

SALMON-FISHING ON LOCH TAY.



ARULY it cannot be said that if a man is fond of gun and rod, and has time and opportunity to make use of either, he has reason to complain of want of sport ; for no sooner are partridges and pheasants covered by the Close Time Act than the “stately salmon,” to use an expression of Burns, who had but one pastime—and that angling—is declared free. Of course, in southern waters, there is plenty of fishing all the winter round for those who wish to

—live harmlessly and near the brink
 Of Trent or Avon, have a dwelling-place
 Where I may see my quill or cork down sink
 With eager bite of perch or bleak or dace.

But no angler who had lived much north of the Tweed would thank one for such a home, and such a system of “cork or quill watching.” Of course, it is not every Scotchman who is indulged with the privilege of salmon-fishing—thanks, no doubt, to his richer brethren of the southern towns, who have money enough to give the laird what he wants as rent, to the exclusion of those old village veterans whose forefathers have been privileged to fish the streams which run past their doors for centuries. This is a fact which his grace the Duke of Argyll possibly forgot to mention when he wrote his article on the depopulation of the Highlands, but it is nevertheless true that the town-life has become more attractive because the rich people have come out and with their money bought up the attractions which kept “Sandy the cooper,” “Duncan the farrier,” and “Dougall the weaver,” to their native sports, against all the temptations of riches. More sport but fewer sportsmen has been the result, but no doubt the laird has every right to do with his own as he pleases, though it would be better to see the spirit exercised as seldom as possible. The further north you go the finer, possibly, the fishing ; as, though the lakes and rivers of Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness Shires are mostly let along with the moors and forests, when civilly approached, the lessees in most cases will not refuse a respectable angler a day. In the counties further south the area of preserved water is much greater, and though

plenty of good trout-fishing is to be had, salmon fishing is as a rule the sport of the rich or the favoured.

In Scotland, as is well known, the rod season opens on Candlemas Day, the 2nd of February, and on that day will always be found a limited number of anglers on Loch Tay, which is as famous in its way for salmon as Loch Leven is for its trout. Spring fishing in Scotland, it need not be mentioned, is, as far as the surroundings are concerned, almost as cheerless as winter fishing in the south. But what cares the salmon-fishing enthusiast for the look of the surroundings? The peak of Ben Lawers may be covered with snow, and the Dochart may be fetching down with impetuous spate the brown floods from the upper haughs of the Highlands, the last of an Atlantic squall may be scouring the hillside and the wind cold enough to penetrate a half-dozen ulsters; but the "Knight of the Rod" (no kinsman of Dick Turpin, we deny we are in a punning mood) will not care a *wrap* for it. He dreams only of the salmon and the experiencing of that glorious sensation which yet makes his fingers tingle when he thinks of that day he killed his last fish of the season in October. But there is more than a rod required to kill a fish in Loch Tay, and more indeed than enthusiasm, for—

You may sing full early and late
Of your tak's wi' the bonny red hackle,
But the man must have *golden bait*,
And the man must have *silver tackle*,

if he would wish to be successful. The charge for boats on the loch to visitors staying at the hotel is £5 per week or £1 5s. per day, besides which charges the angler has to pay 4s. per day for each of two boatmen, also 2s. 9d. for lunch and whisky. As the fish are, however, allowed to be retained, and the average is from two to four salmon, the charges are not so very heavy after all. It is recorded that twenty-six salmon, weighing in all 55lb., have been caught on five successive days, but if I mistake not this was in the preserved water and by Mr. J. Watson Lyall, the well-known proprietor of the *Sportsman's Guide*, who is proverbially lucky, and what is better, peculiarly skilful, a qualification, however, which one fisher rarely cares to admit about another.

Though the scenery on Loch Tay is scarcely so beautiful in early spring time as in summer, it is not without its charms. There are few signs of vegetation about the hills, in the sheltered clefts of which patches of snow may be seen shining in the sun, but in the woodlands which fringe the loch edge there are bits of green every here and there which speak of a coming primrose or bluebell. On the lower slopes of the hills the young wild Highland cattle of Lord Breadalbane may be seen busily browsing in their winter coats of long, shaggy, dun or red brown hair, while in the glens the ewes are observable moving about in little white clumps, their shepherds no doubt watching them anxiously as they think of the approaching lambing season, the most anxious time, indeed, of all the year to the northern flock-master.

The fishes in all rivers and lochs have, as is well known, their peculiarities, and those of Loch Tay have theirs. Salmon of certain rivers have their peculiar delights in colour; on different days a particular one will be very deadly, and at different seasons of the year, other colours will again be more successful. This may arise from the various degrees of transparency of the water of different rivers, the colour of the ground at the bottom, and the reflection of the sun; but, whatever be the cause, it is the case. On Loch Tay the fly is of no use for salmon, and so trolling is the favourite system, the phantom being used most successfully. Possibly the keen salmon angler, who loves to follow the winding river, would not care so much for such a style as for a cast in his favourite pools; indeed, there are many northern fishers who cannot stand being cramped up in a cobble at all, whether they be in quest of salmon or trout, and with them we have a most decided sympathy. Give us an autumn day by the banks of the Annan at Hoddum, the salmon jumping in the pool above the well-known brig, the September sun shining down upon the yellow stooks, which stand in long rows round the ancient burying-place of the Irvings, the friends and countrymen of Carlyle, and above whose lone graves grow the hawthorn and the boortree bush, their boughs being laden with the old nests of the blackbird, while the fowmart has made a home for its young beneath a headstone, and steals a furtive glance at us as we pass with easy step and look over the wall. Over on the slopes is a hill of foliage,

the red of the beech being toned by the mixed yellow and pale green of the ash, while here and there the silver trunk of a birch stands out like a moonlight spectre. Rabbits rustle away hurriedly among the brake as they catch sight of us, and now and then a startled cushat jumps from the bough of a larch and with wings shimmering in the sunshine, sweeps across the river below, and holds away for some new gleaned feeding ground. We are wading the water, broken bubbling past on either side as we draw our line in and cast again o'er that little stream which is made by the water hurrying past a half-sunken rock. The purring noise has made us half asleep, but our dreams are the dreams of an opium-eater. On a sudden we are awakened to the most glorious of all sensations, and the most lovely of all music.

Let the courser cry, So oh !
 And the coachman sound his horn,
 Let the huntsman's Tally ho !
 Awake the hunting morn.
 No song that a sportsman sings
 So merry can make me feel,
 As the covey's whirring wings,
 And the berr of the merry reel.

The gun from the Commodore
 The yachtsman likes full well ;
 Can the racing man like more
 Than the sound of the saddling bell
 But the sweetest bell that rings
 Of chimes the merriest peal,
 Is naught to the whirring wings
 And the berr of the merry reel.

There is no dreaming now, it is man and tackle against fish and stream for a thousand. In vain he sulks, in vain he dashes up stream with fresh speed ; the colt is broken as much by his own struggles as by the work of the breaker, and our fish submits in due time to be led to that shelving bank like a child. The gaff well handled by a stout fellow in tweed does its work, and on the grass green bank, 'mid the musky odour arising from the stooks of oats, we drink success from the flask-lid, pluck a luscious brambleberry from the bush alongside to change the taste, and tired but happy bend our steps for home, while the



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sun sinks down red in the western horizon and the young plough lad hurries past us to the field to get one more cart of oats for that stack in the homestead on your left, where the busy farmer is tapering off the head into conical form with all the art that the bucolic mind is capable of. A good afternoon, the river in good condition, a good fish home with us, a good dinner waiting, a smoke, and a sound sleep certain, and what would a sportsman want more ?

