly I was in for a good day, my first cast rising two fish and getting one of them.

The weather was perfect, and the light and shade on the distant hills of Dartmoor exquisite in their lovely changes. With the bright green of the spring grass and the sparkling Looe for a foreground, it made up a picture which it was a delight to gaze on.

At the end of that charming day's sport I had nineteen brace of beautiful trout, the largest about three-quarters of a pound in weight, the fish not running large in the Looe, and, but for the parr constantly taking the flies, I should have had many more. On my way back I called at the house of my kind friend, the owner of the fishing, and left him as many trout as he required.

Later on in my stay I was fishing at the junction of the Okement and Torridge, where the two rivers formed a fine pit, which always held fish,

and rose, but did not hook a fish with the fly, my old friend 'the butcher.' I put on a Devon minnow, and had him directly.

The bank on my side went sheer down some eight feet to the water, and getting him out seemed to be impossible. A friend of mine, Mr. S—— O——, was fishing on the other side with a fly, so I asked him to throw his fly over my line and pull the fish out on his side, which was a nice sloping bank. He dexterously did this, and his fly held fast at the knot of my main line.

'Pull away,' I said, paying out; and pull away he did with such a will that the fly drew, and he all but fell on his back in the water.

Laughing heartily at the accident, and not much caring whether we got the fish out or not, being doubtful of his quality, I wound up the slack line and found the fish still fast. S—— O—— soon had another fly on, and again hitching it on to my line, after a most amusing battle, pulled the fish out on his side. He was bright enough, the kelts mending in the Torridge in a wonderful way; but having to cut the minnow flight out of him, kelt or not, it was no use putting him back; so he

also left for a farmhouse, where he was more appreciated than I fancy he deserved.

The autumn of the following year, which was a very wet one, found me again at the 'George.'

I asked where Billy was, and found that he had scraped through his last standard, and had gone 'prentice to a tailor; so I engaged a boy I used to call 'the Weasel' from his strong resemblance to that animal.

The Torridge, G—— R—— told me, was bank high and very thick, the Looe as bad; what were we to do?

'How about the Okement?' I said, a beautiful stream which rises in Dartmoor, and joins the Torridge about three miles from Hatherleigh.

'Might do,' said G—— R——; so, ordering the dog-cart, we both started for the stream.

For a mile or so we had a good road over the moor, but then had to turn off to get into the valley, down—a road you can't call it, but a muddy swamp, filled with huge blocks of stone and ruts a foot deep.

The Weasel, who was behind, was soon disposed of, being shot clean out. Telling him to run on,

we bumped and banged along that infernal track, till I thought all my back teeth were coming out.

We got to the farm at the bottom near the river at last, and saw the farmer, Mr. P ——, a civil, obliging little man, who told us the Okement was terribly big 'sure*ly*,' but not very thick, he thought.

Putting up the trap, which was not improved by its rough journey and made G—— R—— look rather sorrowful, we walked on to the river, a quarter of a mile off.

On coming in sight of it, it *was* big, sure enough, but not hopelessly thick; so I determined to try it.

There was only half a mile of water I had a right to fish before it joined the Torridge, which was quite unfishable. Where we hit it off there was a long pit with grassy, low banks on our side, the picture of a place to kill a fish in. A minnow in such water was my only chance; so, selecting a bright $2\frac{1}{4}$-inch Devon, I set to work. I had got about half-way down the pit, when I was fast in a fish. I had just time to put on the check

when away went the line. All at once the reel stopped running, and, looking to see what was the matter, I found the line was crossed and in a tangle; I ran after the fish to prevent a break, and, taking off the strain, the fish quietly returned to his holt.

Then several anxious moments ensued, pulling at the line and unwinding on the grass as G—— R—— and I cleared it, till, getting some fifty yards clear, I deemed it enough and wound up over him.

If that fish had only known the fix I was in, one rush would have settled matters.

'Now, then, my friend, blaze away,' I said, as I stood over him with a tight line on the bank. Blaze away he did, darting to the other side and nearly stranding himself on the stones; back again under the bank; down-stream with a rush; then up. Oh! it was great diversion.

G—— R——, gaff in hand, followed his motions with a most devoted attention.

'Hang it, G——,' I said; 'we'll have a look at him.' And, giving to the pressure, up came a beauty.

G—— R—— was soon flat on the bank; stretching over, he stuck the gaff into him, and pulled out a picture of 19½ lbs.

Delighted—'Hundred to one it's the only fish killed in the county to-day,' I cried. 'Out with the flask, and let us drink to his immortal memory.' We did so.

On examining my reel, I found it must have been carelessly wound up, after drying the line, and I suspect Mrs. R—— at the cottage was the delinquent. The old adage: 'If you want a thing well done, do it yourself.'

G—— R—— and I soon got it clear, and I fished down the water, but did not get another run.

It beginning to rain again, we started on our rough journey home.

On our arrival at the inn G—— R—— said, looking over his dog-cart, 'Never no more; I will borrow Mr. P——'s spring butt next journey.'

The fish I sent to my friend on the Looe, who kindly asked me to come up and help to eat it, which I did, and found it first-rate.

As only a small quantity of rain had fallen

during the night, and the weather looked like mending, I started the next morning to try the Okement again, in Mr. P——'s cart this time.

The Weasel was in attendance, G—— R—— not being able to come, it being market-day and business to be attended to.

We survived the journey and duly arrived on the bank of the stream; it had fallen a little and was rather clearer, but still too thick for a fly.

I got out the spinning rod, and, using the same minnow as before, fished the long pool—blank.

At the end, round the corner of the meadow, was a not very likely spot for a fish, but not caring to leave it without a trial, I cast in, and to my delight was fast in a salmon.

It was a nasty place to kill a fish in, as I could not follow for the trees on the bank.

Away the beggar went, down-stream, under those confounded bushes. I could not see the fish, but could hear him floundering about some sixty yards off. I hardly expected to be able to drag him against the heavy stream, but his own incli-

nation to return to his old quarters helped me, and I did get him back, though it was a tough job, and brought him up to the expectant Weasel.

Then did he equal the prowess of the redoubtable Billy, and getting the gaff well in, with my help, pulled out an eighteen-pounder.

I had taken some trouble to teach him how to gaff, and a very good plan of doing so is to throw in pieces of newspaper, about the size of a hat, and telling him as it floats by to stick the gaff through it; offering but slight resistance, it requires a sharp, clean stroke to transfix the paper. Full of hope, I came to the last run before reaching the Torridge. It was, perhaps, a hundred and fifty yards long, and the banks clear of trees.

I had never fished it before for salmon, it being in the usual state of the water, too shallow to hold fish.

Being the last bit of water fishable, of course I tried it, and after a few casts I was fast in another fish, apparently of fourteen or fifteen pounds weight.

After some brilliant play, I brought him to the side for the Weasel to operate on.

He missed him, lost his head, and began digging and striking at the fish with the gaff, eventually pulling the bait by the trace clean out of his mouth.

His distress was so evident, I could not say much, though I thought a good deal.

Changing the trace, which had been frayed in the operation, I began again, and fished to the junction without success. I was thinking of giving it up as a bad job, when I saw a fish turn, close to where I had lost the other; I fished down over him, and, great Scott! I had him.

This time I determined to gaff him myself, but, just as I was about doing so, the fish made a last rush for freedom, and was some twenty yards off down-stream, turning over and over close to the side of the bank.

I had dropped the gaff to mind the reel.

The keen Weasel seized it, and ran down the stream to gaff the fish and retrieve his lost character. I wound up to get over him, but a gorse bush prevented my seeing the salmon.

The line slackened: 'Have you got him?'

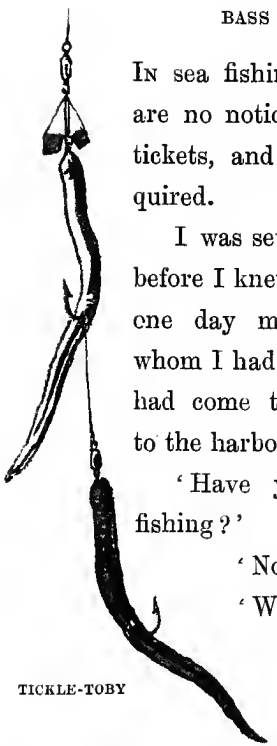
'No, sir,' with a sob, said the wretched Weasel.

He had missed him again, and the minnow had come away. This was *too* much; for a second or so the Weasel's life was in peril. From what I could see of the fish he was much the same size as the last, about fourteen pounds.

Damnation!

CHAPTER XI

BASS FISHING



TICKLE-TOBY

In sea fishing, thank goodness, there are no notice boards, no keepers, no tickets, and no leave or license required.

I was several years in North Devon before I knew anything about it; when one day my friend Captain P——, whom I had met on the Taw, and who had come to reside at Instow, close to the harbour, said to me:

'Have you ever tried any bass fishing?'

'No, never,' said I.

'Would you like to come out one day?'

'I should, very much.'

'All right; meet me at the Custom-house, A——, to-morrow, at seven A.M.

sharp, and I'll have a boat ready; bring your spinning rod, salmon reel and line; I'll find the rest.'

The bass fishing begins the end of May or the beginning of June, so comes in handy, as the rivers, from want of water, are generally unfishable.

I was there to the minute. It was a charming morning in June, with a light breeze from the north, which would enable us under sail to stem the ebbing tide; the fish usually sporting, as they call it, on the ebb for perhaps two or three hours.

The boat for the purpose was a strong, roomy one, with a sprit-sail and small mizen, and was the property of an old salt and fisherman, called Captain F——. We started; Captain P—— then handed me as a bait a revolving piece of bright metal, shaped like a big V, with a swivel at the point and a large triple hook at the other end; the corners of the V being slightly turned reverse ways, made it revolve very rapidly; this I attached to my salmon trace.

P——, giving me the seat of honour (he was the most unselfish fisherman I ever met, and I wish there were more of them), that being the

thwart nearest the stern, and himself taking the one nearest the mast, away we sailed, tacking up to our position near the lighthouse.

We had not been there long before Captain F—— said, 'There they are!' and looking in the direction he was pointing, I saw a number of gulls, darting and plunging into the water, some two hundred yards off. These are attracted by a small fish called britt, which are driven by the pursuit of the bass to the surface, and between the two, one from above and the other below, must have a lively time of it. Off we went, and were soon amongst them, the gulls in hundreds flying around us, picking up the bright, silvery britt, and the great circles in the calm water showing the rises of the bass.

We had not gone far before P—— shouted, 'Tally ho! I've got one,' and after a short battle, pulled alongside a bass of some three pounds, which Captain F—— got into the boat with a large landing net.

Whilst gazing at the first bass I had ever seen, I felt a heavy pull at my line; 'Tally-ho!' I said, fancying it the right thing, 'I've got one;' and

after a wondrous fight from so small a fish, another, of nearly the same weight, was soon on board.

The fun was fast and furious for a bit, when fish and gulls suddenly disappeared. In about a quarter of an hour we saw them again, rather further down the harbour, the fish having apparently gone out with the tide. We followed, and were soon at work again. This was a school of rather larger fish, P—— getting a fish of nearly five pounds, and shortly afterwards I had one still larger, which gave me as much play as a salmon, though for rather a shorter time.

The boat is brought up to the wind when a fish is hooked to stop her way through the water, and if the fish is a good one the other rod had better wind up to prevent the lines fouling.

I forget how many we got, fourteen or fifteen, I think, the largest being five-and-a-half pounds.

A little before half ebb, the fish sank or ceased to play, and the fun was over for that tide.

Taking greatly to the sport, I engaged an old fisherman at A—— called James Scilly, who had a strong serviceable boat, which he kept beautifully

SCILLY AND HIS PIPE

clean, and in this my friend P—— and I had some capital sport.

One day later in the summer we were fishing at low water near the bar of the harbour, which in those days frequently afforded good sport.

We were sailing backwards and forwards, when a curious accident happened. James was steering, P—— sitting on the stern-thwart, and I near the mast, when there was a terrible crash and bang in the bows, which sent us all flying into the bottom of the boat; James on his stomach, P—— and I on our backs, and our legs in the air. 'Good Lord! what's that?' said P——, thinking we had run into something. Looking round, I saw a wretch of a boy in another boat, which the sail had hidden from our view, and who in trying to cross our bows had run into us.

James was very indignant, and seizing one of the paddles gave him a good slap on the head with the blade.

The collision had knocked a hole in our bows, but fortunately above water line, so no great harm was done.

Thinking matters over, I fancied some improve-

ments might be made in the bait, and my idea was to duplicate the spinners, placing one behind the other, so that I should have two instead of one, and a more showy bait.

Having let my house for a month, I put up at a little inn at A—— to be handy for the bass, James's boat being moored beneath my windows, which had a charming view of the harbour.

The best time for fishing was usually very early in the morning, for, as James used to say, 'they're more savager'er then;' so it was very convenient being so close.

The weather being settled and very fine, James called me one morning in August before light, as we were to go the Bar, a distance of two miles, and were anxious to get there at daybreak.

We pulled out on the last of the ebb, and brought up at the Bar buoy, and as soon as it was light enough, saw the gulls at work close to us.

A light breeze springing up, we set sail, as sailing is in some respects better than pulling, not disturbing the water so much. My rod was soon over the side, with thirty yards of line out, and my double spinners working away.

These proved a great success, and I soon had ten or eleven nice bass in the boat, one weighing about seven pounds, the largest I had as yet caught. After an hour and a half's capital sport, the tide then flowing strong, we left for A—— and some breakfast.

About two o'clock we started again for the high-water fishing under the lighthouse. A son of James's then accompanied us with a hand line, and a natural eel, which the fishermen always use.

'There they am,' said James, and sure enough the gulls were plunging and screaming like mad; we were soon amongst them, and it was murder, I can assure you.

James and I had a bet, a quart of beer, as to which would kill the most, the eel or the spinners, he backing the former.

I was two fish ahead when I got broke in a big one, and during the time I took to repair damages, young Scilly caught two on the eel, making the score all even. When the fish sank and it was all over, I was one to the good, so won my quart, which James drank.

On weighing the fish when we got in, we found we had killed, with the morning's take, eighty-seven pounds weight of bass, the best day I ever had, though I have since killed larger fish.

Soon after I discarded the spinners, and used the india-rubber sand-eels, white, black, and red, such as I have previously described in pollock fishing. With these I had capital sport.

The summer succeeding the above, though there were plenty of bass in the harbour, as shown by the numbers caught in the salmon nets, they would not sport, and, with the exception of a few, I could do nothing.

'James,' I said one day, when talking over this unsatisfactory state of things, 'the beggars are there, and I suspect harbour in the rocks and seaweed.'

I had just read in the *Field* of how a celebrated salmon fisher used first to attract his fish with a large and gaudy fly; then, having done so, gave him the real thing, and frequently captured him.

I determined to try to attract the bass from the bottom by a more startling bait than was generally

used. I got two india-rubber eels, one black and one red, and fastened one behind the other, thus creating the immortal 'Tickle-Toby!'

James, when he saw it, said with a shrug of his shoulders, 'Bean't a might 'o use, Major.'

'We'll try it, anyhow,' I replied.

Waiting till nearly half ebb tide, we started for the rocks, when there was from four to eight feet of water over them, and began slowly sailing across, 'Tickle-Toby' and some thirty yards of line astern.

We had crossed once, when, turning my head to see if it was time to wear round, with the rod over my shoulder, I got a dig in the jaw from the butt that was singularly nasty. Bottom, I feared. But what is that astern splashing about?

'A fish, by jove!'

But I had hardly got the words out of my mouth when he got off.

'Tickle-Toby' on examination was all right, and with much better heart we wore round and sailed across again. Not far had we gone when 'Got one!' was my joyous cry. 'He's a buster, James. Bring her up.'

Then a rare fight ensued, James eventually

slipping the landing-net under a seven-pound bass.

I must here explain that a landing-net is much better than a gaff, as the skin of the bass is tough, and it is difficult to get one into them.

'There's biggerer ones than 'e,' said James, with a murderous grin.

Off again, and I was soon fast in another of five pounds. Well, before the water got too low to cover the rocks we had two of five pounds, one six pounds and a half, one of seven pounds; and just as we were leaving, taking a last turn round a rock which was nearly showing, my line received a terrible pull. Fast in the rock, I thought; but no, whatever it was, it was moving. A fish, by Heavens! 'Grandpapa' (as James used to call the big ones) this time.

He was a whacker, and soon had some fifty yards of line out; then he stopped and came into boat quite quietly, till I began to think he could not be so big after all.

James had got up on his seat to have a look at him.

'Oh, Lord,' he said, ''e's as big as a 'ouse!'

The fish had, I presume, caught sight of the boat or James, for he then gave me a taste of his power, plunging and rushing in a frantic manner.

'Mind you zave 'un,' James kept saying.

He gave in at last, and the landing-net laid in the bottom of the boat a bass of eleven pounds, the largest I had, or have since, caught.

'Tickle-Toby' was the invention of the century, and myself the creator.

As James and I were carrying the fish up to the inn, I heard one of the fishermen standing on the quay remark with envious admiration:

'I say, Bill, how does the bald-headed old beggar catch 'em?'

At it again next day, but did not do quite so well, though we wound up with another whacker of nine pounds.

What sport I have had with that bait! Often and often killing fish when not another was taken, though several boats were out.

'Tickle-Toby' was not so good for the smaller fish; too much for their nerves, I suppose; but if a big one was about, he was sure to have him.

The bass fishing has fallen off sadly these last

two or three years, owing, I believe, to cutting the weed in the harbour for manure, thus destroying the refuge of innumerable small fish. I tried some years ago to get it stopped, but failed. My best day last summer, 1892, was only seventeen fish, and the largest of these did not exceed four pounds, but it was pretty fishing.

This occurred on an exquisite morning in August, quite calm, and about 6.30 A.M. The tide flowing strong, I told James to anchor, which he did in the middle of the rising fish; then, standing in the stern, I spun right and left with 'Tickle' *only*, and fine but strong gut. Up they would come just like salmon.

The boat being stationary, the fish would rise close to it; and if the water had not been so clear, I should, I think, have doubled the number.

Anchoring as close as possible to the rocks during the ebbing tide at low water, and spinning with 'Tickle-Toby,' I got some very fine fish, averaging between seven and eight pounds each, but they were not nearly so numerous as they used to be.

Now I must say a few words of caution as to

the harbour and its dangers. The tides run very strong, especially the spring ones, and when at three-quarters ebb become a boiling torrent over the rocks. A boatman thoroughly versed in its navigation, and a rather heavy, steady boat are essentials.

My old boatman, James, was thoroughly reliable, and his management of his boat under sail, perfection. His conversational power was limited, but he was a good smoker of very bad 'baccy,' and a glass of whisky he did not despise. His love of cleanliness and affection for his old boat was carried rather to excess, as the following incident will show.

I was accompanied by a young lady staying with us on one of my fishing excursions, and James with his boat was waiting for us at the Custom House ; but not being able to get the boat close enough for us to step in, he removed his socks and boots, and, taking the young lady in his arms, carried her through the water, and was about to deposit her on board when he caught sight of some mud on a pair of pretty boots she had on ; so, stooping, he dipped both her feet up to

the ankles in the sea, paddling them backwards and forwards to remove it; the owner meanwhile banging his old head, and calling him all the names she could think of. His only remark was, as he put her in the boat, 'Bless yer, miss, salt water won't give yer the snuffles,' meaning a cold.

My guest, Miss C——, was very fortunate in her day, for we had a charming morning's sport, principally among the small fish in the pool, where the two rivers Taw and Torridge meet. She was fishing with a small 'tickle,' and fish of a pound and upwards were taking it readily.

A gull seeing this nice little sand-eel spinning along took a fancy to it, and pouncing down seized it in his bill, taking eel and line high into the air; discovering his mistake, he speedily dropped it, and with a shake of his head expressed his opinion that it was the worst sand-eel he had ever tasted. It was excessively funny.

Getting tired of the sport in the harbour at Appledore, I determined to try the rocks about Lundy Island, some fourteen miles off in the Bristol Channel.

Embarking in the mail boat, a smart fishing-

cutter which sailed weekly, I arrived, after a tedious passage of four hours—the wind being against us—under the lee of the island, where several weather-bound ships were anchored.

Though there is no harbour in the island, it affords secure shelter when the wind is in the north-west, the cliffs being several hundred feet high.

On landing, which we did in the dingy, I went to pay my respects, and leave my card on the proprietor of the island, who resides in a charmingly situated house half-way up the ascent to the plateau on the top.

I then proceeded to some lodgings which I had secured in one of the old cottages formerly used by the workmen in the granite quarries, but which have not been worked for many years.

They were clean, but not luxurious, and in wet weather the roof might have been improved upon, an umbrella being then a necessary addition to the bedclothes.

The solitary armchair in the sitting-room was also a trap for the unwary, evincing a somewhat 'piquant' objection to being sat on, by suddenly projecting the sharp point of a broken spring from

the seat—anything but conducive to comfort and repose.

The difficulty at the time of my visit was getting a boat and man, there being none for hire on the island; however, as long as the ships were anchored for shelter, there was little difficulty in obtaining both from them.

On rising the next morning after my arrival I found the north-west wind still blowing; so, proceeding to the beach with my rod and tackle for pollock, I hailed a schooner, and soon had a man and boat at my service.

There were large schools of mackerel about a mile from the island, but these I had to give up, as the sea was too rough when out of the lee of it.

I then directed my boatman to pull slowly along the rocks near the shore, which I hoped would be the home of numerous big pollock, but was sadly disappointed in their size, Tickle-Toby failing to bring anything over three pounds to book.

Returning to the landing-place, I saw a Clovelly boat had come over with a boatman and gentleman on board; so, hailing them, I ran alongside, and the

latter told me he had come for some conger-fishing, which he said was very good.

I told him I had not done much with the pollock, and he then asked me to accompany him that evening, saying he thought we should have some rare sport.

This invitation I gladly accepted, and, after dinner at my lodgings, we started about 7 P.M. on a warm August evening for our fishing ground. We had a capital supply of bait, principally herrings, and gear which implied heavy fish. The boatman, Bob, took the paddles and slowly pulled the heavy boat, a two-masted lugger, to a likely spot; anchored, and down into the black green depths went two large hooks, with the best part of a herring on each, heavy leads, and some seven fathoms of line.

Lighting our pipes, we awaited results. 'I have got one,' said my new friend, M——, and hauling away as hard as he could, up came a great conger of some seven pounds' weight.

Bob stuck a huge gaff into him, had him in the boat, and by making free use of a heavy stretcher soon killed him.

'That's nothing,' said M——. 'He's a baby to some of them.'

A little time elapsed before getting another bite, when my line received a violent jerk. 'By George, I've got something,' said I. 'Feels d——d like the sea serpent. Give me a hand—I can't hold the beggar.' The thick line spinning through my fingers too fast to be pleasant. 'Blazes!' says M——; 'he's a stunner! The tackle will hold, so haul away.' Easier said than done, most of the said hauling being done by the fish.

With plenty of slack, we beat him at last, and, oh Lord! looking over the side, I saw a great bar of silver nearly as thick as a man's body, fifteen or sixteen feet long, wriggling about in the clear phosphoric water. 'What are we to do with the brute now we've got him?' I thought. This was speedily settled for me by Bob cleverly inserting the gaff in its huge belly, and with M——'s help pulling half his long body into the boat, the rest following.

Horrors! his great ugly head and gaping jaws are within a foot of my legs.

A moment's respite whilst the brute disposed of

'GO IT, BOB.'

the gaff stick by seizing it in his mouth and breaking it off like a carrot. Ah! that sight settled me, and apparently M—— too, for, as I disappeared over the stern, he did ditto over the bows.

Hanging on with our hands to the sides of the boat, we earnestly urged Bob, who was dancing about on the thwarts, hammering away with the stretcher, to do for the beggar.

As the conger wriggled towards the stern in one direction, up would come M——'s head—'Go it, Bob; give it him!' Round the fish would come towards the bows, when down would go M——'s tuppenny, and up mine would come, with a similar request to Bob to give him snuff!

One well-directed blow at last partially stunned the fish, and M—— and I scrambled on board, and by the aid of a large clasp knife succeeded in settling the monster's career. Sitting down in the boat, we roared with laughing; but Bob did not see much to laugh at, being seriously grateful for the existence of his legs below the knees.

The brute weighed 72 lbs.

Of course his capture ended our night's fishing,

as, wet through, we were glad to get back to my lodgings and into dry things.

Bob made a good thing of it after all. On our return to the boat in the morning, we found he had rigged up an awning in the boat, stretched the conger over the thwarts, and, in large letters on a piece of paper, informed the public that the *Sea Serpent* was on view inside, entrance one penny.

An excursion steamer from Clovelly coming in, he did a big trade.

CHAPTER XII

THE FAST REEL

To minnow fishermen this invention of modern years is an immense boon, and I venture to give, as well as I can, some instruction as to its use, and the best method of learning the art.

Having the assistance of W. T. Hadden, Esq., one of the best performers with it I know, I trust they may be of some value.

As I cannot have the pleasure of my reader's company on my grass-plot, where by practical demonstration I could teach them more in five minutes than I can by pages of writing, I must e'en do my best.

We will take the rod first. It should be ten to twelve feet long, and greenheart is as good a material as any. To get this wood good you must go to a reliable man, for a great deal of acacia which resembles it in appearance is passed off for

it, and is very brittle, and perfectly unsuited for the purpose.

Two joints are sufficient, and the butt or bottom joint should be as thin as safety will allow, thus procuring a spring from close to the hand; the top joint considerably stouter than that used in the fly rod. This make will give you a curve when casting, describing a segment of a circle, much larger than a rod made with a light top and stout butt: for it is manifest there will be much less friction for the line in passing through rings on a large curve than on a smaller or sharper one.

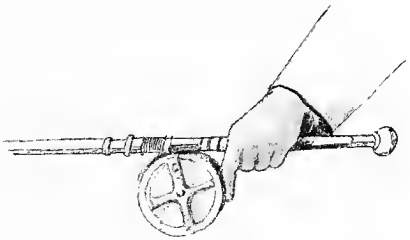
The rod should not be stiff, but fairly pliable, as in good hands it is left to do most of the work. The rings should have revolving steel centres, to resist the constant friction of the line, standing or fixed. Reel fittings as usual, and at the end of the butt an india-rubber pad, which all spinners will find a great comfort.

Messrs. Jeffery and Son, George Street, Plymouth, make these rods very well, and call them the Hadden rod, though, I believe, without authority.

The reel—this is a very difficult article to get

POSITION FOR CASTING

MINNOW WITH THREE SLITS



STOPPING FAST REEL

good—should be made of *light* wood, tough and well-seasoned, four inches in diameter, and one disc revolving on a spindle with a hardened steel point. The barrel should be thick, to wind up quickly, and as being easier to start. A check should be attached, which is useful in stopping the reel over-running when fast in a fish.

The best reel is *not* one that when started revolves any number of times before it stops, but one that is *easiest started*. Here is the advantage of light wood and big barrels. Vulcanite, of which these reels are frequently made, is useless from its weight. With any reel it is easy enough to cast with an ounce minnow, but it is a different story when you come to use one weighing less than half, which, except in thick water, is far the most killing.

The Taw and Torridge being comparatively small rivers, I use a Streeter's improved Nottingham reel, which has bars like the ordinary one. I cannot throw quite so far with it, but quite far enough—some thirty yards; and by putting on the check it at once becomes a common reel, and better adapted for hand casting.

Line.—The best I have had I procured from Eaton and Deller, of Crooked Lane, London. It is of moderate thickness, made of silk, and well dressed with linseed oil. It runs smoothly and wears well. In spinning, the friction is so great that before commencing you should always test the last twenty yards of your line, for constantly have I been broke by the line giving to a pressure which it ought easily to have borne, it being partially cut or frayed by the rings. Forty yards is sufficient, with a backing of some cheaper but strong line of another forty yards in length. For large rivers this must be increased.

The minnow.—The Devon I find the best, as being the heaviest of their size. Jeffery and Son make them very well, but to my fancy they are too short and thick. The object of this is, no doubt, to bring the hooks, which should consist of only two sets of triple hooks, as near the head as possible. In a long, thin minnow, which I much prefer, the first triple hook at the tail would be some distance from the head, and as the fish generally go for that part of the bait, they might be missed. To obviate this, I have had three slits made half-way

up the minnow, which allows the first triple hook to come well up, and, being partially concealed, it can be of a larger size, the tail hooks being close to the end. This arrangement I have found very successful.

The size of the minnow must depend on the water. For general purposes one weighing half an ounce, if you can cast it, is the most deadly, but I have done good work with one that weighed three-quarters of an ounce.

Do not vary the size much. A bright minnow for thick water, and a dull one for clearer, is the best rule to go by. If you arm the minnow yourself, or get them armed, see that the ring of the swivel *only* is showing outside the head; if further, the fish can get a leverage on the swivel that will sometimes snap it short off.

Now comes the difficult part of my task—namely, to convey in writing how to cast. I was a week trying it, thinking it easy enough, and a nice mess I made of it. Till I got a friend to show me, I could not succeed. The easiest plan first: Take your rod in the left hand some twelve inches above the reel, the right hand grasping the

rod immediately behind it, the minnow hanging some four feet from the top, not more. Now face the river; then take a full turn to the left, bringing the rod back horizontally with the ground till it points directly to the rear; this must be done quietly. Then swing it towards the river with a sweep-like mowing, putting most force into it when the rod is parallel with the stream; then follow the flight of the minnow with the point of the rod, slightly raising it.

Whilst you are carrying the minnow back for the cast, keep the forefinger of the right hand on the bottom of the revolving plate of the reel to prevent its turning. At the commencement of the cast remove it, and, as the line runs out, slightly touch the reel with the same finger to prevent it over-running. As the minnow reaches the water, stop it entirely by a harder pressure. Seize the handle, and be ready to wind up.

Mr. Hadden applies the necessary pressure on the reel by placing two or three fingers on the outside of the plate, but I prefer my plan, as it avoids all possibility of a severe crack on the fingers from the revolving handles. If a good cast, there should

be no loose coils of line showing on the reel when the minnow reaches the water.

To get the minnow to fall lightly without plunging, and to find a tight line on the reel ready for winding up, is the acme of the art, and deuced difficult a beginner will find it.

As one is frequently in a position when casting from the left is impossible, it is advisable to learn the cast from the right.

In this the right hand is above the reel and the left below; it is the same process, but with reversed hands, and the objection to using it without necessity is, that when the minnow touches the water, after stopping the reel with the finger of the left hand, you must change places, that the right hand may be available for winding-up. The butt rests on the inside of the hip during winding, and this is where the india-rubber pad comes in pleasantly.

But I have forgotten the trace. This should consist of four feet, not more, of strong single gut, or, for heavy water, twisted gut, with one swivel in the centre, and one near the top where the main line is fastened to it.

It should not exceed four feet, as in that case

the length of the line from the top of the rod when drawn in to cast would be too great.

Do not spare expense in gut, as the dearest is the cheapest in the end.

Most beginners wind too quickly; the deeper you fish for salmon and keep clear of the bottom the better.

In a stream, hardly any winding at all is necessary, till the minnow comes over to your side, when it should be slowly wound in.

Cast your minnow across and rather down stream. Fish the water nearest you well first before making long casts to the other side, for often have I caught a fish close to my side, which a fine caster has missed in his desire to make a brilliant throw beyond him; a long line dragged over a fish is not conducive to a rise.

I heard a queer argument once when remarking on the excessive thickness of the tackle a gentleman was using when minnow-fishing for salmon:

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'the fish think the beggar is fast and can't get away, so take advantage of it.' I left him.

One more caution I must give. Last year my line was continually breaking; not, fortunately, in fish, but on very slight provocation. Every day I had to break off some five or six yards of it.

I examined the rings, but, being of steel, they showed no signs of wear; then I thought it must be a bad line, but, trying the unused part of it, I could not break it, and was fairly puzzled.

On cleaning and oiling my reel (one of Streeter's, with bars) previous to laying it by for the winter, I observed that one of these bars was ribbed with cuts from the friction of the line in winding up, the edges of these cuts being quite sharp.

Here was, no doubt, the cause of the mischief, and I have had a steel one substituted, which I trust will save me next season many yards of line.

I will now presume that my reader has practised on his lawn till he can throw, say thirty yards of line, in a direction he wishes, and without an over-run in the reel, and is anxious to try his skill in the water.

Arrived on the banks of the river, a salmon shows on the far side. 'Oh, I can cover that,

thanks to this blessed invention,' he thinks, and proceeds to try the distance higher up for fear of disturbing the fish.

He makes a good cast, but finds to his surprise it is very short, and, winding up, puts more powder into the next. The result is not satisfactory; the reel over-runs with the extra swing, and, being stopped too late, in goes the minnow with a fearful dive, and there are a dozen coils of loose line round the reel.

The best thing then to be done is to haul in the line by hand as quickly as possible, not winding it up, lay it on the bank, and having cleared the reel, then wind it afresh. Should a fish take you, by ill luck, as you are hauling in, the Lord have mercy on you, the fish won't!

Should the tangle be very bad, it is more easily cleared by taking off one side of the reel, which in all good reels can be done by pressing a spring near the handles which relieves the spindle. After practising another cast with more success, proceed to try for your fish.

Cast some six or seven yards above the fish and rather beyond him; then, with a couple of

turns of the handles to give life to the minnow, let it spin down over the fish, and, if stream enough, no winding will be required.

Ah! a dead stop, and a job as if fast in a rock; on with the check, raise the rod slightly, and feel what it is. If a fish, it won't be long before there will be plenty of movement, then look out for squalls.

After the surprise which salmon mostly show on finding that what they took for a juicy minnow is nothing but metal, with hook sauce, there is a fearful rush.

Don't trust to the check alone, but place the forefinger on the reel plate, as in casting, and help the check by a slight pressure, for an over-run, particularly with the ordinary fast reel which has no bars, is generally fatal, the line getting outside it, and, should the fish continue his antics, a painful parting must ensue.

Should you be able to take off the strain, as I did with the fish in the Okement, you may get time to set your reel to rights, but they are seldom so obliging.

Keep well over your fish if possible, and, if all

goes well, you will soon have something to show for your skill.

I have frequently heard minnow fishing much abused, but have remarked that the abuse generally proceeded from men who were either too old, too lazy, or unable to practise it.

I must say I prefer fly fishing myself, but I also prefer getting a fish to going without, which in these Southern rivers will be often the case if you are, what I call, a one-horse fisherman, *i.e.*, unable to use anything but the fly.

CHAPTER XIII

FISHERY BOARDS

For many years I have been a member of one of these Boards of Conservators, and, as at present constituted, consider they do more harm than good.

In the first place, several of these have too many members. The Acts of Parliament constituting these Boards do not specify any particular number, and the rule, which apparently the Inspectors of Fisheries act on, is that of precedent, viz., that the number composing the Board when first formed should be adhered to in subsequent elections.

These numbers have been largely increased, for, in the case of the one to which I belong, fifteen is the number of the original formation, thirty is now the number of elected members, not including five representatives of the net fishermen, and several *ex-officio* members, as riparian owners.

Since the County Councils have had the power to elect members, politics have seriously influenced the selection, and thus a considerable majority exists which is composed of men who know nothing of fish or fishing, and whose principal object is to procure indulgences for the net fishermen, screen the poacher, and neglect, *in toto*, the interests of the upper proprietors; forgetting, in their short-sighted policy, that these last are, by their preservation of the rivers during the close time, the principal promoters of the salmon species. The Board are in many cases unable, or unwilling, to give proper protection to the rivers, in the shape of sufficient watchers, rewards for information leading to convictions, or to take proceedings against poachers when reported.

Fortunately, the Board of Trade has a veto on all resolutions sent to them for approval, and thus negative many that would be injurious to the increase of the fish; and I think it would be very beneficial if a member of that Board could be present at one or two of the Conservators' quarterly meetings during each year; when from their knowledge of the working of the different fisheries, and the

statistics connected with the whole system, they might help to give a better tone to the meetings, and much useful information.

The great cry is: if the fish are not good for the net fisherman to catch after a certain fixed date, they cannot be good for the rod fisherman after the same date.

This sounds feasible and right, but on examination such limitation to the rod fishing would be manifestly unfair.

The rod fisherman pays, in this county of Devon, one guinea for his license to fish for salmon; this does not give an inch of water to fish in, but merely the right of doing so if he can get the water. Again, the rod fishermen would get no fishing at all, or but very little, if their close time began at the same time as the nets, owing to want of water, the only exception being an unusually wet year.

Many rivers have also to contend with numerous fishing weirs, needles, &c., which are not removed till the net fishing is closed.

The weekly close time of forty-two to forty-eight hours is quite insufficient to supply fish for the river, prior to the annual close-time, as in nine

years out of ten there is not sufficient water for them to get up, and before anything like good sport for the rods can be obtained, a large number of fish must be in the rivers, spread as they are over many miles of water.

Now the riparian owner, with all his expenses, and the rod fisher, with his license, must have, in mere justice, something to show for their money.

The rod fisher also can, in most cases, be relied on to put back an unclean fish. A net fisher, provided he can get even a penny a pound, will keep him.

The rivers in the South of England are late, *i.e.* the principal run of fish is in the autumn, so that the month of April the rod fisher has in advance of the nets is not of much service to him. I must say that the hardship, if any, falls more on the rod than on the net fisherman.

The latter, certainly, works for his livelihood, and supplies the market; the former, for his own amusement, being debarred by law from selling anything he catches after the commencement of the close time for the nets, if he wished to do so; but this motive for the fishing does not affect the

justice of the question, and one cannot but remember that in one good haul of a net, more salmon will be taken than a rod will get in a month.

As to reasoning or talking to the net fishermen, it is positively useless. They have no thought for the morrow, but would kill fish all the year round if allowed.

They must be compelled, *in their own interests*, to obey the laws; but with the members composing the Fishery Boards, as now elected by the County Councils, this course it is almost impossible to carry out.

The remedy for this unpleasant state of affairs, I think may be found, to a certain extent, in necessitating all members of District Fishery Boards to possess certain qualifications, viz., riparian owners, a certain frontage of a river, say one mile, or more; rod fishers, the possession of a salmon license for two years previous to election; net fishers, as at present, one member for every 50*l.* (or part of 50*l.*) of license duty collectively paid by them.

The members composing the different Boards should not exceed fifteen *elected* members, exclusive

of the representatives of the net fishermen and riparian owners. Experience has shown that Boards with members in excess of that number are cumbersome, and time is wasted in useless discussion and argument.

Personally, I should much prefer taking the election out of the hands of the County Councils entirely, and that each interest, riparian, rod fisher, and net fisherman, should elect their own representatives to serve as members of the District Boards, as is done at present in the case of the net fishermen.

There is also another radical error in the action of the Fishery Boards: they endeavour to stop the serious poaching of the net fishermen by trying to convict the *catcher*, and not the *purchaser*, of the fish.

With a magistracy known to be culpably lenient in these cases, the fishermen, in consequence, persist in catching fish, and openly offer them for sale at a few pence a pound three months after the close time has begun.

Now, if there was a difficulty in disposing of the fish, and considerable risk to the purchaser,

the inducement to poach would be greatly reduced, and the penalty would fall on those who richly deserve it, and not on the fishermen, who from poverty might be induced to transgress the law.

Where there are large estuaries, the expense entailed on the Board in keeping a staff of water-bailiffs to watch them, obliges them to leave the rivers comparatively unwatched, and numerous outlays for gratings, weirs, &c., unexpended.

I trust I may be spared to see a more kindly feeling existing between all classes of fishermen, and that in community of interest they will shake hands over their difference, and cordially wish each other

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