

Some Fish Stories.

A friend of ours who recently went a-fishing up Lake Superior way caught few fish, but found lots of time for moralizing and even for letter writing. One of his letters is so amusing that we are sure our readers will enjoy it, and we, therefore, herewith present them with copious extracts. He writes:

I used to believe that fishermen did experience pleasure in the sport. It was a generous illusion. It has been dispelled by close observation. I now know that the only inducement for men to go fishing is for the pleasure of lying about it afterward. This statement applies to amateurs. Men who gain their subsistences as toilers on the waters do it as a business. It is pelf, not pleasure, they seek.

The average amateur fisherman says he loves the sport. He travels off ten miles to whip a trout stream. He sits on a bank and holds a rod and line with one hand, and fights mosquitoes and black flies with the other, until nightfall. He anchors himself on a rock or a bridge with a drop line; at brief intervals he mournfully hauls in and spits on his bait, and throws it out again. He sits in a small boat in waters where striped bass or sheephead sport in sweet communion and eat their neighbors. In solemn silence he awaits the coming of an unsuspecting fish, which he hopes will be tempted by the bait he has thrown to allure his hankering maw. He does all these things, even in a drenching rain or a pinching cold. He does them, too, with a foreknowledge that his friends will wonder when they next see him, whether he is recovering from the chickenpox, or has been applying a blanket blister plaster to his face for a toothache involving the entire force of his teeth on the retired list. He may come home without a scale of his own raising. That makes no difference. He will speak in rapturous praises of the delights felt in the silent communion with nature. He will descend on the poetic emotions inspired by gazing at the landscape or listening to the cadences of the rippling waters. He will tell of the healthful effects on mind and body that come from rest to the brain and breathing in air free from the noisome exhalations of urban surroundings. But the climax comes when he tells of the wild ecstasy he feels when the fish strikes the hook and the struggles that ensue when drawing him from his native element. How mortals do deceive themselves.

Quiet and sentiment don't pay for the loneliness, the annoyance and the fatigues inseparable from going a-fishing. Else why do fishermen never raid the waters without a pocket filled with highly concentrated fluid consolation? A man who enjoys the experience, per se, doesn't need to re-enforce the pleasure by removing the cork from the business end of a bottle. It is when his spirits droop that he invokes other spirits from the vasty shoals of that pocket companion. They bring him solace and give him courage. They prepare him for feats of romantic narrative. If he catches no fish he buys them at the market and exhibits the stock as the result of his skill. If he brings in a pitiful string of light weights, he smuggles it into the house. Then he goes outside. He tells a story in which he triples the number and quadruples the weight of the catch. That is bad enough. But no fisherman's story is believed without confirmatory proofs. In nine cases out of ten he drags wife, daughter, son, cook and chambermaid into the abyss of mendacity to sustain his story.

The chief of the department of ethics in the census bureau writes me that he was astounded himself at disclosures by the statistics of the number of wives and mothers whose home life had been beautiful and characters without reproach, who began downward careers in a reluctant affirmation of their husbands' exploits as fishermen. In each case the initial step taken, the conscience became seared and her course was down, down, until the point of abject depravity was reached. "Then," the chief writes me, "without a blush she would spend hours and hours in building zygairals and writing spring poetry." As the chief is not a fisherman, I believe what he says. If, by chance, a fisherman hauls in a fish of fair proportion, he will regale his companions for a half hour in describing the efforts the captive made to escape, and the dexterous skill he had to use to land him. Then he will tell about another fish twice as big and four times as ganey that got away just as he got him close to the gunwale or the shore.

A story is told of a fisherman who, for fifteen years, sat on an abutment of London

bridge day by day, rain or shine, holding his rod and line. He was never seen to raise a fish. One day a man asked him if he had caught anything that day. He answered no, but that three years before he had a splendid nibble. This was told to illustrate the patience supposed to be the characteristic virtue of the ideal fisherman. I don't believe it. No man would sit, day in and day out, so many years to experience the perpetual joy of catching no fish. He could drop a line into the cistern, go off and read the Pandects of Justinian or Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," or some other equally exciting work, and find just as many fish waiting when he should return home and pull in the line. If, for argument, I admit there is such a man, I know what his answer would have been. He would have told the marvelous number he had caught the previous day or week followed by a bill of particulars of the number and weight of the fish he had landed. If further proof of the absurdity of the story was needed, its author fails to chronicle that the man was not seen to take a drink during the whole fifteen years. That is conclusive.

I think I have shown that fishing and telling incredible stories about it are intimately connected. I am convinced, too, that the paucity of the catch and the stories told about it are always in inverse ratio one to the other. The smaller the catch, the bigger the story, until zero is reached. Then lying, ipso facto, touches the boiling point. I didn't cipher this out until I came to this place. Here and elsewhere a man can nearly always catch enough to satisfy moderate wishes, and sometimes the wildest ambition.

Ontario's Crops.

Notwithstanding the great attention paid to the crops in Manitoba and the North-West, those of Ontario are admittedly the most valuable in the Dominion. It is thus the more gratifying to learn from the latest reports that Ontario is now certain of very fine crops this year. The present wheat crop of Ontario is far larger than that of the North-West. According to the official report of the Bureau of Statistics the yield will amount to over thirty millions of bushels. It is estimated that the crop of Fall wheat will be fully six and a half millions of bushels greater than that of last year, and over three millions of bushels above the average crop of the last eight years. The yield of Spring wheat again this year exceeds last year's crop by two millions of bushels, and the average of the last eight years by one million of bushels. With the exception of rye, and hay and clover, the reports regarding other crops are no less gratifying. For instance, the crop of barley is said to exceed by four millions of bushels the average of the last eight years. Oats, again, exceeds that average (fifty-six millions of bushels) by twelve millions of bushels, and is no less than sixteen millions of bushels above the yield of last year. The crop of peas this year exceeds that of last year by two and a half millions of bushels, and tops the average by over four millions of bushels. Then the bean crop is likewise a good one, being above the average yield. There seems little doubt, however, that the crop of rye this year is not good, being only about one-half of the average. But rye is not considered an important crop in Ontario—the yield never having yet reached two millions of bushels. So, though their hay and clover crops were also under the average, the Ontario farmers will, owing to the abundance of their other crops, do very well indeed this year. An official report states that there will be a surplus in the Dominion of 33,000,000 bushels of wheat for export, and that Manitoba alone will export 25,000,000 bushels. It is now estimated that between Canada and the United States there will be an exportable surplus of 250,000,000 bushels of wheat. In the United States the actual yield of wheat has far exceeded the recent estimate of 535,000,000 bushels.

A Test of Eccentricity.

Lady (to applicant)—"How much do you want a month?"

Applicant—"Do you use Pearlina?"

Lady—"No I never use it."

Applicant—"Never use it. Well, I'd rather not engage myself to you; I don't like to have anything to do with eccentric people."—from *Kings' Jester*, N. Y.

An impecunious Irishman said he liked being asked out to dinner because it was fattening and nourishing.

The Hoop Snake.

He is marvelous enough to have come out of a fiery story, but he lives on solid earth and is one of its real dangers—that is, if you live where there are deep swamps or thick woods or wild rough hillsides. That is his choice of a world to live in, and there he is peaceable enough. If you happen to invade it he will run away if possible and fight only as a last resort. He will even lie so snug that you may step over him scathelless a dozen times—if only you do not step on him. You may see him sometimes basking on a log or bare rock, blinking at the sun and looking inert and harmless as a fallen twig. He is ram-built, long and slim, rarely under 4 feet or over six. His back is dull dead brown, his belly reddish ochre, with brown lights. He has a mouthful of sharp teeth, but no fangs. At the tip of his tail you see a horny spur, for all the world like a cock's spur, but something sharper. So he creeps and blinks away the Spring and early Summer, feeding on frogs, mice, berries and small birds and their eggs. Nobody sees him unless they go a-hunting him, and then only by rare good luck. By and by midsummer dries up the marshes, the woodland pools, the hill streams run low or fail altogether, negroes and hunters begin to say apprehensively: "Better be keener! time for hoop snake ter come whirfin' out der water, an' crazy mad at that."

Soon you hear weird tales indeed. In this midsummer madness the creature curves itself till the horned tail rests just on the back of its head, and whirls out and pastures along country road or open woodland. Woe betide whatsoever may cross its path. Vision is impossible, yet in some way the creature senses a living presence and strikes madly at it, flinging its barbed tail almost its own length in front of its head. There is a poison gland at the root of the spur full of venom so swift, so subtle, that it has no antidote. A horse struck by it falls shivering and groaning, bathed in cold sweat, and dies within the hour. Neat cattle either run bellowing for the nearest thicket in foaming frenzy or drop in their tracks as though shot. A dog dies with the quick rigors of strychnine poisoning, human beings grow blind and faint, then fall into merciful insensibility that runs rapidly into death. Luckily the snake misses oftener than it strikes. In that case it makes no second attack but whirls away in search of new victims. It cannot strike sidewise, but is so full of fight it will turn squarely on its course to deliver a straightout blow. Few things are more awesome than on a lone-some moonlit country road to encounter one of these wheels of vengeance. The name hoop snake or cartwheel snake comes from its habit of locomotion on these mad midsummer forages. The full moon of August is their usual season; sometimes, though the snake runs amuck by daylight.

Once a group in front of a roadside smithy were horror struck at sight of a tremendous fellow rolling down hill at them with the speed and force of a thunderbolt. There were three men with a tethered horse in the midst of them. Almost before they could draw breath the snake was upon them. It struck madly at the animal, which reared, plunged backward and broke rein just in time. Instead of it the snake struck the sapling to which it had been tied, and with such force that the horn penetrated the bark and held the reptile prisoner. The smith smashed it with a blow of his hammer, flung it away and set about putting a shoe on the lucky beast which had so narrowly escaped. By the time it was in place the sapling began to wilt. By morning it was black and dead as though hard frost had touched it. In fact whenever a tree suddenly and unaccountably dies the country folk will tell you that it has been stung by a hoop snake.

Clever Women

quite realize that by the great law of progress something is always being brought out to make life pleasanter. The latest thing introduced is the "Health" underwear for ladies, made from the very finest Australian wool, and which every good doctor in Canada agrees is a perfect safeguard against cold, whilst being at the same time well-fitting, warm, and luxurious. When you go down town step into W. A. Murray & Co's or any first class store and ask to see these goods. If you do not see the word "Health" plainly stamped on the garment, don't buy it, as it will not be the genuine article.

"Do you understand Latin?" asked the student. "I regret to say I do not." "Oh, well, I can make myself understood, I suppose, in German; I lend the five dollars."

What Black Bass Feed On.

Last summer some workmen caught six mice, which I induced them to bring in and throw to my fish, says George Kamper.

Five of the mice were alive and kicking, and as soon as they struck the water each was promptly caught by a bass and swallowed.

The sixth mouse had been killed in the catching, but before it had stopped the motion caused from throwing it a bass had it.

The fish held the dead mouse only a second or two, when he spit it out; none of the fish would eat it.

A boy once brought me a live sparrow, full feathered and nearly full grown, which I threw into the tank. The bird was struggling in the water and within five seconds from the time it was thrown in one of the large bass caught it—and he swallowed it, too.

The sparrow was a big mouthful for the bass, but slowly and gradually, I saw the tail feathers disappear.

The capacity of the stomach of a fish is wonderful. My oldest bass one day came to my hand seventeen consecutive times taking and swallowing a three-inch shiner each time. Sometimes when their stomachs are filled the bass continues to catch minnows, squeeze and kill them and spit them out.

What fisherman of any considerable experience has not been tantalized by having run after ran, when the bass simply squeezed and killed his minnows and then dropped them? And when his tiger possesses the fish, what can equal the satisfaction the fisherman feels when he beats the bass at his own game and captures him by spinning a dead minnow?

In August, 1889, I was attacked with sickness, and for four weeks I was unable to go after food for my pets. During ten days my fish had received nothing to eat, and they were ravenous.

They certainly were hungry enough to eat fresh meat if they could be made to eat it at any time, so I tried them and threw in some pieces of fresh beef. As fast as the pieces of beef struck the water they grabbed for it like a pack of hungry wolves.

Every bass in the tank snatched a piece of beef, and every one of them spit it out again. The bass, when hungry, appear to be willing to swallow anything that wriggles, but they certainly refuse to swallow anything that does not show some signs of life.

Pickles.

Never, on any consideration, use brass, copper, or bell-metal kettles for pickling, the verdigris produced in them by the vinegar being of a most poisonous nature. Kettles lined with porcelain are the best. When it is necessary to boil vinegar do so in a stone jar on the fire. Use also wooden spoons and forks. A small lump of alum added to the vinegar in which pickles are sealed renders them crisp and tender, and if covered with cabbage or grape leaves a fresh green color will be imparted. In making pickles, cider vinegar is best, but very nice strong vinegar may be made of sorghum, as follows: one pint of sorghum to each gallon of soft water (hard water will do but soft is best), add a cake of yeast and some good "mother," if you have it. Tie a cloth tightly over the jar or keg and place it in the sun. It will be good in three or four weeks. Stir it well every few days. See that pickles are always completely covered with vinegar. It is a good rule to have one-third of the jar filled with vinegar and two-thirds filled with pickles. Vinegar should only boil five or six minutes. Two much boiling takes away the strength. Pickles will keep best by being bottled, sealed while hot, and set in a cool place. Bits of horse-radish and spices, with a handful of sugar to each gallon of pickles, assist in preserving its strength, as well as greatly improving its flavor. Ginger is the most wholesome spice for pickles; cloves are the strongest, then allspice, cinnamon, and mace. Mustard seed is also very nice. If pickles are raised and prepared at home in brine an oaken bucket should be used, and they should be kept well covered, with plenty of salt at the bottom of the cask. In making the brine for pickles it should be sufficiently strong to bear an egg. A pint of salt to every gallon of water is the usual proportion.

It has been concluded that with a balloon 330 feet long, with a maximum diameter of 55 feet, a speed of twenty-five or thirty miles an hour can be attained. At the same time it is thought that the problem of flight is more likely to be solved by means of an aeroplane than with a balloon.