

BATTLES WITH BIG FISH.

ANGLING FOR THE TUNA WITH LIGHT BOATS AND LINES.

Comparisons Between the Tarpon and the King of California Waters—Contests With Fish That Swims Long Distances—Swim With a Tuna.

'There's no use in talking,' said a member of the Tuna Club of California who was the little blue button which showed that he was well up in the order and had landed his 100-pound fish; 'there is no use in denying it, fishermen are cranks. Here's a note I have just received from a man in London who is coming all the way to this island to catch a tuna, and then I suppose he will go all the way back again, just to land a fish. But it is worth it. I'd travel to Jericho rather than have missed my experience with tunas; there is nothing like it.'

'Except tarpon,' said a quiet-looking man who was tossing pebbles into the glasslike bay.

'Not excepting tarpon,' responded the first speaker, 'and I have caught both.'

'I believe, though,' said the other man, 'as he picked up another handful of pebbles that there is more excitement in taking a tarpon.'

'Excitement, is it? Well if a man goes fishing with the hope that he will not get his head knocked in or his boat stove, and is always hankering after some accident, perhaps tuna fishing is tame.'

'There is Mygatt of New York,' replied the quiet man; 'he was knocked senseless by a tarpon at Santa Gorda last week, and it took three hours, they say to bring him round.'

'Well,' retorted the tuna advocate, perhaps that sort of fishing goes in Florida; and if I lived at Santa Gorda I would stop fishing and start an anglers insurance society.'

'What does the element of excitement come in?' asked a new arrival on the island.

'Why, I don't know,' said the Tuna Club man. 'I believe I've had more excitement in the times when I never got a strike than at any other; the bottled-up excitement and anticipation was quite enough for me. But I have caught everything from the tarpon up, and to my mind the tuna is the king of game fishes. We have a monopoly of them on this island, and if the Tuna Club was a business corporation I have no doubt we would get up a trust, control the output and sell the shares to whom we would. The tunas are found here principally because they are an oceanic fish, rarely going near the mainland. But this is a rocky island, rising out of extremely deep water, and the tunas come here because they can drive the flying fish into the bays and coves and prey upon them. He is a queer bird, this leaping tuna—We have the flying fish in great numbers from the 1st of May or thereabouts to November, and the tuna will take it as bait until the middle of August, or three months; after that he appears to pay his attention to other food, as small squid.'

'The Tuna Club, with its membership of nearly two hundred, is named after the fish, and the members are enthusiastic advocates of taking the game creature up to two hundred pounds with a rod. I don't mean it should be understood that they all have taken tunas. No, indeed, I have heard that several gentlemen have taken twenty tarpons in a day, but the tuna is another thing, and one day will satisfy the average man, and but twenty-four members of the club—those who are wearing the blue button—have taken a fish weighing seventy-five or so.'

'What is the reason?' asked the man who had been tossing pebbles into the sea.

'Well,' and the tuna siast smiled, 'the men who don't get the tuna have more reasons why than you could remember; but I think the explanation that appeals to expert anglers of the club who lose fish is that they hook fish that are too large to land. You see, the club does not permit a large line, and the fisherman, tyro or expert, goes forth with a rod weighing twelve ounces, or so and a thread of a line. There are several ways of fishing. You can go out in a rowboat and row yourself about, and perhaps get a strike not a hundred feet from shore; but it would be a miracle if you landed your fish. Then you can sit in a launch; and a third way is to have your rowboat fastened behind a launch which will tow you along at the proper speed—a rate approximating the speed of the flying fish when trying to escape. The line ought to be 800 or 900 feet long; the leader a seven-foot wire, flexible and strong; the hook a 7/0 or 8/0; the reel is a big multiplier, rubber and German silver and with a whole flying fish as bait and comfortable seated in a cushioned chair in the stern of your boat you are ready.'

'A great deal depends on your boatman, as if he is awake he can see a slight fly-

ing fish a long distance away, and puts the launch in that direction. In launch fishing there are many advantages. You have a big boat with you in case of accident, and you can take ladies along, who will applaud you when you catch a fish and mercilessly gibe you when you lose it. We will suppose now that we are starting off. The painter of the boat is spliced onto a long line, which is run through a belt in the stern of the boat and aboard the boat again and fastened with a half hitch. At the boatman's hand his two gaffs are in place, and you would notice that his oars are shipped and half-cocked up, ready to slip over. Our seats are in the stern, one behind the other. As we move off you slack out about 100 feet of line each, so that the baits are opposite—a necessary point to observe, as almost invariably the fish run in pairs and each line is taken. Sometimes the strike comes in the Bay of Avalon; sometimes off the point, but always, or nearly always, near shore, and in the morning from 4 to 10 and from 3 to 8 in the afternoon; never in the middle of the day.

'Oh, yes, you can generally tell when it is coming by the flying fish that are leaving the water. Suddenly one scarse across the line, and it is then that the thumping of your heart sounds loud and you intuitively feel your rod handle and heavy leather brake. A moment later it comes—something half way between an earthquake and a cyclone; something that makes the reel whistle and scream; and try as you will the delicate line melts away beneath your thumb, and you are trembling with excitement. Perhaps your companion is gently swearing to himself, having lost his fish, or perhaps he is bracing back, his line also flying off like a living thing. As a rule one fish escapes and the other takes from 200 to 400 feet of line before the angler knows where he is at.

'It takes very little time to get this smunt off the reel, but it is long enough for a good many things to happen. The apparition of a five or six foot mass of silver and blue leaping into the air with the line in its mouth has been known to throw strong men into a species of buck fever, so that they merely sat and watched the line escape and were incapable of checking it or reeling it. Assume that you are not easily demoralized; the moment the click of your reel has sounded your boatman has cast off the painter, the launch sweeps ahead and the carman is backing water, and by the time three or four hundred feet of line has gone out the boat is gliding along stern first, and the fish is towing the boat if you have succeeded in stopping the rush with your brake. If these two propositions do not agree, in time—why, the fish goes and your three dollar line parts company with you forever.'

'But there are other contingencies. Sometimes the fish never stops; he may be a big fellow—no one can tell how large, as tunas have a way of growing up to several hundred pounds; but the average here weigh from 95 to 150 pounds. Sometimes the line has a weak strand and breaks; now it is the wire; again the shark or another tuna slides up beneath it and cuts it. But if everything goes well you should stop the first rush in 200 feet and then be able to hold the fish and let him tow the heavy boat to take some of the life out of him; and from this point on it depends upon the fish. It will be an interesting thing now to take out your watch and see how long this game creature will fight you. Some fish have methods peculiar to them, and affect men differently. Some fight for an hour and then literally drop dead from heart failure; and these are the fellows that come up tail first. The twenty-four men who have caught 100-pounders can tell you twenty-four fish stories, each with some peculiarity. Take the catch of Clifford R. Scudder of St. Louis, one of the best known men in the club. He hooked a tuna at about 6 o'clock in the morning, and for hours played him with all his strength, but could never get the fish with a hundred feet of the boat, the game creature swimming in great circles and slowly towing it out. At about 10 o'clock the launch, which had been standing by, came into Avalon and reported that he was fast to a tuna about four miles out. The launch was loaded with ladies and friends and some breakfast, and it was one of the party. We found Mr. Scudder about five miles from shore. He was working for his life on the fish; no man could do more, but it seemed impossible to get it near the boat. It twenty feet were made it was immediately lost, and then, seeing that both angler and boatman were weary, one of our party went aboard and took the oars while the boatman took the rod. He immediately lost fifty feet and things assumed the shape they had when the strike came, the tuna circling but ever going out. The launch was finally

obliged to take some of the ladies in, and before it got back it had begun to blow. The men in the boat had about made up their minds to make a run for the mainland, when just as they were deliberating the fish showed signs of weakening, and after a desperate effort they brought it to the gaff and the boatman hauled it in. Even then the fish was so lively that it humped and beat the boat in a violent manner. When the tired anglers took out their watches they found it was just seven hours since the beginning of the contest, during which the tuna had towed them nearly twenty miles. They were out of sight of Avalon, and the launch had some little difficulty in finding the white towel stowed with tuna blood which they hung to the breeze on the end of an oar.

'This was an exceptionally hard fight. The average tuna is taken in an hour and gives a splendid exhibition of strength, cunning and power. Often the strike is unusual, the fish leaping high in the air and coming down like a rocket upon the bait, or surging along the surface ten or twelve feet, churning the water into foam, or again striking from below, rising into the air with the bait in a splendid leap. As to the play of the fish, some are disappointing, some magnificent, the old story of the salmon; but my average catch is eminently satisfactory. It asked to suggest the most interesting movement of the fish, I should say it was the method of charging the man with the rod. In small fish of eighty pounds this is first felt by a slacking of the line, and the novice in despair turns to the boatman with the lamentation, 'He's gone!' but he finds out his mistake. In one fish that I took—a large one—this was illustrated in a most graphic fashion. I had stopped the fish at the 900-foot limit, and was trying to reel in, standing when I saw a whirl far away, the water larly boiling. The next moment the line felt. To all intents and purposes the fish had gone, but I took no chances and reeled on the big multiplier; my head swam and eyes danced I assure you.

'Well, my intuition was correct. The fish was racing at me, charging like a bull, and I raced to meet the move. I saw him coming and was at least fifty feet behind when he reached within twenty feet of me. Then seeing me he turned and dashed away, thinking to catch me unawares. Time and time again did this splendid fish try this trick, and the nervous strain of the movement told on me and was a potent factor in the four-hour struggle, during which the fish circled, swam directly away, shot in, now plunging down to the bottom, rising, stopping to beat and hammer on the line, always fighting and never giving up until the cruel gaff pierced his silver sides. I can tell you I was about finished; the fish had me on the run and I was sorry to see him killed. Such a fight, of four hours, towing a boat nearly ten miles and making the last rush of four miles, was deserving of better fortune; yet when we brought him in and found he was the record breaker up to that time, there was joy in the kind of savage joy the angler is supposed to feel, which recalls Beowulf's description of a friend who was casting a fly for trout with 'death in his eye and hell in his heart.'

'Compare the two fish—tuna and tarpon. I have caught both, and both are splendid fish, but their play is entirely different. The tarpon is a greater jumper after he is hooked, but the tuna is a tiger, and I don't know whether you wonder or not when you see him leap ten feet into the air or when you hold the rein and he tows your heavy boat ten or fifteen miles. The tuna is my favorite, as he is caught in smooth waters, where an unpleasantly warm day, in the Eastern sense, is unknown, while when after the silver king you must sit in a tropic sun. The stories told of tuna would fill a book. I know a young man who was fishing for one after dark when a shapely tuna leaped over the boat. I have known a tarpon to leap aboard a steamer on the St. John's River and have seen one leap over a boat. Senator Quay, who is an honorary member of our club, has had some singular experiences with tarpon, one leaping over his boat, falling into it and going through the bottom—a trick a tuna could easily do. A boatman was casting one day for tunas when he appeared about the boat, when just as he cast a large fish shot out of the water and took the bait before it fell, and was ultimately caught. This may seem remarkable to you, but it was a very natural thing for the fish to do, as he saw the flying fish in the air and supposed it was alive.

'The most remarkable event in the history of the Tuna Club was the swim of Jim Gardner, the boatman. He was boatman for the President of our club and for J. C. Townsend of Philadelphia, who were fishing for the first fish of the season. They both had strikes at the same time, but Mr. Townsend failed to hook his fish. His companion brought his fish to the gaff in about forty minutes, and Gardner hauled it into the boat and was about to release his gaff when the fish in a series of struggles landed on the opposite rail and captured the boat, throwing them all into the water. The boat would hold only one, so Mr. Townsend got it, the others starting to swim to the launch, which then lay perhaps 500 feet away. She met the swimmers half way, and Gardner still had the fish by the gaff and never relinquished his grip, though the fish in its lunge carried him down out of sight three times and rolled him over in its efforts to escape. A mere remarkable swim, or a plucky one, was never made or recorded in the annals of sport; and the story of how the first tuna of the season was saved by Jim Gardner will long be told around these parts.'



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A DOG TELEGRAPH OPERATOR.

Its Tail Could Spell Only one Word, but That Word was Effective.

The old time operator, who long ago lost his arm, but who, with many of his kind, exists pleasantly on no apparent income and in an altogether mysterious way that ought to give the rest of the world unbounded faith in Providence, leaned against the desk in the branch telegraph office and lazily took on a blank form a message that was being ticked off in the next room. He got as far as 'I will be ho—' and then a repeater nearer him began to clatter with a market report going across the continent and drowned out the clicking that told of some one's homecoming. It was a quiet hour in the office. The one clerk was working on a report of receipts and a group of messengers were fusing in a corner.

'That market report going out West,' remarked the old-time operator to one in particular, 'reminds me of a good story an old partner who worked out there, told me.'

'That so?' said the clerk, glancing up for a moment. 'What was it?'

The messengers quieted and drew closer. Being thus encouraged, the old timer continued:

'Billy was working for some rusty railroad, and there were only two stations on the line besides the terminals. Billy was the whole thing at one of these stations, and a young fellow whose call over the wire was 'B' was operator at the other. The way Billy told it he didn't see very many human beings in a month, and anything out of the usual that turned up was a theatre to him. Well, he was standing in the door of the station one hot afternoon wishing for something to happen, and suddenly a little yellow cur appeared around the curve to the east and came trotting toward the station. Billy said that the dog seemed to have a smile on its face. It squatted on the platform and looked up at Billy. Billy spoke to it, and it seemed to him that the dog had the most nervous tail he had ever seen a dog wear. As Billy went on to talk to the cur the tail became more agitated, and here's where the story comes in. Billy caught the rapping of the dog's tail on the planks. The raps made four dots, dot, long dash, five dots, over and over again.—I suppose you boys have learned the code,' said the story-teller, turning to the messengers, 'and know that that spells the word 'help'.'

Some of the boys nodded and some only looked sheepish.

'When the dog's tail,' he continued, 'kept on pounding out that word 'help,' Billy realized that the cur was a wonder, and he called it into the office. A dog telegraph operator, even if he can only make one word, isn't to be run across every day. The little cur was desperately hungry and gobbled up a big chunk of meat that Billy gave him. Then it jumped on the desk and lay down, as if it were used to no other bed.

'The road that Billy worked for was principally a carrier for silver bullion from mines and smelters at one terminal to a trunk line at the other terminal. Of course, there was considerable attraction for train robbers, but there hadn't been a hold-up since Billy had been employed on the road. Just at this time, however, a gang of desperate men—and they weren't hard to find in the West those days—had determined to have a try at a bullion train. The train had to slow up on the curve just east of Billy's station, and this point was chosen by the robbers as the right place for them to operate. Accordingly, a few nights after Billy had adopted the dog operator, he was awakened by a rough hand being laid on his mouth, and an equally rough

voice told him to keep his head shut. Billy was dazed, of course, but he realized what was going on, particularly when one of the men in the office took down the red lantern from its nail and lighted it.

'The gang agreed that Billy must be tied, and he was soon fastened good and tight to his narrow bed with a long piece of rope. The gang then went outside. Billy was sort of dizzy with excitement, but when he turned his head and saw the little yellow cur squatting on the table near the knee and squander, a feeling that he had a pal came over him. He spoke softly to the dog, and that started the nervous tail. The tail hit the key, and Billy could tell by the sound that by some chance it was open. The dog sent that one word 'help' over and over again.

'Billy kept on talking to the dog, and wondering what the effect of the nervous tail would be in B's office. By stretching his neck he could see through the window for the moon was up, that the desperadoes were at the curve. They were too far away to hear the instrument. The train would be there in an hour Billy calculated. The minutes dragged on, and the dog curled up and went to sleep. Just then the sounder began, B. had been awakened by the clicking of the instrument. He asked what was the matter again and again, and all Billy could do was to lie there and swear, and presently the sounder shut down. Billy could not make himself believe that the good luck would happen that the other operator would stop the train and warn the crew. He didn't know what a bright young fellow 'B' was.

'It seemed hours to Billy before he heard the distant roar of the coming train. Pretty soon the track began to sing, and the train was only a short distance from the other side of the curve. The suspense must have been something terrible. The train stopped, obeying the signal of the red lantern swung across the track. In a moment more Billy heard a volley of shots. A bullet tore through the thin planking of Billy's little office. The little dog yelled, and next Billy heard a sound of men running. Then some one threw the door of Billy's office open, and the trainmen came in. Billy was released and explanations were made. The other operator had warned the trainmen that something was wrong at Billy's station, and every one was ready with rifles and revolvers. The gang that had intended to loot the bullion train was surprised and had fled. That was all Billy wanted of working there, and he soon came East, bringing the dog with him.'

The story was done. The boys had been intensely interested. The new kid who had stood through it all with his mouth partly open, suddenly came to his feet: 'What come up 'er dog, mister?'

The old-time operator looked down at him seriously. 'You want to know what became of the dog, do you?' he said. 'Well, let me see. Oh, yes, I remember; I got a letter from Billy afterward saying a neighbor had poisoned the dog because it had been chasing his chickens. Say [this to the clerk] let me see you a minute.' And the two drew aside.

The new kid was musing. The other boys grinned cynically. 'Wonder what kind of dope he turns?' said one. 'A quarter changed from the clerk's pocket to the old-time operator's.' 'I had expected a letter,' he explained, confidentially, 'but it didn't come, and I am a little hard pushed. I think I can do some work here this week.'

The clerk was somewhat dubious, but there was such a spirit of comradeship about the old-time operator that it seemed fairly to pull the quarter out of the clerk's pocket.

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