



(From Macmillan's Magazine.)

Some ten or twelve years ago—the date is of no importance, or the exact place—an Englishman wandered down to the north of Scotland and invested some of his superfluous capital in a salmon river. Such an adventurer is often but poorly repaid for his enterprise. He generally finds that the water, which was low on his arrival, becomes lower during his first week, while for the remainder of his stay it is merely sufficient to keep the bed of the stream moist, and give the grouse something to drink. Or there is too much water; the river is running too big, and the fish make their way to quieter stretches above. And it now and then happens, when everything else seems right, that the fish are not up, or, if up, are able to find more profitable occupation for their spare time than taking artificial flies. In such wise the honest angler often makes his complaint. But this fisherman was more fortunate. During his month it rained a little almost every night, while four out of the five Sundays were regular specimens of Scotch downpours. It was very soothing, when lying awake at night, to listen to the drip of water on the roof, or the gurgle of a choked-up pipe in the yard—a lullaby to a fisherman on the dry north-east coast. On Sundays, too, clad in rain-proof garments, it was pleasant to splash across the hill to the little church, and listen to the minister holding forth to his small congregation of keepers and shepherds, translating, as he went, passages from the psalms and lessons for the benefit of his southern hearer.

This paper has nothing to do with salmon fishing, or it would be a pleasant task for us to give a minute and detailed account of the good sport which this Englishman—Mr. John Gibbs—enjoyed; to describe with accurate pen the skill with which he chose the temptations he offered to the fish, and the courage and prudence he displayed in the struggles which ensued. There is, however, something monotonous in continuous success, and it is just possible that the reader, after devouring with avidity the description of the first twenty or thirty battles, might then become a little wearied, a little sated, and wish for a blank day.

Gibbs eat salmon till he hated the sight of it, and he sent fish away to his friends to an extent which almost made the landlord think that the next dividend of the Highland Rail-

way would be affected; four, five, six,—even eight fish in a day. "What slaughter!" some would say, who perhaps get their supplies by nets. But his honest soul was never vexed by such a thought. He knew over how many blank days that white month should be spread to get a fair average, and he abated not a whit of his skill, or let off one single fish if he could help it.

The recipient of one of these salmon—a friend in the south—was the innocent cause of the adventure which shortly after befel Gibbs. After thanking him for the fish the letter went on to say: "I see by the *Courier* that there is to be a sale at Strathamat, so I suppose that old McIntyre is dead. The old boy was very kind to me years ago when I had your water, and used often to give me a day on his pools, which were very good. He had some wonderful books, and as you are fond of such things you should go over and have a look at them. He said they were worth a lot of money. There was one—of Shakespeare's—'Hamlet,' or 'The Merry Wives,' or one of those, which he used to sit and look at as if it were alive. I thought it was an inferior old article myself, but then perhaps I wasn't a very good judge."

Our fisherman was very fond of books, though so far as the great science of bibliomania went he was uneducated; a man who knew ever so much less about such matters than Mr. Quaritch might know a very great deal more than he did. But there must have been something of the blood of the old collectors in his veins. He could at any time spend a pleasant morning in poking about a second-hand bookseller's shop, and regarded with indifference the dust which settled on him in the course of his examinations. He loved the touch and feel of books, their backs and sides and edges, even the smell which hangs about the more ancient, seldom-opened specimens. A catalogue had a charm for him which he would not have found it very easy to give a reason for,—certainly not one which would have satisfied any of his friends, who were for the most part of the pure sportsman breed, and who would have as soon occupied their time in reading a grocer's or an ironmonger's list as a second-hand bookseller's. Gibbs did not parade his little weakness before these friends; he found them unsympathetic, with sou's above the arrangement of type and the width of margins. A large paper copy, or one with the headlines and edges mercilessly cropped, was to them a book and nothing more; they cared nothing for the work of the old printers, and you might call over the names of all the famous binders without arousing any enthusiasm in their minds.

"'Hamlet,' or 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' or one of those!"—what possibilities were opened up by these random words! Gibbs knew that the sale was to take place the next day, for his gillie (who was on the eve of being married) wished to attend it, to pick up something for his house, and another man had been engaged to take his place. Now the Englishman resolved not to fish at all but to go also himself.

The sale was advertised to begin at twelve, but it was well before that time when the intending purchasers were deposi-

ted at the scene of action, but a short time ago the home of the head of one of the most ancient clans in Scotland. Strathamat, as he was universally called, had been an embarrassed man. He had never been able to take in the world the position which was certainly his by birth. His wife had long been dead, he had no children, and for years he had led almost the life of a hermit, seeing few people except his bailiff and house servants. Then he died, and a great concourse of people came together from far and wide to attend him to his grave. He had been poor and little known and of little power in the world; but he was the chief of a great clan, and hundreds of men of his name came together to do him empty honour.

The house had the usual desolate appearance which houses have at such times. People were going in and out, poking and measuring furniture, and laughing and joking as if a sale were the best fun in the world. The lawn in front of the house was littered with odds and ends; it seemed as if the rubbish of half the county had been collected there that day. Gibbs went into the principal sitting-room, a dingy, faded place; some of the bedroom furniture had been brought in to sell there, and half filled it up; the carpet was rolled up in a corner, and near the door the chocolate-coloured paper was hanging on the walls, where careless people had banged it when bringing things in. There had probably not been a fire in the room for weeks, and the air was heavy and mildewy. But Gibbs had no thought for furniture or colour, or even smells that day. Up against one side of the room was a long, low bookcase, and as he walked across to it his heart began to jump a little at the possibilities which lay therein.

The collection was quite a small one. Perhaps there were five or six hundred books in the room, the majority of which were unspeakably uninteresting. There were many old works on agriculture, a great number of theological treatises, Hume and Smollet's histories, a broken set of Rees' encyclopædia, and a common edition of the earlier poets; the bulk of the shelves were filled up with material such as this. But here and there in the last shelf examined were some books of quite a different kind, shining out from among their worthless companions as gold dust does in sand. It was plain that while the majority had stood their ground there for many years—perhaps ever since they were bought by their first owner—that the few had been well cared for, and had not till quite recently been in the bookcase at all. Some one, looking through the old man's effects, had found them in a drawer or cupboard, and had stuck them at random into the nearest shelf where there was room. There were several books illustrated by Rowlandson, the "Three Tours of Dr. Syntax," the "Cries of London," a fine copy of Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield." Some of Cruikshank's rarest works were there; the first edition of "German Popular Stories,"—what a dealer would call a spotless copy, in the original boards, as fresh and crisp as if it had just been sent out from the publisher's office.

(To be continued.)