

II.

THE VERNACULAR NAMES OF FISHES.

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The editor of a well-known organ of the angling fraternity was compelled, a few years ago, to admit, 'the utter impossibility of ever clarifying the muddle caused by anglers clinging so persistently to local nomenclature in the identification and classification of fishes.' Anglers are not, however, by any means the worst offenders, and one of the main sources of confusion and uncertainty in this matter is the inveterate habit, prevalent amongst fishermen and those who handle fish commercially, of giving special names, often without rhyme or reason, to the kinds of fish which they send into the market. With regard to kinds which are uncommon, or of no value for commercial purposes, no name is too absurd to select, and the fishery expert and naturalist while frequently experiencing difficulty in determining precisely what fish may be meant, when a fisherman or dealer uses a special name for a common commercial species, finds the difficulty infinitely increased when some rare or uncommon fish is referred to. It is, as a rule, impossible to know what is meant when a fisherman speaks of a 'Sunfish,' or a 'Dog-fish,' or a 'Minnow,' for each of these terms is habitually used for half a dozen creatures wholly different and unlike. To add to the bewilderment, scientific experts have in recent years decided to throw aside generic and specific names, which from long use and familiarity have become universally accepted and recognized, and have substituted for them, in a great many cases, obscure and even uncouth and forbidding names, which, unlike the names so long adopted, are neither descriptive nor euphonious. This exchange of well known scientific names on which even amateur naturalists were wont with some certainty to rely, has been adopted in obedience to a principle of priority, consistent and defensible no doubt from an antiquarian point of view, but wholly confusing and misleading from the standpoint of utility and convenience. The once uniform and reliable scientific names, which were a safe refuge under the bewildering variations of local nomenclature, have been thrown into hopeless and inextricable confusion. Thus the familiar *Gadus aeglefinus*, the common halibut, has become *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*; the large tunny is *Albacora thynnus* instead of *Thynnus vulgaris*; and its close relative the bonito is *Gymnosarda pelamis*, instead of *Pelamys sarla*.

It is no matter of surprise that the early settlers in this western continent, anxious for old association's sake to keep in use names familiar to them in the old land, should have applied such names, borne by very different creatures, to fishes, birds and animals new to them in this country and bearing some more or less distant resemblance to the originals. Thus it is easy to understand that the name 'robin' was applied to a bird which resembles in hardly a single feature the original *Erithacus rubecula*, or robin redbreast of England. The large aggressive loudvoiced nervous thrush 'every motion decided and alert,' the American robin (*Merula migratoria*), is the reverse of the small delicately-formed, retiring bird with throat and breast of a deep orange red colour, whose song is of a sweet, low, plaintive character, and whose habit is to haunt the dwellings of men only in the winter time, for the English robin, unlike ours, is non-migratory. Our robin is a typical, somewhat noisy, thrush—the original robin a retiring, tender-voiced warbler, indeed the *Sylvias* as a whole differ in every feature from the thrush family the *Turdinae* to which our North American robin belongs. It was no doubt for precisely similar reasons, largely old association, that the name speckled-trout or brook-trout, was applied to that most widely distributed and highly esteemed fish