

*NOTE ON GALILEAN FISH-CURING.*

IN Prof. G. A. Smith's masterly account of the Lake of Galilee in the *EXPOSITOR* for May, he lays stress upon the important local trade of fish-curing, "which spread the Lake's fame through the Roman world"; he adds, however, that of this industry "there is no trace in the Evangelists." I venture to suggest that it was this familiar trade which prompted or at least pointed our Lord's references to salt.

It can hardly be doubtful that fish-curing would require salt to be imported in considerable quantities to those towns where it flourished. Moreover, on the shores of that "torrid basin" no fish could be kept fresh for many hours after it was caught; it must be cooked, or cured, promptly. Now the fisherman's success is everywhere a proverb of fluctuation; we read in the Gospels of long and fruitless toil followed by immense hauls, most of which must have been taken off at once to the curing house, or salted down provisionally until it could be transported there. I remember how it was once my fortune to spend some weeks on board a North Sea herring lugger, where we carried barrels of coarse salt with which to preserve any fish which we could not take fresh into market ashore; and I have heard bitter complaint among the crew when this salt was found to be of bad quality. It seems to me certain that the Galilean fishermen were as familiar with salting as with fishing, though the latter was their own especial work; they would understand their Master whether He called them "fishers of men," or "salters of men." How forcible to them the command "Have salt among yourselves." How natural for them the similitude, "Ye are the salt of the earth," when, as Prof. Smith says, "the pickled fish of Galilee were known throughout the Roman world." We

can understand in this connection why our Lord speaks of refuse salt in such a *wholesale* fashion, "cast out and trodden under foot of men." And we see that His references to salt, like most of His other illustrations, were actually suggested and coloured by His familiar surroundings.

There is one other possible trace of the same local trade in the parable of the draw-net, where the word for vessels (*ἀγγεῖα*) only occurs elsewhere in the New Testament for the oil-vessels of the wise virgins. Now newly caught fish, meant to be sold fresh, are gathered into baskets, from which the water can drain away. May not this use of *ἀγγεῖα* point to curing tubs, into which the fishermen sorted the fish that were fit for curing? Prof. Smith quotes Strabo as stating that "at Taricheæ the Lake supplied the best fish for curing."

More competent scholars will correct or perhaps reject the above suggestion. If it is valid, it only shows the seal of the fisherman impressed on one more page of the Gospel.

T. H. DARLOW.