

## ART. VI.—FISH AND FISHING IN THE BIBLE AND OLD TIMES.

DOES the subject need an apology? Are fish a frivolous topic? Against angling for amusement clever words have been aimed by poet and satirist about “the quaint old cruel coxcomb,” and a fishing-rod having “a worm at one end and a fool at the other.” But these have not dismayed Walton’s followers, nor won the world to condemn them, and probably never will. However, who deals with fish and fishing in the more comprehensive sense, deals with no small part, nay, with the larger part, of our globe. The waters and their denizens cannot be set aside as insignificant. Especially we English, as islanders are by nature and necessity seamen and fishermen. Surrounded by waters, we must—unless content to be *insular* in a bad sense—go on the waters and “occupy our business” there; we shall even be very foolish if we do not gather food therefrom. In these times of import from far lands we are apt to think too little of our home resources; but we cannot afford to throw away the harvest of the sea. Homer, indeed, called the sea “harvestless, vintageless, unfruitful” (*ἀρπύγερος*): to a poet’s eye a waste of salt water might seem so, compared with the broad acres of land teeming with grain, fruits and flowers—the land which (as Virgil says) “renders to the tiller with generous justice an easy sustenance.” But the toilers of the sea, equally with the tillers of the soil, reap a harvest, win a sure return for labours, perhaps not greater, though of more enterprise, risk and adventure than the plodding labours of the husbandman. Fish are a *facilis victus* from sea, lake and river. And of fish we would now speak; yet not learnedly on their natural history, nor didactically on the methods of their capture—ichthyology and angling want not for literature—rather would we present a few gleanings from antiquity about fish and fishing, with such illustrations from modern experience as suggest themselves to one who at the outset owns himself an angler.

Fish are first mentioned by name in the Bible in Gen. i. 28: Man is to “have dominion over the fish of the sea.” But of course verse 20 includes fish among “the moving creature that hath life” which the waters were to bring forth abundantly. Abundance is a characteristic of fish. The Hebrew noun for “fish” corresponds to a verb meaning “to be prolific”—a verb used in Gen. xlviii. 16, “let them grow into a multitude.” This multitudinous swarming is referred to in Habak. i. 14, “Thou makest man as the fishes of the sea.” To Homer the sea is

“the fishful sea.” And the numerous fish at their creation are beautifully described by Milton :

Forthwith the sounds and seas, each creek and bay,  
With fry innumerable swarm, and shoals  
Of fish that with their fins and shining scales  
Glide under the green wave in sculls that oft  
Bank the mid sea ; part single or with mate  
Graze the seaweed their pasture, and thro' groves  
Of coral stray, or sporting with quick glance,  
Show to the sun their wav'd coats dropt with gold.

Par. Lost, vii. 400.

With the fish we find in Gen. i. 21 “great whales” ; no doubt classed with them in that early age by the rough and ready common-sense threefold division into creatures of earth, air, water—flesh, fowl, fish—a classification which science will hardly cast out.

Of the different kinds of fish in Bible countries the Bible tells us little or nothing. There are many various species, as travellers tell us, especially in the Lake of Galilee ; and all are said to be “essentially African in their characteristics.” The fish of the Jordan and its affluents resemble those of the Nile. In the Jordan the fish are very numerous, and are chiefly of the bream or barbel kind. We find, however, rules about fish as food in Levit. xi. 9-12 : “These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters ; whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you.” But we can hardly determine for certain what fish the Jews held to be scaleless. Fishes of the *silurus* kind were probably such. And some think that the “bad” fish rejected by the net fishermen of the parable (Matt. xiii. 37) would be fish of this class. It may be that eels were excluded. For though we now know that they have scales, it is likely enough that anciently the Jews did not know this. And the serpent-like form of eels has raised a prejudice against them in many countries. For instance, in the Highlands of Scotland, though excellent eels abound, Highlanders will not eat them ; Highland goodwives are reluctant to cook them ; a Highland gillie testified an active hostility and disgust towards an eel captured by the present writer many years ago, and was utterly surprised when it was proposed that we should put it in the creel and take it home and eat it.

But whatever may have been the kinds of fish most eaten, that fish were abundant and extensively eaten is quite plain. The Nile produced fish in abundance ; these died when Nile's waters were turned into blood (Exod. vii. 21). The Israelites “remember the fish, which they did eat in Egypt freely.” Sir G. Wilkinson speaks of the great abundance of fish in the Nile,

an abundance distributed over the country into the lakes and canals by the yearly inundations. This swarming of fish is also noticed by Herodotus (ii. 93). When Isaiah is describing the troubles of Egypt (xix. 5-8), he says, "the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river be wasted and dried up. . . . the fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish." Plainly, the fisheries were an important industry in that land; large quantities were consumed, both fresh and salted; there are pictures found of Egyptians bringing in fish and splitting them for salting. We know that fish were an important article of food in Greece; in Athens, especially, of which our knowledge is most minute. Over and over again do we read in Aristophanes of salt fish, of particular fish that were sought after as dainties, of dishes composed of fish, of a regular fish-market. Nor did the Greeks share the above-named prejudice against eels. Nay, they prized eels above other fish. The Bœotian Highlander who comes to the market at Athens, bagpipes and all, and enumerates his list of flesh, fowl, and fish, is enthusiastically hailed when "eels from the lake Copais" are named. And though the Jews were no great fish-catchers, yet there seems to have been a regular fish-market at Jerusalem; for one of the north-western gates is named the Fish-gate (Nehem. iii. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 14). Probably the fish came from the Mediterranean coasts, previously salted. The catchers of them and the dealers in them were the Phœnicians of the coast, as we see from Nehem. xiii. 16. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein which brought fish, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. As to the inland fisheries, it is not probable that the Sea of Galilee was absolutely unfished in those ancient times, though we are told little about it. For it plainly must have swarmed with fish then, as it did in the later New Testament times, and as it does still. One traveller, Dr. Tristram, says: "The density of the shoals of fish in the Sea of Galilee can scarcely be conceived by those who have not witnessed them. Frequently these shoals cover an acre or more of the surface, and the fish as they slowly move along in masses are so crowded—with their back fins just appearing on the level of the water—that the appearance at a little distance is that of a violent shower of rain pattering on the surface." These last words recall an experience of my own in the Scotch Highlands. In a small mountain loch, which I not unfrequently visited for the sake of the view, but never caught many trout there (it was thought to have few but large ones, and we seldom saw them rise), the calm surface of the water one fine day became suddenly alive with fish, no doubt feeding on some minute insects invisible to me. Hardly a square foot on the surface but was dimpled

with a rise. This lasted only a few minutes; the effect was nearly as Dr. Tristram describes, that "of rain pattering on the surface." Among Solomon's acquirements and learning it is remarked that "he spoke of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." The study of natural history in old times was comparatively rare, Aristotle among the Greeks with this wise king of Israel being brilliant exceptions.

Probably there are few classes of animals to which somewhere or at sometime divine honours have not been paid. Men have worshipped either harmful and dangerous creatures by way of propitiation, or have paid honour to the serviceable and good. And so we find fish came in for their share of worship; there are representations found in sculptured slabs of fish-gods. One such was Dagon (the very name from *dag*, fish), of whose worship and the breaking of his image we read in 1 Sam. v. 3, 4. His worshippers, the Philistines, were dwellers on the shores of Palestine, and without doubt fishermen. And compared with their neighbours, the Jews seem to have paid little attention to fisheries; the passages referred to above from Nehemiah point to the Phœnician inhabitants of the western coast as the chief fishers. Tyre and Sidon were noted fishing stations; and even at the present day, though but a poor village, Tyre mainly subsists by fishing; fishing-boats are the only craft in the harbour of that former city of merchant princes; the fishermen's nets are spread out to dry over the ruins."

In old times, equally as in modern, nets were the chief instruments for the capture of fish. Nets are mentioned in the Old Testament, not very frequently, because the Israelites were no great fishermen; but in the New Testament we read much of net-fishing in the Galilean lake. The Hebrew word for net, coming from a verb "to weave, to plait," does not define the kind of net in vogue: the Greek words for net are several; *σαγήμη* ("a drag-net, seine") perhaps was the one most used; it was edged with corks above, sunk by leads below. Such an arrangement is alluded to by Pindar (Pyth., ii. 79): "Even as the cork floats buoyant above the brine, while the rest of the net is doing its work deep in the sea below." Other Greek descriptions of a net buoyed by corks are given by Blomfield on Æsch. Choeph., 499. Ovid speaks of such a net:

"Aspicis ut summa cortex levis innatet unda,  
Quum grave nexa simpl' retia mergat onus."

Such was the net used on the Sea of Galilee, worked from boats, as we may see from St. John xxi. 3-8, and other New Testament passages. Another kind of net was the *ἀμφίβληστρον*; this word is in the LXX. of Ps. cxli. 10, and in Habak. i. 15, 17, where also *ἀγκιστρον* and *σαγήμη* occur. St. Peter and St. Andrew were employed together with a casting-net (Mark i. 16). One would

probably be the thrower, the other would see to the fish caught, and help in clearing the net, etc. Hesiod, in the "Shield of Hercules" (l. 213), describes a representation of a "fisherman on the shore watching for fish, holding in his hands a casting-net, as one in act to throw." Virgil's expression, "alius latum funda jam verberat amnem" (Georg., i. 141), well describes the slap with which the well-thrown casting-net strikes the water. The casting-net of those times seems to have been just like our own; Plautus says: "When the net has sunk to the bottom the fisherman contracts its folds;" the leads round the circumference are drawn together as the cord attached to the centre is pulled in. And Ovid may mean this net when, describing various ways of capture, he says: "Some fish are taken by spear, some by hooks, some by the enclosing net with tightened cord" (Art. Am., i. 163). Dr. Tristram describes a man he saw fishing with a casting-net in the Lake of Galilee, who used it swimming; this must be using it under difficulties, as it is more conveniently thrown from above. He notices that the man was "naked." In using nets, and especially casting-nets (*experto crede*), it is a great point to keep clear of dress and anything that may catch the meshes; buttons are ruinous. Homer has allusions to fishing, mostly by way of simile. In Odyss., xxii. 384 he compares the slain suitors to "fish lying on the shelving beach, which fishermen have drawn out from the hoary sea in a meshed net."

Another mode of catching fish in use of old was by spearing. To this there is a plain allusion in Job xli. 7: "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons or his head with fish-spears?" No doubt the crocodile is the leviathan spoken of in that chapter, which, the author says, cannot be caught by the means commonly used for fishes. Herodotus, however, tells us that sometimes he is caught by a coarse kind of hook-fishing; not, however, by spearing from the outside, his scales being impenetrable. Fish-spearing, travellers tell us, is still practised in the small Palestinian streams and northern rivers of the Lebanon. There does not, however, seem to be any evidence that spearing was practised by torchlight, as it used to be (perhaps still is), in our northern rivers. Weirs and stake-nets are now used in the East, and were probably known in ancient times, though Isa. xix. 10, where "sluices and ponds" were in our received Bible version, is now differently translated.

Pass we to angling—fishing by line and hook, with or without rod. What read we of this in ancient authors? Fish-hooks are mentioned in Amos iv. 2. In Isa. xix. 8—"they that cast angle into the Nile shall mourn"—implies that it was a common occupation. And the passage above quoted from Job may imply hooks as a means of capturing fish. A picture from an old Egyptian relief shows an Egyptian fishing, who is seated in a

chair and holds a rod with line attached. The rod is a veritable "pole," as the eastern counties folk still call a fishing-rod; the angler is plainly at his ease, and probably fishing for amusement. Of course most of the line and hook fishing, as well as the net-fishing, was for food and a livelihood. We all remember how St. Peter caught a fish with line and hook (Matt. xvii. 27). Of the exact nature of the tackle, baits, etc., we have no descriptions in the Bible, and not very many elsewhere. Homer has three similes from angling, one of a warrior who pierces his foeman. Then

He grasped the spear and o'er the chariot rail  
Dragged him, as when with line and glittering hook  
A fisher seated on a jutting rock  
Pulls from the sea below a lusty fish.

Il., xvi. 406.

Of Iris plunging into the sea :

Plumb to the bottom sank she, as the lead  
Which, set in ox-horn pipe that guards the line,  
Sinks fraught with fated doom to greedy fish.

Il., xxiv. 80.

Scylla, with her long tentacles, fishes up Ulysses' companions :

As when a fisher on a jutting rock,  
With long and taper rod, to lesser fish  
Casts down the treacherous bait, and in the sea  
Plunges his tackle with its ox-horn guard,  
Then tosses out on land a gasping prey ;  
So gasping to the cliff my men were raised.

Odyss., xii. 251.

Hence we learn that a rod was used, a lead to sink the bait, and horn as a kind of guard to the line that the fish might not bite it through (as the Scholiast tells us). But the fullest description of anglers and their equipment is to be found in the twenty-first Idyll of Theocritus. Two old fishermen are described in a hut with all the tackle of their trade around them—baskets, rods, hooks, baits, lines of different kinds, wicker-woven traps, bow-nets. Waking up before dawn, one tells the other his dream, how he caught a large golden fish. He describes minutely the catching: he sat upon a rock and shook the fallacious bait suspended from his rod; a big fish took it, was hooked fast, bent his rod by his struggles, was carefully played and landed—a fish all of gold. On which while he vowed to live in glorious idleness like a king, he awoke from his dream. His mate sensibly advises him to think nothing of his vision, to seek fish of real flesh, not starve on golden dreams.

All the line-fishing was probably with sunken baits—bottom-fishing. Fly-fishing appears to have been unknown; indeed, artificial fly-fishing is a comparatively modern art even in this country, to which we believe it to be most native. Izaak

Walton himself seems not to have practised it much, if at all. Dear old man! how could anyone call you "coxcomb," whatever might be his opinion of the frivolous nature of your art, and even of the cruelty of some branches of it? But this last question we will leave—the wide question of sport, pursuit of fishes or other creatures for amusement. Certain it is that some of our worthiest countrymen have taken their recreation in this way. Walton was not only a angler, but a beautiful character in many ways, as is proved by his writings—his lives of some of our good men; and he was a close friend of some of the ablest and best; even non-anglers would own that the "Complete Angler" is a book from which many lessons may be learnt besides the art of catching fish—lessons of contentment, charity, piety. Prominent among Walton's angling friends was Sir Henry Wotton, a statesman of note, and afterwards Provost of Eton College. As an Etonian, a native of Eton, especially familiar with the Thames from my earliest days, I can imagine him amusing his leisure beside that fair river between Windsor and Datchet, perhaps at Black Potts (which villa dignified officials of the college have occupied, and perhaps still do), or now and then in the lake at Redgrave in Suffolk (five miles distant from where I write), with his nephew, Sir Edmund Bacon. Fish and fishing came up now and then both in his poetry and letters. In a pretty poem headed, "On a Bank as I sate a-fishing," are the lines:

The jealous Trout, that low did lie,  
Rose at a well dissembled Flie;  
There stood my friend with patient skill,  
Attending of his trembling Quill.

Walton is probably the friend: in a letter to him he ends thus: "Hoping shortly to enjoy your own ever-welcome company in the approaching time of the fly and the cork." Whence we may conclude Wotton to have been a fly-fisher. He draws lessons from fishing in "The Country's Recreations":

Here are no false entrapping baits,  
To hasten too too hasty fates;  
Unless it be  
The fond credulity  
Of silly fish, which worldling-like still look  
Upon the bait, but never on the hook.

And he ends the same poem with a wish for peace:

Which we may every year  
Find when we come a-fishing here.

We "piscators" of the present day may leave our cause under the shelter of such defenders. All innocent recreations may teach their serious lessons; and all that lead us to contemplate the wonderful works of Nature's God surely do so. "Sermons

in stones, books in the running brooks" is a saying old but true. Still is the fisherman led to see "wonders in the deep"; even the roaming angler is almost necessarily a naturalist and a lover of scenery. Among the Welsh and Scotch lakes I have seen—and even been shipwrecked or stranded in a small way by—sudden squalls sweeping down from mountains. All hill-pent waters are liable to such storms of wind, rising at times with little or no warning, and churning up a smooth surface into a tempestuous sea. These have given me my most vivid impression of that scene on the Lake of Galilee when κατέβη λαίλαψ ἀνέμου (St. Luke viii. 23), to be stilled by Him Whom even the winds and the sea obeyed. The fishers of that lake were called to be "fishers of men"; from their very trade a comparison was taken by Christ Himself in these words. Dante speaks of one who, emerging from the darkness of heathendom, "set his sails to follow the fisherman" (Purg., xxii. 62)—Milton's "pilot of the Galilean lake." Assuredly some of the qualities needed for the earthly fishing will stand the "fishers of men" in good stead—earnestness, skill, patience. Parishioners (as a friend once told me) are as thorny and prickly as perch. The net is a figure used more than once of the Gospel. Let us end with the words of St. Chrysostom, who terms St. Paul "that fisher of the wide world, who by his fourteen epistles, as by spiritual nets, swept the whole world within the compass of salvation."

W. C. GREEN.

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## Short Notices.

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*The Parables of the Old Testament.* By ALFRED BARRY, Lord Bishop of Sydney. 1889. London: S.P.C.K. Pp. 264.

AFTER a perusal of this very interesting book, it will be seen that while the author disclaims originality and independent research, there is not only old material shown in an attractive form, but many new thoughts and illustrations. The chapter in which the structure and significance of the Parable is shown is a model of clearness and intelligibility. The general reader and the teacher of classes will find fully and lucidly explained the difference of the varied parabolic forms—fable, riddle, symbolic vision, etc. Most helpfully, too, is the great truth which underlies all nature brought out, that real history is as symbolical as fiction. Each kind of parable, as it occurs in the Old Testament, has a chapter to itself, in which the various stories are explained, with full regard to their historical circumstances, and whatever moral and spiritual teaching underlies them is made manifest. As a help to Bible-reading and Bible-teaching the book deserves the widest acceptance.