

MODERN SEA ANGLING



F. D. HOLCOMBE

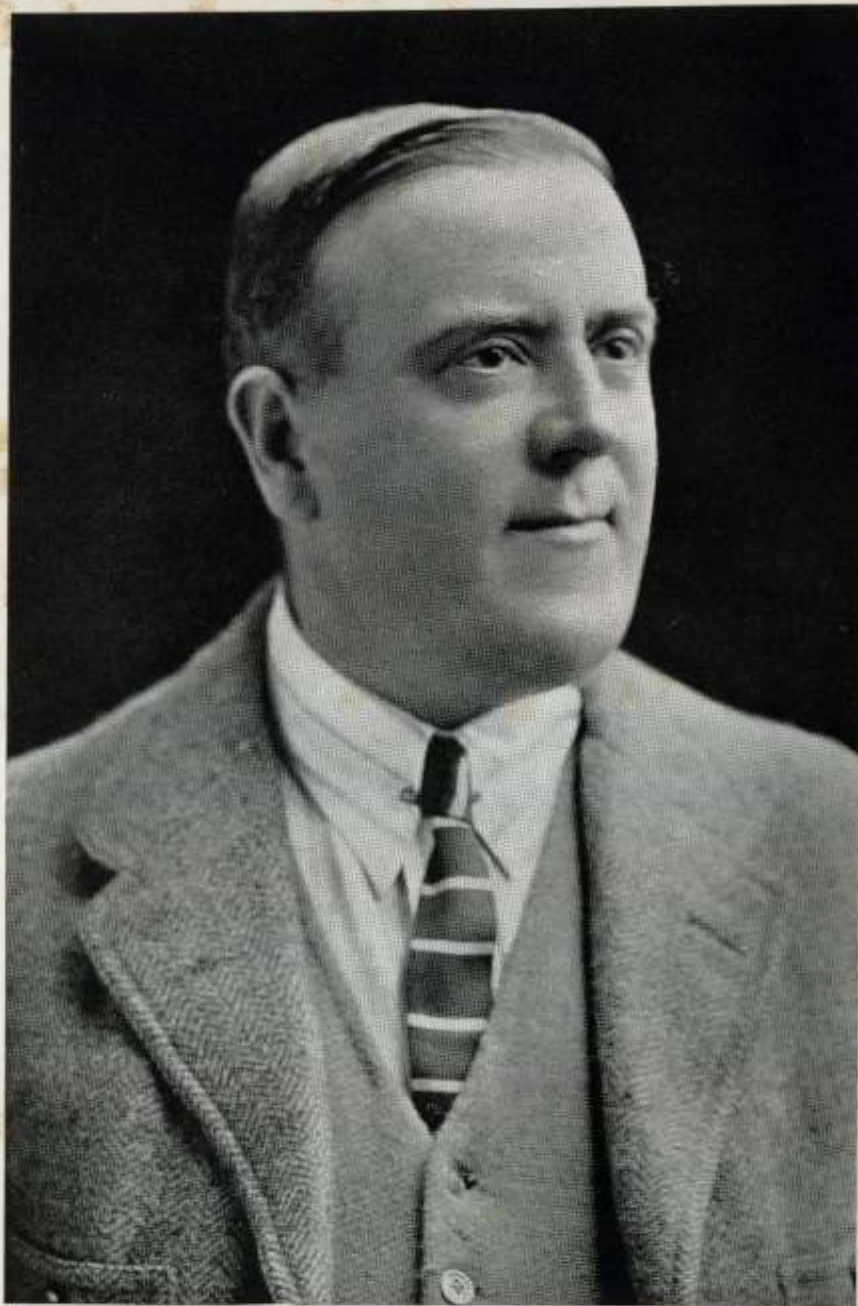


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F. J. Holcombe

MODERN SEA ANGLING

BY
F. D. HOLCOMBE

THIRD EDITION
WITH A CHAPTER ON TUNNY FISHING
IN ENGLISH WATERS

BY
HAROLD J. HARDY



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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

IN issuing the second edition of this book, I wish to thank my many correspondents, almost all unknown to me, for their very kind and appreciative letters to me about the book. These form eloquent and convincing testimony, if such were needed, not only to the widespread and increasing popularity of sea angling, but also to the desire of many present-day sea anglers to fish in a sporting way. My grateful thanks are also due to the Press for their uniformly kind and flattering notices of the book. A few illustrations which have been added to the present edition will, I hope, increase its attractiveness.

F. D. H.

March, 1923.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS book really owes its inception to Mr. R. B. Marston, the well known editor of the *Fishing Gazette*. In the early part of 1919 he asked me to write a series of articles on Sea Angling in that paper, with a view to their publication later on in book form as a handy guide to the sport. The articles commenced in May, 1919, and ran for approximately two years in the *Fishing Gazette*; but the matter in them extended to very much greater length than either Mr. Marston or I had anticipated

when I began to write them, with the result that it was found impossible to compress them within the limits of a book of the size he had in mind, and consequently he abandoned the idea of publishing it.

They were written mainly for the benefit of the sea angling novice who wants to fish in as sporting a way as is possible in our waters. I have tried to avoid, as far as I could, copying from what others have written about the saltwater branch of the sport, now so popular among anglers, and likely, I think, to become a good deal more so in the future; and the information, such as it is, contained in the following pages has been based as much as possible, although not of course altogether, on the experience of my friends (of whom I have many who are practically lifelong sea anglers) and myself.

My best thanks are due to Mr. R. K. Biernacki, Mr. Hollis B. Fowler, Mr. E. Graham-Falcon, Mr. C. F. Godfrey, Mr. F. B. Hannam, Mr. J. H. Hards, Mr. J. Rowan Herron, Mr. E. Hyde, Mr. E. M. Mallett, Mr. Guy de Maupas, Mr. A. Mignot, Dr. C. S. Patterson, Mr. H. Roach, Mr. W. K. Summers, Mr. P. Wadham and several other members of the British Sea Anglers' Society for much valuable information, kind help and practical advice. I am also very greatly indebted to Mr. Marston alike for the kindly encouragement which he has given to a new and unknown writer on the sport and for his generous permission to issue in book form matter practically all of which had previously appeared in the pages of the *Fishing Gazette*.

F. D. H.

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MODERN SEA ANGLING

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

OF all the sports of which the average Briton is proverbially so fond, probably sea angling has made the biggest strides in popularity and progress during the present century, with the possible exception of golf; although that perhaps can hardly be called a sport, for as some one unconverted to the game has rather unkindly said, it is neither work nor play, but a disease! For every amateur rod fisherman in salt water when the British Sea Anglers' Society was founded in 1893 there are probably scores to-day; and there seems every likelihood that their numbers will be very largely added to in the years to come. There is an immense body of anglers in this country, and there are to-day many signs that among them are men, and women too, who sooner or later will turn to the sea for their sport in ever increasing numbers. Among the reasons for this change over from fresh to salt one may mention the following:—(1) The increasing difficulty of obtaining really good fishing in fresh water; (2) the great improvement in sea angling tackle and methods which has been effected in recent years; (3) the possibility that the next few years will provide opportunities of sport in the sea finer perhaps than anything the

present generation has seen ; (4) that inherent love of the sea which is characteristic of most Englishmen ; and (5)—last but not least—the fact that the catch provides a welcome addition to the larder, which except in the case of the salmon, trout, grayling, eel, perch and gudgeon, is more than can be said for the freshwater branch of the sport, and is in itself no mean consideration in these days.

The first of these reasons is one which needs no emphasizing. Tar, pollution, over fishing, and (in some cases) poaching have played havoc with our fresh waters, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that not a month goes by without an addition to the already too long list of our rivers which have either been ruined already, or are in a fair way to become so, from one or other of these causes. The condition of that famous river the Ouse, below Bedford, is only one instance which could easily be multiplied from many other parts of the country. Perhaps in what the late Mr. Gladstone used to call the dim and distant future something *may* be done to find an efficient and innocuous substitute for the deadly tar, and to put a stop to pollution, especially if the long continued agitation for a Minister of Fisheries is ever crowned with success ; but over fishing is an evil for which it would seem to be impossible to provide a remedy.

As to the improvement in sea angling tackle and methods, it is scarcely too much to say that some branches of the sport in recent years have been almost revolutionized in this respect. Of course for bottom feeding fish in a strong tideway the use of the heavy weights which so seriously interfere with sporting angling can never be eliminated ; but the great development of driftline fishing has robbed the ancient jest about hauling up 2 lb. of lead and 1 lb. of whiting of much of its sting. Some time ago a very old and skilful sea angling friend of the writer's—a great exponent of driftline fishing—ventured on the

prophecy that before very long all our commoner British sea fish (except the skate) would be taken in this way, and already the prophecy has been realized, except in regard to one species—the halibut ; and there is little doubt that one of these days a halibut will be landed on a drift-line too by some lucky sea angler. When it happens, may the writer be there to see ; a halibut would be great fun on a pollack rod ! In all the higher branches of the sport the tackle used to-day approximates very closely to that of the freshwater angler ; and every one who has tried, for example, catching mackerel or bass or black bream on a fly rod and unleaded driftline knows that here is sport fully equal—so far as the play of the fish is concerned—to anything our fresh waters can produce, except of course in the case of the salmon ; and salmon fishing in this country is beyond the reach of the majority of anglers.

As to the prospects of sport in the sea during the next few years, this opens up at once an intensely interesting field of speculation as to the effects of the operations of war upon fish life in the sea generally. Without going into the subject too closely, and avoiding the technical and scientific questions which a full consideration of it would involve (fascinating as they are), it may be stated broadly and generally with fair certainty that the great diminution of trawling during the years of war, combined with the innumerable wrecks sunk around our coasts, must necessarily have an immensely beneficial effect upon maritime fish life of which the nation in general, and the sea angler in particular, will reap the advantage in the years to come. Our seas had throughout the war, and at a fearful cost in human life, what was almost a "close time." Every sport of course was hit very heavily by the Great War, but the sea angler perhaps suffered as much as anyone, for most of his best grounds were out of bounds.

It is unnecessary to say anything about reasons four and five except to express the hope, in passing, that an increasing tendency on the part of the boatman to annex the catch as his perquisite, which is to be noticed on some portions of our coast, will be sternly resisted by every amateur sea angler.

Our seas of course do not furnish the magnificent and at times almost too strenuous sport obtainable at Santa Catalina, in Florida, South Africa and many other places abroad ; but nevertheless some heavy fish have been taken on rod and line in our waters. Taking 50 lb. as the standard or minimum weight, there are three fish of that size, or over, which the sea angler may hope to catch, namely, the halibut, the shark and the skate. Probably of all the fish in our home waters the halibut affords the nearest approach to the exciting sport to be had in foreign seas. This fish is unfortunately not very common around our coasts, but between two and three score, of 50 lb. weight or over, have been captured by anglers up to the present time, the record being a fine fish of 135 lb., landed after an exciting and exhausting struggle which lasted about three quarters of an hour. The blue shark too puts up a very good fight (although a good many anglers look down upon shark fishing as something beneath their notice), and quite a number over 50 lb. have been taken on rod and line, the heaviest at present, as far as the author knows, weighing 114 lb. Skate fishing is in a class by itself. A mild sensation was produced in the sea angling world here, rather more than twenty years ago, by the capture of the first large one (a fish of some 120 lb.) on rod and line. But we have progressed a good deal since those days, and skate fishing to-day is rightly looked upon with contempt. The effort of bringing a large one to the surface is very much like trying to pull up the bottom of the sea ; and as an occupation it is entirely without

merits except as a very strenuous test of the soundness of one's tackle, to which one might appropriately introduce any unsuspecting angler to whom one owes a grudge. It is a pity that this should be so, for the skate is fairly common, and (although he does not look built for speed) is in reality one of the swiftest fish which swim our seas, as anyone can testify who has seen the lightning-like flash in which a big one, brought to the top of the water and lost in the gaffing, will disappear; so that if he would only run, instead of clinging like grim death to the bottom with his capacious wings, he would provide the sea angler with some pretty sport. A large number over 100 lb. in weight, and two of 200 lb. or over, have been taken on rod and line—the heaviest a fish of 211 lb.

Of our other British sea fish, the angler will be lucky if he ever gets a conger of 50 lb.; although as a matter of fact a few over that weight have been taken on rod and line, the heaviest a fish of 66 lb. captured a few years ago near Worthing. If he be on appropriate ground however he may look forward with reasonable certainty to ling of 25 lb. or so, and the ling (although he cannot be called a game fish) is not to be despised as a fighter, especially when, as sometimes happens, he is taken on the drift-line and a pollack rod. A large number of ling between 20 lb. and 40 lb. in weight have been taken on rod and line in our seas, and the record is a fine fish of 44 lb. Another fish often caught by the sea angler is the cod, and every season, in normal times, sees a good many over 20 lb. in weight captured on rod and line; in fact during the war quite a number of this size were taken pretty close inshore, which rather leads one to think that disturbances due to the war may possibly have driven them closer in to the coast than is their usual habit. The writer believes the heaviest cod so far taken on rod and line weighed 34 lb., but several in the neighbourhood of 30 lb. have been captured.

In venturing to offer some advice to anyone who has decided to take up sea angling as a sport the writer would say in the first place that about the last thing he wishes to do is to pose as an authority on it, for he is profoundly conscious of the fact that such experience of it as he has had is altogether insufficient to warrant his taking up that attitude, even if he wanted to do so—which he does not. But he has many friends among sea anglers, and it is possible that the accumulated total of what he has learned from them may enable him to say something on the subject which the sea angling novice may find of some use.

Probably none but the confirmed cynic would feel disposed to quarrel with the suggestion that ability to fish is one of the most essential qualities of a sea angler. Although the literature of the saltwater branch of the sport, as compared with the other, is as yet more or less in its infancy, the cynic perhaps would say that a reputation as a sea fisherman may be made more easily with the pen than with the rod. This is a rather delicate matter, upon which for various reasons the writer is disinclined to say much; for one thing a fellow member of the British Sea Anglers' Society has told him that he (the writer) is a very fair fisherman *on paper* himself. Probably most sea anglers, if interrogated on the question, would claim to be able to fish. But the term is an elastic one, and in its widest and most comprehensive sense may well imply a good deal more than the actual literal meaning of the words themselves. In this sense it would cover, in addition to the hooking and landing of fish, and the casting of fly, spinning bait and bottom tackle, such matters as the provision of bait, the management of a boat, the picking up of "marks," the care of one's tackle, and so on. It is probable that if every sea angler had to sit for an examination in his sport conducted on these expansive

lines a goodly few—and the writer includes himself among the number—would run considerable risk of being “ploughed.” It is not too much to say that in many instances the sea angler is almost entirely dependent on his boatman for his sport ; in fact the attitude of some of these worthies towards the customer rather reminds one of the advertisement “ You press the button, and we do the rest.” This remark does not apply of course to the man who fishes from pier or shore, for he is always independent of paid assistance, and in that sense is the better all round angler. The good sea fisherman should be able *if occasion demands it* to do everything for himself ; obtain his own bait, scull his small punt from the stern, manage his own boat, put her on to the marks—a delicate operation, as all those know who have tried it in a wind with a strong tide running—bait his own hooks and gaff and unhook his own fish. Some of these operations are easier than others, but unless the angler has attained a fair degree of proficiency in all of them he can hardly claim to be a good all round sea fisherman. There is of course no royal road to boat management ; only instruction, practice and experience can teach the sea angler what to do and what to avoid. The novice therefore may safely be counselled not to go afloat except in the company of a steady, reliable boatman, whether professional or amateur. Later on, when the angler has learned to manage his boat for himself, he will find an added enjoyment in his sport ; for professional boatmen as a class are apt to be conservative, and strongly prejudiced in favour of what they consider orthodox methods of sea fishing ; so that the angler, if he wants to try experiments, will probably be happier if he be by himself, or better still in the company of another amateur whose tastes run in the same direction. As regards the actual operation of fishing, casting should be considered an important part of every sea angler's

education. To the pier or shore man of course it is vital, while the angler who usually fishes from a boat never knows when a knowledge of the art may not stand him in very good stead ; although the novice should be rather chary of going afloat with people—of whom there are some about—afflicted with a desire to cast from a boat containing other anglers. As with boat management, so with casting ; there is no royal road to proficiency in it. Assuming the angler to be equipped with suitable gear, practice is the only thing to make him proficient ; but it may be whispered that the art does not take so long to learn as some sea anglers, who have never tried it, seem to imagine. The practice, it need hardly be said, should not be carried out on a crowded pier or foreshore ; and the presence of a friend who is a proficient caster, and can give the novice a little instruction, is a great advantage. The question of the gear to be used for casting will be dealt with a little later on.

The sea angler must also possess of course, if he is to deal with running fish—and there is little sport in reeling up the other sort, although they come in usefully enough for the pot—that quality called “ hands.” It would be an impertinence to offer the experienced freshwater angler any advice on the management of the hooked fish, but the novice may safely be counselled to be rather “ tender ” with his fish at first, and to check a very natural desire to reel them up to gaff or net as quickly as possible. This is a serious fault from which even some experienced sea anglers are not altogether free. The rather ticklish question of when to give line to a fish, and when not, is one upon which only experience can really teach the novice properly ; but the probability is that he will learn quickly enough, especially if he should happen to lose one or two good fish by holding them too hard !

As many a sea angler knows from unhappy personal

experience, the matter of bait is often a veritable thorn in the flesh to him, for it sometimes happens that none of the usual baits is obtainable. In such cases the novice may be counselled to display a little resource and initiative, and try experiments. Even if he catches no fish he will be no worse off than if he stayed ashore bemoaning his fate. Two examples may be given. On one occasion a sea angler, confronted with the "no bait" difficulty, gathered some garden snails, with which he went afloat. With the snails he caught pouting, some of which he cut up and used as bait to catch other fish. The other instance occurred many years ago at Ballycotton, and was told to the writer by one of the fishermen at that little village, now so well known, at any rate by repute, to all sea anglers in this country. The men in question went to sea one day with no bait, and apparently no possibility of obtaining any, but overcame the difficulty by putting over a piece of bread on a small hook. With this they caught a whiting, and with pieces of the whiting many more of his brethren. Anchoring on different ground, they got among the hake with whiting bait and made a great catch. Many of the hake, on being hauled on board, vomited up herrings, so that in the end the fishermen had plenty of bait—both whiting and herring. The moral of experiences such as these would seem to be that lack of any of the ordinary baits need not necessarily cause the sea angler to despair. The writer will have more to say on the bait question later on, when he deals with angling for particular kinds of sea fish. If the sea angler does not fish "on his own," but engages a boat and man, he will naturally look to the latter to provide the necessary bait, the charge for which should be included in what he agrees to pay. But the amateur should always be ready, if necessary, to obtain his own bait. There are men who would consider it *infra dig.* (no pun is intended) to dig

their own lugworm, which is a staple bait of course for many kinds of fish. This is an attitude which it is difficult to understand, for the digging of lugworm has a fascination all its own, in addition to being remarkably good, if rather back-aching exercise. To the allotment holder, at any rate—and there are a good many such in these days—it should present no terrors.

A very important matter to the sea angling novice who fishes afloat concerns his relations with and his treatment of the boatman who takes him out. The good sportsman will always try to avoid spoiling the market for other people. The writer is no advocate of meanness, but he holds strongly that it is as great a mistake to overpay one's man as it is to underpay him. Yet most sea anglers, he supposes, have come across instances at different places round the coast where the local fishermen, or some of them, have been spoiled, and rendered lazy and independent, by injudicious and misplaced and quite unnecessary generosity on the part of some patron. Let the novice therefore pay the fair market rate—and no more. The question of a "tip" at the end of his holiday may be left to his discretion, according to circumstances; with this word of warning, that in some of the Cornish villages the offer of any money over and above the agreed rate of hire would be looked upon as an insult, although any little present in kind—for example, tobacco—would be accepted gratefully enough. As to what is the fair market rate no fixed rule can be laid down. A great deal depends of course on the kind of boat hired, and then local circumstances vary considerably. Like everything else, there has been since the war a substantial increase in the charge for boat, man and bait; although it is to be hoped that not many sea anglers will have the experience of an angler who was asked 30s. at a well known sea angling town for a day's boat fishing with one man in a paddle punt, the

angler to provide the bait and the boatman take the fish! Needless to say, this preposterous offer was declined. It is superfluous to add of course that a clear understanding should be come to as to terms, including the questions of the provision of bait and the disposal of the catch, before going afloat.

But there are other matters affecting the relations between the sea angler and his boatman than the mere question of £ s. d. The novice may safely be counselled to avoid the putting on of "side"—piscatorial or otherwise—and to endeavour rather to find in his man, within due limits of course, a guide, philosopher and friend. Obstinate (sometimes pig headed) and conservative to a degree as professional fishermen often are, the amateur should always remember that they fish for a living, not for recreation, and in most cases no doubt know a good deal more about the game than he does. The novice who keeps his eyes and ears open, and is not too superior to learn from his men, may often pick up valuable wrinkles in this way. He should also be ever on the alert to foster and cultivate, as far as he can, a spirit of good sportsmanship among them, a quality in which such experience as the writer has had teaches him they are sometimes rather deficient. He remembers, as an example, that a few years ago at Ballycotton one sea angler had almost a row with his men because, although they had plenty of bait (mackerel and herring), they refused at first to give some to another angler whose men were without any, saying that it was the fault of these latter, who had been too lazy to set their nets—which was no doubt true. The writer is glad to say that angler No. 1 took a firm stand about the matter, and refused to go afloat until his brother sportsman's wants had been supplied. There is one failing, common to many professional fishermen, against which it is to be hoped the good sea angling sportsman, whether

novice or not, will strongly set his face. They are often quite unnecessarily and brutally cruel to captured fish, particularly dogfish and sharks. Perhaps this is not much to be wondered at, for fish of these particular species are the fishermen's natural enemies, and the men often suffer seriously in pocket through their depredations. The writer does not advocate of course that dogfish should be returned to the sea alive and uninjured (in these days indeed they have a market value); but the sea angler should always insist on their being killed expeditiously and without the infliction of needless suffering, and should sternly repress anything in the nature of unnecessary and wanton cruelty on the part of his men.

It is hardly necessary to warn the novice against a notion, prevalent among some people, that the sea is full of fish in all parts of it, and that wherever one may drop anchor one is sure of a good catch. As a very general rule (to which perhaps the case of the mackerel provides the best known of the few exceptions) one must be on definite and appropriate ground in order to catch fish. And even then blank or poor days at sea sometimes occur, although certainly they are not so frequent as in fresh water; but the novice, if a good sportsman, will be quite content to take the rough with the smooth. It is all the luck of the game, and there is little doubt that one of the many charms of angling, whether in salt or fresh water, is its uncertainty. If one could always make sure of catching a lot of fish there would probably be very little in it. There is nothing perhaps which brings out the sea angling sportsman's good qualities better than to come ashore after a long day's fishing with a poor catch, only to find that the rest of the crowd have done well, unless indeed it be to undergo an experience that has no doubt befallen most sea anglers at times, to sit, fishing hard, and looking on while one's boat companion catches all

the fish. One sometimes comes across very curious and quite unaccountable happenings of this kind. It is rather difficult no doubt to be enthusiastic in such circumstances, content to look at happiness through another man's eyes; but the good sportsman will always try to remain cheerful, and comfort himself with the thought that his turn will come to-morrow—when no doubt, if he be a Jonah man, there will be no bait!

There is one type of sea angler extant—fortunately quite uncommon—who is never so happy as when he can "wipe the eye" of a brother fisherman by beating his catch. The writer has no use whatever for this gentleman, and he hates, as the devil hates holy water, a selfish, an envious or a jealous fisherman. If the sea angling novice should come across any such he may safely be counselled to give him a wide berth.

Among minor virtues of the sea angling sportsman is punctuality, and the novice may be advised to cultivate the habit assiduously. A man who is habitually late in getting to the boat is a confounded nuisance. A clever young writer who has written one or two brilliant articles about the sport, has spoken in one of them of the thousand little demons who sometimes seem to be conspiring together to prevent the sea angler from getting afloat in good time, and those who have fished in the West Country—where many of the men seem to have no sense of time—have no doubt suffered on occasions from the unpunctuality of the boatman; but it is a good deal worse when the culprit is a brother angler, who ought to know better. It is a thing to try the patience of most men to have to sit, waiting and fuming, perhaps with the consciousness that one is missing the best of the tide. Some years ago at Ballycotton the writer and a friend suffered greatly from the unpunctuality of their two boat companions. Life is made up, some one has said, of wasted opportunities, and

the writer will always regret that they did not give the two laggards a lesson in sea angling manners by going afloat one fine day without them.

There is one other quality which the sea angling novice will do well to cultivate if he can, and that is a certain light-heartedness and buoyancy, even irresponsibility, if you will. The writer finds it just a little difficult to put his exact meaning into words ; but he feels that some sea anglers in our waters take themselves and their sport—particularly themselves—much too seriously. This is a mistake. After all, sea angling is a sport, a game, a recreation, or what you will ; it is not the serious business that some men make of it. As a sport it is a wonderful thing for keeping a man young ; but if it be taken too seriously it may have an exactly opposite effect.

CHAPTER II

RODS, REELS AND LINES

IN the case of the freshwater angler turning to the sea his previous experience, and some of his tackle, will serve him in very good stead because, as has already been stated, sea angling methods and tackle nowadays approximate pretty closely to those of the freshwater fisherman. In the case of the absolute novice, perhaps the first word of advice should be to avoid, in the first instance at any rate, the accumulation of too much gear. The acquisition of large quantities of tackle seems to have a curious fascination for some anglers, whether in salt or fresh water. Just as some men collect old china, or butterflies, or postage stamps, so others collect fishing tackle—a harmless and interesting hobby which, to do them justice, the members of the tackle trade do not attempt to discourage!

Of course the very essence of sporting sea angling is to specialize for one's fish, using in each case rods and tackle appropriate to the quarry one is after; but the object the novice should try to aim at is to accomplish this, at any rate at first, with a minimum rather than a maximum quantity of rods and other tackle. Later on, as the fascination of the sport grows upon him, as in all probability it will, he may, if he chooses, join the happy band of tackle collectors; it is all a matter of the length of his purse.

In the opinion of many anglers the ideal sea rod has yet to be made. The American system of rod building—short butt and long top—for general bottom fishing from a boat, especially for the heavy fish encountered at Ballycotton, Valentia and similar stations, is superior to one built in the English style, namely, with two joints of about equal length. The drawback to a rod built in the American fashion is that the length of the top joint makes it inconvenient to carry about, except in a rod box; but if the angler is hoping to go far afield for his sport (for example, to Ireland or Scotland) a rod box is a necessity. The whole question of the design of sea rods (primarily for big game and other heavy fishing) was worked out very thoroughly and exhaustively a few years ago by an extremely clever and brilliant sea angler, Mr. R. K. Biernacki, and the results were tabulated in an article from his pen which appeared in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly* for September, 1913, and subsequent issues; so that the sea angler who wishes to take his sport *very* seriously (a thing, by the way, which the present writer has already advised him not to do), and have a rod specially built, has the whole matter of lengths, tapers, etc., already worked out for him. Mr. Biernacki, by the way, is a civil engineer by profession, as well as a very experienced sea angler, so that his conclusions may be thoroughly relied on; but any one consulting his article may be warned that there were a good many misprints in it, which were put right in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly* for June, 1914. He points out that strength and flexibility are not necessarily converse terms, as many anglers suppose, and that a strong rod can easily be flexible, or a weak rod stiff—it is all a matter of *length*. There is one matter in which almost all our English builders of rods for sea work seem to go wrong, and that is the position of the upper grip and the reel fittings,

which are almost invariably too near the end button. This mistake has been pointed out over and over again by practical sea anglers, and that all rod makers have not avoided it long ago would seem to indicate that the fishing tackle trade is very conservative. The sea angler who is having a rod specially built for him should see to it that the upper grip and reel fittings are put in their right places; this is a point specially dealt with in Mr. Biernacki's article. Many English rod builders too put the reel fittings the wrong way round for sea work; that is to say, the sliding ring is at the top and the fixed one nearer to the end button. A moment's reflection should convince any one that for casting, and for all fishing involving any strain on the reel, it is much less likely to work loose or come off if the reel fittings are reversed (as is the case, for instance, in Carter's "Ballycotton" rod), and there is no doubt that for general use in the sea this reversed fitting is the more satisfactory type. As regards material, much has been written about the respective merits of greenheart and split cane (this again is a question very fully considered by Mr. Biernacki); but it is very much a matter of personal taste and fancy. A good selection would be double built split cane (without steel centre) for sporting fish, as being more reliable and less likely to snap at the sudden rush or plunge of a big one, and greenheart for general bottom fishing; but each angler to his taste. For pier or shore work the choice of the rod is very important, for a good rod is almost as necessary for long casting as a good reel. For general pier work 8 ft. 6 in., or thereabouts, is the most suitable length for the rod, and the strength of the rod should of course be appropriate to the weight of lead to be cast. For all casting, and also for driftline fishing, agate or porcelain rings (if expense be no object very decidedly the former, as far as the driftline is concerned) are best; with the

"tunnel" type of end ring generally fitted to tarpon rods (and lined with agate), and next to that the "Stirrup" or the "Pelican," in the order named; but in any case the novice is advised to avoid pulleys, whether fixed or swinging, as being unsatisfactory in practice and now quite out of date. For general bottom fishing phosphor bronze rings are quite good enough; but if the angler's fancy runs to agate or porcelain there is no reason why he should not indulge it if he chooses.

And now for the minimum number of rods which will be required; although the writer does not wish to dogmatize. He is only expressing his own personal opinion, and other sea anglers of more experience than his own might easily increase, or possibly lessen, the number. His own view is that the angler should provide himself with:

- (1) A rod for pollack and bass fishing.
- (2) Either a single-handed fly rod or a trout spinning rod for fishing the driftline for mackerel and black and red bream.
- (3) A rod (built on the American plan) for general bottom fishing.
- (4) A rod, either single or double-handed, but preferably the former, for casting a spinning bait from either boat or shore.
- (5) A rod for ordinary bottom fishing from pier or shore.

Of the above the first and third are essential, and the second very desirable; while the fourth and fifth depend of course on whether the angler is proposing to go in for those styles of fishing respectively. If expense be an object one rod might at a pinch serve the purpose of both the second and fourth. As to the first, the writer would suggest the "Minchin," in split cane. In its long length it is an admirable weapon for pollack, although rather too

heavily built for bass ; so that if the angler decides to specialize in bass fishing it will probably not be long before he provides himself with a rod rather more lightly built. (In its short length the " Minchin " is a very fair rod for bottom fishing.) By the way, why *will* some writers on sea fishing persist in advising short, stiff rods for pollack ? A greater mistake could hardly be imagined. As to the second, if a fly rod be used, of course a Leonard or a Hardy is unnecessary ; the cheapest obtainable will do quite well. Probably, from a strictly piscatorial point of view, the trout spinning rod is the more appropriate and workmanlike weapon, for it has been objected that a fly rod, unless pretty stiffly built, is slow in the strike, which is no doubt true ; but personally the writer does not mind missing one or two fish (if need be) for the sake of the hooped rod, with the point almost in the water, which is to him one of the greatest joys of angling. If the angler be a freshwater fisherman his oldest trout rod will do very nicely ; although in any case it should be of split cane and (unless expense be a great object) be fitted with agate rings. As to the third, the " Falcon " is an admirable little rod, and (in the hands of a competent angler) fully up to any fish he is likely to get hold of, except skate and perhaps shark. But nobody (at any rate after he has landed *one*) wants to haul up skate nowadays, and if a big one should be hooked the best plan is to get the boatman to handline it ; while shark fishing is really a sort of " extra turn " or side line, so to speak, and if taken seriously demands a special rod to itself, of which more hereafter ; although to tell the truth these rascals, as often as not, are hooked on the pollack rod when fishing a driftline from an anchored boat in the manner to be described a little later on.

The writer will be pleased to hear from any sea anglers who are sufficiently interested in the matter to write to

him as to how far—if at all—their own views on the great rod question agree with those expressed here.

Dealing now with reels, the angler will want one for bottom fishing, one for pollack and bass, and one for driftline fishing for smaller fish, such as mackerel and bream; while if he decides to go in for casting and spinning he will want reels for those purposes also. For bottom fishing a strongly built, well made 6-in. wooden reel with brass flange and optional check is recommended. This will serve equally well for small fish like whiting or for the heavier varieties; but if it is to be used for this heavy fishing care should be taken in buying it to see that there is plenty of metal in the brass star-back and reel seat, for the strain on those parts in getting in a heavy fish is a considerable one. A Bickerdyke line guard, around which has been neatly wound a leather bootlace, or better still a long narrow strip of raw hide, makes an effective brake for running fish. For bass and pollack the writer likes a 5-in. reel of similar make, but without the line guard, so that the fish can be checked by the hand on any part of the rim; although this is perhaps only a fad of his own (most anglers are full of fads). For driftline fishing for smaller fish a 3-in. or 3½-in. reel of the same sort will be required, although at a pinch the 5-in. can be used if it will go into the reel fittings of rod No. 2. If this latter be a fly rod the probability is that it will not take a 5-in. reel without having the fittings altered, so that for this reason, and also because such a reel will usually be too heavy for comfortable fishing with a fly rod, it is no doubt better for the angler to get the smaller reel straight away. Some sea anglers have recently plumped for a multiplying reel for this smaller driftline fishing, but there is apparently no particular advantage in such a reel. If our novice be a freshwater angler an old pike reel of the Nottingham pattern, pro-

vided it be of not less than 4 in. in diameter, and has a metal flange, will do at a pinch for bass and pollack; while really almost any smaller kind of reel which he may possess will serve for the driftline fishing for mackerel and bream, although if it contain any aluminium it will need careful treatment when used in salt water.

If the angler decides to go in for casting from pier or shore, or spinning, the choice of a suitable reel for these purposes demands more serious consideration. As every fisherman knows, American sea anglers use multipliers for casting; but the practice does not seem to have "caught on" in this country, although British ideas as to the best type of reel for casting have been greatly modified in recent years. Previously it used to be thought that the faster a reel would spin round the better it was for the purpose, and that the centre pin reel which would revolve at an extraordinary rate for about three minutes was the ideal. This idea of course is now exploded, because it was found that such a reel had to be checked pretty hard with the finger to avoid an over-run (which nevertheless was a fairly frequent occurrence, owing to wet fingers, etc.), while the angler was apt to get some very nasty knocks on the fingers from the flying handles, and sometimes a broken line into the bargain. At the same time one has to bear in mind that lightness in the running part is an important essential of a good casting reel, because if that is at all heavy there is a certain check at the commencement of the cast, before the reel starts to revolve, which spoils the angler's performance. The ideal casting reel is one which will offer no resistance at all at the commencement of the cast, and at the same time will not revolve faster than the rate at which the lead is going out through the air, as that of course is the cause of over-runs. If it were possible to get a thoroughly well made light

wooden reel (say $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter) with wooden flange, which would not warp or rattle when in use, this would be the best and cheapest reel for the purpose. But it is practically an impossibility; while the general "cussedness" of things may be relied on to see to it that if the fish *should* happen to be biting freely the reel will be pretty certain to jam altogether. Therefore an all wooden reel is not suitable for actual fishing, although if the novice can borrow an old one—some anglers are very successful at borrowing—it will do very well to practise casting with, whether on the beach or on grass.

Probably the best casting reel for actual fishing is a low-momentum reel of the Nottingham type, having front and back plates of Xylonite—a material which will not warp in our climate—with flange of aluminium. The Washburn "Facile" is one of the best on the market. This reel can be tightened up, so that the drum need never be revolving faster than the rate at which the lead is travelling; and after a certain amount of practice it is really the angler's own fault if any over-run occurs. With regard to the flange of aluminium a good deal of controversy has raged in the past round the question of the use of that metal on a reel for sea fishing, owing to the well known fact that salt water corrodes it very quickly. But all that is wanted is a little care on the part of the angler. The line should be run off the reel to dry as soon as possible after the day's fishing is over, and the flange thoroughly rubbed over, back and front, with an oily rag. With this treatment, combined with a drop of the finest machine or typewriter oil on the spindle (vaseline of course should never be used on a casting reel), the reel will keep in good order for many years, and the angler will find that there is never the slightest rattle or any other sound when casting with it. If however he be against the use of aluminium for sea work, and

decides on a reel with a brass flange, he must see to it that he gets one the flange of which is specially made very thin and light (as in the "Cowes," a first-class casting reel), because the brass flange of the ordinary reel of Nottingham type is too heavy, and causes that check at the commencement of the cast which has already been mentioned.

With regard to the question of size, it is pretty generally admitted now that, other things being equal, the smaller the reel the better it is for casting—within reasonable limits, of course. Most anglers use 100 yards of line, and in practice it will be found that (except in the case of a fine silk one) a $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch reel is the smallest that will carry this quantity comfortably; and this size now is very generally used for casting from either pier or shore, except at Scarborough and one or two other places round the coast (and the Scarborough reel, as used by the expert rock fishers there, is of course in a class by itself). Many pier anglers however use a 4-in. reel, and perhaps for all round work this is the most useful size, especially if one fishes much after dark; for there is more room on the drum for the line, and consequently not so much risk of the latter mounting over the flange if not wound up quite evenly—an occurrence which one is a little apt to overlook when fishing at night. For casting a light bait the novice will find the "Roach" an excellent reel.

And now we come to the running line. Lines used in sea angling here are usually of hemp, flax or silk. Of these, hemp is stronger than flax, and flax than silk. There is another material which, as Mr. Biernacki has pointed out, is very much stronger, viz., ramie, which is in fact the strongest and finest fibre known, and might very well be tried for fishing lines. It is rather a pity that none of our makers of lines for sea fishing has taken

up this idea. American sea anglers, as is well known, limit the strength of the line; but Mr. Biernacki thinks that this is a mistake. His remarks on this question are so instructive that they are worth quoting:

"Personally (he says) I do not believe in the American cult of light *lines* for sea fishing. The rod is the governing factor of strength, not the line. With a sufficiently flexible rod you get the maximum of sport, however strong the line may be. The strength of the rod is a fixed and known quantity, and you know where you are with it. With the line you do not. Its deterioration in sea-water is rapid, and the weakening effect due to this and the wear and tear of playing heavy, hard-fighting fish is a *continually increasing and unknown quantity*. There should, therefore, be a large margin of strength in the line to start with. . . ."

—with every word of which the writer very emphatically and respectfully agrees, although the point of course is not of so much practical importance in our waters (except perhaps in halibut and shark fishing) as when angling for the larger and more active fish of foreign seas. For bottom fishing in a strong tideway, whether from boat, pier or shore, the use of a fine line of course enables the angler to employ a lighter lead; but if the truth must be told there is not very much sport about this style of sea angling (except for pretty large fish), so that the use of the heavier lead does not really matter a great deal. It is quite likely that a good many experienced sea anglers will not agree on the point, which is one in regard to which every individual fisherman must decide for himself. For bottom fishing a line of twisted hemp, if it can be obtained, is recommended, and if the angler be thinking of trying the heavy fishing associated with

Ballycotton, Valentia and similar stations, 200 yards of *sound* line should be on the reel. In the great majority of cases, no doubt, 100 yards will be sufficient ; but if the angler gets into a big shark, or has the good fortune to hook a halibut, the probability is that he will want the extra 100 yards pretty badly, and its presence may make all the difference between landing, and losing, the fish of a lifetime. A line which had a great vogue at one time was the "Bates," brought out by the late Mr. T. B. Bates, a well known sea angler ; but one does not often hear of it nowadays. When the present writer was a good deal younger he was inclined to be rather fussy about the particular kind of lines he used for bottom fishing, just as he was in the matter of pipe tobacco ; but in later years he has come to the conclusion that for this purpose one line, like one brand of tobacco, is very much like another. The important qualities to be looked for are great strength, combined with a reasonable degree of fineness ; some sea lines in use in this country are quite unnecessarily stout. For bass and pollack fishing a plaited line is advisable ; and if the angler be thinking of trying the method of float fishing for bass from a drifting boat, to be described hereafter—and if he be a freshwater man he may be strongly advised to do so, for it will probably appeal to him greatly—he will want a fairly heavy line of pure undressed silk. For driftlining for smaller fish a plaited line, finer than that for pollack, although at a pinch the pollack line might be used. The usual colour of lines for sea angling is dark green, and there is little doubt that for most purposes this is as good as any ; although for fishing at or near the surface a white, or at any rate a light-coloured line, is best, for the fish, if he sees it at all, must do so against the background of the sky.

Every line used for bottom fishing and driftlining is

improved by being dressed, as this greatly increases its durability, and consequently lengthens its "life"—an important consideration in these days of high prices. Dressings for sea lines are many and various. One writer (Mr. C. O. Minchin) recommends Mars oil, but the best advice the present writer can give to anyone who thinks of acting on this recommendation is that of *Mr. Punch* to those about to marry—"Don't." There is one dressing which is as good as any, and probably better than most—viz., Stockholm tar. Strictly speaking, this should be applied in a vacuum, to ensure the tar getting into every fibre of the line; but as it is rather a difficult matter for the average man to get a satisfactory vacuum the following method may be recommended as good enough for practical purposes: take 1 oz. of Stockholm tar and place it in a wide-mouthed pickle-jar; pour in half a pint of either methylated spirit or turpentine (it does not very much matter which, but the former for choice), and leave it until the tar is thoroughly dissolved, stirring occasionally to assist the process. Then run the line (which must be thoroughly dry) off the reel and form it into a coil, leaving six inches or so of the end of the line free; and tie loosely round the coil in two or three places some old line or thin string, to prevent a tangle. A convenient and practical way of forming the coil is to wind the line fairly loosely round the wide part of an empty wine bottle. Slip the coiled line off the bottle, put the coil in the solution, and leave it in (corking the jar with a bung or stopper) for not less than forty eight or more than sixty hours. Then take the coil out, dry it as much as possible with an old duster, and hang it up loosely in a dry, but not too warm place, where the air can get to it, until it is thoroughly dry. To unwind the coil put through it a rounded piece of wood (such as an ordinary office ruler), or an old newspaper

rolled up tightly into cylindrical form, as this prevents entanglements. Before winding the line on to the reel again see that it is thoroughly dry, and if necessary remove any stickiness by running it through an old cloth.

CHAPTER III

TRACES, HOOKS AND OTHER GEAR

THE next item in the sea angler's outfit to be considered is the trace, or paternoster, if he uses this latter form of tackle ; it is usually composed of silkworm gut, gut-substitute or wire. Gut-substitutes are so rapidly replacing silkworm gut for sea angling (except perhaps with some bass and mullet fishermen) that the novice will not be very far out in pinning his faith very largely to them. For bass fishing there is probably nothing *quite* so satisfactory as good salmon gut ; but its cost, especially in these days, is high, and the average man will probably decide to use one of the gut-substitutes, of which there are several on the market to-day. The twisted kind however has a tendency to become soft, and to untwist, in salt water. Most gut-substitutes are sold undyed, or dyed either neutral or sea green. In their undyed state they seem after a little use to become an opaque white colour which shows up rather plainly in the water, and for this reason they should be dyed. The dye used on those he has tried washes out pretty quickly in the sea ; but through the kindness of a friend in that trade, the writer has found (perhaps other sea anglers have made the same " discovery ") that the dyes used by the makers of strings for musical instruments are nearly (although not quite) " fast " in sea water ; and if the novice can get his substitute dyed by some one in that trade he will

probably be well satisfied with the result, although much depends on the length of time it is left in the solution. For use in shallow water or near the surface a light grass green, and for pollack fishing a dark greeny-brown, are more likely to be mistaken by the fish for a length of weed; but each angler to his choice. The novice will want two or three sizes, ranging from "stout trout," for mackerel and bream, to "sea," for bigger fish, and the 40-yd. coil is the most economical and satisfactory way of buying it.

And now we come to the hook—a very important part of the sea angler's outfit. Like the ideal rod, the ideal hook for sea fishing has yet to be made; but our novice of course will have to take what he can get, unless he is thinking of trying to have hooks specially made for him—an idea which he may safely be counselled to get out of his head at once, at any rate for the present. A number of years ago there was a curious movement in the sea angling world here in favour of long-shanked hooks—curious because, as a general proposition, it is unquestionable that a short-shanked one both hooks and holds better. Boatmen of course almost invariably prefer long-shanked hooks because they facilitate unhooking—an important consideration when fish, particularly those of the prickly-finned kind, are coming in fast; and it is probable that the movement referred to was due, in part at any rate, to the influence of the professionals. With lugworm for bait of course one must perforce use a very long-shanked hook, because a short one will not carry the worm properly; unless indeed the angler uses a kind of Stewart tackle—of which more hereafter. The size of the hook, by the way, should be regulated quite as much by the bait as by the fish angled for; and for large fish a very sound general rule, of practically universal application, is that the bigger the bait (and

consequently the hook) the bigger the fish—in reason of course. Another very sound general rule, which holds good with almost all kinds of sea fish, is that when the water is very clear and bright the size of the bait, and hook, should be reduced. Some sea anglers are notoriously “faddy” about the hooks they use; but the writer has tried to keep an open mind on the question. However,



FIG. 1.

he prefers a round bent or Limerick bend, dislikes a sneaked or “rank” hook, never uses (except by compulsion) one with two barbs—which he thinks unsound in theory—and is not a believer in expensive hand forged hooks for heavy fishing, as he has twice had the experience of hooks of this kind (for which, in pre-war days, he paid 4*d.* apiece) breaking like a carrot across the bend—once in a big fish, and the other time when badly hung up in the “carpet.” Since then

he has invariably used, for heavy work, a much cheaper machine made hook (in the 10/0 size they could be bought, before the war, at the rate of three for a penny); and he never remembers one breaking, although they would sometimes bend under a very heavy strain. He recollects on one occasion landing on one of these hooks a ling of 25 lb. or so, which fought

very hard, and when the fish was safely in the boat it was found that the barbed part of the hook was at an angle of about 60° to the shank ; but it had held the fish all right, and a second or two with a pair of pliers brought it back to its proper shape. It is particularly annoying, by the way, to lose a good fish through the hook breaking, because this is an accident against which, once the hook is in use, no amount of care on the angler's part in playing the fish can guard. For this reason the novice may be counselled to test every hook (especially any bought during the war) before mounting it ; this can be done of course by sticking the point in the sole of the boot, and pulling. As a matter of fact many of our hook manufacturers were so handicapped during the war by their skilled workmen being called up for military service that the wonder really is, not that some war time hooks should be unreliable, but that the makers should have been able to turn out any satisfactory hooks at all ; for the tempering of hooks is very highly skilled work. The size of the hooks which the novice will want will depend of course on the particular kind of fishing he decides to go in for, and will range from a 10/0, for the heavy bottom fishing at places like Ballycotton, to a 10 or 11, or thereabouts, for driftline fishing for mackerel. For fishing a live prawn he will want a very short-shanked hook, which is sometimes rather difficult to get hold of ; and a small triangle, for use in mullet fishing, or with a live sandeel for bass, will come in useful. It is hardly necessary to add, by the way, that the points of all hooks used should be kept very sharp—although this is a matter in regard to which even some experienced sea anglers are sometimes rather remiss.

The novice should buy all his hooks loose, and mount them himself ; also, as far as possible, all his traces, etc., should be home made. A few years ago, in the

course of a discussion at the head-quarters of the British Sea Anglers' Society, it was laid down by one man that as a general rule it was a mistake for the sea angler to make his own tackle. But in addition to the harmless enjoyment which can be got out of tackle making, there is the added gratification of catching fish by the aid of one's own handiwork; while the angler can always rely (or at any rate ought to be able to do so) on what he has made himself, which may not always be the case with what he has bought. There is reason however in all things, and most sea anglers have probably come across the tackle making fiend, who seems to derive more enjoyment from it than from actual fishing, and is always making up a lot of gear, often of the complicated variety, which he seldom or never uses!

The use of eyed hooks is now so universal in sea angling that the novice need never have anything to do with one with a "tang"; but if he be thinking of making an extended stay at some out of the way place, perhaps a word of warning to provide himself beforehand with an ample supply of eyed hooks may not be amiss, as otherwise he may possibly find himself obliged to fall back for a day or two on some with a "tang" obtained locally. In all the smaller sizes of eyed hooks, by the way, the more satisfactory pattern is that in which the end of the eye is continued for a little way alongside the shank of the hook; but one cannot always get it.

On the knot for attaching the reel line and trace to the swivel (the connecting link between them) much might be written, for the subject of knots is rather a fascinating one. Many fishermen have their own favourite knots, and most sea anglers have at times been shown some weird and wonderful "contraptions" in this line by knot making enthusiasts. The essential points about a knot of course are that it is strong and incapable of slipping, and is not

of the "cutting" kind; simplicity is also desirable. The novice may safely be advised to decide on one knot and stick to it. For instance, for both running line and trace, the very well known knot shown on page 30, but for heavy bottom fishing the running line should be doubled before making the knot. For knotting an eyed hook to gut or gut-substitute, if there is only room for the material to go once through the eye, the same knot may be used; but in the case of gut-substitute, to prevent any possibility of a slip, it should be tied with the loose end sufficiently long to allow of an ordinary overhand knot being tied on it. This should be pushed down quite close to the main knot before being drawn tight; or the well known double jam knot may be used, finished off in the same way (if the material be gut-substitute it is not safe without). If the eye of the hook be large enough for the material to go twice through it the best knot is so well known (and illustrated in several books on sea fishing) as not to need description; but with gut-substitute, in order to make quite certain of it, it should be finished with a treble, instead of a double overhand knot. Both gut and gut-substitute, of course, should be well soaked before being knotted; and neither, after being used in the sea, should be put away for future use without being thoroughly washed in fresh water.

To complete his outfit the sea angler will want a variety of other things, such as leads, swivels, spinning baits, pliers (for making wire traces), rubber eels and so on; but these may be more usefully considered a little later on, when dealing with angling for particular kinds of fish. Just a word however may be said here about swivels. For sea work those made of German silver, dulled by being "dipped," are the best, but they are sometimes difficult to get; however brass swivels (now

also rather scarce in some places) are almost as good, but if they are to be used for heavy fishing it is a good plan to give the coil round each eye a touch of solder, to guard against the danger of the eye pulling out under a great strain. Steel swivels should never be used in the sea, except in the case of the spring link variety; and there it is unavoidable, as this particular pattern is not made in any other material. When fishing a drift-line for pollack it is very desirable of course to have one of these swivels at the end of the trace, to admit of the easy and rapid changing of the baits; and the kind in which the spring link takes the form of a sort of elongated horseshoe is the neatest and most satisfactory.

The novice will also want a landing net and gaff; and if he decides to take up bass fishing a wicker *courge*, to hold live sandeels and prawns, will also be required. For heavy fishing a leather tarpon belt, to house the end button of the rod while playing a big fish, is a great comfort, and its use is to be strongly recommended. As to the landing net, the folding ring kind, which screws into the handle, is very convenient to carry about, but is hardly strong or large enough for general work at sea. A better pattern is a fixed pear shaped ring of good size, made of stout wood, and strongly secured to the handle by brass clamps. The handle should be long, but for convenience in travelling it may be in two pieces, joined together by a long sliding brass collar fixed by a screw nut.

The sea angler's gaff is a very important part of his outfit, and if it is to be used for heavy fishing the writer would suggest that the novice should make his own; for cases of a bought gaff giving way under the strain of a large fish, such as a big halibut or shark, have not been unknown. For a shilling or two a blacksmith will make the hook, which should be of mild steel, and something after the pattern shown on the following page.

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The dimensions should approximate pretty closely to those shown in the sketch, but in any case care should be taken to see that the hook has not too wide a gape ; for a gaff with a wide gape, although excellent for dealing with fish like halibut, sharks and skate, is an awkward thing for tackling a conger, a fish which at the best of times is rather a difficult one to gaff properly. Two holes should be drilled in the shank, the approximate shape and position of which are shown in the sketch. An ordinary broomstick, cut down to the appropriate length, makes an excellent handle ; for all round boat work 2 ft. 9 in., or thereabouts, is a very convenient length. A long shallow groove should be fashioned in the handle

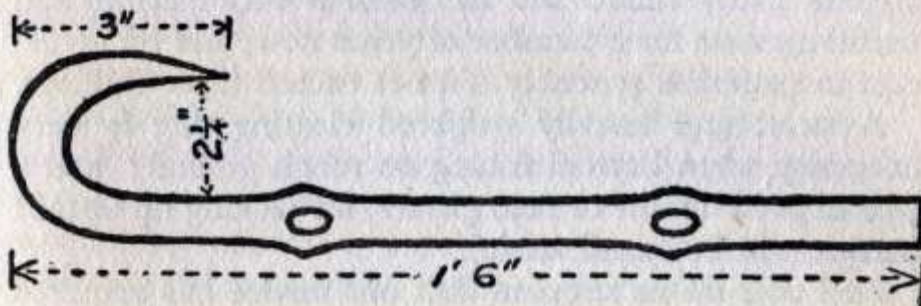


FIG. 2.

to receive the shank of the hook, the groove being made a little deeper where the two bulges over the holes occur ; here also a shallow groove should be cut right round the stick, to hold the lashings. These should be of stout copper wire, and each should be passed several times through the particular hole in the shank, and finished off neatly. Then bind the whole affair, handle and all (except of course the hook), with stout tanned water cord, give the bottom part a couple of coats of " hard brown " varnish, bore a hole with a red-hot skewer about an inch from the top end of the handle, to receive a stout

piece of cord, looped to a size big enough to go easily over the wrist—and the gaff is ready for action. This looped cord at the end of the handle has been condemned by one authority as a dangerous expedient, presumably because a man with the loop over his wrist might possibly be pulled overboard by a big fish—which is no doubt true; but it is a very convenient thing in practice, for it enables the gaff to be lashed to the boat. If it is made fast to a thwart amidships with five or six fathoms of stout cord it can be used with ease in any part of the boat, and one has the consolation of knowing that it cannot very well be lost overboard—an accident not unknown to sea anglers. The author has a home made gaff (such as is described above) which has accompanied him to Ireland a good many times, and has been a very faithful and useful servant for a number of years now, and its actual cost in materials probably did not exceed three shillings.

A stout and heavily weighted clearing ring is very necessary when bottom fishing on rough ground; and a pair of good marine or field glasses, for picking up distant marks, will be found useful.

And now let us suppose that our novice has acquired his tackle; the next, and almost the last, thing on his list will be something to keep it in. Here a variety of receptacles awaits him, for fishing tackle houses make and stock an almost bewildering assortment of tackle bags, cases and boxes—from which he may make his choice, according to his particular inclinations and the length of his purse. In this matter some men go to one extreme and some to the other. The writer knows one very keen and enthusiastic sea angler whose tackle case—a model of neatness, compactness and ingenuity—is so small that it can be slipped into the jacket pocket; on the other hand he has seen a tackle box so heavy and bulky that it was more than one man could conveniently carry, and

had to be wheeled down to harbour on a sort of go-cart ! On the whole, in this, as in various other departments of human activity, the middle course is best. Many experienced anglers favour a fairly large bag, made of stout oilskin, and carried over the shoulder by a strap of broad, strong webbing, which is stitched right round the bottom of the bag ; but each individual angler to his own choice. Whatever type of tackle case be decided on, an endeavour should be made to keep it neat and tidy ; otherwise when another hook or swivel or what not is wanted in a hurry rather a prolonged "fumble" may be necessary before the particular thing is found—and at a time perhaps when the fish have come suddenly on the feed, and every minute is of importance.

The washing and drying, at the close of each fishing holiday, of lines which have been in use is an important matter, and the novice should make a point of attending to this religiously ; while if he likes to dry his lines at the end of each day's angling well and good, although this is unnecessary except in certain cases, e.g. when using an undressed silk line or a reel with a flange of aluminium. Indeed an old sea angling friend says it is wrong to dry a line which has been used in the sea without washing it in fresh water first, as minute salt crystals form in it which in time tend to destroy the fabric of the line. The writer is no great believer in line driers, as he has an idea that they have a tendency to rot the line at the points of contact ; he prefers to run each line off the reel, and leave it in loose coils on a flat surface, such as the floor, or an old newspaper spread on a table. It is just as well, by the way, to see to it that a kitten does not happen to get shut up in a room where lines have been left to dry in this way ; the writer has known this to happen, with rather disastrous results, and as the lines in this particular instance were not his own he was able to see the funny side of the incident

—which their owner did not. At the end of a sea angling holiday, every line which has been used should be well washed in fresh water and thoroughly dried before being wound on to the reel again ; and in the case of a line which has been well dressed by the method previously recommended it is doubtful if more is really necessary. A good way of washing the line of course is to wind it on to a large wooden " reel," such as is used for holding handlines, and put it in the bath for twenty four hours or so, with a couple of leads on it to keep it under water.

The care of his tackle during the " off " season is rather an important matter for the sea fisherman, but one in respect of which there is considerable divergence of practice among anglers. Between the man, on the one hand, who tends all his gear with loving care, who is perpetually getting it out and tinkering about with it, dressing lines or oilskins, varnishing rods and reels, and what not, whose tackle cases are always models of neatness and order ; and on the other, he who pitches his tackle bag into a corner on his return from his holiday and leaves everything just as it is until he wants to go fishing again, only to find that hooks, wire traces and swivels are rusted, lines rotten, and everything in a general state of disorganization and decay ; there is a wide gulf, and varying degrees of method, or the want of it. Such elementary and essential things as the keeping of loose hooks, swivels, etc., in vaseline, to prevent rust ; the varnishing of rods, particularly those made of split cane (sea water is very destructive to such rods if their varnish is in bad condition, and therefore every split cane rod which has been used much should be re-varnished every year) ; and the unwinding of lines from one's reels, if they are not likely to be wanted again for some time, should always be attended to of course ; but if one does very much more than this it is easy to make life rather a burden to the angler, and some-

times to those around him also. Many a wife, the writer suspects, whose husband is a sea fisherman, has had occasion to complain of the "strew," as women call it, made by his tackle when undergoing assortment or repair—unless indeed he is fortunate enough to possess a tackle room of his own, to which no one else is allowed access. The wise man will remember that after all tackle was made for the angler, not the angler for his tackle, and will never allow himself to become a slave to it. At the same time there is, at times, a good deal of pleasure to be got out of the overhauling of one's gear during the "off" season—a remark which applies, by the way, to most other sports. It is just as well too, from the strictly utilitarian and practical point of view, to go over one's tackle occasionally, and anything which is worn out or perished should be scrapped, or as one's Irish boatman says, "condimned." The ruthless scrapping of tackle which is worn out, by the way, is a thing very necessary, but not always practised by anglers. There are men, for instance, who have a curious weakness for hoarding old and perished gut; which is on occasions brought to light, knotted together, and used, with rather unfortunate results. Rubber eels too are apt to become hard and perished after a time (although they last much better if kept in an air-tight tin), and when they get to that state are useless, and should be discarded; the hook and swivel, if in good order, being saved for further use.

A word or two about clothing will bring these rather lengthy introductory remarks to a close. It is unnecessary of course to say that old clothes should be worn while sea angling, for there is hardly any other sport which is so destructive to good clothing. At the same time it is just as well to be rather more warmly clad than for shore-going sports, and woollen underclothing may be recommended, for even in summer it is often colder on the sea—or at

any rate it seems to be—than on land ; although, *per contra*, the writer has known days afloat, off the Irish coast, when it was so hot that it was quite impossible to sit in a coat, and the mainsail had to be rigged up as an awning. The writer has found that a fisherman's ordinary blue jersey is a very comfortable and convenient garment, and when fishing at out of the way places almost invariably wears one ; a habit which on one occasion, so he is told, provoked the pertinent comment that, although unable to catch fish, at any rate he " dressed the part." A tanned cotton jumper too, such as the Deal boatmen wear, is a capital thing, for light as it is, and although of not much use against rain, there is a good deal of warmth in it, and it keeps the wind out as well as any garment. Oilskins of course are an absolute necessity, and for a serious day's fishing the novice should never go afloat without them—nor without a compass and some fresh water in the boat. For heavy work jacket and trousers (not the " yachting " brand, to quote A. H. Davies, in *The Riddle of the Sands*, who ought, by the way, to have been a sea fisherman, and very likely was) ; and if the novice can get a suit made and dressed for him by his fisherman the chances are that he will find it will stand a good deal of pretty hard wear. A double seat to the trousers may be recommended, and braces should always be worn with them.

Periodically one sees inquiries in the angling Press for a remedy for " tacky " oilskins. The writer confesses that he does not know of any really certain cure, except to scrap the suit and buy another. For the benefit of anyone who does not mind a long and rather " messy " job however, he mentions that he is told by a fellow member of the British Sea Anglers' Society that oilskins which have been in the first instance home dressed with raw (not boiled) linseed oil never become sticky, as long as they are not redressed with any other stuff. It is a question

of the personal equation, no doubt, but as far as the writer is concerned (although he finds the varnishing of rods rather a fascinating job) he is afraid that the dressing of oilskins is not in his line.

As a final word the novice who cannot swim is advised to learn before he goes afloat, and not to wear sea boots in a boat unless he can get rid of them easily in the water.



CHAPTER IV

MACKEREL

AND now, after a good deal of preliminary introduction, let us go a-fishing. The writer proposes to deal first with angling for sporting fish, and to do so in an order of his own choosing.

A few years ago there was a discussion at the headquarters of the British Sea Anglers' Society on the question "What is the most sporting fishing of our seas?" in which an endeavour was made by the various speakers, not to decide what is the one most sporting kind of fishing which we have in our waters, but to see if they could place in order of merit all the various kinds.

This is a matter in regard to which probably no two sea anglers would be in complete agreement; but the writer is going to deal with our sporting fish in the order in which he placed them in the course of that discussion. This (as regards our smaller fish) was mackerel, bass, coalfish, pollack, grey mullet, black bream and—a good deal behind the others—red bream, a fish in regard to which he had serious doubts about including it in the list at all; and (as regards larger fish) halibut, blue shark and tope. That list was severely criticized by the writer's fellow members, and he remembers saying at the time that he thought it was a very good thing for him that neither of such expert mullet fishermen as Mr. Daunou, of Margate, or Mr. W. K. Summers was present on that occasion, or he would

assuredly have been seriously hauled over the coals for placing the mullet so low down on the list. Other members called attention to omissions from it, the flounder and the hake finding their champions—the latter of which, at any rate, is a fish which the writer admits he thinks should be included in a complete list of our sporting sea fish.

In this Chapter, then, angling for mackerel—one of the commonest of our British sea fish, and one of the most widely distributed—will be considered. There are probably few seaside visitors who have not at some time or other caught mackerel in the orthodox way, namely, by railing —towing a baby spinner at the end of a more or less heavily leaded line, behind a boat propelled by either sails or oars. This is a perfectly legitimate method of catching mackerel, either for the market or for bait for other fish; but (as usually practised) it is murder, not sport. Mackerel may be caught in this way on the Cornish coast, in suitable weather, during almost every month of the twelve; but the angler who wants to capture this game and handsome fish on unleaded tackle must wait, as a rule, until July, or better still August and September, when the shoals of mackerel approach our shores sufficiently closely to make angling for them by the methods here described worth while.

There are four ways in which the sport loving sea angler may catch them—on the fly, on the driftline, on float tackle and by spinning. Of the first method the writer cannot say very much, for he could easily count on the fingers of one hand the occasions when he has caught mackerel in this way; and as far as his experience goes opportunities of doing so are not very frequent. Occasionally however the fish come very close inshore in pursuit of brit (the "whitebait" of commerce), and they may then be seen breaking water, sometimes within a very few

* pay out - 9/10 fms of line to clear the
wake of a motor cable. If sailing
just clear the boat.

yards of the beach. At such times they may sometimes be caught with a fly, and the best "flies"—if one can call them such—to use are a small brit bait or fly spoon. The tackle shops stock a considerable variety of mackerel flies, but they are decidedly more ornamental than useful. In approaching the shoal the angler must proceed very slowly and cautiously, or he will put the fish down; in fact, with almost all kinds of sea angling (except of course bottom fishing in pretty deep water) the angler will lose nothing, and possibly gain a great deal, by exercising as much caution and quiet as if he were fishing in fresh water.

The second method named above—the unleaded drift-line—is the writer's favourite way of angling for mackerel, and the one which he recommends with the greatest confidence to the sea angling novice. Two or three conditions are necessary to success. The weather should be fairly calm, for although it is possible to fish a driftline in rough water one cannot do so with nearly as much comfort as in calmer weather; and it is a good deal more difficult to distinguish mackerel bites when there is a lot of "lop" on—just as is the case when angling for pollack by similar methods. The fish must also be present in considerable numbers, and so close inshore that the angler may "bring up" within, say, half a mile or so of the coast; for if he has to go farther afield, where the tide of course runs more strongly, he will find perhaps that he may have to put lead on his line in order to get down to the fish—and that spoils the fun. The ideal tide is one of just sufficient strength to carry the unleaded line away from the anchored boat at an angle of 45 deg. or thereabouts; and at the right time of year it is not so exceptional to find perfect tide conditions as might be thought because as has already been stated, mackerel in the summer months are often pretty close inshore. Ground baiting (a



THE AUTHOR PLAYING A MACKEREL: DR. C. S. PATTERSON WITH
LANDING NET.



MEVAGISSEY HARBOUR.

practice which, even to-day, is not nearly as much practised in sea angling as it ought to be) is also so advantageous that it may almost be said to be essential to success. An old string bag or discarded landing net, with a stone or two in it to make it sink, makes a capital ground bait bag, and it should be suspended from the bows of the boat about a couple of fathoms below the surface. For ground bait almost anything of a "fishy" nature will do. If the angler be in the West Country, and can get pilchards, so much the better, for the very oily nature of that fish gives that "smear" to the water—as the Cornishmen call it—which is so attractive to fish. It is a very good plan too to tie a piece of old sponge to the side of the bag, and before lowering it to pour about a dessert-spoonful of pilchard oil (which is obtainable by every sea angler who likes to take the trouble to get it) on to the sponge. Failing pilchards, the cleanings of fish, cut up into fairly small pieces with an old knife or pair of scissors—rather a "messy" business—and mussels, small shore crabs and shrimps, and the livers of skate or dogfish, pounded up between a couple of large flat stones, make a very good substitute. Work the ground bait up into a fairly stiff paste with a little wet sand—for which purpose the angler will find the boat's bailer will come in handy—and fashion it into balls about the size of a large walnut. When fishing, the ground bait bag should be well shaken from time to time, and occasionally it should be hauled up and a little more pilchard oil poured over the sponge.

The tackle used will consist of rod No. 2 in the list in Chapter II (if this be a fly rod, so much the better, for the angler will get more fun out of his fishing), the 3 in. or 3½ in. reel and fine running line previously recommended, and trace of gut or gut substitute ("stout-trout" size) about 8 ft. or 9 ft. in length, connected to the running line by a medium sized swivel. This is one of the few styles

of sea angling for which the writer (now a convert to the "one hook" theory) likes two hooks. One hook of course will be at the bottom end of the trace, and the second should be about 2 ft. from it. This second hook should be mounted on a snood, or "point," of the same material that the trace is composed of, and the snood should be quite short (4 in. is quite long enough, and 3 in. is better), because otherwise it will go foul of the trace. In attaching the snood to the trace (when using gut-substitute) tie a single overhand knot in the trace, and through the loop of this, before pulling it tight, put the end of the snood, making it fast with the knot shown in the last Chapter. The size of hook used will vary with the bait; if this be slips of mackerel, cut up as described below, a No. 10 or 11 hook will be quite large enough. The best bait of all, although one cannot very often get it, is the small fish ("whitebait") on which the mackerel feed; and if the angler happens to be present when a whitebait seine is hauled he should always be on the look-out to get a can of this very attractive bait—which must be used however when quite fresh. For this bait a slightly larger hook will probably have to be employed; for the little fish should be hooked (dead, of course) through both eyes, and it is naturally essential for the point of the hook to project a little way—or the angler will fail to hook his mackerel. Failing this bait, or a live sandeel, the anglers (for this is a style of fishing which can be worked much better with a friend than when single-handed) should provide themselves with a couple of orthodox railing handlines, and row about until they strike mackerel. It is better to wait until, as so often happens, a fish is felt on each line almost simultaneously, because that indicates of course that one has struck a shoal in which the fish are fairly thick. Haul them in, and back the boat gently and quietly to a spot, as near as one can judge, about 25 yards or so up-tide from

where the fish took hold. (One has to allow of course for the "scope" of the cable, as fishermen call it, so that in fairly deep water one need not paddle back at all, the anglers' object being to bring the boat up within comfortable fishing distance, say from 10 to 15 yards, of the shoal.) Then over with the killick—and over with it quietly and without unnecessary splashing, especially if the weather be very calm—and lower away the ground bait bag, which should be all ready of course beforehand. The baits used will be small slips cut from the silvery bellies of the freshly caught mackerel. The orthodox way of cutting such a bait—a triangular piece from the tail end—is very well known, but the writer prefers a slip of about the size and shape shown below, as more nearly resembling a small fish :

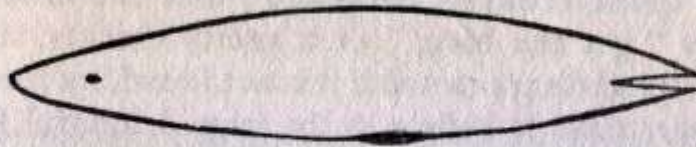


FIG. 3.

First kill the mackerel (the practice of cutting a "last" from the living fish is a brutal one), and then with a sharp pointed pair of nail scissors cut neatly out of the skin a piece of the size and shape shown above. This must be detached from the fish with a very sharp knife, cutting rather shallow, so that not very much of the flesh adheres to the bait. It is quite useless to attempt this except with a blade of razor-like sharpness—the angler will only spoil the bait if he does. The writer likes to finish the bait off with a snip made with the scissors, as shown at the right-hand side of the sketch, so as to imitate the tail of a fish ; but perhaps this is a fad. The hook should be stuck through once at the point marked with a dot at the other end of the sketch, and the orthodox method of baiting

(laying the bait, skin downwards, on a flat piece of cork before sticking the hook into it) is very necessary if one wants to make a neat job of it. If available, by the way, strips of fresh pilchard are as a rule considerably more attractive than mackerel, at any rate on the Cornish coast; but one cannot always obtain pilchards even in Cornwall, and rarely elsewhere. Lower the two baited hooks over the side, and pay out line smoothly and evenly (this is where the agate rings come in); and the chances are that before very long the fun will be on. The baits should be worked with a sink and draw movement, and if the anglers do not strike fish at first a little more line should be let out from time to time until the shoal is located. Possibly one or two fish will be missed at the start, for the mackerel is a sharp biter, and consequently a fairly quick strike is necessary; but the novice will probably "get the hang" of it pretty quickly, and the writer will feel disappointed if it is not found, by those who have never tried it before, to be very delightful fishing.

A fly rod, as has been remarked in a previous Chapter, is rather slow in the strike for this kind of fishing; but that difficulty can be got over of course either by bringing the rod smartly backwards in a horizontal position, or pulling in a foot or two of line through the rings with the other hand, afterwards (when the fish is on) taking up the slack carefully, and without any slackening of the line, by raising the point of the rod. Hold the fish pretty tight for a second or two, to drive the hook well home, and then let him run about; this makes the other bait play about in the water in a very life-like way, and the chances are that in a second or two the angler will feel a second mackerel take hold of it. If the fish are of a good size it will often be quite as much as he can manage to get both safely to the net, and indeed it will not be an infrequent occurrence for the second one to be lost—which does not



A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: THE LARGER MACKEREL WEIGHED 2 LB. 8 OZ. AND WAS CAUGHT BY MR. H. E. BURLTON ON AN UNLEADED DRIFTLINE.



BASS CAUGHT BY MR. LEWIS R. W. LOYD FROM THE BEACH ON AN UNLEADED DRIFTLINE. WEIGHTS: 9 LB. 2 OZ., 8 LB. 8 OZ., 5 LB. 12 OZ., 5 LB. 1 OZ., 3 LB. 13 OZ.

matter very much, for the angler will have had the fun. With really large mackerel—say, fish of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. or so—the sport is very fine; but only one hook should be used. A fish of that size will often take 20 yards of line in his first rush, and may even delude the angler into thinking that a bass has been hooked. In fact, the sea angling novice who doubts the fighting powers of the mackerel may be recommended to see how long it takes him to play a large one to an absolute standstill on this unleaded tackle.

Fishing in this way, the angler will often take scad, and (if on rocky ground) sometimes small pollack, as well as mackerel; while occasionally a garfish will be hooked, and this latter will give a lot of fun, for he is almost the only British fish the writer knows of which will make the line fairly hiss through the water in his rushes. If the tide should begin to run too strongly a little lead can be used (the writer prefers a few inches of lead wire, wound round the running line just above the swivel), but anything more than half an ounce or so spoils the fun; and in that case it is better either to start spinning, or else to haul up the killick and let the boat drift with the tide, the anglers taking turn and turn about—one to fish, and the other to manage the boat by keeping her head to tide, with an occasional stroke of the sculls to keep her from over-running the bait. The novice need not be afraid of losing the shoal, for if the ground baiting be properly done he will probably keep the fish with him; but a word of warning not to get too far down-tide may not be out of place, for he should always bear in mind that he has to get back again. But it is pleasanter and more comfortable to fish from an anchored boat.

It only remains to be said that before breakfast, and from about the time of afternoon tea until dusk, are the best times for this fishing; for it is well known of course that mackerel do not bite well in the middle of the day,

especially in bright sunshine. The novice will generally find too that he will get on better without a boatman; for the average professional fisherman will probably think it mere foolishness and waste of time for the anglers to spend an hour or two in catching perhaps a dozen mackerel in this way, when by towing for them in the orthodox manner they could possibly take three or four times the number. The novice however, when once he has tasted the joys of it, will think otherwise. It is often possible of course to fish from a pierhead in this way just as well as from a boat.

As an alternative method, if the weather be calm (for it does not work very well if there be much "popple" on), the angler can try float fishing. In that case the rod should be stiffer, and the running line of silk, well greased with mutton, deer or some other animal fat (not vaseline, which is of course a mineral product) to make it float. This will wash out in time, in the sea, but it can be renewed when required. The float should be a "slider," with the top painted either red or orange, for those colours are most readily picked up by the eye. A small piece of cycle valve tubing, attached to the running line by a slip-knot, makes a good "stop," and the rod rings of course must be of sufficient size to allow it to pass readily through them. The trace should be shotted, in the freshwater method, with pretty large shot—or a small bullet may be used. Try at different depths, commencing at about a couple of fathoms, and gradually increasing until one strikes fish. This method has its points, but it cannot be compared to the driftline, either for pleasure or effectiveness. Like driftlining, it can often be practised from a pierhead as well as from the boat.

For spinning, the angler will want rod No. 4 on the list, and the tackle used will be very similar to that to be described hereafter in dealing with bass fishing. The

trace (the length of which will be regulated, to a great extent, by that of the rod) should have three swivels—two at the top, with a small spring link swivel at the other end. The bait may be an ordinary baby spinner, mounted with a rigid single hook—for a flexibly mounted one is a nuisance, as it so often fouls in casting—and should carry a “last,” which may be cut in the orthodox way; or a small plano-convex or Devon minnow (mounted with a single hook), a small spoon or some other small spinning bait may be used. Long casting is not usually so important as it is in bass fishing, but the angler should recollect that he should wait for a few seconds, at the conclusion of the throw, before he starts to reel in, for otherwise his bait will not be deep enough to get fish. This again is a way of catching mackerel which has its points, but it cannot be compared with the driftline unless the tide be running really hard, and then it is probably the best method that can be practised. The angler should throw across the tide, on either side of the boat.

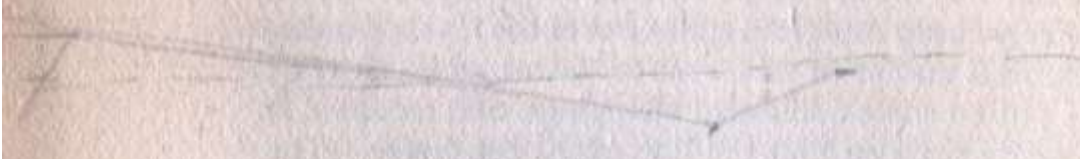
If the novice should decide that he would like to try railing, Mr. Edgar Hyde, an enthusiastic advocate of light tackle, has shown how it can be done in as sporting a way as is possible with that style of fishing. Here is his railing outfit, as described by him in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly* some thirteen years ago:

“First (he says), the 10 ft. rod, weighing $6\frac{3}{4}$ oz., an extremely cheap American split-cane of the toyshop order, which, as a matter of fact, cost 8s. 6d. at an outfitter’s; but I put on some additional whippings, and mounted it with agate rings so that the line might run freely. The reel is a low-power multiplier (two and a half times), but any very light reel capable of getting in line quickly would have served the purpose. The line is the finest casting line made for use on the Illingworth reel. It cost 1s. for 40 yards. The 9-ft. trace is of *fina* gut, tapering to finest

refina—a light trout-fly cast in fact. The lead weighs about $\frac{3}{4}$ oz., and the bait is a small baby-spinner made of sheet silver, with *one* hook, not the usual barbarous triangle. I found that with this extremely light tackle it was quite possible to fish behind a boat under sail, only that when a fish took hold the boat had to be thrown up into the wind so as to take the way off her, for though the tackle would kill a fish, it was not powerful enough to drag a fish through the water at the rate of four knots an hour or more."

Each angler to his taste of course, but personally the writer thinks the game hardly worth the candle, although it enables mackerel to be caught a good deal earlier in the year than is possible with the driftline; for Mr. Hyde took them in the Falmouth district with this tackle at Easter, 1908—and at a good many other Easters too!

*2½ fms very thin line
between the lead & the spinner
when sailing - get them between wind
& water*



CHAPTER V

BASS

WE now come to the bass, a fish which a good many sea anglers would doubtless place at the head of the list of sporting British seafish. It is not so widely distributed as the mackerel, and speaking generally, is most usually to be met with on our Southern and Western coasts. On the East coast it is not so abundant, and is not often taken North of Cromer or thereabouts, although on the West coast it is common as far North, at any rate, as the Menai Straits, where there is at times excellent bass fishing. The fish is common in Southern Irish waters, and on the South, South East and South West coasts of Ireland there are several places where fine bass fishing may be had. If there be one English county more famous for its bass fishing than another, the author would be inclined to plump for Devon.

As a general rule it is not of much use to try for bass before the latter end of May, although very fine warm weather in that month will often bring them in to the coast rather earlier than in an average year. Of the three summer months (June, July and August) which may be said to constitute the bass fishing season, July is perhaps the best ; in September the cream of the sport is usually over for the year, although much, again, will depend on the weather. Bass may be caught in a variety of ways, and when taken on unleaded or lightly leaded tackle

provide sport which is perhaps the nearest approach to that given by the salmon as is to be obtained in our seas. Unfortunately (perhaps the bass fishing enthusiast would say fortunately) the fish is a very uncertain and capricious feeder, and most sea anglers have probably seen huge shoals of bass, perhaps of an acre or two in extent, when it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the sea was grey with them; although they could not apparently be induced to look at any kind of bait. The writer has had this experience off Bognor, at the Mewstone and Blackstone, near Dartmouth, and at one or two other places on the Devonshire coast, and a very exasperating experience it is.

The principal methods of fishing for bass are with the fly, the driftline, unleaded or lightly leaded float tackle, by spinning and whiffing, and by bottom fishing; and of these in their order.

Most sea anglers will probably agree that *the* most sporting way of catching bass is by fly fishing; it is probably also the most uncertain. It is unfortunate too that as a general rule (to which there are exceptions, of course) it is only the smaller fish which are caught in this way. If the angler be ever lucky enough to get a really good take of good sized bass (say fish of 5 lb. or over) on the fly he may safely write it down as a red letter day; and it is an experience which, although it does not very often befall the sea angler, nevertheless atones when it does come along for a good many blank or disappointing outings. The fly fisherman for bass should watch very closely the movements of the gulls, for unless the birds are "working" it is not, as a rule, of much use to try to catch bass in this way. The last quarter of the ebb, and just the first bit of the flood, is usually the best time of tide, and a light breeze is a considerable help; for in very calm weather, when the surface of the sea is like glass, it is

generally difficult to get near enough to the fish to reach them with the fly without putting them down.

There is one famous estuary in North Devon where splendid sport has at times been had in this way, often very close to the breakers—as close, in fact, as one dare go; but the novice should be warned that this estuary fishing is rather dangerous work, for even in the calmest weather there are often very nasty rollers over a river bar, and every now and then (especially after a “smooth,” which may tempt one into venturing too far) a particularly big one often comes along, which may easily swamp a small boat if one gets caught in the “break.” For this reason the angler will be well advised not to try it unless he has at the oars a skilful, experienced boatman who is used to the game. The single-handed fly rod will do at a pinch, but the most appropriate weapon is a grilse rod of about 14 ft.—not only because one can get out a longer line with it, but also because sport, when it does come along, is usually of the “fast and furious” order, and soon over; so that it is not advisable to spend too much time over each fish. The line used should be a light salmon one, with at least 80 yards of sound “backing”; and 9 ft. of light salmon gut makes the best cast, although, as previously mentioned, it is expensive. The tackle shops stock a great variety of bass flies, but one with a silver body and white wings, or else a soleskin “fly” or brit bait, may be recommended. The fly should be worked with short, jerky movements, to imitate those of the brit on which the bass and the birds are feeding at the only times when it is generally of much use to try the fly. Sometimes one can catch bass in this way from the sandy flats at the mouths of unfrequented rivers, especially if one does not mind wading; and the writer knows of at least one enthusiastic bass angler who never fishes for them in any other way.

The next method of bass fishing to be considered is the driftline ; and this can be fished in a variety of ways—either from an anchored or a drifting boat, or from the shore, and with the live prawn or sandeel, a small dab or other small live fish, a large slice of mackerel, herring or pilchard, or even, in default of anything else, lugworm. The late Mr. Aflalo, who lived for some years at Teignmouth, and by his writings did so much to popularize sea angling, made the estuary fishing for bass in the Teign so famous that there is no need to say very much about it here. It is not now so good as it used to be, but on the wall at the head-quarters of the British Sea Anglers' Society in Fetter Lane there hangs a case of two stuffed bass, weighing respectively 11¼ lb. and 9 lb., which fell to Mr. Aflalo's rod in the Teign on one memorable morning. His tackle was eminently sporting, for the writer believes he always used a trout fly rod and unleaded trace, usually with an ordinary bottle cork on the line to serve as a float, baiting with live sandeel. This is a style of bass fishing (either with or without a float) which can be pursued in almost any river estuary which has not much boat traffic ; and the first of the flood tide, especially when it occurs in the very early morning, is usually the best time. (One of the first lessons the novice will learn, by the way, not only in bass fishing, but in practically every other kind of sea angling, is that the matter of tides is all important, and that a habit of getting up at daybreak is one to be cultivated assiduously ; from which it follows of course that late nights should be avoided.) There is one difficulty about this estuary bass fishing which the novice will soon find out, and that is drifting weed. Some estuaries are worse in this respect than others, but at times this nuisance is so bad that it is impossible to keep the trace clear ; and when this is the case it is better to give up fishing, for it is quite hopeless of course

to attempt to catch bass unless one's line is quite free from weed.

In some rivers bass run up on the flood quite a long way from the sea, dropping down again on the ebb. In the Arun, for example, they have been caught above Arundel. This is a point which the novice who is a bad sailor will do well to bear in mind. For driftline fishing in the open sea, there are two live baits more commonly used perhaps than any others—prawn and sand-eel. Each of these has its adherents. The writer knows at least two skilful and accomplished bass fishermen who rarely use anything else than prawn; and others, equally skilful and accomplished, who swear by sand-eel. Probably a sand-eel, if in really lively condition, is the more deadly bait of the two for a bass, but as a rule it is not so easily come by as a prawn. The most suitable weapon to use is a light spinning rod about 10 ft. or 11 ft. in length, although, as has been mentioned in a previous Chapter, the novice at a pinch can use his "Minchin," if he has one; and not less than 100 yards of line should be on the reel, for the bass of course will often take out a lot when hooked. In fishing from an anchored boat the novice's first care, after he has put his tackle together, should be to plumb the depth accurately, marking the line with a piece of worsted, which should be pushed through it with a needle, and tied; this can be carefully snipped off when done with.

Bass are often found at different depths, from which it follows of course that the water should be thoroughly searched; and it may, or may not, be necessary to use a little lead on the line in order to get down to the fish. The bass, like the mackerel, is such an eminently sporting fish however that it is a shame to fish for him with a heavily leaded line; although as he grows to a size so much larger than that attained by the mackerel one can of course, if necessary, use more lead in proportion, and still

claim to be fishing under sporting conditions. Personally the writer would not care to fish for bass with more than 1 oz. of lead on the line; but that is a matter in which every individual angler must decide for himself.

If baiting with prawn the angler should use, if he can get it, a very short-shanked hook, and the prawn should be hooked through the middle of the joint next but one to the tail; by this means he will live the longest—and a dead or moribund prawn is nearly useless. The bait should be worked with a slow sink and draw movement, and sometimes it pays to get down as close to the bottom as one can, from which it follows that if on rough ground, such as the rocky gullies off Newhaven (a famous bass fishing station, unavailable during the war, but now happily open again) the novice will sometimes lose tackle; but he must not mind that, for at times it is unavoidable, although the loss no doubt can be minimized with care. With this bait it is inadvisable to strike too quickly; it is better to give the fish time to turn it in his mouth, for both bass and pollack invariably swallow a prawn tail first. If the novice does not believe this, let him examine a prawn closely, when he will be convinced that it would be a very uncomfortable morsel if swallowed head first. With this bait the angler is often bothered with wrasse if he gets too low down on rocky ground, which is a nuisance, but cannot be helped; and similarly one often gets pollack, a fish which your true bass fisherman (who is sometimes almost as much of a purist, in his way, as the dry fly man in fresh water) classes as "vermin"—in which however the writer most emphatically does *not* agree with him.

As a change from driftline fishing, the angler can try with a float, using a slip on sliding one (of which Mr. Summers's pattern is as good as any, as it can be put on and taken off the line without removing the lead); in fact in fishing with a small live fish, such as a small pouting

or dab, it is better to use a float. By this means one can try at different depths until the fish are found. As in fly fishing for bass, so in every other method; the angler should keep a sharp look-out to see whether the gulls are "working," for this invariably indicates that fish are on the feed down below, and driving the bait up to the surface.

A very sporting and successful method of fishing for bass from a drifting boat was evolved not very long ago at Sandown, Isle of Wight, by George Hooper, the eldest of a family of clever professional fishermen at that place. The writer is open to correction, by the way, in speaking of this as a new method of catching bass in the open sea because, as Mr. J. C. Wilcocks has pointed out in the *Fishing Gazette*, the sport is constantly attracting fresh adherents, and present day sea anglers sometimes make what they think are "discoveries," although in reality they are things which their fathers found out before them; but as far as the present writer knows the method is a novel one, at any rate in some of its details. At Sandown the bass usually come into the bay about the end of June, and although numerous and of good size they are very shy, and not many can be caught by whiffing; although a friend of the writer's has occasionally taken them in this way, and especially with a small atherine smelt when these come in, about August. Hooper therefore evolved the method about to be described. The bass specially frequent patches of the long "bootlace" weed, and it is here of course that the local professionals have such a great advantage over the casual visiting amateur, for they know the most likely places for the fish—particularly the patches of weed just mentioned. In fact in bass fishing generally, more perhaps than in any other kind of sea angling, the man on the spot has a considerable advantage over the casual visitor. A light boat of the skiff type is used, and

therefore those days when only a light breeze is blowing are most suitable. Perhaps the flood tide at springs is the best ; but fish can be caught on the ebb as well, as it is usually necessary to go out into fairly deep water, where there is a fair run of tide both ways. The angler sits facing the stern, and it is very essential to have a skilful man at the oars, who keeps the boat drifting steadily at about the pace of the tide. A long rod and rather large winch are used, and the running line, as mentioned in a previous Chapter, is a fairly stout one of pure undressed silk, which almost floats. The line goes to a large gaudy float, about as big as a small orange, so as to be seen easily. Below the float is the trace of stout single gut, from 6 ft. to 9 ft. in length, terminating in a small triangle. No lead is used. The triangle is very lightly attached by one of the barbs to the skin on the back of a very lively sandeel, which can thus swim about freely, from 6 ft. to 9 ft. below the surface ; and floating with the tide, at the tide's pace, will live for some time in vigour. The angler lets out about 30 yards of line, a distance at which one can just see the float easily, even if there is a little ripple on. It is essential of course that there should be no slack line from rod top to float, because if there be the angler cannot strike in time ; and perhaps more important still, there must be no pull or drag on the bait. The float, with the sandeel swimming about underneath it, must travel at an even pace with the tide, and hence the necessity for a skilful man at the oars. If he overruns the tide the line between rod and float will go slack, and the angler cannot strike ; while if the boat lags behind the tide there will be drag, the float will be on its side, and the sandeel pulled up to the surface and drowned. Constant vigilance on the part of both angler and boatman is necessary, for the strike must be a quick one—or the fish will be away with the eel. As regards the bait live prawn and other things

have been tried, but there is nothing so effectual as a really lively sandeel. They are plentiful at Sandown, as elsewhere, but are not very easily come by—a remark, of course, which applies to a good many other places as well. A special sandeel seine is necessary, and this needs several men to work it. The sandeels can only be caught just at sundown, and they must be kept in really lively condition. The Hoopers therefore do not let the eels come out of the water at all. When the net is hauled they wade in and pick out a number of baits of suitable size—there are usually thousands of eels in the cod of the net—and these are put into a large *courge* under water. This *courge*—which they call the “penner”—is then immediately towed out about a quarter of a mile from shore, and anchored where the tide runs well. When the angler goes fishing he is rowed out first to the “penner,” and the baits required for a tide’s fishing are taken from it and put into a smaller *courge*—all done under water if possible. The small *courge* of course is towed behind the angler’s boat, and any baits not used are thrown away. It will be realized of course that the casual visiting angler is entirely in the hands of the local professionals—but he has not much to complain of. The Hoopers are pleasant fellows, very keen to show sport, and reasonable in their charges; and having brought this method of fishing to a fine art they are legitimately entitled to their reward. They provide rods and all gear, although the angler can of course, if he chooses, use his own. Some very fair takes of bass (as many as a dozen or more good fish on one tide) have been made in this way; and the angler who goes to Sandown in July, and strikes soft weather, is pretty sure to get sport if he puts himself in the Hoopers’ hands. Personally the writer is not particularly keen on being “taken out fishing” like this—he would prefer to catch fewer fish in his own way—but that of course is a matter

of the personal equation again. This method of bass fishing is one which would no doubt pay very well at a good many other places besides Sandown; and for all the writer knows it may already have been tried elsewhere.

A very sporting and (at times) successful method of angling for bass is by fishing an unleaded driftline from a shingly beach. The term "at times" is used advisedly, because, although sometimes very successful, it is rather uncertain in its results, and on occasions the fish seem to go off the feed for days together. This method of angling is a favourite one with some of the initiated, but the writer is under the impression that it is not very widely known among sea anglers generally, although it is quite possible of course that he is mistaken in saying this. A friend of his (Mr. Lewis R. W. Loyd) was very successful in taking bass in this way in the summer of 1914, the beach from which he fished being the straight stretch of shingle which lies some six miles to the West of Sidmouth, in Devonshire. It can be practised however from almost any of our steeply shelving beaches along the South coast, for bass often come very close inshore at such places, especially when there is some sea on. Mr. Loyd's account of the way in which he found out this method of catching bass on an unleaded line is rather interesting. Writing in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly*, he says: "On the morning of June 20, 1914, and a very hot morning it was, I had tramped this stretch of shingle for several somewhat weary hours, trying in various ways, but all in vain, to lure a bass from the watery deep. The morning, as I have said, was hot; the shingle was loose, and the 'going' consequently heavy, so were my sea boots, and at last I gave it up in despair and sat disconsolate on the shelving bank, close to the edge of the waves. It so happened that at the very spot which I had chosen for my resting-place a seine had been hauled the previous

evening, and as I idly turned the stones at my side, my fingers came in contact with the corpse of a baby mackerel which had presumably escaped the eagle eye of the fishermen when its companions in misfortune were being collected, or had been considered too small to be worth picking up. As the sun was strong and the mackerel rapidly becoming so, I hastily flung it away. It dropped not a yard out to sea, and I watched the light glinting on its silver scales as it sank slowly and erratically through the clear water. And then the miracle came to pass. A long grey shadow slid silently and mysteriously into view, absorbed the little mackerel, and as silently and mysteriously vanished again. That shadow was a bass—and a big one."

The weapon which the novice may be recommended to use for this fishing is the light spinning rod, 10 ft. or 11 ft. in length, which he will probably have acquired if he has been seriously "bitten" by bass fishing, although in default of this he can use either rod No. 2 on the list (if this be a trout spinning rod) or his pollack rod. It is inadvisable to use a fly rod because a pretty hard, quick strike is required, and also because when there is some sea on—and this method of fishing is not often successful in very calm weather—bunches of floating weed have frequently to be contended with, so that a fly rod is not up to the work. The reel should be 4 in. or 5 in. in diameter, carrying not less than 100 yards of strong but fairly fine line; if the angler be short of lines his pollack line will do at a pinch, although strictly speaking it will usually be rather too stout for the game. The trace may be of gut or gut-substitute ("medium" or "strong salmon" size), about 8 ft. in length, joined to the running line without the usual swivel; the idea being to let the bait drift in the waves in as natural and detached a manner as possible. A loop should be tied at the top end of the trace

{for which purpose the ordinary overhand knot is as good as any), and the running line made fast to this. The hook should be about a 5/0, and the bait which will generally be found most successful is a large slice of mackerel ; if the mackerel be a small one half a side will not be too big. In default of mackerel a similar piece of either herring or pilchard may be used. The hook should be put twice through the bait, which should then be sewn or tied with whitey-brown thread either to the eye of the hook or round the trace just above it, in order that the bait may not slip down and " bunch " on the bend of the hook. The last half of the flood and the first hour of the ebb is usually the most successful time for this fishing. It is not necessary to cast far ; the bait, Mr. Loyd says, is almost invariably taken in the " curl " of the wave immediately below the breaking crest, and therefore need seldom be more than 3 yards from the beach, and by careful manœuvring the angler will find that with the assistance of the tide and the backwash of the waves he will be able to work quite a considerable stretch of beach without recasting ; but unless wearing sea boots he will often get his feet wet because, as has been remarked before, this style of fishing is usually most successful when there is some sea running. It is advisable to look at the hook from time to time, because it naturally happens pretty often that the bait gets rolled in by a breaker, and the point of the hook is therefore liable to get turned and blunted on the shingle. When this occurs it is as well to mount a fresh hook. This is a very pleasant and sporting way of catching bass, for the angler is almost as unencumbered by impedimenta as is the fly fisherman ; the spare tackle (hooks and either gut traces or a coil of gut-substitute) can be slipped into the jacket pocket, so that all that the angler need carry (besides his rod, reel and line) is the bait and landing net, and the fish he catches.

Good bass are often taken by this method, Mr. Loyd's average weight of a good many fish in the year mentioned having been in the neighbourhood of 6 lb. If the angler be making a stay at some place with a suitable beach, and takes to this fishing, it is not at all a bad plan to ground bait a convenient spot (such as a few yards away from a groyne) by planting an old sack containing fish offal, defunct lugworms, etc., weighted with one or two large stones, a little above the half tide mark, for this will be found an attraction to bass, and will often cause them to congregate at that place in considerable numbers.

An equally sporting and somewhat similar method of angling for bass to that described above is practised in the Menai Straits (and no doubt on other parts of the coast where similar conditions prevail), but the bait used is a live sandeel, hooked through both lips with a square bent hook. The last quarter of the ebb and the first of the flood, when occurring in the early morning or the evening, is the best time for this fishing, and the eel is allowed to search the eddies in the tidal pools and channels among the rocks—very much in the style of live bait fishing for trout in a Thames weir pool, except that neither float nor lead is used.

On those parts of the coast where prawn pots are set, bass (often big ones) frequently follow from pot to pot a boat which is "pot hauling," for the purpose of picking up the waste bait which is thrown overboard by the fishermen after they have hauled and emptied each pot; and if the angler can persuade the men to let him accompany them on one of these expeditions (this will generally involve a very early start, but it has been remarked previously that the habit of early rising is one the sea angler should cultivate assiduously) he will find that a judiciously impaled live prawn, on an unleaded and unswivelled trace, thrown overboard with the waste bait,

and allowed to sink naturally in the water, with a slack line, will often result in a bass being hooked, and when this happens the fish will frequently be a good one. Bognor and Selsey are localities which occur as presenting opportunities of this kind to the sea angler who can get into the good graces of the local men, but no doubt there are a good many other places round the coast where prawn pots are set.

An interesting method of catching bass which is practised from the pier at Herne Bay was fully described in an article in the *Fishing Gazette* about three years ago, so that there is no need to say very much about it here. A fine silk line and light unweighted spinning bait is used, and all sorts of ingenious devices (such as the affixing of small air balloons, feathers, etc., to the line) are employed to get the lure out to the fish, when they are "schooling" at or near the surface some little way from the pier. In its way this style of fishing is the nearest approach which the writer has heard of in this country to the famous "tunaplane," or kite used by American sea anglers at Santa Catalina, and described in one or two of the late Dr. C. F. Holder's delightful books. The present writer has never fished at Herne Bay, so he cannot say anything about this fishing from actual experience, but he is told by a friend who knows the place pretty well that the bass taken in this way are mostly small.

A very fascinating and interesting method of catching bass is to cast a light spinning bait for them, either from an anchored boat, from a pier, or from the shore; but before he can accomplish this of course the novice will have to become proficient at casting a light bait. Mr. Percy Wadham, of Newport, Isle of Wight, who is very expert at this style of angling, and to whom the writer is indebted for some very useful notes regarding it, says it can be made almost as interesting and scientific as fly

fishing for trout, as on some occasions it is possible actually to pick out the desired bass among a shoal when they are feeding at the surface ; and as the bait used is always an artificial one it appeals strongly to those sea anglers—of whom there are many—who prefer to delude their fish with such a lure rather than to catch them with a natural bait. As a general rule the bass taken in this way will not exceed 5 lb. in weight, although sometimes heavier fish will be captured. The writer believes that most of Mr. Wadham's spinning is done in the coastal waters round the Isle of Wight, and there he finds the ebb tide the better of the two, while early morning and evening are the best times of the day. As in other styles of bass fishing, the angler should always be on the look-out to see if the gulls are "working," for this is generally a sure indication of bass on the feed ; at the same time one can often catch bass in this way by getting the bait well down to the bottom when no gulls are to be seen.

The rod the novice may be recommended to use is the single-handed casting rod, from 5 ft. 6 in. to 6 ft. in length, and split cane is the most satisfactory material. Of reels suitable for this light bait casting there are many excellent ones on the market, from which the angler may make his choice ; among others (to name them in alphabetical order) the "Carisbrooke," the "Cowes," the "Dreadnought," the "Meteor," and the "Roach." The line used should be of plaited silk, *without any dressing*. There is no dressing which does not set up a little stickiness, perhaps so slight that it is hardly discernible to the touch ; and of course the merest suspicion of "tackiness" in the line is absolutely fatal to the satisfactory casting of a light bait. Long casting is generally necessary to success, and naturally the finer the line the farther one can cast with it ; but it must also be strong enough to play a vigorous 4 lb. or 5 lb. bass, perhaps in a strong

tide, and therefore the size of line chosen must be in the nature of a compromise. With a line having a breaking strain of 8 lb. Mr. Wadham says he can cast over 40 yds., and if the novice can get out this distance, and possesses "hands," he will be able to kill bass satisfactorily on such a line when conditions are favourable. The best lead to use is an elegant pear shaped one, varying in weight, according to the conditions, from 6 dr. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz.; for it will be found in practice that this kind of lead casts well, and travels steadily through the water without "wobble"—which is fatal to success. These leads are fitted with a fine wire ring at the top, and the loop at the end of the trace should be threaded through this, and the blunt end of the lead afterwards passed through the loop and the trace pulled tight, the running line being made fast to the wire ring by the knot the angler favours. From time to time the last yard or so of the running line should be broken off and discarded, as this soon becomes unsound with the continual friction involved in casting. The trace should be about 3 ft. in length, with not less than three No. 8 box swivels, and of gut or gut-substitute of about "light salmon" or "stout lake" size. The bait should be a small artificial sandeel, or other small spinning bait, and perhaps the O.K. Flexaloid and "Nature" baits made by Percy Wadham's Specialities, Ltd., are the best to use. Some of these baits are wonderfully life-like in the water.

If the angler sees bass on the feed at the surface, and can anchor near enough to cast into the shoal without putting them down, he will probably get fish, but if none is to be seen on the feed he should search the water thoroughly at all depths; and in order to get the bait well down to the bottom it is a good plan to cast against the tide at an angle of about 45 deg., and then wait for 15 or 20 seconds before starting to wind in. The writer thinks that any sea angler who has not tried this method of

fishing for bass will find it a very interesting and sporting way of catching them.

A more restful method of course, and one more commonly followed, is to whiff for them, using tackle similar to, but rather lighter than, that employed in whiffing for pollack—of which more hereafter. Of whiffing baits there are many—rubber sandeels of various colours, wagtails, minnows, etc. ; and most of them will kill bass at times. An attractive whiffing bait may be made by cutting once through an ordinary indiarubber band, afterwards painting one side with silver paint, which must be renewed from time to time. Bass may also be caught at times by casting a rubber eel or similar lure from rocky headlands and similar places, either with a spinning rod or a double-handed fly rod ; the Gull Rock, near Falmouth—when one can get there—is a famous spot for this style of fishing. It is perhaps unorthodox to say so, but the writer has proved by experiment that when bass refuse an artificial sandeel they will sometimes accept it when furnished with a " last " of mackerel on the bend of the hook (after the style of the pollack fisherman), although when the lure is garnished in this way what on earth the fish take it for the writer does not know.

Bottom fishing for bass is usually pursued in harbours and such places. The baits used are many and various, and as a rule it is rather an advantage than otherwise to employ one which has lost its first freshness.

In playing the fish the novice must be continually on the alert, for the bass is a wily beggar, and up to every move on the board. At the end of a rush he will sometimes double back on his tracks so quickly that it is impossible for a second or two to prevent a slack line, and with a lightly hooked fish this is often fatal. Keep him under water as much as possible, and at a distance from the boat, and don't bring him alongside to the net until he

is absolutely played out and on his side. As a final word about bass fishing generally, the writer would say that the novice must not always expect to catch fish, for perhaps the only thing really certain about it is its uncertainty.

CHAPTER VI

COALFISH AND POLLACK

IT will be convenient to consider these two fish together, for there is considerable similarity in their habits, and particularly in their well known preference for rocky ground, so that it frequently happens that when the angler is fishing for one he catches the other as well. The true home of the coalfish is Scotland, where he is known as saithe (and by about half a hundred other names as well), and speaking generally he is considerably more plentiful there than in English waters. South of Yorkshire one does not often come across coalfish until one gets right round the South coast to Cornwall, where he is again fairly common, and is known as "rauning," or black pollack. On the rocky grounds off the Irish coast there are a good many places where coalfish, as well as pollack, may be met with, and here again coalfish are often called black pollack or "black jacks." Of the two species, coalfish grow to a considerably larger size than pollack, and the scientists, in their detached, superior way, all agree (for once) in instructing us that *Gadus virens* is also a stronger, fiercer fish than *Gadus pollachius*; besides which, when one handles him, the coalfish feels (as indeed he looks) the harder and compacter fish. The pollack, unless in exceptionally fine condition, somehow gives one the impression that he is more loosely knit.

If there be any one matter connected with the sport

more than another upon which there has been a good deal of exaggeration, it is the weight of pollack. One sometimes hears, and reads, loose statements about pollack "of 20 lb. and over"; and Mr. C. H. Cook ("John Bickerdyke") in one of his books says that he has some reason for believing that the professional fishermen at times take them up to 30 lb. and even 35 lb.—one of the most extraordinary statements which the author ever remembers to have seen in any book about sea fishing. As a matter of fact any pollack over 15 lb. or 16 lb. is a distinct rarity. Many a pollack fisherman with years of experience behind him has never had one over that weight; and in 1911, probably the best pollack year on record at Ballycotton since the place has been known as a sea angling station, among the hundreds of big pollack—and by that is meant fish of 10 lb. or over—taken there on rod and line that season only two, so far as the writer is aware, were fifteen pounders, and there was none over that weight. Some anglers appreciably over estimate the weight of their pollack, perhaps because the fish often looks a good deal heavier than he really is. More than once the writer has seen a so-called "fourteen pounder" shrink to something between 11 lb. and 12 lb. when placed on the scales. The fact of the matter is that a big pollack is sometimes rather thin for his length, and consequently the weight of the fish depends greatly upon his condition; a remark which applies of course to most fish, but with peculiar force to pollack. For years the record rod caught pollack was the fish of 19 lb. 3 oz. taken by the late Mr. J. N. Hearn at Ballycotton in 1905. In September, 1920, however Mr. J. H. Layton caught one of 20½ lb. at Lochinver, Sutherland; and just as this book is going to press the writer has heard of two truly wonderful catches of pollack and coalfish made by Captain Hugo Millais and his wife not far

from Land's End on June 16 and 17, 1921. Among the fish were a pollack of 21 lb. caught by Captain Millais, and two of 20½ lb. and 19½ lb. taken by the lady. Any one of these three might fairly be called the fish of a lifetime; to get three such in two days is far and away the greatest piece of luck the writer has ever heard of in connection with angling for pollack. The catches also comprised coalfish of 23½ lb., 20½ lb., 20 lb., 19 lb. and smaller weights. The author does not know whether or not this 23½ lb. coalfish is the record one for rod and line, although it is about the heaviest of which he remembers to have heard. The heaviest he has actually handled was within a few ounces of 20 lb., but as the coalfish attains a weight of 30 lb. or more the record rod and line one should be, he imagines, in the neighbourhood of 25 lb.

Not a great deal is known, even to-day, of the life habits of the two species, and particularly to what extent either is a migratory fish in the true sense of the word. It is laid down however by the authorities that the coalfish is somewhat of a roamer—here to-day and gone to-morrow; and certainly this is borne out by the experiences of sea anglers in Ireland, particularly at Ballycotton, for in some years coalfish have been absent, or nearly so, while in others (1913 for instance) they have been fairly plentiful, and specimens up to close on 20 lb. in weight have been taken by visiting anglers. The popular conception of the pollack, on the other hand, is that he is more of a stay at home fish, haunting the weed covered rocks; but whether this is as generally true as is popularly supposed is perhaps open to question. It is rather a favourite theory of the writer's—like a good many other theories it has only a somewhat slender foundation of fact to support it, but nevertheless he has a strong suspicion that it is correct—that there are two distinct races or sub-species of pollack; one the bronzed, weed haunting fellow we

read of in the books, and catch on high rock, and the other the deep sea, black backed school pollack, varying somewhat in his habits as in his appearance, often caught on low rock, and (like his cousin the coalfish) more of a roamer.

There is a considerable similarity in the appearance of coalfish and pollack, but (although the one is sometimes confused with the other) there is really no difficulty whatever in distinguishing them. Apart from the difference in colour, which is most marked in the case of freshly caught fish (although the coloration of the pollack often varies a good deal), the coalfish has a tail which is much more forked than that of the pollack, and his under jaw does not project nearly so much as does that of *Gadus pollachius*; but perhaps the most reliable point of difference between them is the lateral line. That of the pollack is not continuous, but presents an appearance of dots and dashes, or better still—so it has always seemed to the writer—a series of rather coarse stitches, done in some dark coloured, stout thread along the side of the fish, and curving upwards at the shoulder; it distinctly resembles (to quote Mr. Edgar Hyde) a note of interrogation. The lateral line of the coalfish, on the other hand, consists of a narrow white stripe, *always quite continuous*, very nearly straight, and looking, as one writer says, like a narrow tape; it is also slightly raised, a feature which may be distinguished by running one's fingers lightly over the skin of the fish. According to one authority, sometimes late in the season the pollack assumes this stripe also. If this be true—as to which the present writer has no knowledge, for he does not remember to have caught pollack earlier in the year than May, or later than October—it is rather confusing and unsatisfactory; and he hopes he is not offending any Cornish susceptibilities when he says that it may possibly account for what he strongly

suspects to be the "terminological inexactitudes" one sometimes hears about big Cornish pollack. Every "rauner" over 15 lb. or so taken there might so easily be assumed to be a pollack which had adopted his winter stripe!

Both species are pre-eminently sporting fish, for at times each swims pretty high in the water; and consequently, where tides are easy, each can be angled for with unleaded or lightly leaded tackle. Most pollack fishermen who have had much experience can remember occasions when the fish have been at, or close under, the surface; and at such times they will sometimes actually jump out of the water. The writer has a vivid recollection of an evening on the Irish coast about twelve years ago, when he was in a whaleboat under sail; a number of big pollack suddenly made their appearance in the broken water in the wake of the boat, tumbling over and over one another for all the world like a school of porpoises, and one fish (of some 9 lb. or 10 lb.) was actually gaffed into the boat, close to the rudder! Both coalfish and pollack may be fished for by the sport loving sea angler in a variety of ways; they may be taken on the fly, on the driftline, on float tackle, by spinning and whiffing, and by bottom fishing.

As in the case of the bass, probably most sea anglers would agree that *the* most sporting way of angling for both coalfish and pollack is with the fly, and it is to be regretted that opportunities of practising it do not come the way of the South Country sea angler very frequently. The fly fishing at Filey Brig, in August and September, is of course famous far and wide among present day sea fishermen; but apart from that, and perhaps one or two other places round our coast where somewhat similar conditions prevail, the sea angler who wants to catch either coalfish (saithe) or pollack (lythe) on the fly may be

advised to go to Scotland for his sport. In all the salt lochs and estuaries of the North, and round all the islands on the West of that country, the coalfish is very common, and indeed in some parts it positively swarms. Of the two species the coalfish rises more readily to the fly, and (to quote Mr. Edgar Hyde in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly*) "all round the Scottish coasts from Campbeltown to Dundee the rod and the cuddy fly is the popular method of taking small saithe." The author cannot speak of this fishing from the standpoint of actual practical experience, because (although one of his earliest recollections relates to the catching of coalfish on the Haddingtonshire coast) as far as his memory goes he has never taken either species on the fly; but judging from what he is told by friends of his who have, he thinks the outfit previously recommended for fly fishing for bass will do very nicely. As to flies, Mr. Hyde says the best are "very simple combinations of feathers, mostly white with red and silver bodies, but any salmon or grilse fly will tempt the coalfish; indeed, when they are in shoals they appear to go for anything which moves as long as it looks like a small fish." As in the case of fly fishing for bass, the novice may be warned that the sport is rather uncertain, for it is not every day that the fish are in fly taking mood; but when they are those anglers who have tried it say that the sport is magnificent. Mr. Hyde indeed, who has had a good deal of experience of this fishing, says that the coalfish, when hooked in shallow water such as some of the Scottish lochs, is not far inferior to a sea trout.

After fly fishing, the writer thinks the driftline (or rather the combination of driftlining and spinning which he is about to describe) the most sporting way of angling for coalfish and pollack; and in his opinion it is the pleasantest, most artistic and most deadly method of all.

It is sporting because, where tides are easy, it enables the angler to catch fish on unleaded or very lightly leaded tackle; it is artistic because a considerable degree of skill, as well as constant attention and vigilance on the part of the angler, is required; and that it is deadly the takes of pollack which have been made in this way at Ballycotton bear witness. It can however only be practised in perfection at places where tides do not run strongly, and it is in this respect that Ballycotton (unquestionably one of the best pollack fishing stations in our waters) has such a great advantage over, for instance, many Cornish stations. Cornish waters abound in pollack, but speaking generally Cornish tides run so strongly that during springs many of the outer marks are either unfishable altogether, or one has to use so much lead that sporting angling is practically impossible.

The writer believes that the method he is about to describe is comparatively modern, and dates from about the year 1913, but in saying this he is open to correction. The old method of fishing a driftline for pollack was with a stationary bait (usually consisting of a large slice of mackerel, pilchard or herring), and a slipping lead adjusted some five fathoms from the bait. When fishing in this way sea anglers years ago adopted the practice of slowly winding in line, and then letting it out again, because it was found by experience that pollack frequently took a bait moving upwards better than a stationary one. As an additional attraction a rubber eel with a "last" of mackerel, herring or pilchard on the hook was often used. In the year 1913 however Mr. B. O'Flynn, of Cork, inaugurated a new era, at any rate as far as the Ballycotton pollack fishing was concerned, by using a spinning bait weighted at the head, and made the interesting discovery that by this means it was possible to catch pollack, and to catch them pretty

frequently, on the downward as well as on the upward journey of the bait. The bait he used was a rubber eel, having at the head one of the flanged balls taken from a "Waterwitch" bait, the hollow ball being filled with lead so as to give the necessary weight and ensure a proper spin while the bait was sinking. A "last" of mackerel or herring on the hook completed the outfit. The writer will be interested, by the way, to hear from any reader whether this method of catching pollack really was novel; that is to say, whether it had been practised elsewhere than at Ballycotton prior to the year 1913 or thereabouts. Perhaps the best all round spinner for the purpose is Hearder's plano-convex minnow. It should be bought unmounted, and the angler should mount it himself on brass or copper wire, the bottom end of which should be put through the eye of a single hook (size about 5/0 or 6/0) and twisted around on itself two or three times. Two glass beads should be threaded on the wire, one above the spinner and the other below. A small piece of rubber tubing should be put on the hook, and pushed up it until it is over the eye, where it should be kept in place by a few turns of fine wire. This prevents the hook from "wobbling" about too much, and minimizes the risk of its fouling the trace while the bait is on its downward journey; and one end of the fine wire will come in useful to secure the top of the mackerel or herring "last" with which the hook is baited. But really any small spinning bait will answer the purpose provided it be weighted sufficiently to make it spin while sinking; this can be effected, if need be, by means of a small bored bullet at the head of the bait. If additional weight be required on the line it is better of course to use fixed rather than slipping leads, as the latter have to be adjusted at each swim down, and life is rather too short for that kind of thing; the writer accordingly

prefers a long trace—say 10 ft.—so as to keep the leads as far away from the bait as one conveniently can with those of the fixed type. The leads he recommends are the well known elongated kind with a small spiral wire at each end. But where tides are easy it will often be found possible to fish this gear without additional lead—and that is the great charm of it. For the trace, unless dogfish or sharks are about, gut-substitute, “stout salmon” or “sea” size, is recommended. There is however always the risk of hooking a shark—the spinning bait seems to have a peculiar fascination for these gentry—and for this reason it is no doubt safer to use wire. A good many sea anglers are rather “fussy” in the matter of wire, and the writer has listened to many discussions, learned and otherwise, about the merits of some particular kind. The sort he prefers is Ormiston’s black tempered steel wire, and the appropriate gauge for pollack fishing is 25 or thereabouts. The trace should have three swivels, a medium sized one at the top, another at the middle, and a small spring link swivel at the bottom end. Wire traces are so easily and quickly made up, and the wire is so cheap (even to-day) that it is better to mount a fresh trace each day. Great care must be taken to prevent a kink, for that, it need hardly be said, is fatal. The running line should be marked with different coloured worsted, pushed through it with a needle and tied, at every five fathoms—red for five, white for ten, blue for fifteen, and so on.

In fishing in the method of which the writer has been speaking, a point which frequently bothers the novice is as to how much line he should let out before stopping the downward journey of the bait. He should of course plumb the depth accurately before commencing to fish, and if his line be going away at an angle of 45° , which the authorities lay down as the correct one, then

the length of the line AB, as compared with AC (the vertical depth of the water), in Fig. 4, will give him the theoretical length of his "swim." It is however scarcely necessary to say that in actual fishing in a tideway the position of the line below the surface of the water will approximate more closely to the line AD in the same figure; a circumstance of course due partly

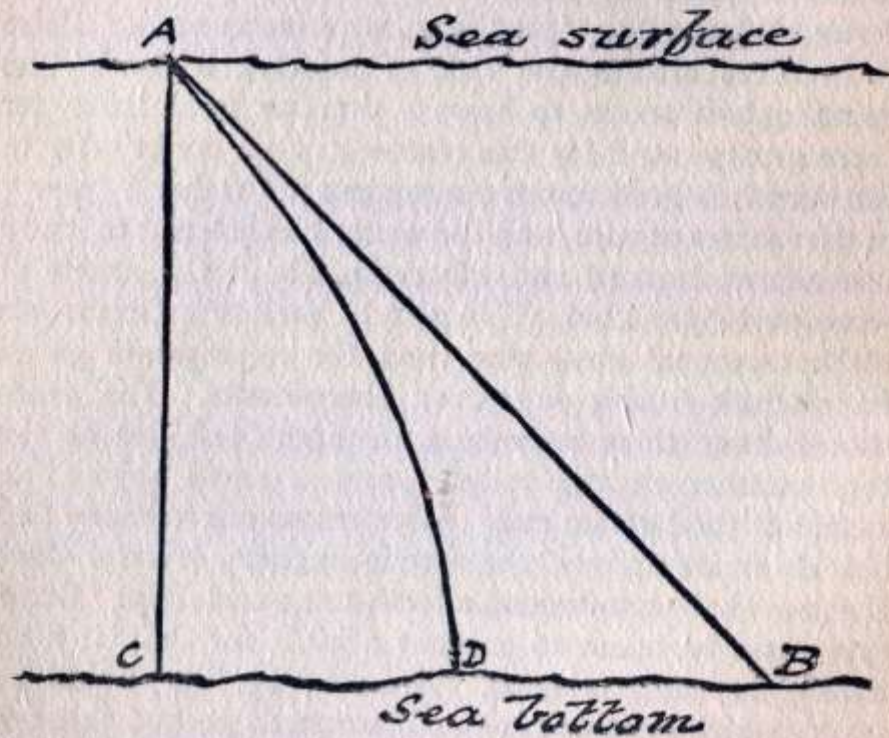


FIG. 4.

to the bellying of the line, and partly to the well known fact that the current runs more slowly near the bottom than higher up. The angler's object, before checking the downward swim and commencing the slow wind up, will be to get his bait as close to the rocky bottom as he can manage with safety, for generally, although not always, the heaviest fish will be found close to the ground. He

will remember too that when he is anchored over low, as distinguished from high rock, he may safely let out rather more line than he would otherwise do, for the reason that the contour of the former kind of ground is usually not so irregular, while the growth of weed upon it is, as a rule, neither so long nor so thick as on high rock, so that the risk of a bad foul and consequent loss of gear is not so great. Bearing these and similar considerations in mind, and assuming the line to be going away from the rod top at an angle of 45° , a good general rule, sufficiently accurate for practical purposes, is to allow two extra fathoms for every nine of the vertical depth. Thus if the angler be anchored in 18 fathoms of water he will stop the downward swim and commence the slow wind up when 22 fathoms of line are out ; in $13\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, when 16 are off his reel, and so on—rather more on low rock, a trifle less on high. But however careful he may be he will be fortunate indeed if he does not occasionally leave a bait in the "carpet" ; and if he be using the "Hearder" spinner, costing 2s. or 3s., the careless or inattentive fisherman may well find himself considerably out of pocket at the end of a fortnight's angling. But the game is very decidedly worth the candle. A little practical tip which the writer has found useful is to pause for a second or two at the end of the downward swim before commencing to wind up. This allows the hook and "last" to assume their proper position below the spinner, and minimizes the risk of the hook fouling the trace—a very annoying and time wasting experience. But however careful one may be this will occasionally happen, and the angler should not allow himself to get discouraged if it does.

On the question whether one should strike a pollack the authorities differ somewhat. The late Mr. Bates, for instance, was against it, and recommends a steady

draw rather than a smart strike. In the old days at Ballycotton, when a stationary driftline was fished for pollack, the fish usually struck himself. One put the rod down, leaning against the gunwale not too far outboard, and when the reel screeched snatched up the rod and played the fish. There are still times when the fish take well of course, and one suddenly realizes that one has hooked a good one without having struck him, at any rate consciously. But the very essence of this sink and draw fishing which the writer has been describing is that it enables the angler to catch pollack when they are *not* taking well, but merely "picking" at the bait; and accordingly the writer holds that at the slightest suspicion of a touch the angler should strike, strike instantaneously, and *strike hard, especially if the bait be on its downward journey*. The reason for the last few words is obvious, but a glance at Fig. 5 will make it clear to every one. On the swim down pay out line regularly and evenly, a foot or two at a time. Avoid pulling line off the reel by the handful, and try to "feel" the bait throughout the whole of its journey down. Keep your eyes fixed on the point where the line enters the water, and at the slightest suspicion of any momentary quickening of its pace, strike. If you miss the fish, continue the swim; he has probably gone down, and may come for the bait again. On the wind up it is no uncommon occurrence for a large fish to follow the bait right up, "picking" at it three or four times, and finally either taking it or sheering off when close to the surface—a pretty sight. On such occasions a momentary quickening of the pace of winding, after an unsuccessful strike, will often effect a capture. But occasionally the fish are very shy indeed, and then it is rather exasperating fishing, for one feels them continually, but cannot apparently hook them. At such times they will steal or

mutilate one's "lasts," even when sewn or wired (as they always should be) to the top of the hook; a second hook, buried in the bottom of the "last," or perhaps better still, a smaller hook and "last," will often enable the angler to

circumvent some of these artful dodgers. This excessive shyness of the fish is often due to extreme clearness of the water, and in such conditions the writer's experience has been that a small plain "last," properly mounted on a hook of appropriate size, and fished sink and draw, will sometimes kill better than any spinning bait, however

assiduously worked. In such circumstances too a triangle, with two of the hooks buried in the "last," will at times beat a single, but its fouling propensities are rather tiresome.

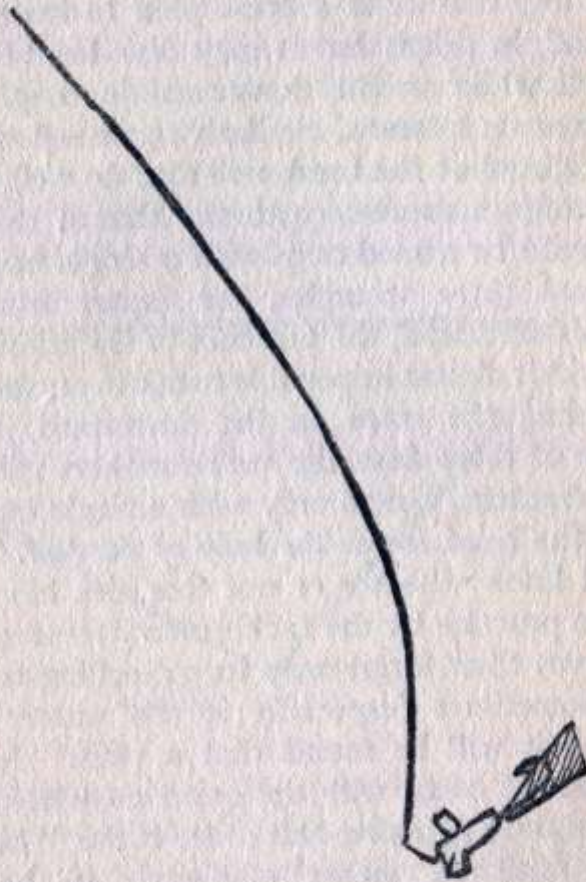


FIG. 5.

Another bait which may, at times, be used with effect on the driftline is the rubber eel, garnished with a "last" of mackerel or herring, which as a rule should be cut rather narrower and smaller than when used with the Hearder spinner. Generally, although not always, it will be found that an eel furnished with a spinner at the head is more effective for this purpose than a plain one, and in any case it is a good plan to have it leaded at the head, in order that it may dive head foremost, and spin well while on the downward journey. A wagtail or a phantom minnow, similarly furnished with a "last," and weighted at the head, will also do well at times, but it is perhaps unnecessary to say that if this bait be used it should be armed only with a single hook, instead of the usual three triangles, for (apart from more sporting considerations) the presence of the triangles will of course make it almost impossible to fish it on the driftline without fouling the trace on the downward journey. Perhaps one of these days the tackle makers will provide us with a phantom, armed only with a single hook, and weighted at the head *inside the body of the bait*. The writer does not know whether or not this idea has yet been carried into practice by the tackle manufacturers, but if it has he craves their forgiveness for preaching to the converted.

Sometimes (especially if the water be on the clear side) it will be found that a plain "last," *mounted on a leaded hook*, will do quite as well as, if not better than, any spinning bait; for if the "last" be cut from the tail of either mackerel or herring, approximately of the size and shape shown on page 85, and properly mounted on the hook by being either sewn or wired to the eye (as previously recommended), it will be found in practice that the bait sinks with a circular spinning "wobble" which is sometimes found very attractive to fish. For the benefit of the abso-

lute novice—the writer hopes the experienced pollack fisherman who may happen to read these lines will forgive him for descending to rather obvious detail—it may be remarked that the narrow end of the “last” should be fastened to the eye of the hook, the point of which should be stuck *once* through the bait, approximately at the spot marked with a dot in the sketch. One method of weighting the hook of course is to wind some lead wire neatly and evenly round the upper half of the shank. A better way perhaps (although it makes the affair rather more conspicuous) is to mount a small bored bullet on a short length of brass wire, fastened to the eye of the hook, and terminating at the other end in a small loop, to which the spring link swivel at the end

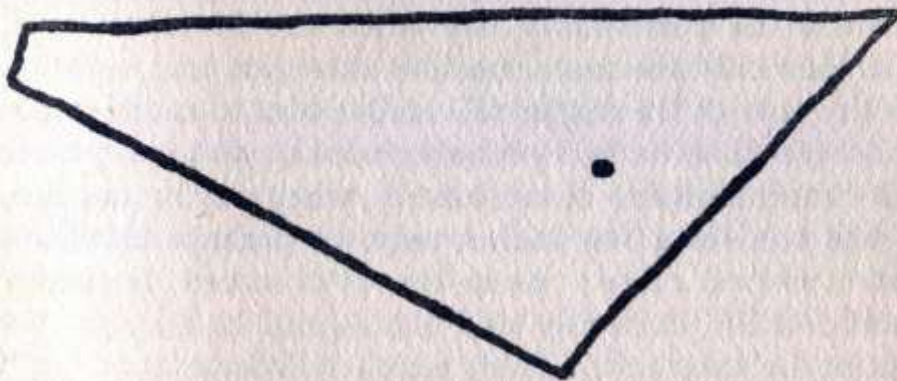


FIG. 6.

of the trace can be made fast. The junction of the wire and eye should be covered with the small piece of rubber tubing previously advised, so as to give that semi-rigidity to the hook which will be found so useful in preventing a foul, or at any rate minimizing the risk of one, while the bait is on the downward journey. With this lure it will sometimes be found that more fish will actually be hooked, or at any rate felt, while the bait is sinking than when it is being wound up.

One great advantage of course of having all the weight at the head of the bait is that the angler has a line *without any angle in it*, direct from rod top to lure ; and when fish are shy (whether owing to clear water, the presence of dogfish or sharks, or mere disinclination to feed) the importance of this cannot be over stated—indeed it is at times absolutely vital to successful angling by this sink and draw method. If additional weight be required, and the angler has to put a lead, or leads, on the running line at the head of the trace, he will find himself very severely handicapped, for it will often happen that by the time he has struck the angle thus formed out of the line the fish will be gone. The pollack is stated, in some of the books on sea angling, to be a bold biter ; and so he is at times. But pollack, especially big pollack, can also be particularly shy when the fit takes them, and then only the most constant attention and vigilance on the part of the angler will enable him to catch them ; and even then he will probably miss a good many more fish than he hooks. Occasionally, when paying out line, it will run for a few inches only, or perhaps check for just a second or so ; when this is observed the angler should strike, instantly and hard—and he may get the fish or he may not. From which it follows that when fish are very shy they can only be caught in appreciable numbers by this sink and draw method when conditions are just right—that is to say, the sea must be fairly calm, and the tide of just the right strength to carry the bait away from the boat at the correct fishing angle (45° or so) without any additional lead on the line. But it is particularly interesting fishing, even though (as previously remarked) it is very exasperating at times. The writer has known pollack so shy, owing to intensely clear water, that good sized fish could only be taken on a bream hook, without any lead whatever, and a

small mackerel "last," no bigger than this—

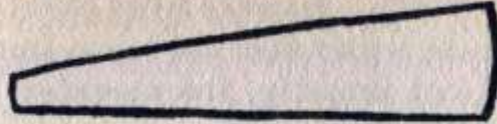


FIG. 7.

If the angler be fishing a trace of single wire one difficulty which he will encounter is the tendency of the trace, after a few heavy fish have been caught on it, to "corkscrew" into very troublesome curls, instead of lying out straight in the water. The writer has tried a good many different kinds of wire for his trace, but he confesses that he does not know one which does not develop this fault after a time. A trace composed of either twisted or plaited wire is not so liable to curl in this way, but as a rule such a trace is rather too conspicuous, at any rate in clear water. In practice therefore, if the angler fishes single wire, it will be found a good plan to make up three or four traces, either the night before or while on the way out to the fishing ground, so that when one is badly curled it can be discarded and a fresh one mounted without loss of valuable time. It need hardly be remarked of course that a trace which is badly "corkscrewed" does not fish properly, and it is much more difficult to feel fish, let alone hook them, with such gear than with a straight trace. Recently the writer was told by an old friend of a little dodge, practised by American sea anglers, by which this tendency of wire to develop curls may be counteracted. The assistance of a friend is necessary, the method being as follows:—A length of wire (say six feet or so) should be cut from the coil, and each end held firmly by a pair of pliers, the wire being stretched as taut as is possible between the two anglers; each holding the pliers very firmly, so that the wire does not shift, and pulling as hard as he can. Then let one take four complete turns, either to the

right or left, with his pair of pliers, while the other hangs on for all he is worth. Exactly what effect this twisting has on the wire the writer does not know, but it is claimed that, if carried out properly, the operation destroys the tendency to curl.

Some anglers complain that single wire traces, under prolonged and heavy strain, sometimes give way at the knot by which the trace is made fast to the swivel. The writer's old friend, Dr. C. S. Patterson, once had the misfortune to lose the only halibut he has ever hooked on the driftline (after the fish had been on for almost half an hour, and was nearly beaten) through the single wire trace he was using carrying away at the knot. The method of fastening shown below—which the writer believes also hails from America—has been recommended to him as one which may be relied on not to let the angler down in this way. The essential feature of this fastening is stated to be the small loop in the main wire, and in practice it will be found that this can be most conveniently made by twisting the wire round a steel knitting needle or some similar object.

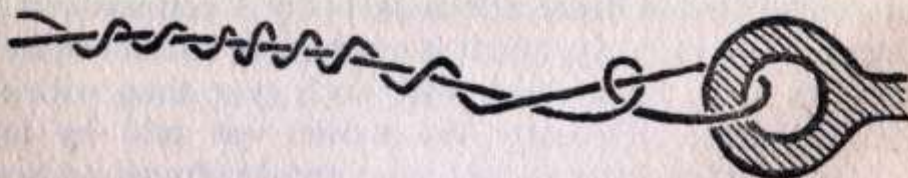


FIG. 8.

If they can be obtained, live baits may be fished on the driftline for both coalfish and pollack. The most generally useful of these are prawns and sandeels; but a small live fish, such as a pouting, poor cod, or the little fish known as the comber or gaper (a *serranus*) will at times account for a large pollack. Hook the bait either through the lips or the tail (the latter for choice), and let him swim about at the end of the trace, about

a fathom from the bottom. The newly born young of the spur dogfish (*Acanthias vulgaris*) may also be used in this way, and the pollack fisherman in Irish or Cornish waters who has suffered much from these pests may be forgiven for feeling a certain amount of satisfaction at turning the tables on his arch enemy by using his young for bait. The young dogfish (yolk sac and all) should be hooked through the tail, and at times will be found an attractive bait. Several years ago quite a number of good pollack were taken in this way at Ballycotton.

The two best live baits however are prawns and sand-eels, and of these the writer distinctly prefers the former. He believes the prawn is one of the natural foods of the pollack, which the sandeel as a rule is not ; and such experience as he has had leads him to the conclusion that the virtues of the sandeel as a pollack bait have been rather over-rated by one or two writers on the sport. Besides which prawns as a rule are easier to obtain. If the angler does not happen to have a *courge* with him an old basket, kept afloat at the boat's moorings, is about the best thing in which to keep one's prawns alive, and a lid (if that be missing, as is very often the case with a discarded basket) may be improvised out of a piece of old sacking, sewn to the basket with a packing needle and twine. Prawns, by the way, should never be towed behind the boat when under way, or they will soon die ; and to keep them in good and lively condition, put plenty of seaweed (bladder-wort for choice) into the *courge*, or basket, with them ; together with a piece of fish—or they will kill and eat one another. Dead or sickly prawns should be removed ; but don't throw them away, for the pollack is not quite so fastidious as the bass, and will sometimes take a dead prawn.

The method of inshore fishing for pollack with live prawn was described not very long ago by Mr. J. C. Wilcocks

in the *Fishing Gazette*, so there is no need to say much about it here. Float tackle was advised, fished from an anchored boat; but the author prefers the driftline, fished from a boat either drifting with the tide or rowed *very slowly*—considerably more so, in fact, than the regulation whiffing pace (which often, by the way, as practised by the average boatman, is too fast). By this means more ground can be covered; and if the depth be plumbed from time to time, and the running line be marked in fathoms, the angler will find that he will be able to judge pretty accurately, from the angle his line makes with the water, the depth at which the prawn is swimming, although to minimize the risk of fouling the “carpet” it is better not to allow the bait to get down much nearer the bottom than a fathom or so. (Speaking generally, where there is a choice between using float tackle and the driftline, the writer would plump for the latter every time, because it can so often be fished unleaded, and there is therefore a direct pull from bait to rod top, and one is on to the fish at once; whereas with float tackle one has to strike the angle caused by the float out of the line before one can hit the fish.) The prawn should be hooked through the second segment from the tail, *from side to side*, as recommended in the last Chapter.

When fishing with live prawn in deeper water for large pollack a short-shanked, square-bent hook, rather stouter in the wire than those used in bass fishing, should be employed. When using live sandeels the method of baiting (putting the hook in at the mouth and out of the gills of the eel) recommended by the late Mr. Wilcocks, and copied from him by most other writers on sea fishing, is not recommended, as the writer has found that when hooked in this way the sandeel does not live long; he much prefers to hook the bait through both lips,

from above downwards, using a square-bent hook. Both prawns and sandeels (particularly the former) are good baits for large pollack when used alive, especially in bright, clear water; they are decidedly most effective in easy tides and calm weather, for neither prawn nor sandeel will live long on the hook in a strong current, or if the boat be heaving about much in a tumbling sea.

Another method of angling for both coalfish and pollack is by whiffing—towing a bait behind a boat propelled very slowly either under sail or by oars; indeed to judge from one or two books on sea angling it is the principal way of catching these fish. Personally the present writer has very little use for it, as he considers it, as generally practised, an unsporting method of angling for sporting fish. In his opinion it is open to the following objections:—(1) It is generally necessary to employ a more or less heavily leaded line in order to get the bait down to the fish, the occasions on which it is possible to use an unleaded one, whether by reason of the shallowness of the water, or of the circumstance that the fish are near the surface, being the exception rather than the rule; (2) however careful the angler may be, and however good his knowledge of the ground he is fishing over, it is much more difficult for him to gauge exactly where his bait is than when he is fishing a sink and draw drift-line, properly marked, in water of which he knows the exact depth; and (3) he has not the same command over the hooked fish, for it is obvious that with a bait which is usually 20 or 30 yards behind the boat—if not more—and trailed pretty close to the bottom, it must often be much more difficult to prevent a fish getting to weed than when fishing a driftline. However, each angler to his taste; and if the novice decides that he would like to try whiffing by all means let him do so. It is hardly fair to his “Minchin” rod, if he has one, to use it

for this purpose ; unless indeed he takes care to keep the rod pointing well astern, so as to take the continuous strain of the leaded line off it. A better plan is to use a rod rather more stoutly built, if he possesses one ; although Heaven forbid that he should descend to the short, stiff rod recommended by some writers on the sport, for such a weapon robs the playing of the hooked fish of almost all its charm—and incidentally largely increases the chance of a smash, for it is unquestionably the spring and “ give ” of a good pollack rod, in the hands of a competent angler, which plays so large a part in the killing of the fish. The reel, running line and trace used will be similar to those employed when fishing the drift-line, but some form of release lead may be recommended, in order that it may be adjusted on the line somewhere from three to five fathoms away from the bait. There are several patterns of release lead on the market, but perhaps the well known one invented by Mr. H. E. Burlton—an accomplished pollack fisherman—is as effective and certain in its action as any. It has the advantage that it can be put on and taken off the line without removing the trace, and the slight drawback that a small loop, either tied in, or (a better method) neatly whipped to the running line, is necessary when using it. Other forms of release lead depend for their action on an adjustable wire loop fixed to the lead, or some similar device, or else on a rubber “ stop ” on the line—a principle which is quite an old one. Of these latter one may mention the “ Kilmore ” lead link, brought out by Messrs. Powell and Strickland some years ago, in regard to which an anonymous writer in the *Fishing Gazette* of May 24, 1913, claimed that pollack fishermen in particular would owe a debt of gratitude to the gentlemen named ; rather extravagant praise, in the present writer’s opinion, and probably emanating

from some one who had not had much experience of other and better leads. As a matter of actual fact all slipping leads which depend for their action on a rubber "stop" on the line suffer from the drawback that the lead is liable to slip if it happens to touch the bottom—not at all an unusual occurrence when whiffing, however careful the angler may be. However, if the novice decides for a lead worked with such a "stop" well and good; and in that case the present writer would recommend Mr. Burlton's "safety pin" lead, if the angler can get hold of one—the writer does not know whether it is on the market or not. It is a better lead than the "Kilmore," for with it the angler has a double chance of the lead resisting a slip when it fouls the bottom, and in addition, like Mr. Burlton's other release lead (previously mentioned), it can be put on and taken off the line without removing the trace. The writer's experience—such as it is—with release leads which depend for their working on an adjustable wire loop has not been a particularly happy one, and the general "cussedness" of things may usually be relied on to see to it that they will not slip properly when wanted, and *vice versa*; and it is rather trying to the temper, when one is reeling in a good fish, to find that when the lead reaches the end ring of the rod (where, in a small boat, it is often out of reach of the angler) it refuses obstinately to slip! Whatever type of lead the angler decides on, its actual weight of course will depend on the depth of the water, the strength and direction of the tide, and the depth at which the fish are feeding; so no hard and fast rule can be laid down. In general the angler will find that it pays best to get the bait as close to the bottom as he can with safety, although this is not always the case; because, as has been previously stated, both coalfish and pollack sometimes swim well off the ground. It is believed too that as a rule fish see

a bait which is above them better than one which is underneath, although it is quite possible that this may be a mistaken idea. Of whiffing baits there are many. Perhaps the rubber eel, in various colours—red, black, green, prawn coloured, and so on—is as commonly used as any. On some parts of the Cornish coast they keep the eel in milk when not in use, which is said to give it a peculiar sheen attractive to fish. It is a good plan too to dip it in pilchard oil, a useful little "tip" for which the writer is indebted to his friend Mr. Guy de Maupas. A phantom or a wagtail will also kill well, and the writer has heard of large takes of pollack made on a wagtail extravagantly painted in almost all the colours of the rainbow. As a general rule when whiffing with a rubber eel it is not necessary to employ a "last" of mackerel or herring on the hook, as it is when fishing this bait sink and draw on the driftline; although there are occasions when it will be found an additional attraction in tempting fish to bite. The tail of a small conger, or a small freshwater eel (*minus* the head), makes an excellent whiffing bait; and the latter in particular, put on the hook by being slit down the belly as far as the vent and neatly stitched up again round the hook, will be found, if properly adjusted, to spin with a wonderfully life-like and attractive action in the water. A Header or other spinning minnow too mounted with a single hook, and fished with a "last," makes a capital whiffing bait, and personally the writer is inclined to think the "Header," used in that way, as good an all round bait for pollack as any, especially if the water be rather thick. As regards natural baits, ragworms (if the angler can get them), mounted on the hook, two at a time, in the well known manner described in most of the books on sea fishing, will generally catch both coalfish and pollack. The writer confesses that such fish as he has caught in

this way have usually been under, rather than over, 5 lb. or so ; but he is told by friends who know more about this style of angling than he does that if good large worms be used big pollack may be taken by this method. A live prawn or live sandeel may also be fished with good effect from a moving boat, just as from an anchored one, but in that case—as mentioned previously—the pace of the boat must not be so fast (slow as that is, or rather *should be*) as when whiffing, or the bait will soon die ; and decidedly the pleasantest and most effective method of fishing either of these baits from a moving boat is to let the craft drift with the tide over suitable ground. Fishing inshore in this way the angler of course will often have a good chance of getting hold of a bass, as well as pollack.

A rather novel spinning tackle which has only recently been brought to the notice of sea anglers is likely to be very useful to the pollack fisherman, both for whiffing and also for driftline fishing from an anchored boat in a tideway. It is very simple, and consists of a pair of spinning flanges made of celluloid, but placed at the top of the trace instead of at the bait ; by this means one can spin a small brit, ragworm or even a plain “ last ” of mackerel—in fact almost any bait, natural or artificial. It should be useful in whiffing for bass or mackerel as well as in pollack fishing ; or even in ground fishing at anchor in a strong tideway ; in fact it will not be surprising if it proves very successful in sea angling generally.

Both coalfish and pollack may also be caught when ground fishing at anchor, and as a matter of fact some of the largest specimens of both species which have been taken at Ballycotton, Valentia and similar stations have been captured in this way ; but it is unnecessary of course to add that the short, stiff rod and heavy tackle which one has to use when bottom fishing on such ground

destroys almost all the charm of such a capture. Of the two species, the writer (although he confesses he does not know a great deal about him) thinks the coalfish is perhaps the more omnivorous of the two, and at times hardly any bait—he is particularly fond of mussel—seems to come amiss to him. Whether he will take lugworm or not the writer does not know; but the pollack will not. A slice of garfish is an excellent bait for both pollack and coalfish, but it is not always that the angler can get hold of it.

And now let us suppose that our novice has hooked his coalfish or his pollack; what sort of a fight does the fish put up? This is a question upon which, so far as the pollack is concerned, considerable difference of opinion seems to prevail among sea anglers. One friend of the writer's, indeed—like the bass fisherman referred to in the last Chapter—has gone so far as to state boldly that in his opinion pollack are vermin. A libel, brethren of the sea angle—a gross libel on a gallant fish! A fairly common view is that which one frequently hears expressed in the phrase “One rush, and it's all over!” In one sense indeed this is often true, although not quite in that usually meant by the speaker; for if the angler follows the ridiculous advice given by one or two writers on the sport, and attempts to “hold” his fish, he will find himself, when dealing with large pollack, “busted” pretty frequently. The present writer has a very shrewd suspicion that one or two sea anglers of his acquaintance whose names he could mention have had this experience a good many more times than they have chosen to admit; although it is rather curious, by the way, that some anglers appear to speak almost with pride of having been “broken” by fish, whereas as a matter of fact it is only too often a sign of bad handling on their part. In the author's opinion a considerable

amount of rubbish on this subject of "holding" pollack has been written in some of the books on sea fishing, and it is curious to notice that in this, as in a good many other matters connected with the sport, one writer seems to have followed another, for all the world like a flock of sheep. Let the novice then, on hooking his pollack, snub him, check him, make him fight hard for every inch of line he takes—and with a long, powerful, springy rod like the "Minchin" it is wonderful how well the furious downward rush of a big fish can be checked and stopped; but to attempt to "hold" a pollack in his first rush is not only *very bad fishing*, but (in the case of a large one) practically impossible, and nine times out of ten spells disaster. It may be perhaps a matter of the personal equation again, but it would be better to lose twenty fish in the weeds than have one either tear himself free or smash the gear through being held too hard.

On the whole, perhaps because he has always been particularly fond of pollack fishing, the writer is inclined to take a rather higher view of the fighting powers of this bronze sided warrior than the average sea angler, although he does not of course claim that the fish has the staying power of the bass; he has noticed too, or so he fancies, in the course of a day's angling, that the fighting capacity of different individual fish of about the same size has varied appreciably. In a general way however he considers that the pollack forms a rather striking exception to the well known rule that it is usually the moderate sized fish, rather than the very large ones, which give the best sport. The writer's experience has almost invariably been that the bigger a pollack the harder he fights. There are few sensations in the sea angler's life (so far as our waters are concerned) which can compare with that produced by the mighty downward plunge of a large pollack. It is simply gorgeous, and

is usually the first thing the angler realizes after he has hooked the fish; although curiously enough, when fishing in the sink and draw fashion previously described, the writer—like other sea anglers—has on occasions had the experience of a big fish which has hung, a dead weight in the water, while one could count perhaps five; leading to a suspicion, momentary but horrible, of the "carpet." But the downward rush has always followed.

A rather interesting point is as to how the play of a large pollack compares with that of a coalfish of equal size. On this question the writer feels that he has not had sufficient experience with big coalfish to enable him to judge fairly between the two species, for so far he has only caught one over 15 lb. in weight, taken at Ballycotton—but alas, on the heavy bottom tackle. He is told however by fellow members of the British Sea Anglers' Society who know more about the fish than he does that the coalfish runs more, and does not plunge so much for the weeds as the pollack. The writer is quite content to accept this view; but with the smaller fish, say up to 10 lb. in weight, his experience has been, when catching coalfish and pollack indiscriminately on the driftline (and in some seasons this has been a fairly common experience at Ballycotton), that there was no appreciable difference between the play of the two fish, and it was quite impossible to tell, until the hooked fish was actually seen, to which species it belonged. In playing either fish, by the way, if he *should* get to weed the angler should keep a steady strain on him for two or three minutes, without relaxing the pressure at all. If this does not bring him out the best plan is to slack away some fathoms of line and put the rod down for a little while; sometimes this will induce the fish to come out, and in that case the angler *may* get him. Failing this, there is usually nothing for it

but a break ; for the clearing ring, as a rule, is not of much use in pollack fishing unless one can get the boat directly over the fish (when fishing from an anchored boat, this can sometimes be done by letting out more cable). But in most cases the angler will find that a fish which gets badly weeded will succeed in making good his escape.

As a final word about these two grand fighters the writer would say that he is inclined to think the good coalfish and pollack fisherman is born, not made ; and if the sea angler does not possess the gift of " hands," and especially if he be of the " organ-grinding " variety, he may be counselled not to attempt to catch them at all but to confine himself to pouting, a fish which he will find will suit his peculiar methods very much better.

CHAPTER VII

GREY MULLET

THE next on the list of sporting fish to be considered is the grey mullet ; to which, as was hinted in a previous Chapter, a good many other sea anglers would doubtless assign a higher place in the list. The writer confesses frankly that he approaches the subject of mullet fishing with a good deal of diffidence, for it is one of which he has had only a little experience ; although the cynic would no doubt say that that need be no drawback to writing about it in a learned and authoritative style ! He therefore will have to rely largely for his facts on the experience of his friends and on what has been written by others on the subject. The latter, as has been remarked before, is a habit not unknown among writers on sea angling, so that in indulging in it the writer feels that after all he is in very good company.

One of the chief essentials for the mullet fisherman is a very large stock of patience, and unless he possesses this the angler may safely be advised to leave this wary and elusive fish severely alone ; but if he has made up his mind to try mullet fishing perhaps the soundest advice the writer can give him is to put himself, if he can, under the tuition of some expert mullet angler and learn by his practical instruction and guidance the best way to go to work ; for the grey mullet, as a rule, is a difficult fish to catch (perhaps *the* most difficult of all our common British sea fish), and of all

classes of sea anglers the habitual and experienced mullet fisherman is perhaps as expert a specialist as any. The writer once assisted in the capture of a mullet not far short of 4 lb. which was landed by a friend on a thick twisted gut paternoster *with booms* (and reeled up to the net, by the way, very much like a whiting, with little or no playing of the fish); but this was no doubt an accident—and an accident of a rather exasperating kind to an expert mullet angler, if one had chanced to be present to see the performance. Somewhat akin to this experience is a story which the writer has heard (and believes to be true) of a number of fine mullet which on one occasion were landed, one after the other, from the steps of a harbour by a lad who was using a handline and fishing with a whiting hook mounted on ordinary snooding, and baited with mackerel roe.

There are a good many different species of grey mullet scattered over the world, but not more than three—*mugil capito*, the thin lipped, *mugil chelo*, the thick lipped, and *mugil auratus*, which has a golden spot on the gill covers—are to be found in our seas; and it seems to be doubtful whether the last named is really British. Probably the thick lipped species occurs most frequently. Mullet are common in the summer and early autumn on the South, South East and South West coasts of both England and Ireland, but farther North their presence is more uncertain, although they have been caught on the Yorkshire coast and in various parts of Scotland; while in summer time the thick lipped species is said to be fairly common as far North as the Orkneys. They are usually found pretty close to the coast, and are very fond of estuaries, harbours and docks; while they often ascend rivers far above tidal waters, and there is no doubt that, like bass, they are greatly attracted by fresh water. They grow to a good size, and in the rooms of the British Sea Anglers' Society in Fetter Lane may be seen a stuffed

specimen of the thin lipped kind which weighed 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. This particular fish was caught in a net at Pagham Harbour, Sussex, in 1906, while several of the thick lipped species nearly as large have also been captured at the same place. But the angler who catches one over 5 lb. may consider himself lucky, and the average weight of his fish will probably be a good deal less.

The rod the angler may be advised to use will be No. 2 in the writer's list if this be a trout spinning rod—for a fly rod, although excellent for playing the fish, is too slow for the quick strike which is required. If the angler be a freshwater fisherman a roach rod (ringed of course) may be recommended as an appropriate weapon; while in fishing from rocks or breakwaters a long rod is often useful, as it enables one to keep out of sight. A 5-in. or 6-in. reel is advisable, for the mullet, like the bass, will often double on his tracks at the end of a rush, and therefore a reel with a quick winding capacity is desirable. A fine silk running line is the best to use, and the trace should be a fine gut one, from 6 ft. to 9 ft. in length, connected to the reel line by a small swivel. Two or more hooks have been recommended by some authorities, but personally the writer would now never think of using more than one, for he remembers some years ago seeing a very fine mullet lost through the second hook which the angler was using fouling the landing net. A No. 4 or No. 5 hook is about the size to use for the larger fish, but this may sometimes be reduced with advantage; while a good many mullet fishermen swear by a small triangle—indeed with some baits (for instance, boiled macaroni, or the rotten fish gut which is *de rigueur* in some harbours) a triangle is decidedly the best. A taper float, some large split shot, and a little lead wire will complete the angler's tackle outfit.

One shot should be placed about a foot from the hook.

and the rest about 18 in. higher up. In quite slack water a small float (the smaller the better) and a very few shot will be sufficient, but in a run of tide a larger float is advisable, to allow of the use of more lead. For this purpose of course lead wire is very handy, for it can be put on and taken off the trace with the minimum of trouble. In Portland Harbour—which used to be a famous place for mullet fishing—the writer believes it is usual to fish at depths varying from one to six feet, and in fine weather there is little doubt that good sport could be had by fishing an unleaded, unswivelled driftline on the surface but for one thing—the difficulty in striking; for on calm days mullet may often be seen on the surface nosing about among floating food. Ground bait, or to speak more correctly, floating bait, is necessary, not only to attract the fish, but to keep them near the angler. Mr. W. K. Summers, an acknowledged authority on mullet fishing, recommends soaked bread, bran, boiled potato or cabbage stalk for this purpose if paste be the bait, and chopped fish or roe when the bait is fish. The hook baits for mullet are many and various; paste, ragworms, putrid fish and fat, boiled cabbage stump, bananas, macaroni, bread flavoured with marmalade, and so on. One successful mullet fisherman the writer has heard of swears by uncooked sausage meat, a bait with which he generally takes a number of good mullet every season; it has the advantage (with its attendant drawback) that small particles are continually washing off the hook, and these naturally attract the fish. At Margate, where a large number of fine mullet have been taken underneath the end of the jetty by Mr. Daunou and other anglers in years gone by, the bait generally used was paste dipped in sugar. The writer has no personal knowledge on the point, but he is told that with the closing of the restaurant at the end of the jetty during the war most of the mullet deserted this

spot, although he has been glad to see that since the peace they have again been taken there. At Portland excellent sport used to be obtainable, at times, by fishing from some of the moored lighters and hulks, around which mullet were often to be seen browsing on their weed covered sides and bottoms. Here the float was discarded, the tip of the rod being allowed to rest on the edge of the boat, with the point overhanging it about nine inches; and the angler had to judge from the movements of the rod top the precise moment when to strike. This fishing of course was not available during the war, and the writer understands that the craft in question have now been moved, so that for the time being, at any rate, it is not possible.

A difficulty which the novice will probably be up against in all mullet fishing is to determine exactly when to strike. When one is float fishing the movements of the float when fish are around the bait are often very tantalizing and perplexing, for the mullet does not bite in the way that most fish do, but "noses" and sucks at the bait; and the angler must make up his mind beforehand that for one successful strike there will be a good many failures. As far as the writer's rather limited experience goes, the angler has the best chance of hooking the fish when he can strike by sight. This is very interesting fishing, but of course it is not always possible. The comparatively few mullet the writer has landed have mostly been caught in this way, fishing in the early morning from a whaleboat at her moorings in Ballycotton harbour. The writer has found it most fascinating when, peering cautiously over the gunwale, he has watched the movements of the fish, nosing at the bait hanging in the water some six or eight feet below him. The lure which has generally proved most successful there is four or five day old mackerel or herring gut—a truly pernicious bait to handle and put on the hook, especially on an empty

stomach ! It is usually necessary to smoke, and to smoke hard, during the process, so as to kill the awful smell ; but if this be done it is a good plan to put on an old pair of gloves while filling one's pipe, in order that the smell of the tobacco from the fingers may not taint the bait ! In all harbour fishing, by the way, the early morning is decidedly the best time ; for the mullet is a very shy and timid fish, and with the commencement of boat traffic the fun, such as it is, is soon over.

Some authorities on the sport speak of taking mullet on the fly, among those recommended being a tinselled Coachman and an Alexandra ; and sunset is stated to be the best time. The writer however, although he has a fairly extensive acquaintance among sea anglers, has yet to meet one who has actually caught one of these fish in this way.

In playing the mullet the angler may be warned that he will have to exercise great caution, or he will lose the fish. Its mouth is very tender, and consequently the hook hold is often insecure. If the fish be one of the thick lipped kind, and hooked in the lip, the angler will have the best chance of landing it ; but in both species the membrane behind the lip is very soft, and if the hook be in this part it is almost as liable to tear out of it as easily as it would out of wet blotting paper. The angler must therefore be very " tender " with the fish, while at the same time always keeping a tight line—the latter of course a golden rule when playing all kinds of fish ; and the mullet should not be permitted to approach the landing net until it is thoroughly played out. If it be of any size the fish will usually make several rushes before it is exhausted, and will frequently take out a good deal of line ; although, conversely, the writer has assisted in the capture of a 3-lb. mullet which was into the net within considerably less than half a minute after it was hooked. This

particular fish did not run, but spent all its energy in twisting over and over very rapidly on the surface, very much in the same way that the writer many years ago has occasionally seen a grayling behave on the hook. As a general rule however the mullet puts up a very good fight, and in playing the fish it is a good plan to keep him as much as possible away from the boat, pier, or other standpoint from which the angler is fishing; for mullet are particularly quick to take advantage of any obstruction round which they can take the line. The writer has seen more than one good fish lost through getting round the boat's mooring rope; in fact this is one of the disadvantages of fishing from a boat at her moorings in a harbour, for in such circumstances the rope is often one of the first things the hooked fish will make for.

CHAPTER VIII

BLACK BREAM

THE next fish on the list—the black bream—is one which is a great favourite with all sea anglers who are fond of sporting fishing. It is not very widely distributed round our coast, and like some other British sea fish, not very much is known of its life history. It has been assumed that the black bream is a fish which inhabits fairly deep water for most part of the year, only approaching our Southern shores to spawn in the spring of the year. This is undoubtedly true of the Sussex fish. They are however taken on some parts of the coast of Anglesea, and sometimes on the Cornish coast. In both localities, the writer believes, they are at times caught without fully developed roes. A year or two ago a friend of his took one on fish bait (mackerel) at Beer, South Devon, in August, and if he had had other baits to offer would probably have landed more—for the black bream, like the red, is gregarious, and swims in shoals. The captured fish weighed about 2 lb., and was in fine condition, but without fully developed roe. The writer has heard rumours of these fish at one or two places on the Irish coast and elsewhere, but so far he has been unable to verify them; and he will feel grateful to any reader who will send him particulars of any authentic capture of black bream upon any part of the coast of these islands—apart, that is, from the well known spring fishing for them off the shores of Sussex. Any reader who com-

plies with this request is asked to state the place and date of capture, the depth of the water (and whether the fish was taken actually on the bottom or higher up), the bait used, the weight and condition (and if possible, the sex) of the fish, and whether with or without fully developed roe.

It is however on the coast of Sussex, in the spring and early summer, that these fish are to be met with in greatest abundance ; and it is a matter of much regret that there the black bream season is so short, for it provides the sea angler with some pretty sport which, coming as it does when there is not very much doing in other directions—for it is usually just a little too early in the year for bass—is doubly welcome on that account. The Sovereign rocks (off Eastbourne), Brighton, Shoreham, Worthing, the Kingmer rocks (off Littlehampton), and Bognor are all places where black bream may be fished for at this time ; and as all are within easy reach of London, and the sport comes at a time when these towns are usually not very crowded with visitors, as they are later on in the year, the black bream fishing season, short as it is, comes as a godsend to Londoners and South Country sea anglers generally. The first fish is generally taken in the trammel nets at Bognor some time in April, but they are not usually thick enough to make it worth while to fish for them before May, and in an average year the last week of that month is generally about the best. After that sport usually goes off pretty soon, for from a month to six weeks generally represents the extent of the angling season.

In size the black bream does not run quite so large as the red, which on some parts of our coast sometimes attains a weight of 5 lb., or even a little more. The average weight per fish of a catch of black bream in an ordinary year will probably be nearer $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. than 2 lb., while the



Photo, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Murray, Bognor.

A GOOD CATCH OF BLACK BREEM AT BOGNOR.

bag will usually contain a few from 2 lb. to 3 lb. apiece ; 4 lb. is about the maximum weight which the fish attains, and in an average year one or two specimens of that size are generally taken.

The novice who wishes to angle for these fish in as sporting a way as possible may be recommended strongly to fish at Bognor, for there the conditions—at any rate as regards some of the marks which it is customary to fish on the flood tide—are as nearly ideal as one can get them, the comparatively shallow water and easy tides often enabling one to fish a driftline without any lead at all. At Brighton, Shoreham and Worthing the deeper water and stronger tides render the use of more or less lead necessary, for the fish usually swim and feed fairly close to the bottom—generally within a fathom or so of the rocks ; while at the Kingmer ground, off Littlehampton (which is some seven miles out to sea), the tides are so strong that the writer is told by friends who have fished there that at neap tides about 4 oz. of lead is necessary, and at springs one has difficulty in keeping the bait close to the bottom with as much as 12 oz. ; and it goes without saying, of course, that the use of so much lead for such a comparatively small fish as the black bream absolutely destroys all sporting fishing. At the Sovereign rocks too (which also are some distance out at sea) tides run pretty strongly ; and personally the writer would never think of fishing for black bream anywhere than at Bognor. He is not quite sure, by the way, whether he is right in saying that the fish may be taken at the Sovereign rocks, but if this be incorrect he will be very glad to be put right on the point.

The black bream is rather a shy fish, and it is therefore necessary to get the bait well away from the boat when one is fishing in such shallow water as that at Bognor ; and there are practically only two ways of doing this—

the driftline and float tackle, of which the writer (unless the tide be very slack) decidedly prefers the former.

The rod which the angler may be advised to use for driftlining will be of course No. 2 in the list; and if this be a fly rod so much the better, because, as previously remarked when dealing with mackerel, the angler will get a good deal more fun out of his fishing. Some one has recently complained that a fly rod does not give one sufficient control over the hooked fish; but a good deal depends of course on the man behind the rod. The worst of a fly rod, as has been stated before, is that it is slow in the strike; but the angler can get over this difficulty by striking the fish in the way recommended in Chapter IV. The running line should not be too fine, for in fishing without lead one can get the bait down to the fish better if the line be rather on the heavy side; at the same time of course it must not be too heavy for comfortable fishing with such a light and whippy tool as a fly rod. A little dodge which the writer has sometimes practised, when using a fine running line, is to "marry" about three or four feet of pretty thick line to the end of it, followed by about a fathom of fine silk line, and then by the swivel and trace. This materially helps to get the bait down to the right depth, and plays the part of a light lead, in fact, without causing that undesirable angle in the line which any lead, however light, brings about to a greater or less extent. The running line should be marked in fathoms, commencing, say, at three. The swivel connecting the line and trace should be a fair sized one; or perhaps two smaller swivels linked together is better still. The trace should be as long as one can comfortably fish with the rod used. The writer's favourite weapon for this fishing is 10 feet 6 inches in length, and with this rod he finds that a trace of 10 feet is about as long as can be fished conveniently; indeed unless the landing net used has a fairly

long handle (always a considerable convenience) it is better to employ a trace a foot or so shorter. The trace should be composed of either gut-substitute ("stout trout" size) or gut. One or two authorities on this fishing (Mr. Ivan J. H. Boyton is one of them) recommend the use of a wire boom between the running line and trace, for the purpose of carrying any lead which may be required; but there is really no necessity for this, besides which it complicates the tackle and renders it more conspicuous. Any lead which may be required (it will rarely exceed an ounce in weight) can be put on the running line itself; either some lead wire can be twisted round it, or a small lead of the kind recommended for driftline fishing for pollack may be used. The hook used should be a fair sized one (a No. 1 will be about right) with as long a shank as one can get, so as to carry the lugworm, which is the staple bait for these fish at Bognor, as comfortably as possible. When the fish are very shy it is not at all a bad plan to construct a sort of Stewart tackle by making a second (and smaller) hook fast to the trace just above the eye of the other, although the angler will probably find this arrangement unpopular with his boatman, who will usually succeed in pricking his fingers when unhooking the fish. With this exception, the writer is a strong believer in one hook; for as the bream makes a number of dashes when hooked, and the fishing is all done over (and fairly close to) rocky reefs which are pretty irregular in contour and covered with weed, there is always the possibility of the second hook fouling the bottom while one is playing a fish—a very annoying and disconcerting occurrence. Mr. C. O. Minchin recommends the angler to get into the stern of the boat when fishing for black bream; but in practice it will be found that this is a mistake. It is much more convenient to relegate the boatman to the stern, where he can net the fish more comfortably; the

anglers, if there be two (and more than two cannot fish together for black bream in a small boat with any degree of comfort), working their driftlines, one on either side of the boat, from the 'midships and forward thwarts respectively, and sitting of course facing the stern.

In the writer's opinion, the use of ground bait (as in driftline fishing for mackerel) is so beneficial that it may fairly be said to be necessary to success. The chief ingredient of the ground bait employed at Bognor used to be spider crab, pounded up small, thrown overboard, and allowed to stream away with the tide; and at one time there was no difficulty there in getting these crabs, for they were quite common, and often taken in the trammel nets in considerable numbers. A few winters ago however a very severe frost in the early part of the year killed practically all of them, and since then anglers have often experienced a good deal of difficulty in getting ground bait in sufficient quantities on the spot. For this reason the novice who intends to fish at Bognor will find it a good plan to make arrangements to have a sufficient supply of shell-fish (mussels for choice) for ground bait sent to his boatman from elsewhere a day or two beforehand. If our novice be a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society he will be able to obtain from their headquarters in Fetter Lane particulars as to where mussels may be bought for this purpose. As in the case of mackerel fishing too pilchard oil may be used with advantage; but when one is after black bream it is better to tie the sponge fairly close to the lead at the end of the line, which should be suspended from the bows of the boat, with the lead resting on the bottom.

If the angler be fishing at Bognor he may be advised to choose the period of spring tides for his expedition, for then he will be able to fish the early morning flood. Most of the Bognor grounds—such as Holly Hole, Luff

Bucknall and the South West Corner—fish best on the flood tide. There is no doubt that, other things being equal, one has the best chance of catching these rather shy fish before the sun is high in the sky, especially if the water be clear ; besides which, as a general rule, one does not find the fishing grounds so crowded with anchored boats in the early morning as they are later on in the day, when sometimes there are so many boats engaged in "breaming" that it is not easy to get a good berth with a clear run of water astern of one. As has been remarked before, tides are easy at Bognor, and consequently one can fish there at springs with comfort.

When fishing the driftline the first (and indeed the only) difficulty is to get the bait down to the exact depth at which the fish are swimming. Usually this will be about a fathom from the bottom, but it may sometimes be a good deal less, and occasionally rather more. The angler's first care, as in all driftline fishing, should be to plumb the depth accurately. This will give him a very good idea as to how much line he should pay out as a start, although it may be remarked, by the way, that the 45° rule does not hold good when black bream fishing ; the ideal angle is a good deal narrower—say 20° or even less. If he does not get fish the angler should pay out more line, a yard or so at a time, until he strikes them, or else either fouls the bottom or catches wrasse or small pouting—a sign that his bait is too low, and must come up again a little. The bait in fact should be worked a little, sink and draw fashion ; although not of course to anything like the same extent as when driftlining for pollack, or the angler will soon find the bottom.

As a matter of fact it is quite likely that the novice will lose a trace or two in the "carpet" before he finds the bream, for sometimes they swim pretty close to the rocks ; and as the formation of the ground is rather irregular this

is an accident which may well happen, and often does, to the most skilful and experienced sea angler, so that the novice should not allow himself to be discouraged by it. After he has caught his first bream at that particular berth, however, he will usually find that he will lose no more gear—unless of course he is looking for trouble by using two hooks on his trace.

It is unnecessary, by the way, to remind the angler that in letting out line while endeavouring to find the fish he must keep a watchful eye on the fathom marks on the running line, so that he will be able to tell, at the particular moment when the first bream bite comes along, exactly how much line is out; because otherwise of course he will have the work to do all over again after landing his first fish, and this means an unnecessary waste of time. At the start, and for some time after, the ground bait should be plied vigorously, especially if there are a good many other boats around. The writer thinks this is very important. More than once he has had the experience of seeing a boat near him getting fish for some time after he had begun angling, while he was sitting without a bite; and it was not until a good deal of ground bait had been put overboard that the bream were attracted from the other boat's "swim" to his own. This does not sound particularly sportsmanlike, by the way, and as a matter of fact it is perhaps difficult to defend the practice on purely ethical grounds; but the writer (although he hopes he is a great stickler for sportsmanlike behaviour on all occasions when one is angling) thinks that in this instance it is legitimate. At any rate it is a very sound practice from the point of view of the bag. After the bream have been found, and as long as they continue to bite, the ground bait should be used more sparingly, only just sufficient being put overboard to keep the fish together; but if the bites cease after a time the writer thinks that as

a general rule it is a good plan, if one has a sufficient supply of ground bait, to try the effect of another liberal application of it before making a shift and taking up a fresh berth. The black bream, as has been remarked before, is gregarious and swims in shoals; but the writer is disposed to think that the shoal is often rather a small one, and does not comprise many fish. And if this view be correct it is obvious of course that it is quite possible for the angler to fish a shoal out, in which case he must endeavour to attract another to his "swim." This is a point however in regard to which, as indeed in most matters connected with sea angling, it is rather unsafe to dogmatize, on account of that uncertainty which is undoubtedly one of the great charms of the sport. The writer is told, for instance, that in the black bream season of 1919 at Bognor it was the experience of most of those who fished there—he was not among the number—that the fish were more scattered than usual, and not so confined to the various marks as in previous years. There is one little matter, by the way, connected with the use of ground bait which is of great importance. The novice should see to it that a good supply of this is smashed up in the boat *while on the way out to the grounds*, instead of leaving this to be done until after the killick is overboard—which is the usual practice. In such shallow water as that at Bognor the continuous pounding up of ground bait which often goes on is very bad from a fishing point of view. As the boatman will probably be engaged in rowing the boat it follows that the novice, if he takes the writer's advice in this matter, will have to do the smashing up of the ground bait himself; and if this consists of spider crab he will find it very good exercise for the arms! It is quite likely that the boatman will object that it is an entirely unnecessary precaution; but the angler should insist, politely but firmly, on having his own way in the matter. As a

general rule the amateur sea angler will find that he can learn a good deal from the professional fisherman. The writer would be one of the first to acknowledge this, for he has picked up many a useful wrinkle in this way. But there are some points connected with the sport in regard to which the amateur can occasionally teach the professional something; and this matter of exercising great caution and quietness in a boat, *especially when fishing in shallow water*, is one of them.

The bite of the black bream is stated by one writer to be a "gentle nibble." This is a statement which is not by any means invariably accurate, although as applied to some occasions it is correct enough. The fact is of course that in the case of black bream, as with most other sea fish, a good deal depends on the particular mood in which they may happen to be. The writer has known occasions, for instance—and no doubt other sea anglers who have fished at Bognor have had the same experience—when the fish have been biting very vigorously, and generally hooking themselves, without the necessity of any strike on the part of the angler. On such days it will sometimes be found that if one puts the rod down for a few moments (and it is curious how that simple action often seems to provoke a bite, not only in black bream fishing, but in a good many other kinds of sea angling also) a fish will pull five or six inches of line off the reel against a fairly strong check, causing a screech which reminds one, on a smaller scale, of the good old fashioned pollack snatch which often gladdened one's heart in the old days, when fishing a stationary driftline. As far as the writer's recollection goes however he has not had this experience when black bream fishing since 1914, or thereabouts; and in more recent years, on the whole, he thinks the "gentle nibble" has been the rule rather than the exception—which rather leads one to imagine that the fish may

perhaps be becoming somewhat more educated than they used to be. This touches the fringe of a subject of course as wide as it is fascinating ; in regard to which however it is rather unprofitable to theorize, at any rate in the present state of our knowledge. But it does not seem impossible to conceive that if it be the habit of successive generations of black bream always to resort to the same reefs at Bognor when they come inshore every spring to spawn, the intensive fishing which now goes on there during the short angling season would tend, in course of time, to produce a race of fish more educated and wary than their forefathers ; thus reproducing in the sea a process which, as all anglers know, has been going on in most of our over fished fresh waters for a great number of years. That however is rather by the way ; let us get back to our immediate subject—the bite of the black bream.

Assuming it to be one of the “gentle nibbles,” the angler is advised to be on his guard against striking too soon, although the temptation to do so is sometimes rather a strong one. Contrary to the advice he has given in the case of driftline fishing for pollack, the writer thinks it is much better in such circumstances to wait a bit before trying to hit the hook into the fish ; and a little tip which he has sometimes found pays very well is to let out a little more line, slowly and gradually, at the first sign of a touch. This often seems to induce the fish to take hold of the bait properly, and when they are very shy the angler will generally find that it is well worth trying.

If the novice be at Holly Hole, he will usually find that he will be able to fish the whole of the flood without lead ; but at the other marks generally fished on that tide, which are farther out, a little lead will probably be required. When the tide is so far done that it is no longer sufficient to carry the line away properly from the boat driftline fishing of course is at an end ; and then is the

time to try float tackle, which in order to save time it is just as well to have all ready to one's hand (as a matter of fact both rods should be rigged up while on the way out to the grounds, the anglers, if there be two of them, taking it in turns—one to put his tackle together and the other to smash up the ground bait).

As in the case of float fishing for mackerel, the rod used should of course be stiffer than for the driftline, as one often has to strike the fish a good distance away from the boat; and the rings must also be of sufficient size to allow the rubber "stop" to pass freely through them. The running line should be of silk, well greased with animal fat, to make it float—in fact, the tackle may be exactly the same as that recommended in Chapter IV for float fishing for mackerel, except that one hook only should be used. The depth should be carefully plumbed again before adjusting the float "stop" and beginning to fish; for it will be of course a good deal deeper by this time than it was at the commencement of the flood. If the angler has a fairly accurate idea of the exact depth at which the fish have been taking his bait on the driftline, the "stop" should be so adjusted that the bait will swim as nearly at that depth as possible; but failing this it should be tried first at about three feet from the bottom. The angler should endeavour to pay out line as smoothly and evenly as possible—if the line be well "fatted," it will be found that this will be a material help in preventing the wet line from clinging to the rings of the rod when it is being paid out—and there must be of course no slack line from rod top to float, or one cannot strike properly. Indeed, however careful he may be in this respect the angler will probably find that he will have a difficulty in striking the fish when the float is some distance away from the boat, especially if they are biting shyly; although it will often be found that they bite more

boldly at a bait which is travelling, as it should be when one is float fishing, at an even pace with the tide. (However assiduous one may be in working the bait, it is of course impossible to achieve this result to any great extent when one is driftlining.) A danger which the novice must be on the alert to guard against when float fishing is a slack line *after the strike*. When the float is a good way from the boat it is often necessary to bring the rod well back over the shoulder in order to hit the hook into the fish, and the writer has seen more than one angler lose bream after bream by dropping the point of the rod and thus slacking the line. The angler should train himself to start reeling in line quickly while the rod is in the backward position and before bringing it forward again, so as to keep a tight line the whole time.

The local fishermen tell one that at the marks mentioned bream can only be caught on the flood tide ; but the writer has caught them on float tackle when the tide has been setting well in towards the shore—which it usually does before it starts to run Westward—and indeed for some little time after the ebb has actually begun to run ; and one of these days he intends to try the experiment of fishing the ebb tide through on Holly Hole. The usual practice, if the angler wants to fish both tides, is to move to a mark farther Westward—such as the Pollard—where the fish take on the ebb. The ebb tide however runs more strongly there, so that a good deal more lead will be wanted, and consequently the sport is not nearly so enjoyable.

There are other places along the South coast where black bream may be caught during the season ; but Bognor easily takes the palm for sporting fishing. At Brighton, Worthing and other places where the fish are to be met with the water, generally speaking, is deeper and the tides stronger, so that one has to use a good deal more lead to get the bait down to the bottom—and that spoils

the fun. If there be any other place round our coast where such sporting fishing as that at Bognor may be had the writer will be very glad to hear of it; for in recent years the fishing has become much more popular than it used to be, and consequently some of the Bognor marks are often rather uncomfortably crowded during the black bream season. At Brighton and other places, by the way, mackerel and mussel are the favourite baits, and they usually do better than lugworm.

In playing the fish, no special directions need be given the novice. The black bream, for his size, is a fine sporting fish, and fights hard, generally right up to the net. He does not take out a lot of line in a long run, but makes a number of dashes; and the angler, if using the light tackle recommended by the writer, will find that he will have to give line to the fish time after time. The cock fish fight appreciably harder than the hens; but when the cocks appear in any numbers it is a sign, so the local fishermen say, that the all too short season is drawing to its close.

CHAPTER IX

RED BREAM

AND now we come to the last on the list of our smaller sporting British sea fish, the red bream—a fish in regard to which, as the author has remarked previously, he had serious doubts about including it in the list at all. The red bream is admittedly not such a good fighter as the black; but the fact of the matter is that almost every one of our common British sea fish can be transformed into a sporting fish, or something very much like it, when one can angle for him with light tackle and an unleaded or lightly leaded line. In June, 1919, for instance, the writer was catching codling up to about 5 lb. apiece on live prawn, fished with a fly rod and unleaded driftline from a very slowly moving boat, and having great fun with them—sport as different from that to be had with similar fish when angled for from an anchored boat in a strong tide at such a place as Deal, for example, as chalk is from cheese.

Speaking generally, the angler who wants to catch red bream must go West for them, for these fish are very rare on the East coast, while on the South they are not often taken East of the Isle of Wight. The mature fish are always found on rocky ground, and they are sometimes rather a nuisance to the pollack fisherman, just as wrasse are to the angler who is after bass. Red bream are common in Devon and Cornish waters, and they are often

very plentiful on the rocky grounds practically all round the Irish coast. Clovelly used to be a famous place for them, and in years gone by some remarkably large specimens, several of which were over 5 lb. and at least one over 6 lb. in weight, have been taken there by members of the British Sea Anglers' Society ; but a great drawback is that the tides, as is generally the case along that particular coast, run very strongly, so that sporting fishing is difficult. The Old Wall Reef, off Falmouth, is another well known spot for these fish, and large ones are sometimes taken there ; while as the water is not very deep it is possible during the neap tides to fish there under fairly sporting conditions.

It sometimes happens that when the angler is bottom fishing for large fish in deep water and on rough ground a shoal of red bream comes along ; this is a fairly common occurrence in Cornish and Irish waters. In such circumstances of course sporting fishing is impossible. But it is often worth while—if only to use them as bait for the larger fish—to catch a few bream ; and if the angler decides to do this the tackle he may be recommended to use is a three hook paternoster of fairly fine wire—the material and gauge previously advised for the wire pollack trace will do very well—and the hook, which should be about a No. 1 or No. 2, should be mounted on a short snood made of the same substance ; not as a protection against the teeth of the bream, but as some sort of safeguard in the not unlikely event of spur dogfish taking their place. The lead should be a fairly heavy one, in order to get the tackle to the bottom quickly, and the baits may be small strips of the mackerel or herring which the angler will probably be using on his heavy tackle. With this gear it will sometimes be possible to haul up bream two and sometimes three at a time while the shoal remains—although this, as a rule, will not be for

very long ; for the angler will either fish it out or else, as probably more usually happens, the bream will be frightened away by other and larger fish. It cannot by any possibility be described as sporting fishing ; but it helps to fill the fish box, and as previously mentioned, it will provide the angler with some fresh bait. In fact it is often worth while, when one is on such ground, to keep a rod and tackle all ready rigged up for the purpose, so as to save the waste of time in getting it ready when the bream come round.

The angler however who wants—as it is to be hoped he does—to catch these fish in a sporting way will go to work in very different fashion. To begin with, he will choose a ground—not always a very easy matter—where tides are moderate, and the water not too deep. Ten fathoms may be looked upon as about the limit, and if it be rather shallower than this so much the better ; and as a general rule he will set out on his bream catching expedition somewhere about the time when a good many other sea anglers are thinking of returning to harbour—that is to say, in time to arrive on the ground about an hour before sunset. The fish, it is true, may be caught in this way during the daytime ; but other things being equal, and especially in bright, sunny weather and clear water, the angler will usually find that he will do much better during the evening and at night. The tackle he may be advised to use will be that previously recommended for driftline fishing for black bream, and if he has the choice between a fly rod and a trout spinning rod he should certainly use the former ; for with such a rod, as has been remarked more than once before, one can get more fun out of the fishing. Moreover the red bream, when he bites at all, generally does so boldly, so that the difficulty of striking him with such a rod does not arise ; in fact it will often be found that he strikes himself.

Contrary to his practice when fishing for black bream, the writer likes two hooks ; of which the second, as in the case of driftline fishing for mackerel, should be attached to a very short snood about two feet from the bottom end of the trace. The red bream, when hooked, does not run so much as the black, and moreover the line will be fished at a very different angle, so that the danger of the second hook fouling the rocks may be disregarded ; and two bream are much more fun on a fly rod than one, although it is often difficult to get the second fish into the net unless this latter happens to be a big one. After plumbing the depth, the running line should be marked about six inches away from the reel with a little piece of white silk, as this shows up better in the dusk—although when once it has been wetted it is always rather difficult to make it out ; and for this reason, if there be a little run of tide likely to take the line away at a fishing angle, the angler will find it better to use a running line marked in fathoms (that employed for black bream will do very nicely), for by this means he will be able to judge pretty well, from the angle it makes with the water, when his baits are close to the bottom—although he will have to be careful, in paying out line, that he does not miss one of the fathom marks, which he will be very likely to do in the dusk. When the angle is a wide one (that is to say, when the line is nearly "up and down") the angler, particularly when using gut-substitute, will probably find a difficulty in getting his trace and baits to the bottom without fouling the running line ; and there are one or two ways in which this may be got over. The best plan is to have some weight on the trace itself ; accordingly a good sized swivel should be mounted in it not quite halfway up from the bottom hook. For instance, with a trace of eight feet (which in general will be found quite long enough for red bream) put the swivel about eighteen

inches above the top hook ; and if the weight of the swivel is not sufficient to prevent a foul, wind a little lead wire neatly round the trace just above. This little dodge, combined with a rather slow rate of letting out line, will generally keep the trace clear even in quite slack water ; but if it does not some sort of boom will have to be used. This may be either a " direct pull " one, or a combined lead and boom may be made by threading a piece of brass wire about a foot or fifteen inches long through a small bored bullet, leaving the latter about midway on the wire, and afterwards bending one portion of the wire very nearly to a right angle with the other, and forming the end of each into a small, neat loop. The running line is passed through both loops, and the swivel joining it to the trace acts as a " stop " against the lower loop. The angler, however, should avoid the use of anything of this sort if he can, because of course it complicates the apparatus and renders it more visible.

And now we come to the bait. Practically all the authorities agree in instructing us that the red bream is a very omnivorous fish, and will take almost anything. He is said to be particularly fond of limpets (one writer says the fish are mad after them) ; but the present writer, although he has tried limpet as a bait on several occasions, never remembers to have caught a fish of any kind on it. On the whole small strips of mackerel or herring, or else lugworm or ragworm, if the angler can get it—which is not always the case—are recommended. The baits should be worked a little, sink and draw fashion, commencing quite close to the bottom ; and the angler should always be keenly on the look-out for bites on the downward journey, for it very often happens that red bream will rise to mid-water or thereabouts towards evening. If the fish are on the ground he is almost certain to get them if his baits and tackle are right, and the gear is fishing properly ;

but perhaps a word of warning not to be discouraged if he does not get a bite at once may not be out of place. The writer well remembers an occasion when he and a friend sat for considerably over an hour without the faintest suspicion of a nibble, so that one would not have thought there was a bream in the place (although as a matter of fact both anglers knew they were as thick as bees there); and it was not until the sun had sunk below the Western sky-line that the first bite was experienced. After that it was a case of hauling the bream up, two at a time, until when between two and three score of fine fish had been taken the writer and his friend tired of it and came ashore—leaving the bream biting as furiously as ever.

Fishing in this way the angler, if using mackerel or herring bait, is very likely to get hold of a pollack, and if this be a good one he will have rather an exciting time! With this tackle of course only very little strain can be put on the fish, and one has to let him go; so that if the weeds at the bottom are thick and long it will be odds on the pollack. Fish up to about 5 lb. or so may be landed on this tackle, with a little luck, by any angler possessing "hands"; but larger fish will generally beat him. However the novice will probably enjoy the experience hugely, even although the pollack succeeds in making good his escape.

A good many sea anglers make a practice of fishing for red bream with a paternoster, whatever the depth of the water; but this is a great mistake. In deep water, as already mentioned, the paternoster is the more convenient form of gear; but in water up to ten fathoms or so in depth the driftline will beat the paternoster out of sight—and not only with bream but with most other small fish, including gurnard (which are generally considered rather easy fish to catch).

There are a few places round the coast where red bream

may be fished for from a drifting boat. In that case the tackle used may be just the same as that previously recommended; but before commencing the drift the novice should plumb the depth accurately, and get his baits down to within about a fathom of the ground—it is inadvisable to go lower than this on account of the danger of a foul. But it is decidedly pleasanter and more comfortable to fish for red bream from an anchored boat.

It only remains to be said that from about the latter part of June to the end of September is the best time of year to angle for them.

CHAPTER X

HALIBUT

HAVING completed the list of the smaller sporting British sea fish, we now approach the subject of the larger ones, and will deal first with a fish the capture of which is the particular ambition of a good many sea fishermen who are fond of angling for large fish. Halibut fishing however is a sport in which the blanks are many and the prizes but few ; and it is very much to be regretted that the fish is such a comparatively rare one in our seas, because the halibut probably furnishes the nearest approach which British waters afford to the exciting and strenuous sport to be obtained in foreign seas.

The halibut is essentially a cold water and a deep water fish, from which it follows that the South Country sea angler who wants to catch one will have to travel a long way before he has a chance of realizing his ambition. The fish are plentiful enough at the Faroe Islands ; but it is not every one of course who can spare the time which a journey to that rather remote and inaccessible fishing ground involves. A friend of the writer's undertook it some years ago, but met with such bad luck in the shape of breakdowns of steamers and such like mishaps that he was obliged to start his return journey almost before he arrived at his destination, and in consequence had practically no opportunity of sampling the fishing. To the busy man, who only gets one sea angling holiday a year and

likes to make the most of it, one experience of that kind is usually enough for a lifetime! Other good halibut grounds are between the Orkney and Shetland Islands and in the Pentland Firth, localities which, although not so remote and inaccessible as the Faroes, nevertheless involve a long and tedious journey in order to reach them from the South. Here however at the appropriate time of year there are a good many halibut, and the sea angler who is thinking of trying this ground may be advised to choose one of the summer months for his expedition. He may be warned however that there are some terrible tides in that locality, and that even in summer bad weather is likely to keep him ashore a good deal. Halibut are also to be found at a good many other places in Scottish waters and also on the fishing grounds off the coast of Ireland, although not usually, so far as Irish waters are concerned, in sufficient numbers as to make it worth the sea angler's while to fish specially for them. It is true that Ballycotton and Valentia, between them (the former predominating), have probably furnished more rod and line captures of halibut than all the other coastal waters of the United Kingdom put together; but that of course is because these two famous places have been so much more fished than any others by sea anglers using tackle likely to be successful in landing halibut. As far as English coastal waters are concerned the fish, although not absolutely unknown, is rare, although the writer believes that one or two have been taken off the Cornish coast.

The rod and line capture of halibut, at any rate as far as our waters are concerned, is a comparatively modern thing, and as far as the writer is aware (he will be glad to be corrected on the point if he is wrong) the first large fish to be taken in this way in our seas was captured in the year 1905. This particular one weighed 95 lb. and

was caught at Ballycotton by Mr. S. Bullock. Since then, apart from the years lost to the sea angler through the war, scarcely one has gone by without a substantial addition to the list of halibut taken on the rod, which now attains quite respectable proportions; most of the fish, for the reason already referred to, coming from the two famous places previously mentioned. Naturally the seasons have varied somewhat, and some years have furnished much better results, so far as halibut are concerned, than others. A better year than any up to the present time, at any rate at Ballycotton, was 1912; and a sea angling friend of the writer's, who is also greatly interested in the subject of weather (upon which he is somewhat of an authority), has propounded an ingenious theory to account for the almost abnormal number of halibut in the Ballycotton waters in the month of June in the year named. It seems that rather earlier in that particular year there was an anticyclone of unusual intensity and duration in Northern latitudes, and in consequence several weeks of extraordinarily fine weather and brilliant sunshine; this had the effect of raising the temperature of the sea in those regions appreciably above the normal, with the result that the halibut came South in greater numbers than usual in their search for colder water! Whether there is anything in this theory the writer cannot say, but it is not more ingenious and far fetched than some he has listened to in connection with the sport of sea angling; and at any rate it has the substantial foundation of fact that the number of halibut in Southern Irish waters in June, 1912, was appreciably above the normal.

The halibut grows to an enormous size—600 lb. or 700 lb.—but probably a weight somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200 lb. represents about the size limit of fish likely to be taken on the rod, unless indeed our sea anglers



THE LATE MR. S. BULLOCK AND HALIBUT OF 95 LB. CAUGHT BY HIM AT BALLYCOTTON IN
1905: THE FIRST LARGE ONE TAKEN ON ROD AND LINE.

copy the example of their American brethren and take not only to using very long lines on their reels but also to following the hooked fish in a moving boat ; and the off chance of an exceptionally large halibut is such a small one that this of course would not be worth while in Southern waters, although to the sea angler going North—to the Shetlands or the Faroes—for halibut the writer thinks that this idea is at any rate worth consideration. As a matter of fact he believes that at the time of his friend's visit to the latter place (previously referred to) there was a considerable number of good motor boats there ; but whether these craft are still there since the war the writer does not know.

The present rod and line record for halibut, as stated in Chapter I, is believed to be 135 lb., and apart from this fish the writer knows of at least three others over 100 lb. in weight—namely, 123 lb., 120 lb., and 102 lb. It is not given to most sea anglers who have caught halibut in Southern waters—except perhaps to those fortunate ones who are able to devote months at a time to the sport—to capture more than one fish in a lifetime ; and the writer thinks that not many will have the experience of one sea angler, now dead, who some years ago at Ballycotton landed two halibut and lost a third, all in one day. Perhaps the most successful rod and line halibut fisherman the writer has heard of in our waters is Mr. E. Graham-Falcon, a well known member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, who has, at present, at least six good fish (it may be more) to his credit, of these weights—100 lb., 93 lb., 91 lb., 77 lb., 72 lb., and 60 lb. ! All were taken at Ballycotton.

The halibut is an exceptionally fierce and voracious fish, and it is not at all an uncommon experience for a large one to follow up a hooked fish of another species almost to the boat ; the writer has seen this on two

occasions. A celebrated instance of this kind, which resulted in the capture of the halibut, occurred in the year 1910. About a couple of years ago a writer in the *Anglers' News* referred to this particular incident in these words : " Once a 102-lb. halibut, which was landed at Ballycotton, became hooked through seizing a good-sized pollack a friend of mine was playing. This was Mr. George Elliott, an old New Albion." As a matter of actual fact the weight of the halibut was 129 lb., not 102 lb. ; the hooked fish which it followed up and attempted to seize was a conger, not a pollack ; and the halibut was never hooked, but was promptly and cleverly gaffed by the two boatmen as it was following the conger, close alongside the boat. In other respects the account quoted is quite accurate. The interesting feature of this particular occurrence of course is that it well illustrates the length to which the halibut will sometimes go when in pursuit of its prey, and the fearless disregard of a boat which, like the blue shark, it occasionally displays. There have been one or two happenings of this kind at Ballycotton, although as far as the writer knows this is the only instance in which the halibut was successfully gaffed ; and he believes that somewhat similar experiences have befallen handline fishermen, both in our waters and elsewhere.

Whether it occurs once in his lifetime, or oftener, the sea angling novice who has the good fortune to hook a halibut is assured of an exciting time. One sea angler some years ago rather aptly described his experience as very much like " being hitched on to the Scotch express " ; and the writer has seen a two piece rod which was only saved by the fraction of a second from being pulled overboard, and as a matter of fact was actually *disjointed* by the bite of a large fish which, although it was never seen, was believed by every one in the boat to be a halibut. From which one may safely draw the moral that if the

angler be fishing on ground where he has reason to suspect the presence of halibut it is as a general rule rather an unsafe thing to put the rod down in the boat and allow it to fish itself. The bite of a halibut cannot, even by the wildest exaggeration of language, be described as a "gentle nibble"; it is usually a very startling occurrence, and it is quite likely that the novice, if he is fortunate enough to experience one (especially if he is not expecting it) will be so surprised that he will quite forget to strike the fish! It is therefore fortunate perhaps that it will often be found that the fish strikes himself.

Speaking generally, the authorities instruct us that the halibut, like other flatfish, prefers a sandy to a rocky bottom; and one writer says that if found on the angling grounds in this country "they will most probably be on sandy bottom in the vicinity of rocks and reefs and at a considerable depth." It is however evident that this rule, so far as our Southern seas are concerned, is by no means of universal application, for probably the majority of those taken in Irish waters have been caught on rocky ground; and in at least two authentic instances large halibut have been *seen* (although not landed) on extremely rough, high rock, where the water was not more than ten or eleven fathoms in depth. It is probable that the halibut in our Southern waters is rather a wanderer, and given to roaming hither and thither in pursuit of the smaller fish upon which, as all sea anglers know, he lives almost entirely. Irish boatmen tell one that the fish usually swim in pairs (presumably, one would suppose, male and female), but whether this is really an authentic fact the writer does not know. At any rate the angler, if he succeeds in landing one over there, is pretty sure to be urged by his boatmen to put down another big bait at once and try to catch *the other*.

The sea angler cannot hope to land a halibut success-

fully unless all his gear be sound and good ; and therefore, if the novice be trying specially for one of these fish, either in Irish waters or elsewhere, he may very safely be advised to see carefully to it that there is not a weak spot anywhere in his tackle, for if there be the fish will surely find it out. Rod No. 3 on our list is quite capable of dealing with halibut, but some form of brake on the reel may fairly be said to be a *sine quâ non* ; for without it the angler will probably find it impossible to stop a large fish, and will be quite likely to have an experience such as has befallen more than one sea fisherman in Irish waters—namely, to lose all his line in one rush of the fish, and find himself left with an empty reel. As to the length of running line required the novice, if fishing from an anchored boat, will find 200 yards none too much to enable him to deal successfully with a really large halibut.

The writer thinks the Ballycotton (or banker's) lead and trace the most convenient and appropriate form of ground tackle ; but several of these fish have been landed on heavy paternoster gear. The hook should be about a 10/0 or 11/0, and in the writer's very decided opinion only one hook should be used ; for in the case of a heavy, powerful, plunging fish like the halibut it is a very distinct danger to have a second hook on the tackle, as this may easily foul something (for instance, the boatman's thumb—this actually happened on one occasion) during the gaffing of the fish. As to the material of the trace itself, some form of wire may be strongly recommended, for the halibut has extremely sharp, cutting teeth ; and as it usually happens that he is hooked well inside the mouth no other material than wire is likely to resist them successfully. As in the case of the wire for the pollack trace, the writer has tried a good many different kinds, and has come to the conclusion that he likes Ormiston's black tempered steel wire better than any other for the purpose ;

although the gauge of course should be appreciably stouter than 25. The writer is not quite sure of the appropriate number, as it is a considerable time since he bought any, but he fancies that Nos. 19 or 20 will be about right. A good many anglers use piano wire, which is however harsher and not so easy to work ; if it is employed it is as well to buy the tinned sort, as this does not rust so easily. The wire should be cut with the pliers into pieces about 10 in. or 11 in. in length, out of which the trace should be made up, so that when finished it will consist of links each about 6 in. long. There should be one large box swivel on the eye of the hook, and the trace, which should be about a fathom in length, should contain two other similar swivels, one at about the middle of it and the other at the top, next the lead. The angler should take particular care to see to it that the fastening by which the trace is attached to the "strapping" of the lead is strong and secure, and he may be advised not to trust to a spring link swivel, which (however large) is not strong enough for the purpose, and is quite likely to open out and give way under the tremendous strain which the pull of a really heavy halibut always involves. The writer has known of one or two instances of a spring link swivel letting the angler down in this way. He is disposed to think that as a general rule the halibut swims rather off the bottom ; and the novice, if trying specially for this fish, may be recommended to fish the bait at about three feet from the ground. In letting out line therefore he should wait until he feels the lead bump on the bottom, and then reel up until as nearly as he can judge it is suspended in the water about a fathom and a half from the ground. The trace and bait of course hang below the lead.

As to the bait that is most likely to attract a halibut, it must of course be fish ; and the maxim "The bigger the

bait, the larger the fish," applies with more than ordinary force. As a matter of fact many of the halibut which have been landed by sea anglers in Irish waters have been caught on the usual "butcher's shop" which it is customary to use on the ground lines there—only more so, so to speak. The writer however has seen the half digested remains of a haddock which in life must have weighed at least 3 lb. or 4 lb. taken from the stomach of a large ling, and from this and a good many other similar circumstances which he can recall is convinced that the bigger predatory British sea fish frequently take their food in a quantity very much larger than that of the baits which it is customary to use when angling for them; although the angler must remember on the other hand that if the water be very clear and bright he will as a general rule only be handicapping himself, so far as the general ground feeding fish are concerned, by using a very large bait, and is much more likely to achieve success with a smaller one. We are however at present considering the case of a sea angler who is trying specially to attract a halibut; and as the writer believes that this fish is always, or nearly always, hungry he thinks he is giving the novice sound advice when he recommends him to employ a very large bait. If there be any freshly caught fish in the fish box he would suggest that one of these should be employed for the purpose. A pollack, for instance, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. or 2 lb. in weight will do very well, and if the novice has a large sized baiting needle in his kit he can make a neat job of the baiting (the writer would suggest that he should do this himself) by hitching the needle to the swivel at the top end of the trace, before this is made fast to the lead, and then putting the needle in at the mouth of the fish and pulling the trace right through it, bringing it out close to the tail, and leaving the hook sticking out either at the side of its mouth or through the gill; and securing the hook firmly

in position, with the point and barb well projecting, by stitching it in its place with the needle and thread which if he has been fishing for pollack, our novice will probably have been using to sew his "lasts" to the eye of the hook. In the absence of a baiting needle large enough for the purpose—and this is not always at hand, although a sufficiently satisfactory substitute can often be improvised out of a length of the wire—the bait may be hooked either in the back or through the tail.

When using a bait of this size and a halibut bite is felt (and usually there will be no manner of uncertainty about it) the writer thinks it is sound policy not to strike immediately, but rather to wait for a second or two so as to give the fish time to get the bait well into his mouth before attempting to hit the hook into him. Then the angler should strike, and strike *hard*; and immediately look out for squalls! It is quite likely however, as remarked before, that he will be so surprised by the sudden and ferocious pull which characterizes the bite of this fish that he will forget to strike altogether. If the fish should come "unstuck" a fresh bait should be mounted and fished without delay, for a "pricked" halibut, like a ling, will often hang round a boat for some time, and take a bait again, and yet again. The first rush of a hooked halibut is often a surprisingly long one, and the angler may be counselled to apply the reel brake pretty strongly and with gradually increasing pressure; in fact if the fish be a very large one he may be warned that it will probably be all that he can do to stop it, even with 200 yards of line at his command. The fish is an extremely powerful one, and keeps up the fight with an intensity and endurance that has to be experienced to be believed. He will frequently make a number of tremendous rushes; and sometimes, when brought up nearly to the top of the water, will plunge for the bottom very much after the

style of a pollack or a large skate "taking charge." In fact the angler will find that he never knows the direction in which the fish will rush next; and the struggle, if the halibut be a large one, may well run to half an hour or more. When the novice thinks he has the fish beaten, and is bringing him alongside for gaffing, he should be on the look-out for a particularly bad rush directly the fish catches sight of the boat; and this, if it comes, is quite likely to be directly under the boat. It will often happen that the angler, in the course of the fight, will have to shift round from one side of the boat to the other; and if the craft be a whaleboat, with her mizzen mast up, this is rather an awkward performance, so that it will be found advisable, directly a halibut is hooked, to get the men to unstep the mast. While if there be reason to think the fish is a very large one the writer considers it is not at all a bad plan to buoy the cable and heave it overboard at once, and allow the boat to drift away from it, in order to make it impossible for the fight to be brought to a heart breaking termination by the fish getting round the anchor rope. The angler will find, by the way, that a tarpon belt is practically a necessity when playing a halibut, and as it is not always an easy matter to get this properly adjusted when once the struggle has commenced it follows that it is a prudent precaution to do this beforehand.

When the fish is finally brought alongside for gaffing, the angler should insist on its being gaffed in the head (from below upwards) *and nowhere else*; and for two very important reasons. The first is that the head affords far and away the best hold for the gaff; if the fish be gaffed in the side the gaff is very liable to tear out. The second reason is that if the fish be gaffed in the head he cannot plunge, *as long as his head is held well up*; for a halibut invariably plunges by the head, and never attempts, like the conger, to swim backwards. If the fish be a large

one it will probably be necessary to get two (possibly three) gaffs into him—all in the head or down his open mouth—before he can be hoisted on board; and when safely landed in the bottom of the boat he should be laid down, if possible, belly uppermost, as it will usually be found that in this position he will lie more quietly—and if the boat be a small one this is an important consideration.

As a final word about this magnificent fish the writer would counsel the novice who is angling in Irish waters to endeavour to get his boatmen to keep cool and collected during the whole performance; only the writer realizes of course that the Celtic temperament makes this impossible.

CHAPTER XI

SHARK

THE next fish on our list is the shark—one which a good many sea anglers will doubtless think ought not to be included in a list of sporting fish at all ; for the writer has come across several men who look down upon shark fishing as something altogether beneath their notice, classing sharks as vermin—which they undoubtedly are. If our seas were as rich as those of some other parts of the world in large sporting fish it would not be necessary of course to resort to shark fishing. But they are not ; and therefore we Britishers have to put up with and make the most of such fish as we have. And the sea angling novice who has a liking for something particularly " hefty " and active at the end of his line—and the writer has met a large number of men who have this desire—will find (in the absence of halibut) that a tussle with a large shark " fills the bill " more completely than a contest with a fish of any other species that swim our seas. Speaking generally however it may be said that shark fishing is a sport which hitherto has hardly been taken seriously by our sea anglers, although it is a good many years ago now since the late Matthias Dunn, of Mevagissey, suggested that rod and line fishing for sharks would provide very good sport in Cornish waters. The writer, by the way, is not now speaking of tope, a fish which is either a small shark or a large dogfish (whichever one likes to call it),

and one which, as all sea anglers know, is now fished for quite seriously in the Thames estuary and other places round our coast at the appropriate time of year; he will deal with this particular fish in a later Chapter.

Leaving out the huge basking shark, which grows to a length of 40 ft. to 50 ft., and is not at all an uncommon sight on some parts of the Irish coast—a fish of course which is altogether beyond the sea angler, apart from the fact that it lives on minute forms of marine life—the writer believes the blue shark and the porbeagle are the two species most likely to be taken on rod and line in our seas. According to the authorities the hammer head shark is also an occasional visitor in our waters, but the writer has not heard of a case of this particular fish having been captured by a sea angler here. He is inclined to think however that in very warm summers it is not an unknown thing for other species of sharks to find their way to British waters, particularly off the South coast of Ireland, which is directly in the track of course of the Gulf Stream. He recollects an occasion, for instance, when he and two friends saw a large *grey* shark, from 12 ft. to 15 ft. in length, close alongside the boat there. As a matter of fact it walked off with the pet pollack bait of one of the three anglers, taking it almost, but not quite, within gaffing distance. The water was very clear and the whole performance was therefore seen quite plainly by all in the boat, for the fish was not more than 2 ft. or 3 ft. below the surface; and an interesting fact, by the way, about this particular shark was that it did not turn over on to its back to seize the bait, in the well known manner described in the books. It was certainly not a hammer head; it was not a blue shark, for its predominating colour, as already stated, was distinctly grey; nor was it a thresher. It *may* have been a porbeagle; but it looked too slender and not deep enough in the belly for that fish, which has a



very portly appearance, even when seen in the water from above. The writer, like most other sea anglers who have fished in Irish waters, can recall a good many instances where large sharks have been seen pretty close to the boat ; but he does not recollect any occasion on which the fish and its movements were more clearly and distinctly seen. As a matter of fact a good many large *grey* sharks have been seen from time to time in the Southern parts of the Irish Sea, and the writer is disposed to think that some of them may have been fish belonging properly to more tropical waters which had got rather out of their reckoning. He thinks bathing far out at sea distinctly a risky thing in those waters, and personally would never dream of doing it, although he has sometimes felt tempted to undress and go overboard on a hot day when fishing was slack.

As already stated however the blue shark and the porbeagle (particularly the former) are the two species which the sea angler who wants to catch a shark will be most likely to come across ; in fact if he be fishing sink and draw for pollack, and possesses a pet spinning bait which he is particularly anxious not to lose (for instance, the last " Hearder " remaining in his bag), he may be warned that he is pretty sure to hook a shark with it. For the spinning bait, as remarked in a previous Chapter, seems to have a peculiar fascination for these gentry, besides which sharks *will* not " play the game " ; and instead of taking the bait which is purposely put out for them on strong and suitable tackle they often persist in anchoring themselves to altogether inappropriate gear. (This habit, by the way, is not confined to sharks ; in fact it is one of the disadvantages attached to putting down a light paternoster in deep water for bream, in the manner recommended in a former Chapter, that sooner or later one is pretty sure to hook, and probably lose, some big fish on it.) Of the two species named—the blue shark and the porbeagle—the

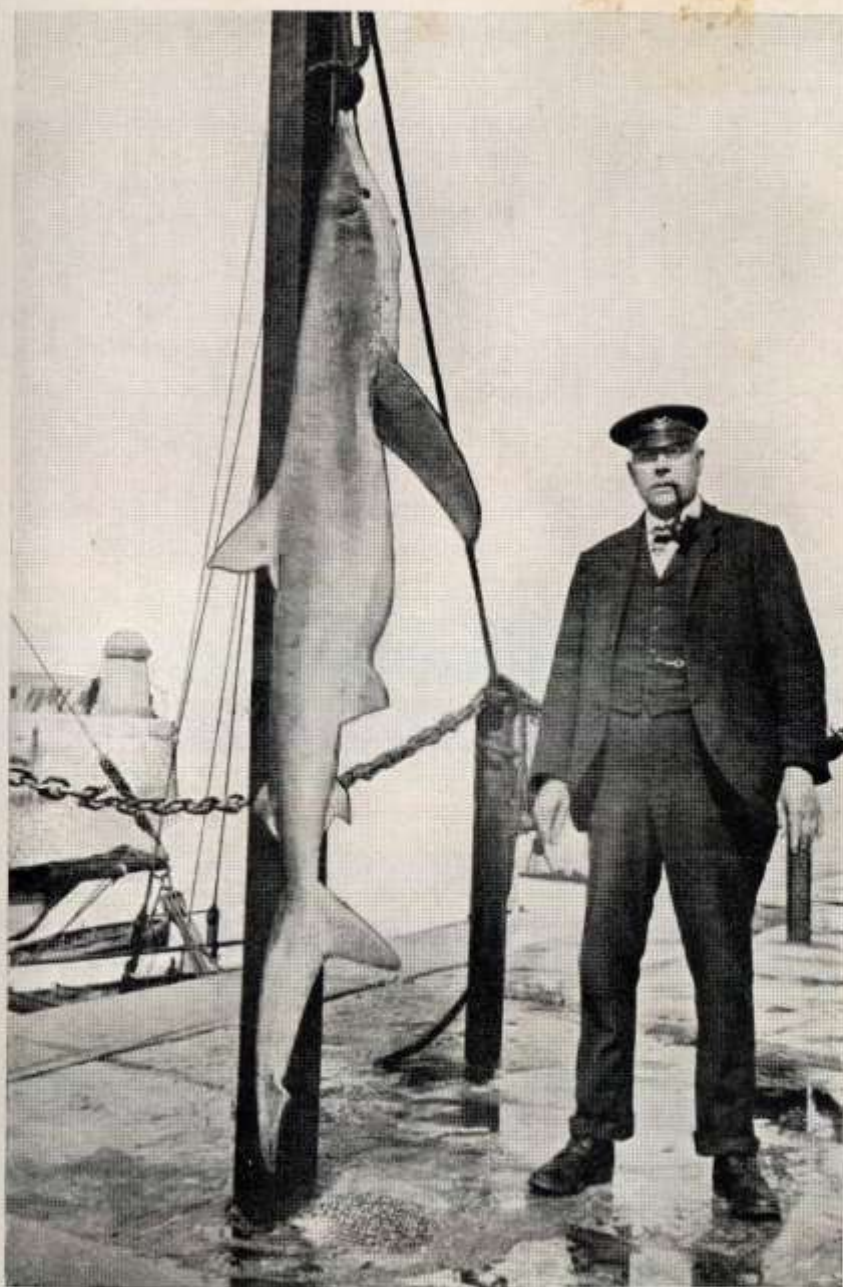
former is the better fighter of the two ; and the writer considers that next to the halibut the blue shark is the best large fighting fish which the sea angler in our waters is likely to get hold of. Some sea anglers would say perhaps that it is rather a near thing between the fighting capacity of the two fish ; but on the whole the writer would certainly be disposed to award the palm to the halibut, not because it is so much more valuable a fish to catch, but as having more endurance and staying power, while it is almost, although not perhaps quite as fast a fish when hooked. As mentioned in the last Chapter however, the halibut is a comparatively rare capture on rod and line ; whereas any sea angler who wants to catch a shark can at any rate make pretty sure of *hooking* one in any fine, warm summer by going to an appropriate locality for them. The porbeagle, as already stated, is not such a fine fighter as the blue shark ; for one thing he has not the speed of that fish. And one writer on sea angling has spoken of "coming in like a porbeagle," using the phrase as a term of contempt. However, any sea angler who has never caught a porbeagle will find, if he gets hold of one, say over 30 lb. or 40 lb. in weight (particularly on his pollack rod), that he will have quite a lot of fun with the fish before he is able to bring him to the gaff. The largest rod caught porbeagle the writer has heard of in our waters, by the way, weighed 82 lb., and was taken by Mr. J. F. Vallin, a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, some years ago off Falmouth, when fishing single-handed from a small boat—quite a notable performance in its way. A good many much heavier porbeagles have however been hooked *and lost* from time to time by sea anglers in Irish waters. The heaviest blue shark the writer knows of as having been caught in our seas by an angler weighed 114 lb. ; and the following is an authentic table of weights and lengths of blue sharks taken on rod and

line by various members of the British Sea Anglers' Society at Ballycotton in recent years :

Name of Angler.	Length of Fish.	Weight.
Mr. F. C. Warren	7 ft. 10 in. . .	114 lb.
Mr. E. Graham-Falcon . .	7 ft. 9 in. . .	112 lb.
Dr. Kempe	7 ft. 10 in. . .	109 lb.
Mr. E. Graham-Falcon . .	7 ft. 8 in. . .	100 lb.
Ditto	6 ft. 8 in. . .	69 lb.
Dr. C. S. Patterson . . .	6 ft. 6 in. . .	65 lb.

From which it will be seen that a sea angler who gets a blue shark, and for some reason or another is unable to weigh it, can form a very good idea as to its weight by ascertaining its length. As a matter of fact a great many blue sharks under 100 lb. in weight have been landed on rod and line by various anglers in our waters ; but the table printed above gives particulars of those of which accurate records have been kept, and will perhaps come in useful to the sea angling novice who lands a good one, and finds his spring balance is not up to its weight.

As a general rule the sea angler who wants to catch sharks must go West for them, for they are not often met with (although sometimes seen) on the East coast and in the Eastern part of the English Channel. They are however fairly common in the summer in Devon and Cornish waters, and off the Irish coast. Perhaps the Southern part of the Irish Sea is as likely a locality as any in which to find them, and July, August and September (particularly August) may be recommended as the most suitable months. As a general rule very fine, hot, calm days are the best for shark fishing, for on such days these fish swim high in the water, and are usually more in evidence altogether ; they may often be seen then, with the well known triangular dorsal fin just above the surface, stalking gulls, although the writer never remembers, by the way, to have seen a shark actually capture one of



MR. E. GRAHAM-FALCON AND BLUE SHARK CAUGHT BY HIM: THE FISH WEIGHED 100 LB., AND WAS 7 FT. 8 IN. IN LENGTH.

these birds. He believes in fact that the depth at which sharks swim is regulated, among other things, by the temperature of the water. But in a certain locality in Cardigan Bay, which is one of the few places round our coast where blue sharks have been systematically fished for, it is customary to angle for them at the bottom, and on marks, just as in ordinary ground fishing; and the writer recalls two occasions in Irish waters when he hooked, on the bottom, an exceptionally heavy fish which he believes in each case to have been a large shark. Each moved away at about the slow and stately pace of a horse drawn barge on a canal—in fact it felt very much like being hitched on to such a craft, for the writer had just about as much chance of stopping it!

It has been remarked in a previous Chapter, when dealing with the question of rods, that shark fishing is really a sort of "extra turn" or side line; and demands, if taken seriously, a special rod to itself. The novice who is thinking of fishing seriously for sharks may be warned however that it is quite likely that he will have to listen to some sarcastic talk from his boatman about the absurdity of fishing for "them useless things"; for professional fishermen, as a class, have a great dislike for sharks, and a not unnatural prejudice in favour of catching fish which are good to eat. And sharks are not generally eaten in this country, although the writer believes, by the way, that they are quite wholesome food. He cannot speak as to the blue shark from an edible point of view, as it is one of the very few of our common British sea fish which he has never tasted; but he has eaten porbeagle, and found it quite good food, although rather close in texture—reminding one somewhat, in fact, of conger. He is told that many French sailormen are quite fond of it, and eat it regularly. But that is by the way.

It has been remarked before that not a great deal of

serious shark fishing has been done, as yet, in British waters. Several sea anglers who used habitually to fish in Ireland have taken over shark tackle with them, putting a shark line out on suitable days; and in one angling season at Ballycotton (August, 1913) there was a perfect epidemic of shark catching, no less than three of the fish enumerated in the table of lengths and weights printed above having been caught there, amongst others, within about a week—all however on pollack rods. Personally the writer has far too much respect for his pollack rods to use any of them for deliberate shark fishing, although his experience, like that of some other sea anglers, has been that a large proportion of such sharks as he has had to deal with have been caught or lost, as the case may be, against his wish on such a rod. In theory, at any rate, it is a protection to the pollack fisherman, on a day when sharks may be expected to be about, to put out a shark line; but in practice the novice will probably find that the protection afforded in theory does not always materialize, and that he is just as likely to hook one of these rascals on his pollack rod whether he has shark-tackle out or not. Apart from the strain on the rod which a fight with one of these fish involves, the trouble of course is that the average sea angler has only a hundred yards of line (and no brake!) on his pollack reel—and that is not sufficient to enable him to play a large shark with confidence and success. All this however is rather by the way; let us get back to the case of the angler who has determined to take up shark fishing seriously.

His main difficulty will be to get a rod suitable for the purpose. And this must be in the nature of a compromise. It is unnecessary of course to say that one has very much more power and command over a heavy, running fish with a short rod than a long one. And if it were not for one factor—the circumstance that it is extremely desirable

to employ a very long wire trace—the writer thinks that rod No. 3 on his list would be quite capable of dealing with sharks. But the blue shark, when hooked, has a nasty habit of rolling the trace and line round itself in the course of the fight—more than one of these fish has been brought alongside for gaffing tail first, regularly “tied up in a parcel” so to speak—so that a trace of about 9 or 10 ft. in length is advisable; and of course in practice one cannot use a trace much longer than the rod, as in that case the fish cannot comfortably be brought near enough to the boat for gaffing—and a large shark is rather an awkward customer to gaff and get on board at the best of times! On the whole the writer would suggest for the purpose, if the angler can get hold of one, a powerful, springy rod about 10 ft. in length, more stoutly built than for pollack, and possessing plenty of courage (not *stiffness*, a quality which some anglers mistakenly speak of as courage). The writer generally uses for shark fishing a powerful split cane salmon rod, with spinning top. It is 13 ft. 4 in. in length, so that with it one can fish a very long trace; but it is really quite a couple of feet too long for the game. It is also a very heavy rod—too heavy, in fact, for comfortable fishing if one had to hold it continuously; but this does not matter so much, for in shark fishing one can put the rod down close at hand (with not more than a foot or two of the top projecting over the stern of the boat), and in such a position of course that it can be picked up at once in the event of a “run.”

As in the case of halibut fishing, 200 yards of *sound* line is advisable on the reel, and the latter should be fitted with some sort of brake; for the novice may be warned that without one even a small blue shark of 25 lb. or 30 lb. will take quite a lot of stopping in his first rush—indeed, as with halibut, there have been several cases

of anglers whose reels have been stripped by the rush of a large shark. The writer generally uses a "Poraj," a reel which was designed by Mr. R. K. Biernacki for big game sea fishing in the East, and is about the best one for dealing with a heavy running fish which the writer has come across; but this reel is not on the market. The trace should be of the same material and construction as that previously recommended for halibut fishing, but as already stated, at least 9 ft. long, with not less than three large swivels; and the hook should be either a 10/0 or 11/0, with a swivel on the eye. It is also a good plan to double the last few yards of the running line, as this affords additional protection against its being cut by the fish; and the most satisfactory way of doing this is to whip the end of the doubled part neatly to the mother line for an inch or two with strong waxed thread, finishing it off with a touch of varnish, as with this method there is not so much danger of its catching in the rings of the rod as there is with a knot, however neat. A large *Fishing Gazette* float will do very well if it will support the trace and bait; but a large cork bung out of a pickle jar, adjusted in the same way—that is to say, with a narrow slit from circumference to centre enabling it to be put on the line without removing the trace, will answer the purpose, with a good sized wooden peg pushed through a hole in the centre of the bung to keep it in place on the line. The peg should be painted either red or orange, in order that it may be picked up readily by the eye when some distance away from the boat. The bung, as a general rule, should be fixed on the running line close to the top of the trace, so that the bait hangs about nine feet or so below the surface; and no lead will usually be required, as the weight of the trace will be quite enough to keep the bait down at a sufficient depth unless the tide be running very hard. With regard to the bait, almost

anything of a "fishy" nature will do. Some anglers bait with a whole mackerel, herring or pilchard, scientifically threaded on the trace and hook by means of a large baiting needle; but it is not necessary to waste good bait on these gentry. Heads and backbones of mackerel or herring and the waste of the bait board generally are quite good enough for the purpose, and have the additional advantage of "smearing" the water more; and any one who has read some of the late Dr. C. F. Holder's charming books knows that sharks hunt quite as much by smell as by sight. He was writing, by the way, of tropical sharks, but in all probability the same rule applies to British species. Whatever the bait used, it should be a large one; as much as the hook will hold, in fact. For the shark is a greedy beast, and his appetite is generally commensurate with the size of his capacious and wicked looking jaws.

When float fishing for sharks in the way described the novice will in general find it sufficient to let out enough line to allow the bung to ride about twenty yards or so astern of the boat, so as to keep the shark tackle out of the way of the other lines. There is really no occasion to pay out more line than this, for sharks often display an almost contemptuous disregard of the presence of a boat. If the tide be running well the tackle will usually fish all right if left to itself. But in slack, or nearly slack water the running line sometimes sinks sufficiently to go foul of the trace; and as the line employed for shark fishing will usually be too thick and heavy to be made to float by "fattening" it is not a bad plan in such circumstances to employ one or two "traveller" floats on it, after the style of the pike fisherman. If these be used however the novice must see to it that these small floats have the hole through them sufficiently large to enable them to slip readily down over the doubled part of the line after a fish has been hooked and brought close to the boat.

This method of shark angling is something like float fishing for pike on a rather large scale; and it is great fun when (perhaps after the sight of a shark's dorsal fin above the surface some little distance away has put the angler on the *qui vive*) he sees the bung disappear with a rush—for the bite of a shark, like that of a halibut, could not by any possibility be described as a "gentle nibble"! As a matter of fact this is the only kind of shark fishing which the writer has tried, so that he cannot speak of angling for them at the bottom from the point of view of personal experience, although as previously mentioned he has hooked one or two sharks there when angling for other fish; but he imagines that the tackle previously recommended for halibut would do very nicely, except that the wire trace should be longer. As sharks often swim at various depths the angler who has decided in favour of bottom fishing for them might find it a good plan to fish his bait first at the ground, and afterwards, by stages, until it was well off the bottom (although that is rather an Irish way of putting it); for by this means he would be able to search the water thoroughly at all depths until the fish were found. The writer recollects on one occasion catching a blue shark when whiffing for pollack from a boat "lollopping" home under sail in a very light wind after a day's angling; and having regard to the well known partiality of sharks for a spinning bait he thinks it quite possible that on suitable days, when the fish are at or near the surface, one could angle systematically for them in this way, using of course a long wire trace of the same kind as that employed in still fishing for them, and a rather larger spinning bait and "last" than one would use for pollack. It would probably be found unnecessary to have any lead on the line, for the weight of the trace would be enough to keep the bait at a sufficient depth.

Whatever the method of angling employed, the correct

way to fish for sharks is, in theory at any rate, from an unanchored boat, for the blue shark, when hooked, almost invariably swims round the boat at the length of his tether during the progress of the fight (sometimes a large one will completely encircle the craft more than once before he can be brought to gaff) ; and consequently it is not at all an unknown occurrence, when the angler is fishing from an anchored boat, for the fish to get foul of the cable—in which event of course it is generally a case of good-bye ! Accordingly, if our novice be thinking of taking his shark fishing *very* seriously (and especially if he be trying to break the British rod and line record) an appropriate method would be to tow a good sized, beamy paddle punt behind the boat on the way out to the fishing ground ; and on arrival there the angler trying specially for sharks would take his place, with one of the boatmen, in the punt, which would ride astern of the other craft at the length of the painter. On hooking a shark the painter would be cast off at once, and the punt rowed after the fish, which could then be played to a standstill by the angler without any possibility of the shark getting foul of the anchor rope, the boatman doing his part by keeping the stern of the boat always towards the fish with his sculls. When the shark was completely beaten the punt would be rowed back to the mother boat and the fish gaffed into that. This is a manœuvre of course which could only be carried out with safety in a very calm sea ; but then it will generally be found that very still, hot, calm days are decidedly the best for shark fishing. The average sea angler of course will probably come to the conclusion that the game is hardly worth the candle ; while our novice, if he decides to try it, will no doubt find that the boatman condemned to sit with him in the punt will have something forcible to say about the futility of the proceedings from his point of view.

Whatever the method of angling employed it is advisable, when a shark bite is seen or felt (as the case may be), for the angler to avoid striking immediately. The shark, it is true, usually takes the bait in no half hearted fashion ; but the lure is generally a large one, and it is better to wait just a second or two so as to give the fish time to get it well into his mouth. Then the angler should strike, and strike *very hard*—"sock" the hook into the fish, in fact, for all that the tackle will stand ; for the shark has particularly tough, leathery jaws, and it takes a good deal of force to bury a 10/0 or 11/0 hook well over the barb. As in the case of a halibut, the novice should then immediately look out for squalls. For the fish will usually respond at once with a tremendous rush, straight away from the boat, and often rather upwards than downwards in direction—a rush which, if the shark be a heavy one, the angler may find it will be all he can do to stop. Usually—but not always. And the writer may perhaps be forgiven if he relates two incidents which have happened to him, and show that a shark does not invariably rush off directly it is hooked. On one occasion when he was fishing off the Irish coast a good sized blue shark was observed close to the boat, and not more than three or four feet below the surface. He had shark tackle on board, but had not been fishing it. However, it was hastily put together, the boatman meanwhile throwing scraps from the bait board to the fish from time to time, so as to keep it near the boat ; and it illustrates the fearlessness which sharks often display that this one made no attempt to sheer off, but remained pretty close to the boat the whole time. When the shark tackle was ready a large bait was put on the hook, which was dangled in the sea in front of the fish, and not more than three feet below the surface ; every movement of the fish could be plainly seen, for the water was very clear. The shark took the bait at once (without

turning over), the writer struck, and stood with his finger on the brake lever of the reel, waiting expectantly for the rush—which never came. The fish plunged about on the surface, and rolled over once or twice; the writer wound in a yard or two of line, and brought him close alongside, and the fish was gaffed and into the boat, well inside half a minute after he was hooked, and (incredible as it may seem) without actually having taken out a foot of line! This particular shark, by the way, measured 6 ft. 5 in. in length, so that its weight (which was not ascertained) was probably nearer 65 lb. than 60 lb. The writer's other experience was, in its way, even more curious. He was fishing, sink and draw, for pollack, and hooked at about mid water a fish which he took to be a pollack, and not a large one at that; in fact he remarked to the old friend who was fishing with him that it was only a "quill"—a local term of contempt for a small pollack. For an appreciable time the writer played the fish in the belief that it was a manageable one, and got in several yards of line; when suddenly, without any warning, there came a terrific rush. The running line broke (the writer remembers he was using a silk one, a thing he very seldom does when pollack fishing, and does not recommend), and almost immediately afterwards the fish jumped twice, quite clear of the water (probably in the endeavour to get rid of the trailing line), and revealed itself a shark quite 10 ft. in length. Since this particular occurrence, about which he was much chaffed by his friend, the writer, on hooking a shark, has studiously refrained from expressing any opinion about its size until the fish has been into the boat! There is little doubt of course that in both these cases the shark did not immediately realize that it was hooked; and sometimes one has similar experiences with other kinds of sea fish also.

Generally however, as has been said, a hooked shark

immediately makes a tremendous rush straight away from the boat ; and when the fish has been stopped and turned, as often as not, after another rush or two, he will start swimming round the boat. If he does this, the angler should get in line by "pumping" the fish ; alternately raising and lowering the point of the rod, and reeling in the line during the lowering process (as in the case of a halibut, it is very advisable to wear a tarpon belt when playing a shark of any size). If the angler be fishing from an anchored whaleboat too it is advisable to have the mizzen mast unstepped ; while perhaps even more important still, if the shark seems a big one it is a very good plan to buoy the cable and heave it overboard at once—although the boatmen will probably grumble at taking so much trouble over an "ould shark." Sometimes, when the fish is about half beaten, he will sulk like any salmon, hanging motionless in the water, a dead weight against the angler. Then is the time for the novice to pump the fish unmercifully, for otherwise of course he will get rested, and the fight will be unnecessarily prolonged. The fish often keeps pretty close to the surface during the struggle, and will occasionally break water, but as a general rule a hooked shark does not jump ; at least that has been the writer's experience, although perhaps other sea anglers can tell another story. When the fish has been brought near enough to the boat to be seen, the novice should not let the occasional sight of the shark's white belly uppermost in the water engender over confidence and delude him into the belief that the fish is quite "done," and incapable of another rush ; this *may* be the case, but it does not necessarily follow, for the blue shark, as already mentioned, has a curious habit of rolling over and over in the water when hooked, and sometimes he will wind trace and line round himself a good many times. The fish should not be brought alongside the boat for gaffing until

it is quite beaten ; and it is advisable to use a very sharp pointed gaff, if one be available, for a shark's skin is very thick and tough. When he first comes on board the blue shark, with his lithe and muscular form, his fine, graceful " lines," and brilliant colouring (indigo on the back, shading off to ultramarine at his sides, and the belly snow white), is a beautiful creature ; but his colours fade rapidly in the boat, and by the next morning he is a loathsome object. Some sea anglers complain that a dead shark on board makes a boat smell. This is noticeably so in the case of a porbeagle, which has a peculiar and rather disagreeable smell, particularly if it bleeds much ; so that it is not a bad plan, if one wants to take him ashore for weighing, to sling the fish overboard from the stern of the boat by a rope made fast round his tail. But one of the first lessons the sea angling novice will learn, especially in Irish waters, is not to be fussy ! The skin of both species, by the way, makes an excellent substitute for sand-paper—but it takes an awful lot of getting off the fish !

CHAPTER XII

TOPE

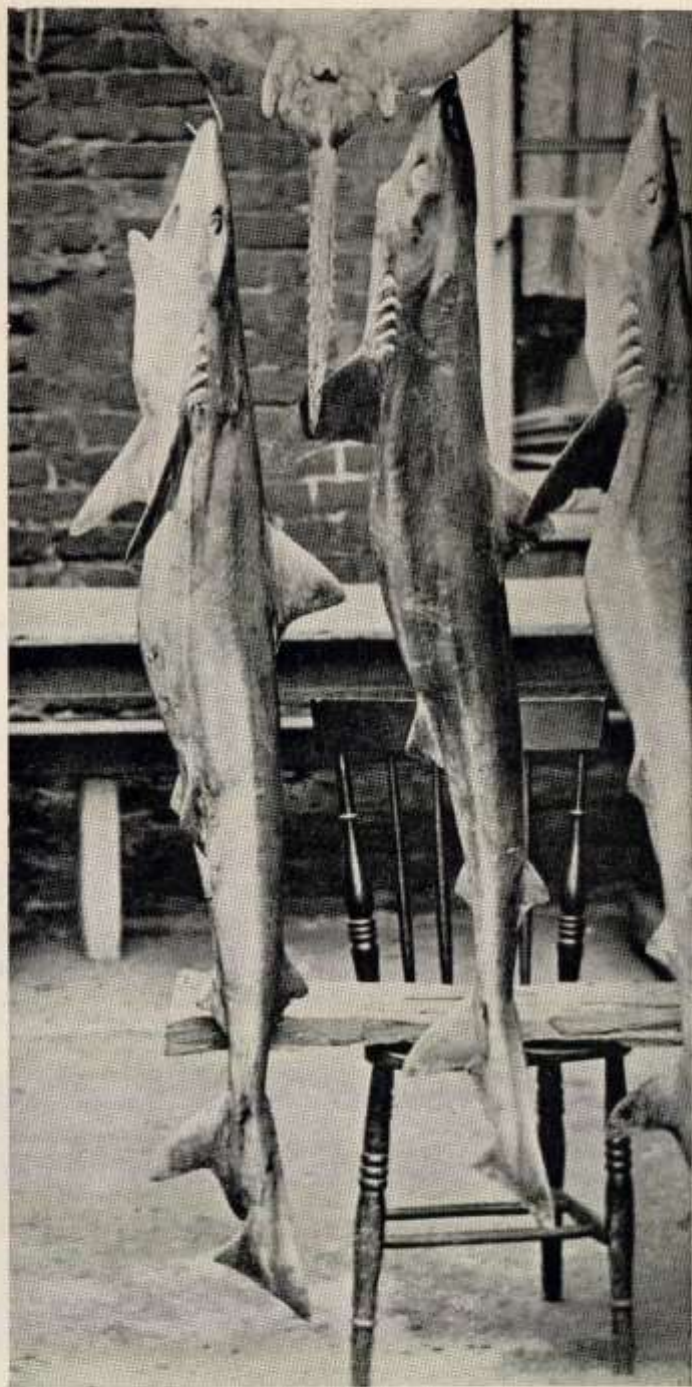
WE now approach, with a certain amount of diffidence and misgiving, the subject of the last on the list of sporting fish—the tope. Tope fishing is a comparatively modern branch of sea angling, and dates only from about the year 1907 or 1908. Prior to that the presence of big fish in the Thames estuary had been suspected, for various sea fishermen had been broken up from time to time there when angling on the bottom for smaller fish. The new sport “caught on,” and by 1909 had become quite popular; a number of tope were caught on rod and line in that year, but more still were lost, probably because the hooks used at first by sea anglers for tope fishing were too large and of insufficient penetrative power. The principal happy hunting ground of the tope angler may be said to be the Thames estuary, and probably Herne Bay and Margate are the two best stations there, with Southend a very bad third. The fish resort during the summer months to the comparatively shallow inshore waters in the district named for breeding purposes, and it is then that they are usually taken by anglers. They may be however (and in fact often are) captured at that time on a good many other parts of the coast than the Thames estuary, although that is where they are fished for most systematically. There are often a lot of tope close to the Goodwin Sands, but

tides run so strongly there that it is very uncomfortable fishing.

The writer deals with angling for tope with diffidence because, although he has occasionally caught them when after other fish, he has never fished specially for them. The question of the fighting powers of the tope is one upon which a good deal of difference of opinion seems to exist among present day sea anglers, and the sport has rather suffered by reason of the altogether extravagant praise bestowed upon it by some writers. Not long ago, for example, a very well known London morning newspaper, in an article headed "The Fighting Tope. Wonder Fish of Thanet," wrote thus of it: "It is a deep sea fish of such fighting qualities that to the rod and line sportsman it gives more fun than any British sea fish, and in that respect is not excelled in courage and strength even by the salmon"; while more recently a writer in another London daily newspaper spoke of the fish as the nearest thing we have to tarpon. Which, as our old friend Euclid observes, is absurd. Personally the writer has no very high opinion of the fighting powers of the tope, but then he does not feel qualified to form a considered judgment on the subject, as he has not caught a sufficient number of them. He recalls landing a few, up to about 30 lb. in weight, in Irish waters, one or two on his pollack rod (they are known generally as "grey sharks" over there, but the fish of course can always be identified by the peculiar and quite distinctive gap, or notch, in the lower part of the tail); and the fight each put up might be described with fairness and accuracy as a sort of "glorified wriggle." Certainly, so far as the writer's experience goes, the tope as a fighting fish is not in the same street with either a halibut or a blue shark of equal weight—at any rate when hooked in pretty deep water. But a member of the British

Sea Anglers' Society who has had a wide and varied experience of angling for big fish and has caught a good many tope in his time, considers—and the writer is disposed to agree with him—that the crucial factor is the depth of the water in which the fish is hooked; for in shallow water, especially with a strong tide running, the evidence of those sea anglers who have caught tope in such circumstances is pretty conclusive that the fish usually makes quite a big rush (almost always down-tide) when first hooked. About the last thing the writer would wish to do would be to run down or sneer at tope fishing as a sport. As he has remarked when dealing with shark fishing, the desire for something “hefty” and active at the end of the line is a fairly common one among sea anglers, and there are a good many of course who cannot spare the time which a sea angling holiday in Irish or Scottish waters involves. To such, no doubt, the tope fishing in the Thames estuary and on other parts of the English coast has come as a god-send.

The largest tope ever recorded as having been taken by an angler weighed $61\frac{1}{4}$ lb.; this was a female in young, and probably most of the tope approximating to that weight which have been captured have been similar fish. It is not very often however that one over 40 lb., or thereabouts, is landed, and most of the tope taken on the rod in any one season range between 20 lb. and 40 lb. in weight. The proportion of male fish to females captured in different years has varied in a curious and rather inexplicable way. In 1910, for example, most of the fish taken were females; but in 1911, out of 130 which were weighed by the scalesman of the Margate Fishing Club about four fifths were males, and in the Tope Competition organized by the same Club in August, 1919, out of 22 tope captured 21 were males and only one



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a female. The ideal conditions for tope fishing are stated to be a warm day, with the sea calm and the water clear (in which respect the fish resembles the blue shark), and neap flood tides; and the very young flood, and the last hour or so of that tide, are probably about the best times. But the fish have been landed in all states of the tide, and in any sort of weather in which the angler is able to get afloat. Brilliant sunshine is said to make no difference, which is rather curious, seeing that much of the fishing is in pretty shallow water and fairly close to the boat. As in most other branches of sea angling, there is little doubt that ground baiting is an advantage; and a method of carrying this out which is recommended by one authority is to tie the entrails of a skate to a good sized stone, lowered from the bows of the boat by a line and allowed to rest on the bottom. The tope is a bottom feeding fish, and therefore must be angled for at the ground. Mr. C. O. Minchin indeed speaks of trailing a big sized bait for them from a motor launch; but the writer believes that this statement is inaccurate, as he is told that tope are not angled for in that way. Having regard to the shallowness of the water in which the fish are often caught however (sometimes as little as two fathoms, or even less), he does not see why it should not be possible, during the last hour or so of the flood at neap tides, to fish for them from a drifting boat with heavy float tackle, using a big sliding float so adjusted that the bait is just tripping on the bottom; by this means more ground could be covered. However, it is practically the invariable custom when angling for tope to fish from an anchored boat. From all accounts the fish seems to be rather a tantalizing one to hook. Like the blue shark, the tope has very tough, leathery jaws, in which it is often rather difficult to drive the hook home properly; but he is not such a free feeder as the shark, and unlike

that fish he has rather an exasperating habit, after he has seized the bait, of running with it for some yards and then dropping it. This he will sometimes do again and again. For this reason, and especially as it is sometimes necessary to use a lead weighing as much as 1 lb. or even more, an adaptation to the sea of the ledger tackle of the freshwater angler (in which the line runs freely through the lead) is the most satisfactory form of gear to use.

The angler who intends to try tope fishing will find that rod No. 3 on the list is a satisfactory weapon for dealing with these fish. The reel should contain 150 yards of *sound* line (if our novice be going to try float fishing perhaps 200 will not be too much), and it will be an advantage to have the reel fitted with some sort of brake. A screw nut, by which the reel can be tightened up sufficiently to prevent line running off in a strong tide when the rod is put down to fish itself, is also desirable, as the check of most sea reels is not strong enough for this purpose. Failing this of course the angler can tie a looped piece of weak thread (strong enough to prevent line running off in the tideway, but weak enough to break on the pull of a fish) round the butt of the rod, putting the looped end round one of the handles of the reel. It is usual when angling for tope to have a second rod in action for the purpose of catching bait and other fish, but (as in shark fishing) the novice should see to it that his tope rod is put down close to his hand, and in such a position that it cannot be dragged overboard by the pull of a fish before he can get hold of it. As in shark fishing, it is a very good plan to double the last few yards of the running line. Almost any form of lead heavy enough to hold the ground will do, but the ring or rings through which the running line passes should be of good size, so that the line may run freely on the pull of a

fish, and the lead should not be made fast; but the swivel connecting the running line and trace must of course be sufficiently large to act as a "stop" against the ring of the lead. As to the trace, some sort of wire is essential. Most tope anglers use a steel trace, well swivelled, and made up in short links in the manner previously suggested for halibut fishing. An alternative form of trace, which the writer has occasionally used and found satisfactory when shark fishing, would, he thinks, do equally well for tope: it is made by taking three strands of wire of the material and size previously recommended for pollack fishing, and plaiting them *very loosely* together. A trace constructed like this is more flexible of course than one made up in links, while it is also less visible. It should contain at least three swivels. The trace should be as long as can be fished comfortably with the rod used. The method of adjusting the hooks in the bait was illustrated about two years ago in the *Fishing Gazette*, so that there is no need to say anything about it here. The larger of the two hooks should be about a 7/0 or 8/0, not too stout in the wire, and it is particularly important that the novice should see carefully to it that all the hooks he uses for tope fishing are kept very sharp. As to the bait, all sorts of fish baits have been used, and will catch tope at times, but probably the best are either a small whiting or pouting, used whole, or else mackerel or herring.

When a bite is seen or felt the angler must school himself to avoid striking, or checking the line in any way, until the fish has run quite a lot off the reel; one authority says that "probably in every case it is advisable not to lift the rod till the fish has gone some fifty or sixty yards." Then the angler should strike, and (as in shark fishing) strike hard. It is said that the fish will then usually run for another fifty yards or so before he

can be stopped, after which the angler will probably find that his play is rather like that of a blue shark, on a smaller scale, except that the tope is said sometimes to jump when hooked, which the shark rarely or never does. Like the shark too the tope has a nasty habit of twisting the trace around himself. The writer does not think that a tope keeps up the fight as long as a blue shark will, although (as previously mentioned) the fact that he has never hooked a tope in shallow water really prevents his judging fairly between the two species. The weight of the lead too is another factor which one has to take into account. He believes that tope are commoner during the summer months in the inshore waters on the East, South East, South and South West coasts of England than is generally supposed, even now. And if the novice be catching small fish on sandy ground, and finds that for no apparent reason they suddenly stop biting, he is quite likely (if he happens to have tope tackle with him) to get a run from one of these fish on putting it down. He cannot reasonably expect to land the fish however without some sort of a wire trace.

CHAPTER XIII

HAKE

THE list of sporting British sea fish is now complete, but before proceeding to consider angling for the other kinds it is necessary to say something about a fish which might very well be classed as a sporting one—the hake; although it is open to doubt whether this particular fish is of sufficient importance, from the sea angler's point of view, to warrant its being dealt with in a separate Chapter. For the hake, once so plentiful in Cornish and Southern Irish waters, is now alas comparatively rare, and consequently it is not often that the present day sea angler will get hold of one, even if he be trying specially for the fish—and a good many no doubt will consider this hardly worth while until such time (if ever) as the numbers of hake in our waters increase again. Various theories have been put forward to account for the comparative disappearance of this fish from British seas. According to the authorities, he is a great wanderer, given to roaming far and wide; and if this view be correct it is quite possible that one of these days he may take it into his head to wander back to our coasts again. Perhaps the scarcity of hake may be attributed to the destruction of small fish wrought by the trawlers, and although it is a very unsafe thing to venture to prophesy in regard to any matter connected with the appearance and disappearance of sea fish (the reasons

for which are often only very imperfectly understood, even to-day), the writer will not be at all surprised if it is found that the great diminution of trawling during the years of war has resulted in an appreciable increase in the numbers of hake in Cornish and Irish waters. One cannot yet say definitely whether this is the case or not; but (for what it is worth) it is an interesting fact that in the years 1915 and 1916 a number of small hake were noted in the Ballycotton waters. In the latter year two or three score of them were frequently taken in the nets at night, the fish sometimes running up to 5 lb. in weight; and on one occasion in that year five score were caught in this way, the largest weighing about 7 lb. apiece. It is perhaps curious that, as far as the writer knows, none has been taken there on rod and line since then; because although, as all sea anglers know, the fish is one which feeds mostly at night, and not much night fishing has been done in those waters (at any rate by amateurs) since the outbreak of war, yet even in pre-war days one or two stray hake were usually taken in the daytime on the ground lines every angling season. It is sincerely to be hoped that the fully grown fish will make a welcome re-appearance in our waters in appreciable numbers; for the hake attains a weight of 17 lb. or 18 lb., and is a fine fighting fish, especially when angled for with unleaded or lightly leaded tackle.

The angler who wishes to try specially for hake may be advised then to make up his mind to spend a night at sea; and this can best be done by making friends with the crew of a mackerel, herring or pilchard drifter, with a view to putting in a night in the boat. While she is riding to her nets, boat and nets drifting along at the pace of the tide, the angler will have the opportunity of trying to catch a hake in a very sporting way. The pollack rod, reel and line may be used, and only sufficient

lead (1 oz. will usually be enough, or 2 oz. at the most) to take the bait down need be employed; the most convenient form of lead is that previously recommended for drift line fishing for pollack, put on the running line just above the swivel. The trace need not exceed 6 ft. or 7 ft. in length, and the kind the writer prefers for the game is made up of three strands of pollack wire—plaited *loosely* together, as mentioned in the last Chapter. The hook should be about a 10/0. Practically all professional fishermen use for hake fishing a very long-shanked hook, for the fish has a mouthful of teeth terribly destructive to ordinary snooding; but for the amateur who is using a wire trace there is really no necessity for this (except of course that it greatly facilitates the unhooking of the fish), and personally the writer has always been against the use of long-shanked hooks whenever possible. It is however often a difficult matter to get a hook with a shank of the ordinary length out of the hake's mouth, especially by the dim light of a lantern; and for this reason the angler, if using these hooks, will find that it is not a bad plan to mount half a dozen or so beforehand on pieces of piano wire, each about a foot in length, and terminating at the other end in a small loop by which it can readily be attached to or detached from the spring link swivel at the end of the trace. When a hake is caught the hook can be taken off the trace and left in the fish, and a fresh hook mounted.

The angler of course will not commence to fish until all the nets have been shot and the drift commenced; but as it is rather an awkward matter to put one's tackle together in the dark it is not a bad plan (if there be, as there usually is, sufficient room in the boat to put the jointed rod down somewhere in safety, and out of the way) to mount the rod, running line and trace before leaving harbour. The angler's first care will be to sound

the bottom, so as to give him a general idea of the depth of the water ; and this should be done before attaching the hook link, the sounding lead being attached to the spring link swivel at the end of the trace, so as to minimize the risk of a hang-up. It is always rather difficult to keep accurate count of the 5-fathom marks on the running line, as it is very easy to miss one in the dark ; and for this reason the writer likes to mark the line specially. On feeling the sounding lead bump the bottom the angler should reel in about 3 fathoms of line at once, and then mark it close to the reel with a piece of white wool. In paying out line a sharp look-out must be kept for this mark, which should not be allowed to run past the butt ring of the rod. By this means the bait will never be much lower than about 3 fathoms from the ground, and unless this be very rough and uneven, or the boat happens to be drifting over a sunken wreck (not an unusual occurrence in these days), there will not be much danger of the angler getting hung-up at the end of the downward swim of the bait. If he does our novice, in nine cases out of ten, will have to make up his mind to part with a good deal of his running line ; and in this event the break of course should be effected at once, so as to lose as little line as possible.

The best bait to use is a whole herring or mackerel, the former for choice ; and here the angler may experience some difficulty, for if he be using herrings caught the previous night they will, if the weather be hot, be pretty soft by this time. For this reason it is not a bad plan to put out a plummeting line while on the way out, in order to try to pick up a few mackerel ; if the start from harbour be made, as it usually is, before darkness has fallen it is often possible to do this. Failing this the angler may perhaps be able to persuade the men after a time to haul one of the nets, so as to see whether a

fish or two for bait cannot be found in it. The method of baiting is to hook the fish through the back, just behind the head. The bait is worked sink and draw fashion, just as in fishing for pollack (except that it does not go so near the bottom); and the method of baiting just recommended affords the best combination of a natural appearance of the bait while it is on the upward journey (which is the time when one is most likely to get a bite) with effective hooking capacity.

The hake is a savage, voracious fish, and there will usually be no mistake about his bite; but it is better to wait just for a second or so before striking, so as to give him time to get the bait well into his mouth. After that, if the fish be a good size, the angler will have a few minutes' capital fun before it can be brought near enough to the boat to get the gaff home. Hake often swim pretty high in the water at night, and sometimes it will happen that a fish will be hooked not more than a fathom or two below the surface—so close to the top, in fact, that on a night which is not too dark one can occasionally see the flash of the fish as he seizes the bait. Fishing in this way it is not at all an unlikely thing for the angler to hook a shark, and in that case, if the fish be of any size, there will probably be a rare to-do, for it is ten to one that sooner or later he will get foul of the nets in one of his rushes. Unless therefore the line be cut directly, and the fish allowed to go (which is perhaps the best thing to do, although our novice will probably hesitate to take this course), it is better for him to tell the men at once that he will make good any damage done to the nets—although in any case he will no doubt find that they will not appreciate the performance!

The angler of course may be advised to choose calm, settled weather, in one of the summer months, for his expedition. He should remember, too, that it is often

pretty cold on the sea o' nights, especially from about one o'clock onwards, and consequently he will be wise to be warmly clad. Oilskins should be worn, not only as a protection against cold and the falling dew (which is often heavy on summer nights), but also to keep one's clothing clear of the flying fish scales, in which (if the catch be herring or pilchard) our novice will find himself smothered from head to foot when the nets are hauled; the scales even find their way into the pockets. Alcohol should not be taken, for its warming effect, as is well known, is only temporary, after which it leaves one colder than ever; the best things to take (in the order named) are cocoa, coffee or soup. These can be kept hot in a Thermos flask. If our novice be wise, by the way, and the catch includes any herring, he will pick out a couple from the heap and take them home for breakfast. No one who has ever tasted grilled herring fresh out of the sea like that will ever want to eat the sort that we know on the fishmonger's slab; but the former is food for the gods. If the angler be going afloat the next day he will probably feel disinclined to make a very early start, while a good sleep in the bottom of the boat after luncheon will not come amiss.

There is a curious fascination about night fishing at sea which cannot very well be put into words—for one thing, the fish one catches always look larger than they do the next morning! In very hot, calm, settled weather however (such as we had for a fortnight or more in August, 1919), with the sea as clear as crystal, it is often the only way to catch fish; and in that case it is not a bad plan to go afloat about three or four o'clock in the afternoon and come ashore again about midnight. If one is pollack fishing the last hour of daylight will probably be the time when the fish will be caught—if at all.

CHAPTER XIV

COD

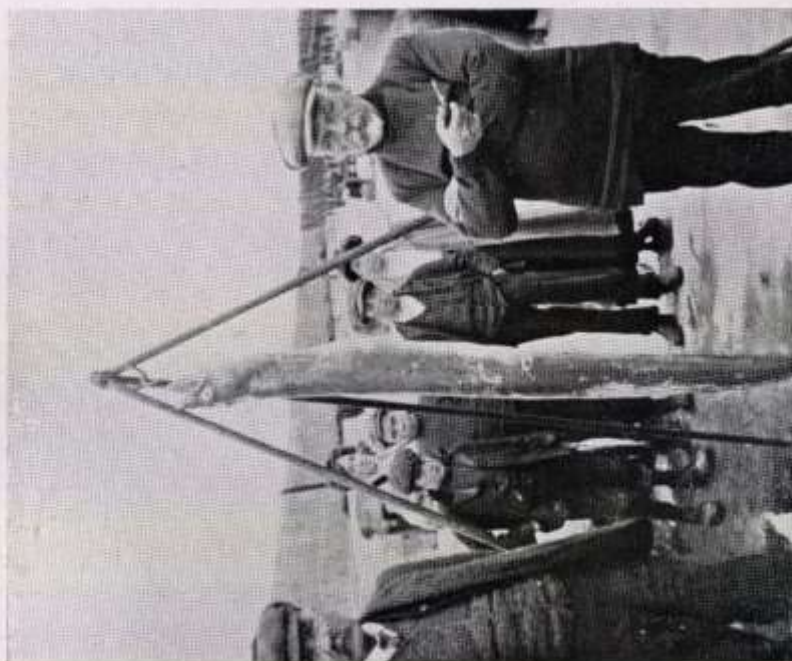
THE writer now proposes to deal with cod, ling, conger, skate, wrasse, haddock, whiting, flounder, plaice, dab and pouting, winding up with some others which are only occasionally taken by anglers, such as turbot, brill, etc. The cod is a fish which is extremely common and very widely distributed round our coasts, so that there are probably few sea anglers who have not caught one at some time or another. At least one writer on sea angling has made some very disparaging remarks as to the fight which a hooked cod puts up. But the fact is of course that so very much depends on the tackle employed and especially on the weight of lead one has to use. If the angler be fishing from an anchored boat in a strong tideway, when it may be necessary perhaps to use as much as 1 lb. of lead, or even more, in order to hold the bottom, there is, if the truth must be told, not much sport about cod fishing. But the sea angler who is fortunate enough to hook one of these fish on light tackle and a lightly leaded line will have a different story to tell. One of the prettiest bits of sport the writer has ever seen on the sea, for instance, was the landing by a friend of a cod of 22 lb. on a small strip of mackerel on a No. 6 hook mounted on gut-substitute (sea bream size), and fished sink and draw in clear water on the slack of the tide with a light, springy rod and less than

an ounce of lead; while more recently a 13-lb. fish which took a live prawn fished on pollack tackle with about the same weight of lead gave quite a good account of itself before it could be brought to gaff. On all grounds it is much to be regretted that opportunities of catching cod in such sporting ways are not more frequent round our coasts.

The cod grows to a great size—probably 70 lb. or 80 lb. at least—but few over 28 lb. in weight have been landed on rod and line here, and not many sea anglers will have the experience of one novice at the sport who a few years ago, at practically his first attempt at sea angling, landed a brace of cod which weighed 59 lb. the pair (one 30 lb. and the other 29 lb.). For years the record stood at 31 lb., but in 1916 Mr. R. Blair caught one of 34 lb. at Ballycotton, and as far as the writer knows this remains to-day the heaviest cod ever taken by an angler in our waters.

At all the sea angling stations within easy reach of London the cod fishing season proper is in the autumn months—from about October to Christmas, and sometimes extending into January; but at a good many places on both the Scottish and Irish coasts cod may be caught practically all the year round, and in some parts of Scotland (for instance Tobermory, in the Island of Mull) February and March are said to be the months when the largest cod seek the inshore waters. At that time of year fish of from 20 lb. to 40 lb. apiece are stated to be fairly common there, so that the sea angler who wants to break the British rod and line record for this fish knows at any rate one place where he has a good chance of doing it, although at that time of year sea angling there is very cold work!

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the fishing at Ballycotton in 1919 was the presence in those waters of



A GOOD CONGER CAUGHT BY THE LATE MR. J. N.
HEARN AT BALLYCOTTON.



A MIXED BAG AT BALLYCOTTON.

very large numbers of codling, quite an unusual feature there. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the bottom of the sea was fairly paved with them, the fish usually ranging in weight from 2 lb. to about 5 lb. or 6 lb. apiece—a state of things which the writer believes to be due to the great diminution in trawling during the war. As he has remarked before, it is always rather an unsafe thing to venture to prophesy in regard to any matters connected with sea angling, but notwithstanding this he thinks that in three or four years' time there will be some magnificent cod fishing in those waters, possibly surpassing anything which the famous little place has ever seen in the past.

Fifteen or twenty years ago one of the most famous stations for the autumn cod fishing on the English coast, at any rate within easy reach of London, was Deal, but in more recent times there has been an appreciable falling off there. Various theories have been advanced to account for this, but although the deterioration in the fishing is incontestable the cause cannot be stated with certainty. One drawback to the Deal fishing is that tides run strongly there, and another is that one has to go afloat from an open beach. The Deal boatmen are probably the finest men for that particular work in the world, but the writer confesses to a decided preference for going afloat from a harbour. It may be perhaps advancing years, or possibly he has been spoiled by a good many years' fishing from an excellent little harbour such as that at Ballycotton, but whatever the cause he has come to look upon the absence of a harbour as a very considerable drawback to any sea fishing station. It does not add to the enjoyment of a day's sea angling to start the day with an appreciable quantity of salt water down one's neck (if any water *does* happen to come on board at the launch it is curious how some

of it invariably finds its way inside the upturned collar of one's oilskins) ; while most sea anglers who know their Deal have more than once seen a galley punt on landing half filled with water before the luckless anglers could manage to hop ashore—which is a distinctly uncomfortable way of finishing up the day afloat !

More often than not it will happen that the angler who is trying for cod is also expecting to catch other fish as well, and the tackle which the novice may be advised to use will depend on the particular locality where he is fishing. If this be any of the rocky grounds off the Irish or Scottish coasts, where large cod, in company with big fish of other species, may be expected, there is no form of tackle to beat the Ballycotton (or banker's) lead, with the trace hanging below it ; but in the case of the autumn cod fishing on the East, South East and South coasts of England, where whiting will probably be met with as well, a combination of paternoster and trace will generally be found the most convenient and appropriate gear to use. In both cases the angler should use rod No. 3 on the list. When fishing the Ballycotton lead and tackle there is, so far as the cod is concerned, no necessity to employ a wire trace ; but the novice may be strongly advised to do so, at any rate in Irish waters, for the presence of other large fish makes this very desirable, while from June onwards he will probably encounter spur dogfish there, and he will find that nothing but wire will withstand their attacks. One writer on sea fishing, in his reference to this tackle, recommends the use of two hooks on independent traces of unequal lengths, but in practice it will be found that this is inadvisable, as the two traces will sometimes foul each other ; and consequently, if the angler decides to use a second hook, he will find that it is much better to attach this by a short wire snood (six inches is quite long enough)

to the lower ring of the swivel in the middle of the trace. But the writer is now a strong convert to the "one hook" theory for this heavy fishing. The trace may be of the same material and construction as that previously recommended for halibut, and the hook should be about a 10/0, not too long in the shank.

For the other style of fishing use a home made paternoster and trace, constructed mainly of gut-substitute of the size previously recommended for pollack fishing. The two small hooks for whiting should be mounted on short snoods of gut-substitute ("stout trout" size) attached to three-way swivels set about a foot apart. Some anglers use booms for these hooks, but they complicate the tackle and render it more conspicuous. A foot below the lower of the two hooks the writer likes a boom made by taking a piece of brass wire and bending it into the shape shown in the following sketch.

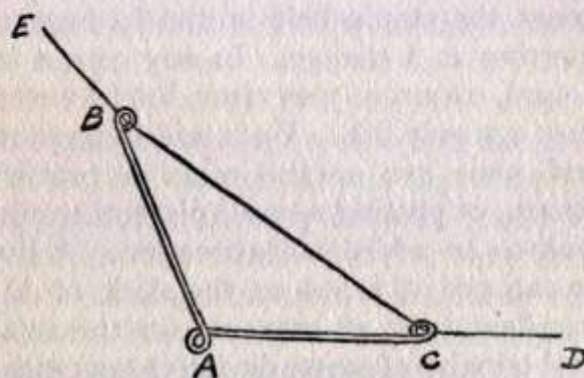


FIG. 9.

At B and C the wire terminates in a small neat loop which may be closed with a touch of solder, and the lower part of the paternoster passes through these. At E and D are swivels which act as "stops," and as gut-substitute frays rather quickly with friction use a piece

of sound running line for that part of the tackle between these two swivels. The cod hook should be mounted on a trace about 3 ft. long, made of gut-substitute of the same thickness as that composing the main part of the tackle, and joined to the swivel at D. The lead is made fast at A either with a spring link, or with some thin, weak snooding which will break if the lead happens to jam. This tackle gives the angler a direct pull on to the hook at the end of the trace, which is an advantage.

As to bait, the cod is rather an omnivorous sort of fish, and he is not by the way quite so particular about his food being quite fresh as are a good many other sea fish. But in practice the angler will often find that his choice of baits is rather limited. If he be fishing in either Irish or Scottish waters he will use no doubt mackerel or herring, although mussels, if he can get them fresh, are an excellent bait for cod, while whelks are not to be despised. For the autumn cod fishing on the English coast the staple bait is mostly lugworm, with sprat or herring as a change. In any case a large bait should be used, except in very clear, bright water, for the cod is rather a greedy fish. He is said to have an eye for colour, and some sea anglers make a practice, when using lugworm, of putting a small piece of scarlet flannel on the hook as an additional attraction. A live prawn (when one can get it) fished on the slack of the tide is also an excellent bait, at any rate for the smaller fish, but is only obtainable of course during the summer months; while hermit crab is another good bait. Cod do not bite sharply, so the novice must be on his guard against striking too soon, and in playing the fish he will find it better to be rather "tender" with him, in case he is lightly hooked.

CHAPTER XV

LING

THE next fish on the list—the ling—is one for which the writer has always had a strong liking. Speaking generally, he does not now care very much for ground fishing; but if he were compelled to angle in that way and no other, and given the choice of fish to be caught, he would, in the absence of halibut or turbot, unhesitatingly plump for ling. For the fish is a strong fighter, and a large one will often run out a good deal of line. The writer was told by a friend of his who caught one of 43 lb., which for some years was the record ling for rod and line, that the fish, aided by a fairly strong tide, went off when hooked with such a rush and took out so much line that every one in the boat thought at first that it was a halibut.

Speaking generally, the ling is to be found all round the Irish and Scottish coasts, and it is very plentiful at the Orkneys. In English waters it is not so abundant, although there are some off Yorkshire and perhaps more off Cornwall; while from the Land's End to the Scillies, and around those islands, there are considerable quantities of ling. The visiting sea angler at the latter place however will find that the tides run so strongly there as seriously to interfere with rod and line fishing. The ling grows to a great size. Couch records one of 124 lb., caught off Scilly; and a friend of the writer's, formerly a keen amateur sea angler and now engaged in the fishing industry

in the way of business, has told him of big ling taken on his long lines several miles South West of the Wolf which were so large and heavy that each fish took two men to lift. A good many, possibly the majority, of the big ling which have been caught by sea anglers have been taken at Ballycotton; but Valentia has also furnished some, and a few years ago a very large one, estimated to weigh 60 lb., was hooked by one sea angler there and got up to the boat, but unfortunately lost, through no fault of his own, in the gaffing—a heart breaking piece of bad luck of which most sea anglers have had more or less experience in this respect at some time or another. As far as the writer knows the record weight for a ling taken on the rod is now 44 lb., a fish of that size, 5 ft. 7½ in. in length, having been caught by Mr. E. Graham-Falcon at Ballycotton in 1915. This fish, by the way, was captured in a very curious manner on a pollack rod and No. 3 Hearder spinner. The angler first of all hooked a pollack, which got to weed, but subsequently cleared; on reeling the fish in a very heavy pull was felt, and after about twelve minutes' fine sport the ling was gaffed into the boat, firmly hooked on the spinner, with the pollack which had originally taken the bait dangling on the trace. Exactly what had happened down below one cannot say with certainty, but evidently the ling had attacked the pollack, and in some way which can hardly be explained the spinner and hook had come out through the pollack's gill and the ling had taken it. This incident was a most interesting one, although perhaps it sounds hardly credible except to those sea anglers—of whom there must be many—who have had experience of other curious happenings when pursuing their sport. It illustrates too a characteristic of the ling which all those who have caught this fish must have noticed, and on which practically all the authorities enlarge, namely, its voracity. For the ling is a very fierce and

greedy fish, and many stories are told of the curious things which have been found from time to time inside the stomach of a large one. One writer, by the way, says that it appears to chase its prey and seize it from behind, gorging it immediately, tail first. If this be correct the ling in this respect is unlike most predatory sea fish, which almost invariably swallow their food head first—for an obvious reason.

The ling is very fond of rocky, weedy ground, and being almost entirely a fish eater is most likely to be captured by the sea angler when fishing at the bottom with a large bait on the rough grounds off the Irish, Scottish or Cornish coasts. It occasionally happens however that the fish is taken on the pollack rod and drift-line, and the sea angler who is fortunate enough to hook a large ling on this tackle is assured of some very good sport. It will not usually happen that the novice is trying specially for ling, but he will probably encounter the fish when angling on ground of the character mentioned for these and other large bottom feeding fish indiscriminately. One writer says that strong paternoster tackle will undoubtedly give the best results in most circumstances, but the author very much prefers the Ballycotton lead and trace for these and all other large ground feeding fish. He is very decidedly of opinion that it is an advantage to have the lead as far away from the bait as possible; and another drawback to paternoster tackle is that it is practically impossible, except in the calmest weather, to prevent the lead from bumping on the bottom from time to time, and this must scare the fish. He thinks that rod No. 3 on his list is quite capable of dealing with any ling the angler is likely to get hold of; and as in the case of other large bottom feeding fish on such ground, he considers 200 yards of good line on the reel very advisable, in case a halibut should be hooked. The trace should be of

wire, made up in the manner recommended in the Chapter on that fish, and the hook should be about a 10/0. As to the bait, it will have been gathered from what has been said about the feeding habits of the ling that some form of fish bait is a *sine quâ non*. Probably mackerel, herring or pilchard are the baits most commonly used ; but such experience as the writer has had leads him to think that slices of freshly caught red bream constitute the best of all baits for a large ling, and if the novice has reason to think that one of these fish is under the boat he may be strongly recommended to try this bait, if it be available. Unlike his relative the cod, which is not always very particular about the freshness of his food, the ling has a decided preference for freshly caught fish, and as a general rule the angler will find that it is hopeless to expect to catch one with stale bait. It has been mentioned in a previous Chapter that a "pricked" ling will often hang round a boat for a considerable time and take a bait again and again. Indeed this is perhaps his chief characteristic and a good many cases are on record of a ling which had been hooked and lost being caught a few minutes afterwards with the broken hook or tackle in him. Therefore if our novice should be so unfortunate as to be broken by a large fish which he suspects from its play to be a ling he should lose no time in mounting fresh gear, putting on another bait, and trying for the fish again. As in the case of ground fishing for other large fish, the angler must be on his guard against striking too soon. The ling, it is true, bites more freely than a conger, which is often a most exasperating fish to hook, especially in the daytime ; but it is better to give the fish plenty of time to get the bait well into his mouth before attempting to hit the hook into him, and nothing will be lost by waiting a little before striking. If a fish be felt at the bait which the angler has reason to think may be a ling, it sometimes pays to draw

the bait slightly away from him by winding in a foot or two of line slowly, as this will often induce him to take hold of the bait properly.

In playing the fish no special advice need be given except that, if he seems a heavy one, it is a mistake to hurry him too much. Nothing will be lost by an extra two or three minutes' play, and with ling, as indeed with most other sea fish, it is a mistaken policy for the angler to try to get the fish into the boat as soon as possible. The ling is a strong, powerful fish, and it goes without saying that the novice, if angling on ground of a character where he is likely to encounter one, should see to it that all his gear is sound and strong. The ling is quite an easy fish to gaff, and usually there is really no excuse for one being lost in the gaffing if he be—as he should be—thoroughly played out before being brought alongside. But a very common reason for large fish being lost in the gaffing is that it is almost impossible to dissuade some boatmen from catching hold of the line—a very fruitful cause of disaster. *The angler should never allow this if he can possibly prevent it.* Irish boatmen are often very fond of gaffing both ling and cod towards the tail, because if gaffed elsewhere it rather spoils the appearance of the fish for the market, or as they say, it “lets the wind out of him”; there is no objection to this provided of course that the gaff be not inserted too near the tail.

According to one authority ling are to be captured off Yorkshire from February to the end of May; in the South West of England in January and February; and in the North of Ireland from March until May. But the angler fishing in Irish waters will as a general rule find ling there on appropriate ground from May onwards through the summer, and until the weather becomes too rough and cold for sea angling; although when once July is in the hordes of spur dogfish which unfortunately nowadays

seem a yearly occurrence in those waters often make ground fishing on the outer marks practically impossible.

In appearance the ling looks very much like a cross between a cod and a conger. But there is of course no foundation in fact for this idea, for the ling is a true member of the cod family; and Mr. C. O. Minchin says that the fish probably represents pretty closely the original type of that family.

CHAPTER XVI

CONGER

THE fish to be considered in the present Chapter—the conger—is one of the commonest of our sea fish, and very widely distributed throughout the waters around the British Isles. Conger have a well known preference for rocky ground, but even on those parts of the coast where the bottom is sandy one may catch them, for there is often some old wreck or something of the sort where a few good fish have their habitation. Conger grow to an immense size—100 lb. or more—but probably less than a score weighing 50 lb. or over have been landed by anglers. The heaviest rod caught conger, as mentioned in a previous Chapter, was a fish of 66 lb., taken near Worthing, and another good one, weighing 62 lb., was caught at Valentia in 1914. The fish is principally a nocturnal feeder, and in shallow water, especially if it be bright and clear, one has not very much chance of catching big conger in the daytime. Indeed prior to the “discovery” of Ballycotton and other fine sea fishing stations on the Irish coast not a great deal of angling for big conger had taken place by day; and even on such grounds, where large numbers of good fish have been landed in the daytime, there is little doubt that, other things being equal, one has a much better chance of making a good bag of conger at night.

Conger fishing has a great fascination for some sea

anglers, but the writer has not very much use for it except in the case of really large fish, for it is a "pulley-hauley" business at best. The fish never runs, and although a tussle with a big one does not lack excitement, and is an excellent test of the strength of the angler's tackle, it must be confessed that once the fish has been hooked and got off the bottom there is not a great deal of skill about it, and getting her up to the boat is more a question of brute force than anything else.

One or two writers on sea fishing—the latest Major W. R. Thompson in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly* for June, 1919—have suggested that the handline, rather than the rod, is the appropriate weapon for these fish, and it must be confessed that there is something to be said for this view. Indeed in some localities where good conger may be caught the depth of the water and great strength of the tides, necessitating perhaps the use of several pounds' weight of lead in order to hold the bottom, make rod fishing out of the question. But handlining is a wet and "messy" business at the best, besides which it is outside the scope of the writer's present purpose, which is to deal with sea *angling*.

The summer and autumn months are the best for conger fishing, for when the water gets very cold the fish do not feed well, and it is probable that to some extent they hibernate during the winter months. It is well known that they are adversely affected by extreme cold, especially in shallow water, and in very frosty weather they may sometimes be found at the surface in a distended state, and a dead or dying condition. It is not always necessary for the angler who wants to catch conger to go out into deep water for them, for quite good fish may often be caught in not more than two or three fathoms, and pretty close to the shore; although as previously mentioned the chance of taking them under those conditions will usually

be very much greater at night than by day. Good sized conger often take up their abode in the holes and crannies in the under water parts of the stone pier of a harbour, and when one tenant of one of these lurking places has been captured it will usually not be very long before it is occupied by another fish. When the water is very clear the head of a good conger may sometimes be seen at low tide projecting from one of these holes, reminding one somewhat of a bird's head sticking out of the nest. The largest conger the writer remembers to have seen landed by an angler from a harbour pier weighed 38 lb., and was taken at night, but he can recall a good many fish over 20 lb. which were caught from similar places, some of them (generally when the water was pretty thick) by day.

Rod No. 3 on the list is quite capable of dealing with any conger the angler is likely to get hold of, while so far only as this particular fish is concerned more than 100 yards of line on the reel is unnecessary. If however our novice be bottom fishing with fish bait in pretty deep water on rocky ground in Irish or Scottish seas he is quite likely to catch a good many conger along with large fish of other species—indeed at such a station as Ballycotton conger will often constitute the bulk of the catch of fish taken at the ground—and in that case the angler, as mentioned in a previous Chapter, will be well advised to have 200 yards of line on his reel, in case he should have the good fortune to hook a halibut. His bottom tackle will be that previously recommended for that fishing—that is to say, the Ballycotton lead and wire trace. The authorities are practically unanimous in instructing us that conger do not like hard things in their mouths; but the advantages of a wire trace for this general heavy bottom fishing outweigh the possible drawback that the hardness of the trace may deter a happening conger from taking the

bait. Besides, one is in any case compelled to use a hard hook.

The novice who wishes to try specially for conger may be strongly advised, if conditions are suitable, to fish by night rather than by day; and the trace the writer recommends is one made of tanned water cord, a material which is soft and pliable, possesses great strength, hangs "sweetly" in the water, and resembles very closely a piece of the long "bootlace" weed. For all night fishing the novice should make it an inflexible rule to use only one hook. The trace should be well swivelled, for conger have an extraordinary habit of spinning round very rapidly when on the hook. There should be one swivel on the eye of the hook, another about a foot away from this, and two more at equal intervals along the trace. One writer recommends that the trace should be allowed to lie on the bottom unless this be very rough, but the angler, if he tries this practice, will probably not be long in discontinuing it, for he will find himself continually in trouble through being caught up in the "carpet."

As to the bait, the angler will find that for good sized conger fish bait is a *sine quâ non*. Probably the best of all baits is a baby octopus, known in some parts of Ireland as a "guddle"; but it is only occasionally that one can get hold of them, although sometimes a stray one is landed when angling for small fish. Squid or cuttle is almost as good, and mackerel, herring or pilchard not far behind in attractiveness. Whatever the bait it must be quite fresh, for the conger is a very particular feeder, and as a general rule it is useless to try for this fish with either stale or salted bait. But a friend of the writer's who was once angling in about eight fathoms of water at a place where there was very little run of tide landed a good sized conger which, when in the boat, threw up a couple of *very* stale mackerel which had been in the bait bucket. but had been

thrown overboard as objectionable and useless only a few minutes previously. This however was no doubt only one of those exceptions which go to prove the rule. Most conger fishermen tell one that the fish likes a soft bait, and one writer goes so far as to recommend that all fish bait used (even pilchard) should be beaten to soften it before it is put on the hook—advice which, so far as the fish just named is concerned, the angler had better not follow, for he will find that the practice is open to more than one serious objection!

It was remarked in a previous Chapter that the conger is often a very exasperating fish to hook, especially in the daytime; indeed, particularly if the water be clear and bright, the novice will find that it will sometimes take as long as ten minutes or even more from the time he feels the first small pull of a conger at the bait until either the fish takes it into her mouth sufficiently to enable the hook to be driven home, or succeeds in stripping it, as the case may be. She will nose and mumble the bait, giving a series of small pulls which the angler will find rather fascinating at first, but very tiresome when long continued; and sometimes she will hang on to the bait with her teeth when the angler winds in line slowly in the endeavour to coax her into taking it properly, only to let go when she has been pulled a fathom or so off the ground. At night the fish usually bite more sharply, although there are occasions when they will play about with a bait then almost as much as in the daytime. There is one annoying drawback to which night angling for conger is sometimes subject, and that is a phosphorescent state of the water. Conditions in other respects may be ideal; a warm, moonless night, calm sea, and a bucketful of freshly caught bait may have raised the angler's hopes high. But if the line looks like a thin stream of molten fire as it is lowered through the water he cannot expect to make a good catch

of conger. The writer has been rather unfortunate in this respect, and he can recall quite a few occasions when a promising night's congering has been spoiled in this way. If, however, one *does* happen to get hold of a decent fish under those conditions she is a fine sight as she comes up, twisting and writhing, through the clear water, and looking like a flaming serpent ; and it is astonishing how much larger she looks than her actual size. In a previous Chapter the writer has remarked on the fact that fish caught at night look larger than they really are ; and the chances are that the novice, when he sees his catch laid out on the harbour pier or beach next morning, will feel considerably disappointed with the size of the fish when seen in the cold light of day. One writer recommends that each fish when caught should be placed in a large, strong sack. This is not a bad plan when once she is in the sack, but the angler will probably find that the operation of getting her there is often a very troublesome one. The present writer thinks it a good deal more important that the novice should see to it that the boat in which he goes night congering is a big, roomy one, with plenty of beam.

After the fish has been struck she should be pulled off the ground instantly, although such experience as the writer has had disposes him to think that the tendency of a big conger to hitch her tail round a rock has been rather exaggerated by some writers. If she *should* succeed in doing this the best thing to do is to slack off a fathom or two of line and wait for her to let go, which she will usually do after a time. When once the fish is off the ground the rest is generally only a question of brute force, sound tackle and a good hook hold ; although very often a good fish will alternate very hard pulling and a bulldog like shaking of her head with an upward swim towards the surface. The novice should therefore be on the watch for this, and when it happens prevent a slack

line by rapid winding. A conger is almost always still full of fight when brought to the surface, and this, coupled with the elongated shape of the fish, makes her rather a difficult one to gaff properly. Her last effort when brought alongside will probably be to spin round at an extraordinarily rapid pace.

CHAPTER XVII

SKATE

IN a previous Chapter the writer has remarked that nobody (at any rate after he has landed one) wants to haul up skate—meaning big skate—nowadays. But perhaps our novice may think that he would like to undergo the experience once, just to see for himself what it is like. It is a thousand pities that the skate is not a running fish, for he is immensely strong and powerful, and grows to an enormous size—probably the great grey skate attains a weight of 400 lb. or so—so that if he behaved as a halibut does when hooked he would provide some magnificent sport. The writer, for his sins, has had his share, and perhaps more than his share of these brutes, although he is thankful to say he has never had an experience like that of a well known member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, who on one memorable occasion, in Irish waters, landed eight big ones in a day ! But among those he has hooked he can only recall one—a small fish of some 60 lb. or 70 lb., foul hooked near the root of the tail—which made a semblance of a rush, and behaved more or less like a running fish. Ninety nine times out of a hundred when one is into a big skate it feels just as if the hook were badly foul in the thick weed at the bottom ; in fact it is often difficult to tell at first, especially if there is a little swell on, whether one is really into a skate or only the "carpet." Speaking generally the skate, like other flat-

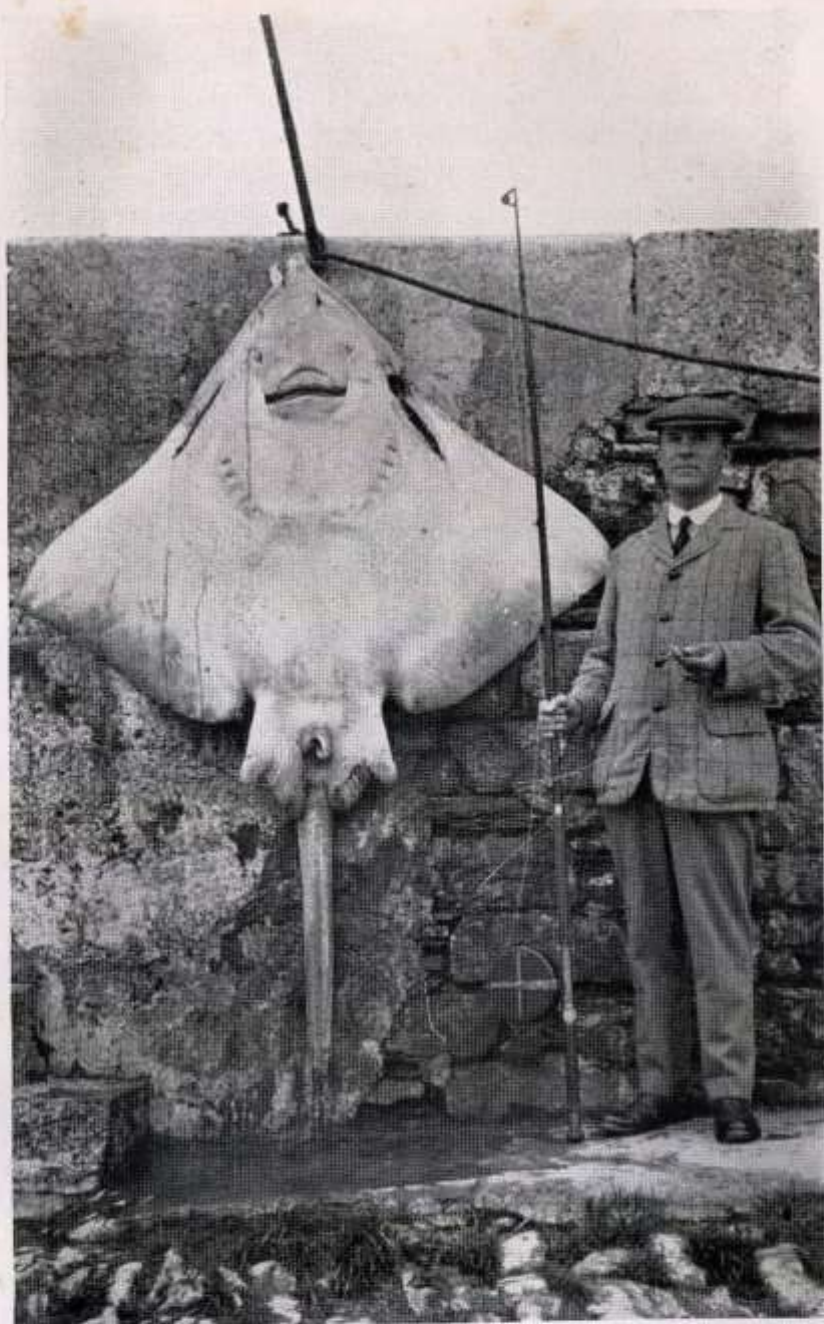
fish (although technically of course the skate is not really a flatfish at all), prefers a sandy rather than a rocky bottom ; but large numbers of them have been hooked on rough ground—a good many on high rock—so that it is pretty evident that the skate, like the halibut, is more or less of a rover, and given to roaming about over all sorts of ground in search of food. The skate, although he does not look built for speed, is in reality a very swift fish, probably surpassed only in speed, among British sea fish, by the blue shark and the halibut ; a large one on being landed into the bottom of the boat threw up a small mackerel, some six or seven inches long, which had evidently only been swallowed a few minutes previously, for it was quite fresh, without a mark or a scratch on it—a capital bait for a big pollack on the driftline, to which purpose it was promptly applied. (It is a curious fact, by the way, that many of our larger predatory sea fish seem to swallow much of their food whole, without biting it ; one would think that they must miss a good deal of its flavour.)

Skate are very common and widely distributed throughout British seas, but the angler who is after a big one may be advised to try Irish, Scottish or Cornish waters. The fish is quite common at Ballycotton, and probably more so at Valentia, while more than one large one has been landed off Penzance. A skate of some 120 lb., taken about twenty years ago at the first named place, was probably the first *very large* fish to be landed on rod and line in our seas ; a circumstance which no doubt gave rise to the impression, prevalent even to-day in the minds of some sea anglers, that Ballycotton is a place famous for big skate and little else, an idea which it need hardly be said is an entirely erroneous one. Large numbers of skate over 1 cwt. have been landed by anglers (mostly in Irish or Scottish waters), in a good many cases unaided,

but more often handlined up by the boatman—a method of dealing with a large skate which the novice will probably invariably adopt after he has once undergone the gruelling experience of bringing one up to the gaff by his own efforts. It is rather curious, by the way, that amongst those captured a good many have weighed 180 lb., or a pound or two more; the writer thinks he could enumerate at least a dozen.

The angler who is seriously trying to capture a large skate, at any rate in Irish waters, will find, as in the case of shark fishing, that his boatmen will probably express a good deal of dissatisfaction with the performance; for there is little or no market in Ireland for this fish, and at one time most of the skate caught there were thrown away. The writer noticed though on his last visit to Ballycotton that the wings (the only edible part of the fish) were cut off each of the half dozen or so of skate landed, and carefully preserved by his boatman; a circumstance due no doubt to the fact that the high prices prevalent there, as well as here, since the war have at last taught the men the folly of wasting so much good and wholesome food.

Rod No. 3 on the list is hardly up to big skate; and therefore the novice who wants to try seriously for a large one may be advised to invest in a more powerful rod for the purpose. The writer would suggest either Gamage's "Super Dreadnought" or Carter's "Ballycotton"; for choice the former, as it is built on the very sound American plan of a short butt and long top, while the special method of its construction renders it an exceptionally powerful weapon—too powerful indeed, in the writer's opinion, for any fish but large skate. The running line used must be a very strong one, and although 100 yards is usually sufficient so far as skate are concerned, the angler will be well advised, as in the case of other heavy bottom fishing on



MR. H. E. BURLTON AND SKATE OF 166 LB. CAUGHT BY HIM.

such ground, to have 200 yards on his reel, in case a halibut should be hooked. The ground tackle should be similar to that previously advised for that fish, and if the novice can get hold of a 10/0 hook particularly stout in the wire he may be recommended to use it ; for the skate's jaws are tremendously powerful, and he is armed with an extraordinary set of teeth which he well knows how to use. Mackerel, herring or pilchard are the best baits, although almost any fish bait will catch a skate at times ; and the bait should be as large as the hook will comfortably hold. The bite of this fish has no special characteristic ; but the fact that it is not an uncommon thing for a large skate to be foul hooked would seem to support the statement of one writer that the fish usually " spreads himself " over his prey, so to speak. Like the halibut and the ling, a skate which has broken away will often take a bait again almost at once ; and therefore if the angler should be unfortunate enough to be broken up by one he should lose no time in fitting up fresh ground tackle and trying again—in which he will no doubt be blessed by his angling companion (if he has one), for a large skate will often hang round a boat for a considerable time and scare a good many other and more sporting fish away. The writer recollects on one occasion, a good many years ago now, landing a skate over 100 lb. which he had lost about ten minutes previously owing to the hook breaking ; and when the fish was at last into the boat the severe surgical operation which was necessary before the hook could be extracted revealed the broken part of the other hook embedded in its stomach—a circumstance which may be rather comforting to the humane sea angler, as it certainly seems to support the theory that fish do not feel pain to anything like the same extent that warm blooded creatures do.

Once the skate is well hooked, then the fun begins—

for the unfortunate angler's companions, if not for himself. The fight is usually a very prolonged one, and a large skate may take an hour or more to land, of which the greater part will probably be taken up by the terrific effort needed to get the fish off the ground. This is a heart breaking job, for a large skate seems at first absolutely immovable, and as if he were anchored to the bottom. There is usually nothing for it but to keep a steady and prolonged strain on the fish—as much as the tackle will stand, in fact; although the writer has seen a heavy weight lowered by a handline and vigorously bumped up and down on the back of the fish, in a despairing effort to make him "get a move on." The writer remembers indeed one large skate which was landed in something like ten minutes; but this particular fish hadn't the ghost of a chance, for (in addition to the hook in his mouth) he was foul hooked close to the tip of one of his wings by a second angler, and pumped up to the boat sideways in fine style by the two rodsters, working together. Of course this was quite an exceptional case; and the novice who has at last succeeded, by dint of great exertions, in getting his fish a fathom or so off the ground will find that a tremendous lot of effort will still be required to bring him up to the boat. The fish resists very stubbornly, and the chances are that the angler, if he perseveres to the end, will find himself pretty well played out at the finish—perhaps more so than the skate! Sometimes too, especially if the angler be rather weak with him for a moment or two, the fish will succeed in getting his head down and "take charge," when there is usually nothing for it but to let him get down to the bottom, and begin the process all over again—a particularly heart breaking job. If there be a good bit of tide running it will often assist the angler considerably when once the fish has been got off the ground, for the tide will frequently get under his wings

and help a good deal in lifting him, much in the same way that the wind lifts a kite ; although on the other hand the fish, when this happens, will usually come to the surface a good distance astern of the boat, necessitating another tremendous effort on the angler's part to get him alongside, with the risk that at any moment (owing to the angler's inability to control the fish anything like so effectively as when he is directly underneath the rod) he may succeed in getting his head down and plunging to the bottom again ; while if he happens to be a very large one, and the tide be running really hard, it will sometimes be found quite impossible to get him back to the boat ; and in that case of course if the angler wants the fish the only thing to do is to buoy the cable and row after him, a proceeding which the novice, if in Irish waters, will probably find (as in the case of a shark) will be resented a good deal by his boatmen as a lot of unnecessary trouble over an "ould skait." When at last the fish is alongside, the first gaff (it will probably be necessary to use two or three if he be a large one) should be stuck into him underneath his nose, if possible, so as to hold his head up and prevent his plunging. The writer has seen more than one big skate lost alongside in the gaffing (although the fish is not really at all a difficult one to gaff) ; and if this happens the way in which he will disappear in an instant of time is really wonderful. Once safely in the boat he is usually quiet enough, although it is advisable to exercise great care in getting the hook out of him, and not to take any liberties with his mouth ; for his jaws are quite powerful enough of course to crush an incautious hand or finger to pulp if once he fairly gets hold of it. For skate fishing a tarpon belt is a *sine quâ non* ; indeed it is positively dangerous to attempt to get up a large fish without one. The liver of a big skate, by the way, makes a capital ingredient for ground bait for almost all kinds of fish ;

and when stale is an excellent hook bait for the harbour haunting and bottom rooting bass, although it is rather difficult to keep on the hook.

The very small fish of a few pounds' weight may be, and often are, taken at the bottom (usually on sandy ground) on single gut or gut-substitute tackle, although if the hook be swallowed right down the trace of course will not stand much chance against the fish's jaws. They will take lugworm or mussel as well as fish—in fact almost all the natural baits usually employed in sea fishing. One of the rays (which are very close relatives of the skates) is said to be particularly fond of sandeels. As food, these very small skate (plain boiled, with caper sauce) are excellent eating.

CHAPTER XVIII

WRASSE

ALTHOUGH he is certainly one of the handsomest of our common British sea fish, and fights well *up to a point*, the wrasse has not been specially fished for to any great extent by our sea anglers, perhaps because it is of no great value as an article of food. Wrasse fishing however is not at all bad fun, and moreover it has the advantage that it can very often be pursued quite as successfully from a rocky shore as from a boat, so that it sometimes affords an opportunity of sport to the weather-bound angler who is unable to get afloat. There are several varieties of wrasse, but the large green one, the ballan wrasse, and the "conner" are the most important from the sportsman's point of view. The pollack and bass fisherman looks upon wrasse as vermin, and to him they are only too often a great nuisance, for they are very fond of live prawn; while when the angler is fishing for black bream at Bognor, the capture of wrasse, as has been mentioned in a previous Chapter, is a useful sign that his bait is too low, and must come up a little.

All the species of this fish exhibit marked differences in coloration, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that one rarely catches two which are quite alike. Formerly it used to be thought by sea anglers that the extreme limit of size which the fish attained was about 7 lb. or 8 lb.; but we have had to revise our ideas on this point, for a

few years ago Mr. F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, astonished his fellow members by sending to the society's head-quarters in Fetter Lane a splendid case of four stuffed wrasse, all caught by him off Looe, and weighing respectively $12\frac{3}{4}$ lb., 12 lb., $11\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and $10\frac{3}{4}$ lb. The writer has never fished the particular mark on which these fish were taken, by the way, but he believes it to be one of the best spots for big wrasse anywhere round our coasts. It is quite close to Looe, and the best time of year to fish it for wrasse is the latter half of October and the early part of November. The most killing bait to use there is lugworm, threaded on the hook from the head to about the middle of the worm, so as to leave the tail half waving about in the water to attract the fish. Mr. Mitchell-Hedges thinks there are wrasse up to 20 lb. in weight on this ground.

The wrasse of course is a fish which lives entirely on rocky ground, and as he swims and feeds very close to the bottom, and is a powerful fish when first hooked, with a horrid habit of bolting for the cover afforded by thick weed or a hole or cranny in the rock, one has to use strong tackle, with which one can hold him pretty tightly, in order to get on terms with a big one. The fish almost invariably feed better on the flood tide than on the ebb, and the first two hours after dead low water are usually the best for wrasse fishing.

The choice of the rod which the angler may be advised to use for the game will depend principally on whether he is fishing from a boat or from a rocky shore, and partly on the weight of lead which he has to employ in order to get his bait to the bottom. For boat work rod No. 3 will generally be found the most useful, although in easy tides some very good fun with wrasse up to 4 lb. or 5 lb. in weight may be had with the pollack rod, and also with rod No. 2 on the list. On one occasion the author recalls

getting a wrasse of $3\frac{3}{4}$ lb. on a fly rod, when fishing a driftline for mackerel on rocky ground pretty close to the cliffs; but this particular capture, he confesses, was probably due more to luck than judgment, and he certainly does not recommend the novice to use his fly rod for serious wrasse fishing. When angling from the shore of course a longer rod is necessary than for boat work, and unless the novice has a rod specially built for wrasse fishing, which is hardly worth while, his best plan will be to use either his pollack or bass rod. As far as the ground tackle is concerned the choice of this may be left to the angler's particular fancy, with the reservation that some kind of wire is a *sine quâ non*; for the wrasse is armed with a formidable array of teeth which will almost invariably prove fatal to gut or gut-substitute. Some anglers use a one hook paternoster, with the single hook on a wire snood fastened to the tackle, either with or without the intervention of a short wire boom, about a foot above the lead. This arrangement has the advantage that the angler always knows, when the lead is resting on the bottom, that his bait is in the right place; and for general boat work, especially where tides run strongly, and also for shore fishing where there is much run of sea, it is probably the best gear to use. But whenever possible it is best to use a wire trace about 6 ft. long, terminating in a single hook, with the lead on the running line above the swivel at the top of the trace. For boat fishing in easy tides, and for shore work in a sheltered spot where there is not much run of sea, this form of tackle is more deadly and effective than the paternoster. If the last named tackle be used, by the way, it is very desirable to have the lead tied on with weak twine; for the fishing is all on rocky ground, often very rough, so that a hang-up will not be at all an infrequent occurrence. Both paternoster and trace may be constructed of wire of the material

and size previously recommended for pollack fishing. The hook should be about a 1 or 1/0, and when baiting with lugworm a long-shanked hook is necessary, in order to carry the worm properly ; indeed in all wrasse fishing the writer, contrary to his ordinary practice, likes a hook with a fairly long shank, for it is a very awkward operation to get a short-shanked hook out of the mouth of a good sized wrasse.

Soft crab is one of the best baits to use, and live prawn or shrimp (preferably the former) are also very good. Lugworm is a good all round bait, as also is mussel. Failing these, one can sometimes catch wrasse with small strips of mackerel or herring, but probably the most attractive bait for a wrasse, as most bass and pollack fishermen know to their cost, is a live prawn—not too large in size. The wrasse is a fish which nibbles and worries at this bait, and if our novice does much float fishing for bass with prawn he will not be long in learning to distinguish between the bite of a bass and a wrasse. When fishing for wrasse with this bait the angler must always be on his guard against striking too soon ; and even then he will often have the experience of winding up, only to find that the wrasse has pulled the head of the prawn off without encountering the barb of the hook. When shore fishing for wrasse in a sheltered spot where the water is calm and clear one can sometimes see the fish take the bait, and consequently can strike at the right moment ; and when this is possible wrasse fishing becomes a very fascinating and engrossing pursuit. When hooked, the fish pulls very hard indeed at first, and the novice must keep a pretty tight hand on him, and (if fishing from the shore) be on the look-out to prevent the running line being cut against the sharp, rough surface of a rock. The writer once saw a friend of his, who was fishing from a rocky eminence overhanging a fairly deep, still pool, lose

a good wrasse through the fish bolting into a hole in the rock right underneath the angler's feet ; reminding one very much of an incident described in one of the delightful books of the late Mr. Francis Francis, where a big trout, hooked at the back of some houses at Winchester, escaped in very similar fashion by bolting up a 10-inch drain right under the angler's feet. A wrasse does not keep up the fight for very long however, and after the first rush or two the novice will not as a rule have very much trouble with him ; indeed at the finish the fish generally comes in like a lamb, without a kick left in him.

The wrasse makes a capital bait for a lobster pot, and this is perhaps the best use to which the angler's catch can be applied. If the novice be fishing from any of the Devonshire and Cornish villages, where often nearly all the local fishermen are crabbers, he will find that they will usually be grateful for the gift of such wrasse as he may catch, and in return (for one good turn deserves another) will probably give him, when they can spare them, a freshly caught mackerel or two, which will come in very useful as bait for other and better fish. As an article of food the wrasse takes a very lowly place on our list of sea fish. But lighthouse keepers in isolated rocky places sometimes catch a good many wrasse in their leisure hours, which they often salt and keep in a cask (presumably for use in case they should run short of other food) ; and during the war a friend of the writer's told him that more than once he saw wrasse exposed for sale on a fishmonger's slab in the West End of London—truly a remarkable sight. They were no doubt described as "rock salmon," which seems to be a sort of generic name in the fish trade, and covers a good deal. A small wrasse of 5 in. or 6 in., by the way, which has been allowed to get stale, makes a very good bait for the harbour haunting bass.

CHAPTER XIX

HADDOCK

IT is a matter for regret that this fish does not come the way of the South Country sea angler more frequently ; for the haddock is lively and active, and when angled for in a place where tides are easy, so that one can use light tackle, haddock fishing is very good fun. The fish, it is true, is distributed fairly widely throughout British waters ; but although it may be caught off Yorkshire and on some other parts of the English coast, it is not very common in those parts of our English seas which are within the reach of the sea angler ; and the angler who wants to fish specially for haddock may be advised to do so in Scotland, which is the true home of this fish, as it is of the coalfish. Indeed at times the haddock is almost as plentiful on some parts of the Scottish coast as is the coalfish, although there is of course a marked difference between the two fish as regards the sort of ground on which they may be found ; for the coalfish, as is well known, has a preference for rough, weed covered rock, while the haddock, speaking generally, prefers a sandy or gravelly bottom. There are a good many haddock in some parts of the North Sea, but as a rule they are so far from land as to be beyond the reach of the amateur fisherman ; although probably one of these days some enterprising sea angler will try bottom fishing there from a drifting motor boat far out from land—an experiment which is

quite likely to meet with success in the shape of good sport with haddock and cod, with the happening chance of a halibut. The North Sea since the war, by the way, is rather plentifully bestrewn with sunken wrecks (a circumstance which will prove of inestimable benefit to our sea fisheries, although not to the trawlers), so that the risk of losing tackle through getting hung up in one would have to be taken. So far as Irish waters are concerned the haddock seems to be rather a wanderer, although the writer believes that there are a good many in some of the sandy bays on the West coast of Ireland—localities which even in normal times are not very often visited by the amateur sea angler. At Ballycotton haddock have been fairly plentiful on appropriate ground in some years (1910, for instance), but entirely absent, or nearly so, in others. When found there they have generally run to a good size, fish of 5 lb. or 6 lb. apiece having been fairly common; and the largest rod caught haddock which the writer can recollect at the moment—a fish of $8\frac{1}{4}$ lb.—was taken there some years ago. Speaking generally, the average size of the fish is smaller in Scottish waters, where the amateur will find that they will not usually exceed 3 lb. or 4 lb. in weight. The authorities mention very much heavier haddock, fish of 25 lb. and $24\frac{1}{2}$ lb. being recorded—one from Dublin Bay, by the way—but such monsters are quite exceptional, and any haddock over 10 lb. is distinctly rare. In appearance the haddock rather resembles the cod, but it may easily be distinguished both from that fish and from the whiting by the dark smudge above the pectoral fin (which Scottish fishermen tell one is the mark of St. Peter's thumb) and the narrow black lateral line. The summer months are the best for haddock fishing, although the larger fish are usually more abundant in coastal waters in winter, when they seem to leave the deeper water and come inshore to spawn. Although

primarily a bottom feeding fish, the haddock has been known to take a small spoon, and very occasionally he may be captured on a coalfish fly or a soleskin imitation bait.

The tackle which the angler may be advised to use for haddock fishing will depend principally on the depth of the water and the strength of the tide. The haddock is a strong fighter when hooked, and it is a shame to use heavier tackle when angling for him than is really necessary; besides which the novice will get a great deal more enjoyment out of his sport by using as light tackle as is reasonably possible—a remark, by the way, which applies with equal force to a good many other fish than haddock. In fairly deep water the angler had better use rod No. 3 on the list, except on the slack of the tide; but in many of the shallow sandy bays of the West coast of both Scotland and Ireland there is not much run of tide, and if our novice be fishing there he will often find it possible to use rod No. 2, if this be a trout spinning rod—and the lighter and more pliable the rod the better the fun because, as has been remarked before, it is the rod and not the line which is the governing factor in all sporting sea angling. At the same time of course the line should be in keeping with the rod, for it is a great mistake to use with a light rod a running line which is too thick and heavy; and in this shallow water the angler will find that the line he has been using for fishing the driftline for black and red bream will do very nicely. A good many sea anglers use a paternoster for the game, but with haddock, as with most other sea fish, it will usually be found that the trace hanging below the lead is the more deadly tackle; and if our novice doubts this he may easily put it to the test, if he has a friend with him, by fishing one form of tackle against the other. Whether trace or paternoster be used, it may be made of gut-substitute, but (except in

very clear water) this had better be a size stouter than that employed for bream. The hook should be about a 1/0 or 2/0 unless pretty large fish are expected, in which case hooks a size or two bigger may be used with advantage. In very clear, bright water the size of both hook and bait should be reduced, a rule which applies, as has been remarked before, in sea angling generally. Except when baiting with lugworm the novice will find that there is no advantage, but rather the reverse, in using a long-shanked hook. The length of the trace of course will be regulated by that of the rod, but in general one of 8 ft. is long enough. For this fishing the writer likes two hooks, for the arguments in favour of the "single hook" theory hardly apply in haddock fishing; besides, the fish usually swim in shoals, and when one is located they may often be caught two at a time—and two vigorous haddock on this light tackle give one a lot of fun. When fishing a trace the angler will start of course by plumbing the depth accurately and marking his running line in the manner previously recommended, for it is essential to fish the bait quite close to the bottom. If there be a little run of tide the trace will usually go clear of the running line in letting down, but in any case a little lead wire should be wound round the lower part of the trace in the manner previously recommended for the driftline for red bream, as this not only helps the trace to go clear but also assists in keeping the baits close to the ground. The lead, or leads, go on the running line just above the swivel at the top of the trace, and the sort previously recommended for pollack fishing are as handy as any, as they are so quickly and easily put on and taken off again. In quite slack water the angler will possibly find it necessary to use some sort of boom to keep the trace and baits from fouling the running line on the downward journey, and this may be either the sort advised in the Chapter on red bream or

one constructed after the fashion shown below (this is probably a fad, but as remarked before, most anglers are full of fads) :

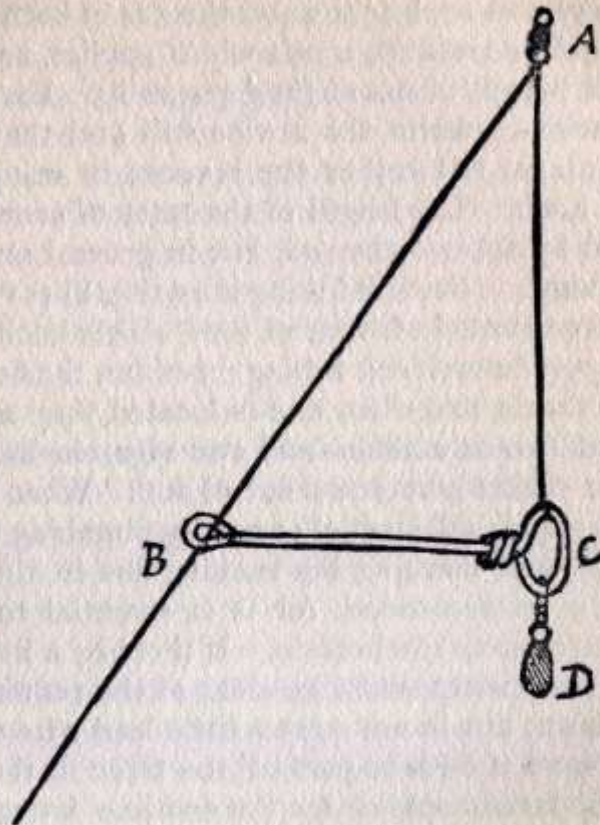


FIG. 10.

A is the swivel joining the trace to the running line, and BC the boom, made of a short piece of brass wire. The trace passes freely through the loop at B, which is in a horizontal plane ; the oval loop C is vertical, and joined to the swivel by a piece of gut-substitute, while the lead (D) is attached to the lower part of this loop by means of a spring link. If it be possible to do so however it is better to avoid the use of any boom, because it complicates

the tackle and makes it more conspicuous ; and it is a very sound general rule in all sea angling to have one's gear as simple as is consistent with its fishing properly.

As to bait, the angler has a wide choice, for the haddock, like his relative the cod, is rather an omnivorous sort of fish, and at times he will take almost any of the standard baits used in sea fishing. Perhaps the best all round lure is fresh mussel ; but both lugworm and ragworm are good, and he will also take squid or cuttle, and strips of mackerel or herring. As in almost every other kind of sea angling, ground baiting is a very distinct advantage unless the tide be running too hard for it to be effective ; and the ground bait bag should be anchored close to the bottom and shaken vigorously from time to time. Haddock are extraordinarily fond of brittle starfish, and when, as sometimes happens, the angler finds one or two of these curious and fragile creatures clinging to his hook bait when he pulls it up the probability is that if there are any haddock in the locality at all they are not very far off. The brittle star of course is too small and delicate to be used on the hook, but if the angler can get hold of any they make very good ground bait, mixed up with other stuff. The bite of the haddock is usually a sharp and vigorous one, and as a general rule the angler, especially if using mussel, will find that it is better to strike at once.

In deeper water and stronger tides of course one has to use a heavier lead and stouter rod, but more than half the enjoyment afforded by the more sporting fishing in shallower water will then be missing.

When fishing for haddock it is not an uncommon thing, especially in the autumn, to get hold of a good sized cod ; while if there be rocky ground not far away the angler, particularly if using mussel, is not unlikely to encounter a coalfish now and then. For this reason the novice, in playing his fish (especially if using light tackle),

will find it just as well to be rather "tender" with him, and in fact to act on what the writer thinks is a very sound general rule in sea angling, namely, when in doubt, give line.

CHAPTER XX

WHITING

TO the sporting sea angler this fish is of more use on the breakfast table, curled round in the orthodox way with his tail stuck through his eye sockets, and fried a nice golden brown colour, than on the hook. For the whiting is a very feeble fish, and apart from the fun of hooking him when he is biting shyly—and whiting can be very shy at times, particularly in clear water—there is really no sport in catching him. In the very early days of sea angling the arrival of the autumn whiting was looked upon as one of the principal events—perhaps the principal one—of the sea fishing year, and the fish shared with the cod and codling which usually arrive on the East and South East coasts at about the same time, and perhaps also with the pouting and dab, the distinction of being the fish most frequently caught on rod and line. But we have progressed a good deal since those far off days, and whiting fishing to-day has lost a good deal of its popularity except with those old fashioned sea anglers, of whom some still remain, who seem wedded to bottom fishing pure and simple, and never appear to try any other method of angling. The whiting is primarily a bottom feeder, and therefore must generally be fished for pretty close to the ground ; and although the fish sometimes rise to mid water or higher still—of which more hereafter—they are such feeble fighters when hooked that the writer

does not think it is worth while to try to angle for them in a sporting way.

The whiting does not grow to any great size, and most of the fish which will fall to the rod of the amateur on the South East coast will be under 1 lb. in weight, although in the West Country, and also in Irish and Scottish waters, fish of 2 lb. or even 3 lb. apiece are not uncommon. A cast of what is believed to be the record whiting hangs in the rooms of the British Sea Anglers' Society; this fish weighed $6\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and was caught in a trawl in the English Channel, near the Varne. The writer does not know the record rod and line weight for the fish, but the largest whiting which he has actually seen landed by an angler weighed exactly 4 lb., and was taken at Deal about eighteen years ago.

As already mentioned, the autumn months constitute the whiting fishing season on the East and South East coasts, but in some other parts of the country whiting may be taken earlier in the year. At Poole Harbour, for instance, the autumn whiting are usually preceded by a short season of these fish in June and July, and curiously enough the earlier of these two visitations of the whiting is generally the better of the two, both as regards size and numbers. The fish do not however usually get so far up the Harbour then as they do in the autumn, but gather in great shoals just outside the bar at the Harbour mouth, which they enter when the tide is ebbing and then swim out again against the flood. On many parts of both the Irish and Scottish coasts the fish may be taken from time to time right through the summer months. It is well known that as a rule whiting prefer a sandy to a rocky bottom, although they may sometimes be taken on fairly rough ground. They swim in great shoals, usually a foot or two off the bottom, and when the fish have been located and are found to be on the feed the fun, such as it is, is

usually of the "fast and furious" order, and they may be caught with the greatest ease two and three at a time. Takes of from five to twenty score of fish per boat are not uncommon, but the heaviest catch the writer has ever heard of was made at Deal on Oct. 22, 1919, when two anglers between them landed the extraordinary number of forty five score of fish, the great bulk of which were whiting.

The rod the novice will use of course will be No. 3 on the list, while a 6-inch reel may be recommended on account of its rapid wind. When the fish are biting freely in a good tideway a paternoster is the most effective form of ground tackle, but if the angler be after whiting alone the cod hook at the end of the combination cod and whiting tackle described in the Chapter on the former fish had better be replaced by a couple of smaller hooks about a foot or fifteen inches apart. If the fish are shy the trace hanging below the lead will be found the more effective tackle; and in that case the angler (if he wants to use a boom) will find the one illustrated and described in the Chapter on haddock as good an arrangement as any, although the trace should be a little shorter and may carry an extra hook. As to the bait, most of the natural lures generally used in sea angling will catch whiting, but like some others of our sea fish they are sometimes rather capricious in their feeding, and what pleases them one day has no attractions for them the next, for no apparent reason. After the sprats arrive on the South East coast—usually in November—pieces of that fish generally prove most effective, and probably sprat and lugworm are the baits generally most successful there. But strips of herring, as also mussels and shrimps, will often catch whiting if neither sprat nor lugworm be available. The whiting is one of the very few of our sea fish which will take salted bait fairly well, although even then the sport

is hardly ever so good as with fresh. But in the West Country at any rate they may be caught with salted pilchard if no fresh bait can be obtained. As a general rule salted bait is very much like the Irishman's mare, which it will be remembered was an exceptionally good animal, and had only two faults—"a divil of a job to get hould av, your honour, she is, and whin she's caught she isn't worth a d——n!" Some time ago however, Sir C. A. Payton spoke of salted herring milt as a good bait for billet. The writer does not remember to have tried this, but it goes without saying of course that any recommendation by a sea angler with such a long and varied experience as "Sarcelle" carries a very great deal of weight. But that is by the way.

The bite of the whiting is generally a sharp little downward tug, repeated once or twice, and when they are feeding well it will be found, as often as not, that the fish will hook himself. When this is the case the angler will find that it frequently pays not to wind up until he thinks every hook has its fish. One sea angler of the writer's acquaintance claims to be able to tell from the feel of each bite which of the three hooks of his paternoster the fish is on, but this is rising to a height of artistic whiting fishing to which the writer feels he will never be able to attain.

As mentioned previously, whiting can be shy enough in clear water, and when this is the case the sound general rule of reducing the size of both hook and bait applies, perhaps with more than ordinary force. Very small hooks and quite tiny pieces of bait should then be used, and in those circumstances it will generally be found that the trace hanging below the lead will beat the paternoster out of sight. On the slack of the tide the fish will sometimes rise a little in the water, and the novice therefore should be on the look out for this, and act accordingly.

When the sprats are in, whiting often rise at night pretty close to the surface in pursuit of them, and then the fish may be caught from a drifting boat with rod No. 2 and an unleaded or lightly leaded line. It goes without saying of course that this is the most sporting way of catching them, and perhaps our novice may like to try it. He need not be warned however that at that time of year the nights are often very cold on the sea.

CHAPTER XXI

FLOUNDER

THE fish to be considered in the present Chapter is one which some sea anglers would possibly deem worthy of a place on the list of our sporting sea fish ; for the flounder is a lively fighter on the hook, and when fished for with light tackle gives quite good sport. Fortunately flounders are very fond of shallow water, except when they go out to sea in the latter part of the winter to spawn, so that opportunities of angling for them with light gear often present themselves to the sport loving sea angler. In the days when the writer used occasionally to fish for flounders at Leigh, near Southend, however he was surprised to see what a considerable proportion of the anglers who flocked there after flounders on any Sunday morning in the late autumn when the tide served used rods of the " bean pole " type, apparently more suited to hauling up skate than anything else ; but that is a good many years ago now, and perhaps things have altered for the better since then. Personally the writer would never trouble to fish for flounders on the bottom unless he could hold the ground with a light lead—he would wait until the tide eased. But each to his taste of course, and there is a certain type of sea angler still extant (although happily in rapidly diminishing numbers) to whom a heavy lead on his line seems rather an attraction than otherwise.

Flounders are very common in our muddy estuaries and

harbours practically all round the English coast, and it is well known that the fish is one of the very few of our sea fish (and possibly the only flatfish) which ascend rivers for a considerable distance, and seem able to live for a long time in fresh water. When the writer's mother was a girl she lived with her parents at Chiswick, and she has told him of the fine flounders and eels which in those days they used to get from the fishermen at Strand-on-the-Green. Yarrell says that in his time flounders were found as far up the Thames as Sunbury; and years ago they were occasionally caught opposite the Water Gallery at Hampton Court. In more recent years a number of these fish were put into the river above Teddington by the Thames Angling Preservation Society—with what success the writer does not now remember. When fishing for mullet in the Swan Pool, near Falmouth, he has seen some fine flounders there; the water is only slightly brackish, for the only access to the sea is by means of an underground drain pipe, about two feet in diameter, used as an overflow for the fresh water, and the seaward end of which is uncovered except at high tide; and there are, or were, a number of trout in the water also. Flounders are plentiful in the shallow bays on the Lancashire coast, and they are said to swarm in the Solway Firth. There are probably large numbers of them in the shallow waters of the Wash; while Pagham Harbour, which lies between Bognor and Selsea Bill—formerly landlocked, but breached by the sea a few winters ago—is another place where good flounder fishing could possibly be had, but the writer has not heard of anyone having actually tried for them there. During the war it was a closed area, by the way, but the restriction has now been withdrawn. There is at times very good flounder fishing in the Medway, although it deteriorated a good deal during the war, possibly in consequence of the floating oil from the warships and

motor patrol boats ; it is now improving again. Leigh was at one time a favourite and famous place for London sea anglers to catch flounders ; unfortunately it is now not nearly so good as it used to be, although the falling off can hardly be put down to the war, for it had commenced a considerable time before. Various theories have been advanced to account for this deterioration, but whatever the cause the sad fact remains that the palmy days of the Leigh fishing would seem to be over, at any rate for the present ; although of course no one can tell what the future may bring forth. The shrimp trawlers have been blamed, but can hardly be the sole cause of the falling off, because although these trawls do undoubtedly cause immense and incalculable destruction to baby flounders and other flatfish (as anyone who has ever witnessed the hauling of one of these engines of destruction could see for himself) they had been worked long years before the flounder fishing was at its best. Some famous catches of these fish were made at Leigh in the good old days ; one of the best the writer has heard of comprised seventy eight good flounders (by three rods), besides a number of smaller fish which were returned to grow bigger.

The flounder, as is well known, does not grow to any great size, and fish of from $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb., with a *very* occasional two pounder, will probably constitute the bulk of the catch of sizable fish which the sea angler is likely to make, at any rate in the Thames and the Medway ; although one writer says that in some places they attain a weight of 4 lb., while one of the very exceptional weight of 6 lb. is stated to have been recorded.

The rod which the angler may be advised to use for flounder fishing will depend on the depth of the water and the strength of the tide in which he is angling, and also of course on whether he is using float or bottom tackle. In a strong tideway he may possibly have to employ for

bottom fishing rod No. 3 on the list, because he will find that he cannot hold the ground except with a heavy lead, even when using a fine running line and one of the various makes of grip lead, of which there are several on the market. As the writer has said, he would not care to fish for flounders at all under those conditions. As to the ground tackle, the well known "Tony" boom, which is illustrated and described in more than one of the books on sea fishing, works well in pretty shallow water, but is not so satisfactory when the water is deeper, owing to the bellying of the line caused by the tide. For this bottom fishing there should be either one or two hooks on the trace beyond the lead, and one about a foot above it; the latter as a protection against crabs, which are often very troublesome bait stealers—as most sea anglers who have fished much on the bottom for flatfish know to their cost. The trace should be of gut-substitute ("stout trout" size) or single gut, whichever is preferred; and the hooks should be quite small and not long in the shank, unless lugworm is the bait. There is often a difficulty about unhooking a flounder which has taken a small short-shanked hook well down its gullet, but that cannot be helped; and unquestionably such a hook catches them better than a long-shanked one, particularly if a live shrimp, the best of all baits for a flounder, is the lure.

But the angler who wants really to enjoy catching flounders may be advised to have nothing to do with bottom fishing, but to confine himself to float tackle. The fish, as has been said, is a lively and active one on the hook, and it is a shame to angle for him with anything but light tackle. For float work the novice may be advised to use rod No. 2 on the list, if this be a trout spinning rod; for a fly rod (much as the writer would like to use it for catching flounders) is, he confesses, too whippy a tool for the rather quick and fairly energetic strike which is

required to hook the fish when the float has travelled some distance away from the boat. Failing a trout spinning rod, the writer would suggest a Thames punt roach rod. One sea angler of his acquaintance has laid it down that a chub rod is the appropriate weapon—a *dictum* with which the writer does not agree. As in bottom fishing, the running line used should be a fine one, and if the angler has been doing any float fishing for mackerel he will find that the silk line, well "fatted," which he has been using for that will do very nicely for flounders; in fact the tackle generally may be the same. For float fishing one hook is sufficient, and the sliding float should be so adjusted that the bait is only just clear of the bottom; from which it follows of course that the angler must plumb the depth accurately from time to time and move the "stop" on his line as the tide falls or rises—tiresome, but well worth while!

The usual method of fishing for flounders at Leigh is either from the deck of one of the "bawleys" moored there in the channel known as the Ray, or else from a small boat anchored in the same place; the former is much the more comfortable way. One writer in describing this fishing says that the best time is from two or three hours before to two or three hours after high water; but as a matter of fact the exact contrary is more often the case, the best time generally being the two hours on either side of dead low water. A live shrimp will generally be found the best bait (ground baiting with the dead ones); and the shrimp should be hooked through the tail, just like a prawn. If the angler cannot come by any live shrimps he had better rely on lugworm, which is the next best bait; although mussel, soft crab, cockle, and small strips of whitebait will catch flounders at times. November is generally the best month for this fishing, and by Christmas it is usually pretty well over.

It is a thousand pities that sport at Leigh has fallen off so, for to the jaded Londoner a few hours spent on the deck of one of the "bawleys" there came as a very pleasant fillip; one could get there and back comfortably in the day, and (best of all) travel "light," for—barring rod, landing net and reel—all the gear one wants for flounder fishing will go into the jacket pockets. If our novice decides to try it and if he fishes from a "bawley" he should be careful to leave the deck of the craft as clean and tidy as he found it, without any litter of ground bait, etc., and *not* to cut a piece of netting out of the shrimp trawl (the writer was told years ago that this was actually done by one "sportsman") in which to carry home the catch!

CHAPTER XXII

PLAICE

OF the three of our commoner flatfish most often taken by sea anglers, the flounder, the plaice and the dab, the first named, as will have been gathered from the previous Chapter, affords a good deal of enjoyable angling to the sport loving fisherman. Next after him—some way after, it must be confessed—comes the plaice, while the dab is a *very* bad third. Plaice fishing is not bad fun when the fish run to a good size and tides are easy, but the smaller fish which the angler will often find in company with dabs on any “dab ground” are not of much account from a sporting point of view.

Plaice grow to a good size, and at the head-quarters of the British Sea Anglers' Society in Fetter Lane there is a plaster cast (executed by Mr. A. J. Gear, whose beautiful and artistic fish modelling work is so well known to sea anglers) of a fine one, heavy in roe, which weighed 11 lb. Plaice up to about 3 lb. or 4 lb. are sometimes taken by sea anglers, although as a general rule the novice will probably find the usual run of such fish as he catches will be under rather than over 2 lb. apiece. The heaviest rod caught plaice which the writer has heard of weighed 7 lb. exactly.

The fish is very widely distributed in British seas, so that plaice fishing is within the reach of most sea anglers. As is the case with a good many other species, the fish

attains a good size in Irish waters ; and in some of the shallow, sandy bays on the West coast of Ireland which are not much trawled the writer believes there is very good plaice fishing. It is however a long way to go for it, and if the angler be prepared to go to Ireland at all in these days he will probably be able to find much better fun than catching plaice to occupy his time.

Speaking generally, the late summer and autumn months are the best for plaice fishing. In October, 1919, some capital takes of plaice were reported to have been made by amateurs at Llandudno. Probably most sea anglers will recollect a remarkable epidemic of plaice fishing which broke out some years before the war near Dumpton Gap, between Ramsgate and Broadstairs, where large quantities of plaice made their appearance, attracted, it was said, by beds of young mussels. The writer is speaking from memory, and is therefore open to correction on the point (not a very important one), but he believes this was in or about the year 1909. Some remarkably good takes of plaice were made, and it was said at the time that as many as 150 or 200 boats, all pretty close together, and all engaged in plaice fishing, might sometimes have been seen while the fun lasted—which was not for very long. Life is made up, as has been remarked before, of wasted opportunities, and the writer has regretted more than once that, unlike a good many of his sea angling friends, he did not take a hand in the game.

The plaice of course is essentially a bottom feeding fish, and therefore must be angled for at the ground. As in the case of the others of our smaller ground feeding fish, the rod which the angler may be advised to use will depend on the depth of the water and the strength of the tide. In fairly deep water where there is a strong run of tide he will have to use rod No. 3, but it goes without

saying of course that the lighter and more limber the rod the better the fun. It is all a question of the weight of lead one has to use in order to hold the ground, for as far as the size and fighting powers of the fish likely to be encountered are concerned one could easily land plaice on a fly rod. The writer has caught a few of these fish with a trout spinning rod in shallow water on the Devonshire coast, where he was able during the neap tides to use less than 2 oz. of lead. The running line should be a fine one, and in practice the angler will find that the line he has been using for driftline angling for red and black bream will do very well for plaice fishing. The ground tackle will consist of a trace of either gut-substitute ("stout trout," or where large fish are expected, a size stouter) or single gut, as preferred; and either two or three hooks may be used. In shallow water and easy tides, the well known "Tony" boom will be found to work very well, but in deeper water and stronger tides he prefers a boom of the kind illustrated in Chapter XIV. A grip lead will assist in holding the ground, and the writer likes as well as any a flat and rather thin lead which has a small hole in it, through which is fixed transversely a small piece of whalebone. This arrangement is better than the projecting wires which are often used by sea anglers, and the author is indebted for this practical and useful little "tip" to Mr. J. H. Hards, a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, and a keen and accomplished sea fisherman. The hooks used should be small and (unless lugworm is the bait) short-shanked. It is quite true that, as in the case of the flounder, there is often a difficulty about unhooking a plaice which has swallowed a small short-shanked hook well down its gullet; but a short-shanked hook catches the fish better than a long-shanked one. As in many other kinds of sea fishing, ground baiting is very beneficial, and where the fish are rather



A YOUNG SEA FISHERMAN : PAUL JOHN CALVERT, A NEPHEW AND
ANGLING COMPANION OF THE AUTHOR.

scattered over a fairly large expanse of ground, as they often are in some of our shallow, sandy bays, it is so advantageous that it may fairly be said to be necessary to success. Probably however it is not nearly as much practised by sea anglers when plaice fishing as it ought to be. One writer (Mr. C. O. Minchin) recommends that a bag or basket filled with the ground bait should be tied to the stock of the anchor before lowering, or that a Tcherkassov ground baiting tin should be lowered over the bows of the boat and emptied on the bottom from time to time. (If this latter device be used, by the way, it will have to be weighted with extra lead, or the angler will find that he will not be able to get it to the bottom.) The same writer tells us that there is a peculiarity about plaice and dabs, especially plaice, that in shallow water they move *with* the tide and feed in the direction in which they are moving. The author is disposed to be rather sceptical on this point, and in any case he does not see how this alleged habit of these particular flatfish is capable of being proved satisfactorily. But if the statement be correct it seems pretty obvious that unless the tide be running really hard it is a mistake to tie the ground bait bag to the anchor, for such a proceeding would merely have the effect of collecting the fish up-tide of the angler's baits.

As to the hook bait, probably that most commonly used in plaice fishing in this country is lugworm, although mussels (of which these fish are particularly fond) will often be found quite as successful. Both these baits of course are fairly easily come by; but there is another good one for plaice which is not so easy to get hold of, and that is the razor fish (called "butt-scully" in some parts of Ireland, where it is sometimes used with a good deal of success for other fish than plaice). As an amusement, stalking razor fish on the wet sand at low tide is in

its way just as fascinating an occupation as the writer thinks digging for lugworm ; it is best done bare footed, and with trousers well rolled up. He confesses, as a man on the wrong side of fifty, that he is getting a little old for such capers nowadays, but he likes to be a boy again whenever he can—although that of course is a personal matter of no particular interest to his readers.

In a strong tideway it is often a difficult matter to distinguish the bite of both plaice and dabs, particularly when the fish run small ; but in such circumstances the novice who has a liking for sporting and enjoyable sea angling may be safely advised to leave plaice fishing severely alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

DAB

LIKE the whiting, the fish to be considered in the present Chapter is of very much more interest to the sporting sea angler on the breakfast table than on the hook, although it is probably one of the three or four of our common British sea fish most frequently caught by amateurs; for as food there are few better fish in our seas than a plump, freshly caught dab. But sporting angling for them is practically out of the question, as even where one can hold the ground with a light lead it is generally a waste of time to use light tackle in fishing for them because the fish is too small and feeble to be able to put up much fight. The dab is not nearly such an active fish as the flounder, and although it can frequently be caught in considerable numbers the angler will find that he will not often get hold of one, at any rate in English waters, weighing as much as 1 lb. The writer indeed has heard a sea angler speak with enthusiasm of catching dabs off Southend when the tide was running so hard that he had to use a 12 oz. weight in order to hold the bottom; a case, literally, of hauling up $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of lead and (probably) $\frac{1}{4}$ lb., or even less, of dab—for a 4 oz. fish is a pretty good one for Southend, where they generally run about six or seven to the pound. If this kind of thing can properly be called sport the writer would suggest that it would be more correctly classified as weight

lifting than as angling; and the novice who decides to go in for catching dabs may be warned that there is very little enjoyment about the game, although when the fish run a good size and are plentiful and well on the feed dab fishing is a very useful sort of sea angling from the point of view of the frying pan, for takes of these fish, when conditions are favourable, sometimes rival in numbers catches of whiting—the fish being reckoned by the score.

The dab, like the plaice, is very widely distributed in British waters, so that dab fishing is within the reach of most sea anglers who care for this rather tame and uninteresting amusement. The heaviest rod caught dab the writer knows of weighed 1 lb. 13 oz., and was taken at Torbay, Devon; and although a friend of his once weighed one which scaled $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. exactly this particular fish was not caught in British waters, but came from the White Sea. Dabs of course are almost invariably found on a sandy or muddy bottom, and as was mentioned in the preceding Chapter, often in company with plaice. There is a good "dab ground" off Newhaven and another off Shoreham; and in many of the shallow, sandy bays on the English coast, and also on both the East and West coasts of Scotland, there are large numbers of these toothsome little fish. Speaking generally, Scottish dabs run larger than they do in England, and the fish also attains a good size in Irish waters—where however it is not often fished for by amateurs on account of the many opportunities there of angling for other and better fish.

As regards tackle, that previously recommended for plaice will do very well, except that the hooks should be rather smaller. More than one writer on sea fishing recommends a long-shanked hook for dabs, but as with almost every other kind of sea fish it will be found that a

short-shanked one hooks them better, although it is a good deal more troublesome to unhook.

As to bait, probably lugworm is most generally used, but at a good many places along the South coast the best all round bait is mussel. One writer says they are rather fond of small hermit crabs. The writer has sometimes wondered whether plaice and dabs would take periwinkle. He does not remember to have seen this little shell-fish recommended as bait in any of the books on sea angling, but one of these days, when he has nothing better to do, he intends to try the experiment—although probably this has already been done by some sea angler of an inquiring turn of mind. When tides run strongly and dabs run small—as at Southend, for instance—the angler will be very likely to experience a good deal of difficulty in detecting the bite of the fish. As in most other branches of sea angling, ground baiting is a very distinct advantage, and (unless the tide be running too strongly for it to be effective) the novice who wants to make a good catch of dabs may be strongly recommended to practise it. Pounded up shrimps and mussels, and pieces of lugworm, etc., mixed with a little wet sand, make as good ground bait as anything.

The summer and autumn months are the best for dab fishing, but the fish can really be caught to some extent and on some parts of the coast almost all the year round; indeed, in February and March, which are rightly regarded as the two slackest months of the twelve from the sea angler's point of view, it is sometimes possible to take dabs.

A small, lively, freshly caught dab, hooked either through the lip or through the side fin, makes a capital live bait for a bass.

CHAPTER XXIV

POUTING

THE pouting, whiting pout or rock whiting—to give him three of the several different names by which he is known on various parts of our coast—might very well be called the beginner's fish ; for of all those in our seas perhaps none is quite so easy to catch as he, and for this reason he is a prime favourite with those family fishing-parties which during the summer holiday season may often be seen at any of our more popular seaside towns. Half a crown an hour used to be the recognized charge for boat, man and bait for one of these expeditions. This was before the war, and according to pre-war ideas we used to think the amusement an expensive one at the price ; although this, no doubt, like that of everything else, has gone up a good deal since then. In fact in comparison with the charges asked by boatmen during the summer of 1919 at some of our coast towns half a crown an hour seems a ridiculously small charge, and probably there were a good many sea anglers along the South East coast in August of that year who wished they could be taken afloat at such a reasonable rate ; but that is by the way. The boatman who takes out a family party pouting fishing has no sinecure ; he has to work for his money, be it much or little. It is no joke to have to tend five or six hand-lines when all are catching fish, and on an average about every five minutes one or other is getting

hung up in the bottom ; and it is small wonder that when a line gets badly foul the harassed boatman sometimes diagnoses a large conger on the hook which has got her tail into the rock, and advises a patient wait until she comes out ! At least that was what a certain boatman (for whom, by the way, the writer has a very high regard) once confessed to, although wild horses would not drag the man's name out.

The pouting is found practically all round our coasts, although unlike his cousin the whiting proper he does not care much for sand, but has a marked preference for a reef of rocks or an old wreck. The fish grows to a larger size in Irish than in English waters, and the heaviest rod caught pouting which the writer knows of was taken off the Irish coast ; it weighed 4 lb. 1 oz., and was landed by Mrs. J. S. Dunn, a very keen sea angler. A number of years ago—in the early days of Ballycotton as a sea fishing station in fact—a wonderful catch of big pouting was made there by an angler ; several of the fish were 3 lb. each, or over.

Pouting swim in shoals, and when they are on the feed, as they usually are, there is not much of either skill or sport in catching them ; one can simply fish the shoal out. Many a happy wife and mother on her annual summer holiday at the sea, the writer suspects, has been rather embarrassed by the large number of pouting brought ashore by her husband and children as the result of one of the family expeditions previously spoken of, all the fish proudly carried home dangling on string (that is *de rigueur* with your August pouting fisher) ; for the fish, although quite eatable food when fresh, does not keep or carry well, which is no doubt the reason that one so seldom sees it on the fishmonger's slab in London or any of the large towns away from the sea.

Probably the paternoster is the form of ground tackle most commonly used in pouting fishing, although, as with most other kinds of sea fish, the trace hanging below the lead will be found the more deadly and effective arrangement, especially in easy tides, calm weather and clear water. Whatever form of tackle be used, the baits should be fished close to the ground, for it is the habit of the pouting to hug the bottom ; and consequently if the angler be fishing over a wreck—and many an old wreck round our coast is a famous pouting mark—he must make up his mind beforehand that he will probably lose a good deal of tackle. The writer remembers on one occasion, more years ago than he cares to think about, making a pretty large catch of good fish at a well known “pouting rock” on the South coast when the sea was so calm and the water so clear that, leaning over the gunwale of the boat, he could see the fish take the bait ; and when this is possible, especially if the tide be easy enough to allow of rod No. 2 and only an ounce or so of lead being used, pouting fishing is rather a fascinating occupation at which, in the absence of anything better, one can very pleasantly while away an hour or two on a warm, calm summer’s day. But in ordinary circumstances there is nothing in it, and an old friend of the writer’s (a well known and experienced sea angler) who visited a certain spot on the Devonshire coast a year or two back, beguiled by misleading reports of good pollack fishing there, bemoaned his fate when he found on arrival that the pollack were non-existent and that he was reduced to pouting fishing.

As to bait, probably lugworm is generally used, but mussel, ragworm, soft crab, mackerel, pilchard, herring or in fact really almost anything will catch pouting. In a previous Chapter the case was mentioned of one sea angler who caught them with snails, and they will on

occasion take pieces of their own brethren ; so that the pouting fisherman is rarely at a loss for bait.

A small live pouting makes a very good bait for a bass, or in fact for almost any of our larger predatory sea fish ; but unfortunately, in waters where these latter are likely to be found, small pouting are not very easily come by unless one takes the trouble to fish specially for them—and the waste of time involved in that, combined with the trouble of keeping them alive when caught (a difficult matter in the absence of a *courge*) makes the game hardly worth the candle.

CHAPTER XXV

SOME OTHER FISH

THE list of our British sea fish which are generally taken by anglers is ended, and in this Chapter something will be said about those which do not usually fall to the rod of the amateur, either on account of their comparative scarcity, or because for some other reason it is not worth his while to fish specially for them.

These comprise the turbot, brill, sole, angler, monk-fish, dory, shad, sea trout, gurnard, weever, scad, smelt, lobster, crawfish and crab; and the writer proposes to say a little about each, taking them in the rather higgledy-piggledy order named above. The list of course does not by any means exhaust our British sea fish, of which there are in all something like 300 different varieties; but from the point of view of practical sea angling it is not worth while to say anything about any of the others. Indeed there are one or two, such as the angler and the monk-fish, which a good many people will doubtless think might very well have been left out, while on the other hand of course it would be easy to name others which some critics would say should have been included; but one cannot please everybody.

Turbot.—It is a great pity that this fish is not taken very often on rod and line, for apart from his value as one of the best—perhaps *the* best—of our marine food fishes, the writer is told that he gives very good sport

when hooked, and if in good condition takes out line almost like a bass ; although he cannot speak as to this from personal experience, because as far as he knows he has never had the good fortune to hook one. The fish grows to a good weight—probably 50 lb. or so—and as far as the writer knows the heaviest ever landed by an angler weighed 27 lb. 14 oz., and was taken at Salcombe by Mr. F. S. Stenning. Some years ago one of about 10 lb. or 12 lb. was caught by an angler (Mr. A. W. Emms) who was fishing in the B.S.A.S. Boat Competition at Deal. The books tell us that the turbot, like all the flatfish, prefers a sandy to a rocky bottom. But three or four years ago the writer saw a fine one of 22 lb. taken in a trammel which had been set on pretty rough, rocky ground ; a circumstance which rather leads him to think that the turbot, like the halibut, may be something of a wanderer, and given to roaming about over all sorts of ground in search of food. The books tell us also that the fish is particularly fond of sandeels, and one writer (Mr. C. O. Minchin), who knows Salcombe pretty well, says that several very large turbot have been taken with rod and line there when the anglers were whiffing for bass at the entrance to the anchorage. The same writer remarks that the best baits are sandeels or herring fry if obtainable, if not, shrimps or lugworms.

Brill.—This fish, again, is one which does not very often fall to the rod of the angler, and probably there are not a great many places round our coasts where they are sufficiently numerous as to make it worth while to fish specially for them. Poole Harbour is, or was, one of them, and in the early years of the present century the writer has caught brill there in the company of the late Mr. Hattatt-Emmott, a local resident who had a wonderfully good knowledge of that water, much of which has died with him. And very pleasant fishing it was, for

one got brill there sometimes in not much more than a fathom of water, so that it was possible to use quite light tackle.

Like the other flatfish, the brill prefers a sandy bottom, and the writer (although he confesses that at the present day he does not know much about brill fishing) thinks that lugworm is as good a bait for them as anything. The fish of course does not grow to the size of the turbot, but nevertheless it attains a respectable weight.

Sole.—This excellent little fish, again, is one which is not very often taken on rod and line, perhaps because it is said to feed principally at night, but more probably because it has such a very small mouth that it is only able to accommodate quite tiny hooks. Now and again one is captured by an angler, and makes a very welcome addition to the catch, especially in these days. The novice will be most likely to get hold of one when he is trying for small dabs (if he ever does such a thing); a small scrap of ragworm is as good a bait as any that can be tried. There are a number of soles in some parts of the Thames Estuary, but the writer does not know of any place round our coasts where they are sufficiently plentiful to make it really worth one's while to fish specially for them.

Angler.—This is a curious and interesting fish of which only one or two have been landed on rod and line, probably by some one who was using a wire trace and a large fish bait.

From its build and (presumably) sluggish habits one would imagine that playing one of these creatures on rod and line must be something like hauling up a big skate—on a rather smaller scale. Its flesh is said to be quite good eating, and a good deal of it finds its way (or used to) to the fried fish shops. There is a very good

cast of an angler-fish in the rooms of the British Sea Anglers' Society.

Monk-fish.—Another curious fish not often taken on rod and line. Mr. C. J. Crisfield landed one in 1907 off Connemara, and more recently a specimen of 62 lb. fell to the rod of another angler fishing on the South coast of England. It is a strange looking creature, something like a sort of double-bodied skate with the head and tail of a proper fish, and it evidently grows to a great size, one of 220 lb. having been reported not long ago from Ryde.

John Dory.—Another fish which makes a very welcome addition to a day's catch, for considered as food it is quite one of the best that swim our seas. There are a good many of them at the Western end of the English Channel and off the South coast of Ireland, where sometimes an angler who is fishing a small live bait for pollack gets hold of one. As far as the writer knows the largest caught on rod and line weighed 7 lb., and was taken off Penzance. Of its sporting qualities the less said the better.

Shad.—From a sporting point of view the shad is one of the best fish the sea angler can get hold of on light tackle, and it is a thousand pities that they are not more commonly taken. The writer only remembers to have caught one—when he was fishing for flounders a good many years ago off Leigh—but he had great fun with it, for the fish, as a friend of his remarked at the time, was "all over the place" until it was safely in the landing net. Both species of shad—for there are two—run for considerable distances up rivers, and it is said that they will then take a fly readily. Fly fishing for shad must be magnificent sport, and if the novice should ever have the opportunity of enjoying it he will probably have the time of his life—although it can hardly be called sea angling. In appearance the fish is something like a large herring,

to which fish indeed the writer believes it is related pretty closely.

Sea trout.—Only very occasionally is one of these fish hooked and landed in the sea in Southern waters—more often than not on a spinning bait of some kind—but such captures are so rare that, in the writer's opinion, it is not worth the sea angler's while to fish specially for sea trout in the South. But in Northern waters it is different, and if the angler wants a reasonable chance of catching these fish in the sea he will have to undertake a pretty long journey. Shetland is as good a locality as any, and when the fish are in the "voes" and are taking the fly well the sport the novice will enjoy is about as good as any obtainable in salt water in this country. A grilse rod is the best weapon to use (although the writer knows at least one angler who always uses a single-handed rod for the game), and the fly may be a small Jock Scott, Butcher or other salmon fly. Only one fly should be used, for most of the "voes" are very weedy, so that to have two flies on the cast is looking for trouble. The fish may also be taken by spinning, but for the reason just mentioned this method is likely to lead the angler into difficulty—in the shape of his bait fast in a thick mass of weed; besides which, the writer thinks, the fly is the more sporting and enjoyable method. The fish generally range in weight between 1 lb. and 2 lb., with an occasional one a good deal heavier, and the summer and early autumn months are the best.

Gurnard.—The writer believes it was the late Mr. F. G. Aflalo who remarked in one of his books that it is not probable that anyone would set out expressly to catch gurnard—a statement with which most sea anglers would probably be inclined to agree. There are several species of this fish in British waters—Mr. Aflalo says half a dozen—but the grey, the red and the sapphirine are those most

likely to be met with by the amateur angler. Of these the first named is decidedly the most common. According to the authorities the gurnard prefers a sandy bottom, but such experience as the writer has had leads him to think that the fish is just as likely to be found on rocky ground, for most of the gurnard that he has happened to catch have been taken on low rock—often when he was fishing for red bream.

Grey gurnards are pretty common at the Western end of the English Channel and also in the Irish Sea; while not long ago the capture of a number was reported from Folkestone, where the fish is quite unusual. Almost any bait will catch a gurnard; small strips of mackerel or herring are as good as anything, while a mackerel spinner moving slowly near the bottom will often pick up one. The fish gives little or no sport, while as food (although quite wholesome) the grey variety is rather uninteresting. Both the red and the sapphirine gurnard attain a larger size than the grey, and are altogether better fish; although curiously enough the largest rod caught gurnard the writer has heard of was a grey one—a fish of $9\frac{1}{2}$ lb., taken off the Isle of Man. But this was an altogether exceptional specimen, and the novice will not often come across a grey gurnard over 2 lb. in weight, although both the other varieties are not infrequently taken up to 4 lb. or 5 lb. apiece. A capital bait for bass, used in some parts of Ireland and known there as a "gurnard pott," is made of the skin from the white belly of a gurnard.

Weever.—Like the gurnard, this is another fish for which no one would think of angling specially. For one thing the fish is not sufficiently common, and for another there is the well known fact that he is armed with extremely poisonous spines, a prick from which is very likely to have serious consequences. There are two species of weever—the greater and the lesser—of which the former grows to a

length of about twelve inches, while the limit of size of the latter is about half that. Neither, fortunately, is a very common fish ; and the two species do not seem to be very evenly distributed. For instance, in the Thames estuary the greater weever is unknown, or almost so, while the lesser, although rare, is occasionally taken ; but in the English Channel the greater weever occurs more frequently than the lesser, although one sometimes comes across the latter there. All along the South coast the greater weever, although it cannot be called a particularly common fish, is nevertheless not a very unusual capture ; and if the angler fishes much at such places as Hastings, Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven, Brighton, Shoreham, Worthing, Littlehampton or Bognor, the chances are that sooner or later he will encounter a weever. The fish occurs in the Irish Sea also, but there its distribution seems to be more variable and uncertain. Couch tells us, on the authority of one observer, that the lesser weever is not uncommonly taken at Youghal by boys fishing at the quays ; but the present writer, in an experience of Ballycotton (only a few miles from Youghal) which dates from 1906, does not remember to have heard of a case of either a greater or a lesser weever having been captured there by an angler.

It is very important of course that the novice should be able to recognize the fish if he should happen to catch one. There is a family likeness between the two species, although the lesser weever is a considerably deeper fish for his length than the greater ; each has two dorsal fins, of which the foremost is small and contains the poisonous spines, while the other runs nearly the whole length of the fish. There are also poisonous spines on the gill covers of each species. Professional fishermen tell one that the fin rays of the tail are poisonous also, especially in the lesser weever ; but the writer believes that this is incorrect, although he has no intention of putting it to the test the

next time he happens to catch one of these fish. The feature by which the angler who has never seen a weever before will be best able to recognize one when he catches it is the series of diagonal lines, sloping (from above downwards) towards the tail of the fish, with which its sides are covered. These lines are of a brownish colour, and although more distinct and clearly marked on the greater weever are sufficiently noticeable on the lesser as to afford the best means of identifying it also.

The novice must be particularly careful how he handles (or rather that he does *not* handle) a weever. Both species are good eating, but the lesser, on account of his small size, is not worth the trouble of keeping; and if the angler catches one the best plan is to hold the trace over the side of the boat and cut the hook link an inch or two above the hook with a sharp pair of scissors, allowing the fish to fall back into the water and float away with the tide. But the greater weever, if of a decent size, is worth keeping; and in his case proceed as before, but let the fish fall into the bottom of the boat and lie there until he is dead. Then transfix him on the gunwale with something pointed (an old two pronged fork, such as a discarded carving fork, is as good as anything), and with a sharp knife cut away the whole of the front dorsal fin and also the poisonous spines from the gill covers, and allow the lot to fall overboard. If the angler should be unlucky enough to be pricked by one of the poison spines of a weever Scrubb's Ammonia, applied at once, is about as good an antidote as any; and for this reason it is not a bad plan to carry a small bottle of this in one's fishing kit. A sea angler of the writer's acquaintance recently raised an interesting question regarding weever poisoning, namely, whether the poison can be absorbed into the system through the mouth. Not long ago the angler in question was unlucky enough to be pricked by a weever,

whereupon he promptly sucked the wound ; and a swelling of the gums which followed, and lasted for some days, was attributed by him to that cause. This question could only be answered satisfactorily by a medical man, but probably the reply would depend on whether or not there was any cut or abrasion on the skin of the mouth or lips.

Scad.—Another fish for which probably few sea anglers would think of fishing specially, although one is not unlikely to catch some when fishing a driftline for mackerel. The scad is not such an active fish as the mackerel, although it grows, if anything, to a rather larger size, its limit of weight being about 3 lb. Nevertheless it is very good fun on a light fly rod, and if perchance the novice should get a big mackerel on one hook and a nice sized scad on the other the chances are that on this light tackle he will have rather an exciting time before he is able to get both fish safely into the landing net. Not so very long ago a sea angling friend of the writer's told him that he had been having some capital fun at Folkestone catching scad from the beach with a fly rod. Under its popular name of horse mackerel the scad is very commonly considered useless for food (an opinion perhaps largely due to the circumstance that it has been condemned by some writers) ; but as a matter of fact the scad, although a very bony fish, is quite wholesome eating, as the angler may very easily find out for himself by trying one. As bait for larger fish it is not so good as mackerel, although freshly caught scad is infinitely better than stale mackerel, except of course in the case of those fish (such as the bass) which like their food " high."

Smelt.—The smallest fish for which it is worth while to angle in our seas. Generally known as a smelt, the fish is not really one at all, but an atherine ; for the true smelt of course is one of the *Salmonidæ*. Sometimes

very good fun may be had fishing from some of our piers and jetties for these atherines in the late summer and early autumn, using of course very light tackle and the tiniest of hooks baited with scraps of lug or ragworm. Poole Harbour is, or used to be, a famous place for these little fish, but there are many other spots along the South coast where they may be caught.

Lobster, Crawfish and Crab.—No sea angler of course would think of fishing specially for crustaceans, but nevertheless a good many have been landed from time to time on rod and line. At one of our piers on the South coast (Southsea) the writer is told that as many as sixty two lobsters were landed by anglers in 1919; while in the rooms of the British Sea Anglers' Society may be seen what is believed to be the record lobster for rod and line, a fish of 10 lb., taken by Mr. T. Lewis. In Cornish and Irish waters (particularly the latter) the crawfish is not at all an unusual capture; indeed the writer has even known one taken, on the slack of the tide, on a driftline. Some of these crawfish are fine big chaps, running perhaps to 5 lb. or 6 lb. in weight; and boiled the same evening and taken afloat for luncheon the next day, want a lot of beating. The writer remembers an occasion when he and his two boatmen, instead of fishing, slept an afternoon away in a small paddle punt as the result of a big luncheon of crawfish—but that, as Kipling says, is another story. As far as the edible crab is concerned, it is not often caught on rod and line; but many a pier angler in the summer months catches little else than small green crabs.

CHAPTER XXVI

SHORE AND PIER FISHING

IN this Chapter the writer proposes to say something about angling from shore and pier ; the former, at any rate, a method of fishing which in his opinion is capable of still further development at various places round our coast than it has as yet received. Fishing from shore or pier is of course the only method available for the sensible sea angler who is a bad sailor and cannot stand the motion of a small anchored boat ; and although some men who suffer from sea-sickness do pursue the sport afloat—the writer has seen a sea angler who shall be nameless lying on his back in the bottom of a whale-boat, practically unconscious from the effects of *mal de mer*—one feels that one admires their pluck but does not think much of their judgment, for they are transforming what should be a delightful and exhilarating pastime into a misery, both for themselves and for their companions, if they have any. As one who has on occasions suffered somewhat from the presence of one of these misguided enthusiasts the writer records his settled conviction that a sea-sick man in a boat is a confounded nuisance.

Speaking broadly and generally, with but few exceptions, one does not get such good sport from shore or pier as one does afloat ; but shore and pier anglers are usually very keen and capable, and in a previous Chapter the

writer has pointed out that they are independent of paid assistance, and in that sense the better anglers.

Various styles of fishing may be practised by the sea angler from *terra firma*, according to the locality and conditions; fly fishing, spinning, float fishing, the unleaded driftline and ordinary bottom fishing.

There are a few places round our coast where fly fishing from the rocky shore can be practised, and the most famous of these is of course Filey Brig, which is known far and wide among sea anglers in this country. In recent years indeed the place has suffered a good deal from over popularity, and sometimes it has happened that there have been more anglers than fish. The fly fishing season there extends from about the last week in July to mid-October, and the best sport is usually in the evening, although sometimes fish can be taken in the daytime. Coalfish (locally known as billet), pollack and mackerel are the fish caught. All sorts of rods may be seen in use on an August evening on the Brig—some getting fish and some not—but a light salmon rod about 14 ft. to 15 ft. in length is about the best weapon. Thirty yards of fairly heavy salmon line, with from 60 to 80 yards of sound backing, should be on the reel, and the cast should be of medium salmon gut, about 2 yards in length. All sorts of "flies" are employed, but speaking generally those most nearly resembling the "sile" or herring fry on which the fish are feeding have the best chance of success. The fishing from the Brig is uncertain at the best of times, and sometimes a North wind will put a stop to it for days together. It is however very fascinating sport when the fish are in and feeding well. Local knowledge is more than half the battle, and the best advice for the angler who is thinking of trying it is to put himself, if he can, under the guidance of one of the old hands. Oilskins and light sea boots reaching to the thigh are



advisable ; and the boots should be of leather, not rubber, and lightly studded with hobnails. Rubber boots should never be worn on rocks, as they give no secure foothold and are consequently very dangerous ; and Filey Brig is decidedly a place to be treated with respect in this particular. In addition to fly fishing, spinning and float fishing are often possible at the Brig ; for the latter mussel is the bait which is usually most successful.

There are a good many places on the Scottish coast where coalfish, pollack, codling, etc., may be caught from the rocky shore. One writer, by the way, in enumerating the fish to be taken in this way speaks of green cod *and* saithe ; whereas " green cod " of course is only one of the many local names—and a very descriptive one too—of the saithe or coalfish. At Aberdeen there are, or were, two flourishing Rock Fishers' Clubs, one of which the writer believes to be the oldest sea fishing club in these islands, for it antedates even the British Sea Anglers' Society. Speaking broadly and generally, with comparatively few exceptions, Scotland is an unexplored land to the English sea angler, although there are some keen and up-to-date sea fishermen resident there.

As far as the South Country sea angler is concerned the fish which affords the most sporting and enjoyable fishing to the man who fishes from the shore is the bass. It is true that there are places in the West of England where pollack may be caught from the shore, either with float tackle, the driftline fished sink and draw, or occasionally by spinning ; but inshore pollack as a rule do not run large there, and if the angler should get hold of anything over 3 lb. or 4 lb. there he may reckon it a pretty good fish. In a previous Chapter the writer has described a method of fishing the unleaded driftline for bass from a beach, and of the various ways of angling for

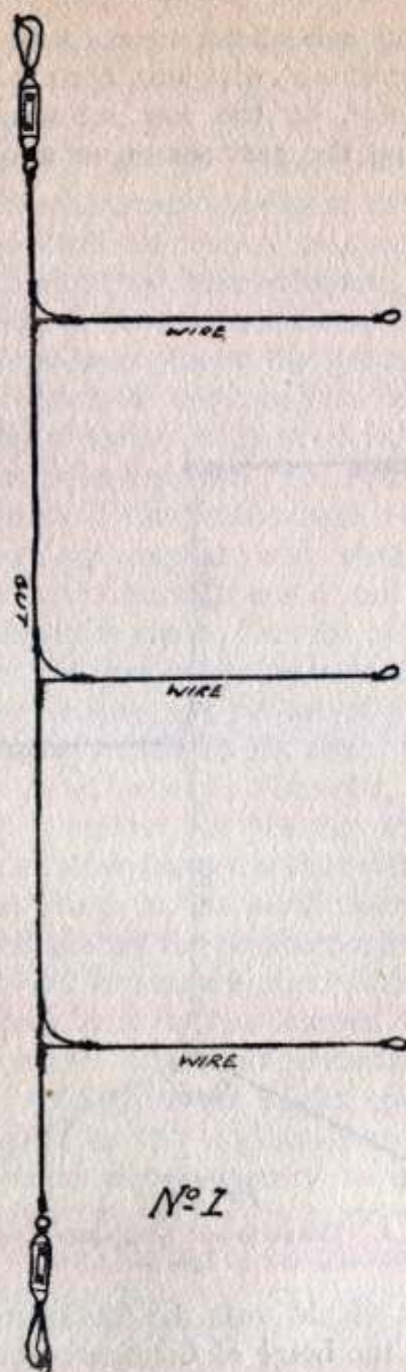
this fish from the shore he thinks this (after fly fishing) the most sporting. In his opinion it is likely to be practised a good deal more than it has been as it becomes better known because (although, like all bass fishing, it is rather uncertain) there are a good many places along the South coast of England besides the Devonshire beaches where bass could be caught in this way. Another and almost equally sporting way of angling for bass from the shore is by spinning the light bait for them with the tackle described in Chapter V. Probably this method also will become a good deal more popular with up-to-date sea anglers than it is to-day.

Yet another way of angling for bass from the shore is to fish for them with float tackle in the rocky gullies to which they often resort on the rising tide, using soft crab, live sandeel or prawn (troublesome baits to keep in lively condition when one is ashore) or mackerel, etc. This style is practised a good deal in the Gower Peninsula, beyond Swansea, where however the local experts have evolved another method which is more usually employed there, namely, wading in and casting out on the flood tide into the shallow sandy bays, where there are often a good many bass in the summer months. The lead generally used is torpedo-shaped, as this kind is said to cast better than any other, and weighs from $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz. to 4 oz. ; and in order to hold the ground it is usual to have four projecting wires at the lower end, so that it may not be rolled shorewards by the waves. As a method of angling for a sporting fish like the bass this style of fishing (although no doubt owing to local conditions the only one often available) is about as good an example of how *not* to do it as one could well imagine ; for the fish as a general rule do not run large, and any bass under about 3 lb. in weight which is hooked remains anchored to the lead, as it is unable to drag it out of the sand. The

bait used is principally lugworm, and in addition to bass (the fish primarily angled for) codlings flounders, soles, turbot, grey mullet and dogfish are sometimes caught in this way. A writer in the *B.S.A.S. Quarterly* who sampled this fishing three or four years ago tells us in all seriousness that the weight of the gear (excluding rods, fish, food and drink) with which he used to encumber himself daily for about half an hour's walk each way over sandhills, etc., was just 20 lb.; as striking an instance of futile and misapplied energy in connection with sea angling as the author remembers to have come across for some time. But perhaps, like the gentleman in *The Skipper's Wooing*, he was doing it for a bet!

In addition to the fish already mentioned, grey mullet, wrasse and conger may be caught from a rocky shore, while sometimes mackerel and scad approach the coast so closely that they may be taken by casting from the beach; but sufficient has been said about the methods of angling for those fish in some of the previous Chapters.

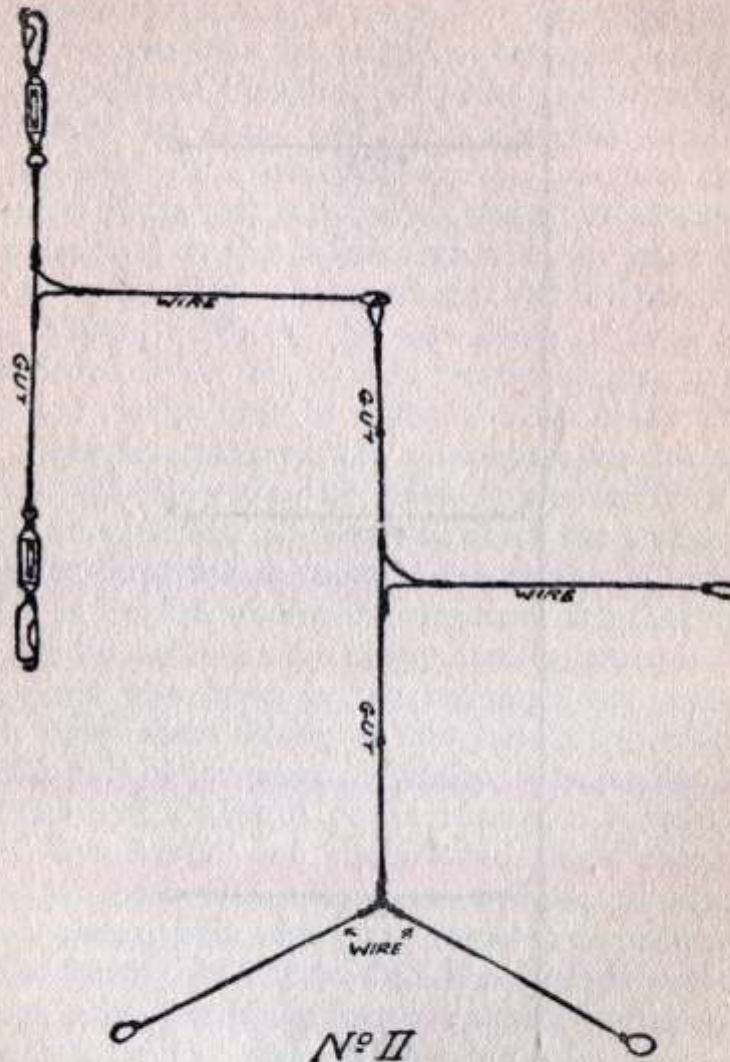
As far as English waters are concerned the East coast may fairly be said to be the happy hunting ground of the shore angler who fishes at the bottom; and probably there is more shore fishing of that kind there than on any other part of our coast. Whether it be on the rock bound shores of Yorkshire, or the beaches of Norfolk and Suffolk, the hardy and enthusiastic shore fisherman pursues his sport with a keenness and zest which one does not always find among sea anglers who habitually fish from boats. It is true that the sport is not of a very high order, for fish are apt to run small (although in the autumn months, when the big cod sometimes come pretty close inshore, one hears from time to time of notable exceptions to this rule) and leads heavy; and in all sea angling a heavy lead is to the writer a hateful thing. But the shore and pier angler fishes at a minimum



No. 1. THREE HOOK PATERNOSTER.

For general fishing, but especially for fishing against or across the tide, from pier, boat, or beach.

of expense, and can afford to snap his fingers at the boat owning profiteer, who has been a good deal too much in evidence, by the way, at some places round our coast during the past season or two.



No. 2. THREE HOOK STREAMER TRACE.
For fishing with the tide from boat or pier.

If the angler should visit the Yorkshire coast he will find himself in the home of the Scarborough reel, which

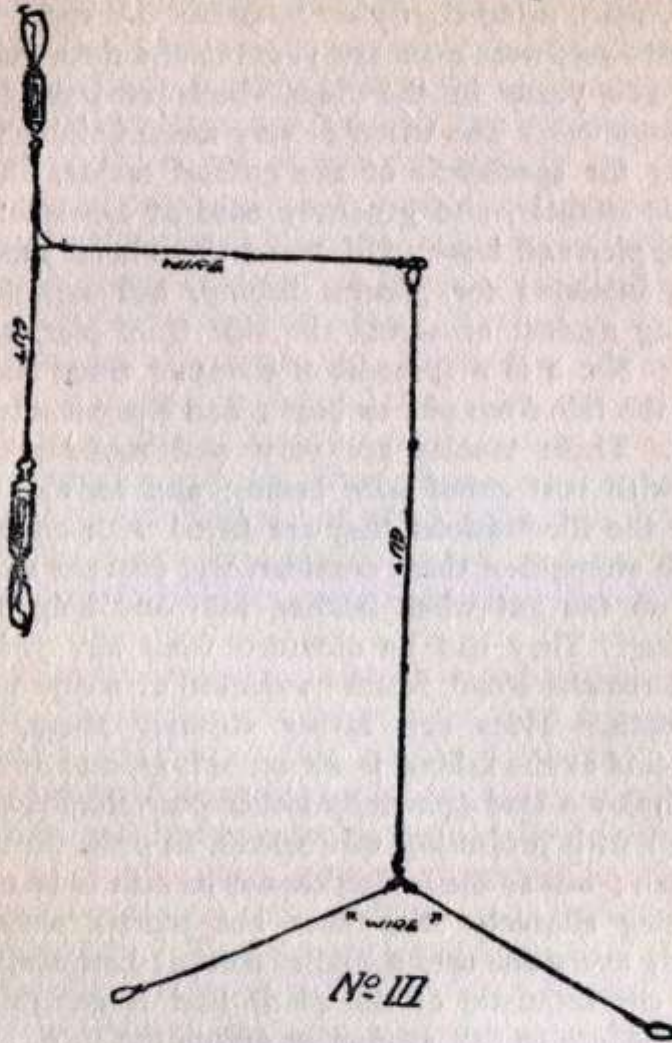
is used by most of the expert rock fishers there ; and the probability is that he will invest in one for himself. It is a very sound general rule in all sea angling, by the way, for the visiting fisherman, however long and varied his experience elsewhere may have been, to study carefully the methods and tackle of resident anglers, and to attach a good deal of weight to their opinions ; for in almost every kind of fishing the man on the spot may fairly be presumed to know most about the game, and in some branches of the sport, for instance bass fishing, the local expert, especially if he be, as he often is, an enthusiast, has a very great advantage over the casual visitor.

The construction of the Scarborough reel of course is well known to all sea anglers, and whether they have actually handled and cast with one or not they know the principle on which it is made ; but for the benefit of the absolute novice who has never seen or heard of one a few words about it may not be out of place. Perhaps its most noticeable feature is its size. It is generally about seven or eight inches in diameter, and the whole affair revolves on a plain pin bearing, so that the reel has no check. Another feature is that it is quite narrow. Like many other things in this world there is a good deal to be said for and against the Scarborough reel, and probably the angler will experience great difficulty when he first uses it, especially if he has learned to cast with a reel of another make. Its great advantage of course is that the quick wind gives the angler speedy command over his fish ; and as the angling is mostly on rocky ground, where it is very necessary to get the hooked fish " on the move " at once, so as to prevent his getting into the weed, this is a matter of considerable importance. Its disadvantages are that it is very easy, when winding in a fish, for the line to get off the barrel and round the pin, which is a great nuisance, especially when fishing at

night; it is also very easy, even for the expert, to get a bad over-run with it, so that if this happens to our novice, as in all probability it will, he should not lose heart. In practising casting with it the writer thinks that *festina lente* is the best working motto which the novice can adopt; and he should check the very natural tendency to try to get out as long a line as possible before he has familiarized himself with the reel and its little ways, for this is a very fruitful cause of an over-run. However, once mastered, the Scarborough reel, in the words of a very good judge (Mr. Gilbert Elliot), is bad to beat.

With this reel the weight of lead cast is usually about 6 oz., and the rod favoured by the local experts is pretty stiff and heavy, and runs to ten feet or thereabouts in length; but in practice the novice will probably find that rod No. 5 on the writer's list, if it be not less than about $8\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long, and up to the weight to be cast, will answer the purpose very well. It is usual in this fishing to dispense with a trace, the two codling hooks, mounted on twisted or stout single gut, being fastened to the running line above the lead and about a foot or eighteen inches apart. It is important, by the way, that the lead should be tied to the end of the line with some thin, weak snooding (but not *too* weak) which will break if the lead happens to get fast. For owing to the nature of the ground fished over the angler will find that this is a pretty frequent occurrence, so that he will often lose leads, which is one of the drawbacks to this fishing. Cod and codling (usually not running very large) are the fish principally caught; and the most successful bait is generally mussel, two or three to the hook. The fishing season commences about August, and continues, in suitable weather, practically right through the autumn and winter.

Farther South the angler will be able to indulge in either shore or pier fishing, as the fancy takes him (although there is of course pier fishing in Yorkshire



No. 3. TWO HOOK STREAMER TRACE.

For fishing with the tide from boat or pier.

also) ; and at Lowestoft, for instance, he will find casters, both from pier and shore, perhaps as expert as any to be

found anywhere round our coast. Foremost among these is Mr. T. C. Rising, who won both the 6 oz. and 8 oz. events in the Casting Tournament held there on December 6, 1919, using Hardy's "Silex No. 2" reel; his two longest casts were over 112 yards in the 6-oz. event and over 110 yards in the 8-oz.—both remarkably good performances. The writer is very much indebted to Mr. Rising for specimens of the ground tackle, illustrated in this Chapter, and generally used at Lowestoft, from shore, pier and boat. No. 1 is a three hook paternoster trace intended for general fishing, but especially for angling against or across the tide from pier, shore or boat; No. 2 is a three hook streamer trace for fishing with the tide from pier or boat; and No. 3 is a two hook ditto. These tackles are very well made in twisted gut, with rust proof wire booms, and as will be seen from the illustrations they are fitted with angle pieces which strengthen them considerably, prevent any cross-pull on the gut when landing fish, and help in quick striking. They can be obtained from Mr. J. Harmer, 2, Claremont Road, South Lowestoft, at a cost of about 2s. each. Tides run rather strongly there, by the way, and as the fishing is all on soft ground it is usual to employ a lead (generally either pear shaped or cylindrical) with projecting wire spikes, in order to hold the bottom; but as the fishing cannot be said to be of a very sporting character this does not matter very much. Nearly every one uses a lead of 6 oz. at Lowestoft, and it is a characteristic of the place that it generally pays better there to fish against or across the tide than with it. The baits used there are mostly lugworm, mussel and mackerel, and the fish caught are whiting, codling and cod in the autumn and winter, and dabs from about March to July. During the fishing season the Claremont pier at Lowestoft is often crowded with anglers, a remark

which applies, by the way, to a good many other piers round the English coast.

If the angler fishes much on the bottom from a beach, by the way, he will find that some kind of rod rest is so desirable that it may almost be said to be a necessity; for one gets very tired of holding the rod continuously, especially when bites are few and far between, and it does not do either rod or reel any good to lay the rod down on sand or shingle. A simple and practical rod rest may be made by anyone at a small cost by taking two fairly long pieces of wood or bamboo of equal length, and joining them together, about four inches from one end, by means of a screw nut. The other end of each should be sharpened (and metal shod if the angler be *very* particular), so that it may be stuck readily into either sand or shingle; and the affair, when opened out and in use, forms a sort of tripod of which the rod is the third leg. When closed it is easily carried, and will indeed at times come in usefully enough for slinging fish, tackle bag, etc., over the shoulder, a purpose to which it is perhaps hardly necessary to say the rod should *not* be applied. The angler who fishes much from a beach will find that a rod rest of this kind well repays the little trouble involved in making it.

Another well known pier is that at Deal, where the fishing is of the same general character as that at Lowestoft,—namely, cod, codling and whiting, and sometimes dabs. Here the angler will find that the reel very generally employed is Washburn's "Facile," which the writer believes was first used there by Mr. J. H. Hards, and has been adopted by a good many of the other anglers who habitually fish from this pier. The fishing from Deal pier in 1919, by the way, was on the whole remarkably disappointing, and it is a curious illustration of the glorious uncertainty of all angling,

both fresh and salt, that although sprats were unusually plentiful at Deal in November and December of that year the codling taken from the pier there were both scarce and small, any fish over 2 lb. being distinctly a rarity. Here also, as at Lowestoft and many other places round our coast, baby whiting have been a perfect pest to pier anglers recently, and it is curious what a large hook and bait these little fish sometimes manage to annex; the writer was told of more than one case where one of them, hardly longer than one's middle finger, contrived to get captured by a No. 5/0 hook!

In all pier fishing of course the angling is done in fairly shallow water, and in consequence it will often be found that the best fishing is at night, especially if the water be clear. This is a cold and draughty business for which the writer is afraid that he personally has little use, although he greatly admires the pluck and persistence of the hardy enthusiasts who habitually practise it. It is superfluous to warn the angler that if he essays it he should be well wrapped up. Long casting is usually conducive to success, and it will often happen that, other things being equal, the angler who can out cast his neighbours stands the best chance of getting fish; but at such a pier as Lowestoft, for example, our novice will find that this takes quite a lot of doing!

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE CHOICE OF A FISHING STATION

THE question Where to fish is an interesting and important one, upon which, since the writer has been the honorary Secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society, he has been asked a good many times to advise fellow members ; he has sometimes found it not the least difficult part of his duties. Tastes differ a good deal, and a place which one man likes does not suit another. The writer prefers to get off the beaten track as much as possible, and has a great liking for quiet, out of the way little spots where some sporting fishing is available, and one can wear old clothes and generally do as one likes ; but of course every one is not built that way. The married sea angler too who goes away to the coast for his annual holiday with his better half has her to consider, and if she does not care for the sport, the spot chosen will very often be in the nature of a compromise. Some cynical wretch said a few years ago that golf and marriage were the two great enemies which sea angling had to fear ; a sentiment with which, so far as the holy state of matrimony is concerned, the writer does *not* agree, for he has had the privilege of numbering among his friends a good many married couples who are, or have been (for alas, some are gone over to the great majority), devoted to the sport. And his experience has been that when a woman does take up sea fishing she very often pursues it with a keen-

ness and enthusiasm which many a male sea angler might very well envy. The writer hopes however that no fair reader will set him down as a hardened, crusty old bachelor if he remarks that as, one by one, his sea angling friends have married he has noticed in some cases that the rod box and tackle bag do not occupy *quite* such a prominent position among the holiday luggage as they used to do in bachelor days. Although on the other hand he knows some married sea anglers who contrive, year after year, to get away for the annual sea fishing holiday alone; being a mere bachelor he does not know quite how they manage it—but they do. But we are getting away from the subject a little.

It is rather an obvious remark that the choice of a place at which the angler may make his initial venture at the sport will depend very largely on the particular branch of it which he decides to take up. It is not very much good his going to Southend, for instance, unless he has a yearning to catch undersized dabs, although occasionally both bass and grey mullet are taken from the pier there. Speaking broadly and generally, if he lives in London he will have to travel some distance in order to get good fishing. There are exceptions to this rule of course; there is quite a lot of good bass fishing along the South coast of England, much of it within fairly easy reach of the great metropolis, while Bognor provides one, during the all too short black bream season, with some very delightful sport. But with these and some other exceptions, and especially if the angler's tastes run in the direction of big fish (other than tope), he will be well advised to make up his mind to undertake a pretty long journey. Cornwall and parts of Ireland and Scotland (especially the two latter) will provide him with fishing of this kind unsurpassed anywhere in our seas. For this heavy fishing there are at least four essentials which go



FALMOUTH QUAY PUNT.



WHALEBOAT.

to the making of a good sea angling station. One must have not only good fishing grounds, but good boats and boatmen, decent accommodation for the angler on shore *not too far from his fishing*, and last (and decidedly not least) a good and plentiful supply of fresh fish bait. In the case of all those anglers who share the writer's views on the subject a fifth essential might very well be added, namely, easy tides. Unfortunately these essentials do not always exist in conjunction ; in fact one almost might say that the places where they do are the exception rather than the rule, at any rate in the more remote districts. There are a good many places on the coasts of both Ireland and Scotland, for instance, where there is remarkably good sea fishing, but one cannot get at it, at least not conveniently and comfortably (except in a good sized sea going yacht) ; or if one can reach it, and get a good boat and men, with clean and comfortable quarters ashore, one finds perhaps that one cannot get fresh bait. It is rather a favourite habit, by the way, with a certain type of writer on the sport to talk glibly about " picking up " mackerel for bait—that is the expression almost always used—while on the way out to the fishing grounds. In the majority of cases this is very distinctly a delusion and a snare. At best it means a good deal of time lost (unless the mackerel happen to be *very* thick) before one can commence the day's fishing ; while at the worst it not infrequently involves a wasted day. It is an excellent idea in theory, but it does not work in practice. If it were worth while the writer could tell a sorry tale of excellent fishing days, on the West coast of Ireland, absolutely thrown away because he and his friends had no fresh bait, and try as they might were unable to catch any on the way out. Accordingly he very strongly advises the angler who is after " big stuff " to choose, if he can, for his head-quarters a fishing port where there

is a regular, professional mackerel, herring or pilchard fishery.

Another piece of advice which the writer ventures to give the angler, also as the result of bitter personal experience, is not to rely entirely on what guide books have to say about a place. That habit also will often be found to lead to very unfortunate experiences. It is always very much better, especially when contemplating a visit to a very out of the way place, to get into communication beforehand, if one can, with some other sea angler who has actually fished there himself. And it is in this direction, among others, that if the angler be a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society he will sometimes find their organization will be of a good deal of use to him.

Personally the writer does not care very much for this heavy fishing nowadays. A lifelong sea angler himself, he thinks that a good many who take up the sport seriously will experience three different stages in their devotion to it. In the first stage one wants to catch a lot of fish, a desire which it is often pretty easy to gratify in the sea if one knows the right way to go to work ; in the second stage one wants to catch *big* fish, which also is not particularly difficult if one is prepared to go far afield ; while in the third stage one wants to catch sporting fish, *and to catch them in a sporting way*. The writer has very decidedly arrived at the third stage, although he confesses that he still has a hankering after big fish if they are of the running kind ; but it is approximately true that any sort of sea angling in which it is necessary to use more than 2 oz. or 3 oz. of lead does not interest him very much to-day. He recognizes however that tastes differ, and that sea anglers, like other people, do not all think alike ; and as far as possible he will do his best, in the remaining Chapters of this book, to cater for all.

As far as the angler's accommodation on shore is con-

cerned, a piece of advice which the writer is disposed to give him is that on a serious sea angling holiday it is as a general rule more satisfactory to stay either in a furnished house or apartments than in an hotel. If one wants to get up, for example, at 3 a.m. to fish the early morning flood there are often difficulties in the way if one is living in either hotel or boarding house; while if the evening fishing seems likely to turn out well, perhaps after a disappointing day, it is a great nuisance if the angler has to choose between sacrificing either that or his dinner. The obligation to be in punctually to meals, as all sea anglers know, does not make for successful fishing, which is one of the reasons why it is generally unsatisfactory to stay with relatives or friends on a sea angling holiday. No one wants to be a nuisance to his hosts, and the best and most even tempered of women are apt to get a little upset if one is continually late for dinner. When the angler is in his own house or apartments difficulties of this kind do not usually arise, and provided he is willing to live largely on cold food—no great hardship in the summer months—he will generally be able either to go afloat or come ashore practically at any hour of the day or night, which is often a very great advantage. In these days however one frequently has to take what accommodation one can get; which brings the writer to another piece of advice, namely, that for any season's fishing the angler should make up his mind in good time where to go, and secure both boat and accommodation on shore well in advance—or he may find himself crowded out. It is astonishing how early in the year all the available accommodation, especially at some of the smaller places in Devon and Cornwall, is booked up for the season.

To the angler who has never fished in either of the counties just mentioned, by the way, a word or two of warning may not be out of place here. At a good many

of the smaller places in both counties he will find that practically all the local fishermen are crabbers, who have their pots to attend to, and consequently have neither the time nor the inclination for taking him afloat. This is a complaint which one hears from time to time from various sea anglers who have visited for the first time some of the more out of the way spots in the West Country. If the angler understands how to handle a boat he will often be able to get over this difficulty, if so minded, by hiring a boat by the week and acting as his own boatman ; for there are a good many places along this coast where, if one exercises ordinary common sense, this can be done in safety in the summer months. The writer speaks from experience when he says that this is a very enjoyable way of pursuing the sport, for the angler can then do exactly as he likes, unhampered by the presence of a professional who will perhaps want him to use ground tackle when he would rather fish the driftline. As a general rule one does not get such big fish in this way because one often does not go very far afield, while in any case the eyesight of the average amateur is not nearly so good as that of a professional fisherman when it comes to a question of picking up far distant marks. It is a game which it is better not to play single-handed, for more than one reason ; one being that if fishing from a drifting boat it is almost impossible for one man to manage the craft and angle properly at the same time, especially if the wind happens to be anything more than the lightest of summer catpaws. But two or three friends fishing together, each taking it in turn to play the part of the boatman, will often be able to get a good deal of fun in this way. If they want to do any fishing at anchor they will usually be able to pick up some marks for the purpose by a little judicious expenditure of beer or tobacco ; although there are marks *and* marks of course, and some are valuable and very jealously

guarded secrets. It is probable that the first time the angler tries to put his boat on a particular set of marks he will find when she has swung to her cable that she is some little way from where he wanted her to be. But he should not let this discourage him, for every sea angler who has had some experience has seen this happen at times, even to the best of professional fishermen ; if one wants to get exactly on the top of a pinnacle rock, for instance, where the Chart shows nine fathoms at low water, spring tides, and when the boat is riding to her anchor the sounding line gives fourteen, one knows one is not *quite* on the " height of the rock," as the boatman puts it. This happened to a very experienced professional fisherman with whom the writer and an old friend were fishing only a year or two ago. And the angler will find that he will improve with practice ; he will learn to allow for the " scope " of the cable (as the fisherman calls it) and the set of the tide, although with a wind across or against tide it is sometimes difficult to judge exactly how the boat will lie. And in certain conditions of wind and tide, as every sea angler knows, it is an impossibility to keep a boat exactly on a small ground like a wreck or a little patch of rock ; but all this one learns by experience—as also how much cable to give her. This will vary of course with the depth of the water and the strength of the tide ; the stronger the tide the more cable she will want, although with a lot out in pretty shallow water the angler must be careful to haul in a bit when the tide slacks, or some of it may go foul of the rocks down below. Except in deep water and strong tides a killick is better than an anchor to bring a small boat up with ; but if an anchor be used it should always be " tripped." For it is a tiresome experience at the end of a day's fishing to find the anchor fast, and after wasting perhaps half an hour in fruitless attempts to get it up to have to buoy the cable and leave

it ; especially as in a hired boat it is not always that one has anything handy to buoy it with. If the angler cannot get hold of any marks lobster pot buoys of course will indicate rocky ground where it will usually be worth while to try ; although he should make it a rule, by the way, *not* to bring up by making fast to the pot buoy—or he will probably get himself disliked by the owner of the pot. Some amateurs, and even some professionals for the matter of that, sometimes bring up a boat in this way. But it is a bad plan, and does not do the pot any good in a tideway or a “ popple ” of sea, and may even pull it over and give any crabs or lobsters in it a good chance of escaping ; and the angler should always remember that while he is fishing for sport the owner of the pot is working it for a living. A difficulty which one sometimes encounters in some of the smaller places is the lack of bait, and this is not so easily got over ; although when confronted with it in an aggravated form the angler should bear in mind a piece of advice which has been given in an earlier Chapter relative to the trying of experiments. One other thing which the angler who fishes “ on his own ” in the West Country will do well to remember is that if he goes afloat on a Sunday he will quickly find himself unpopular with the local fishermen, especially in the smaller places ; for the writer’s experience has distinctly been that the feeling against Sunday fishing is quite as strong in Devon as it is well known to be in Cornwall.

CHAPTER XXVIII
WHERE TO FISH: THE ENGLISH AND
WELSH COASTS

IT is obvious of course that within the limits of a book like this it is quite impossible to deal with the entire coast-line of the United Kingdom from a sea angling point of view ; all that can be done is to indicate a few of the many places round our shores where the sea angler may find sport.

The beautiful coast of Northumberland, which one writer describes as a neglected sportsman's paradise, is not very well known to sea anglers, at any rate to those in the South ; which is a pity, for there are fish in plenty to be caught there. Probably one of the best spots for boat fishing is Seahouses, a charming village which is rapidly increasing in popularity with summer visitors from Newcastle-on-Tyne and other Northumberland towns. There is a capital little harbour there, which contains some good boats ; and it is about the best place from which to fish the Farne Islands, where are some good grounds. Lower down is Cullercoats, where the angler will find both boat and rock fishing. Rock fishers there generally use float tackle, and the principal fish they catch are codling and coalfish, usually not running very large ; a Westerly wind (being off shore) is naturally the best for the game. The boat angler will find plenty of fish in this district.

Nothing need be said about the coast of Durham, for it is of no great importance from the sea angler's point of view ; but Yorkshire presents a variety of attractions to him. The district around Scarborough is famous as the haunt of the rock fisher, and at Scarborough itself a variety of fishing is to be had both from boat and pier, although probably sport there has deteriorated somewhat in recent years. The boat fishing season extends from about April to October, and the fish mostly caught are whiting, gurnard, haddock and flatfish ; but the most enjoyable sport at Scarborough from a boat is the drift-line fishing in August and September for mackerel, which often run large. In September good sport may sometimes be had from the West or Fish pier with billet (coalfish), usually running from about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. to 4 lb. or 5 lb. ; it is very good fun with a long rod and fine tackle. The pier and rock fishing at and around Scarborough goes on in suitable weather practically all through the autumn and winter months. Farther South is Filey with its famous Brig, the fishing at which has been dealt with in a previous Chapter ; but there is very fair fishing for codling, coal-fish, etc., in Filey Bay, South of the Brig.

The coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk are famous for their pier and shore fishing ; something has already been said about this branch of the sport. At Yarmouth and Gorleston the angler will find a considerable amount of fishing available from boat, pier or shore, although it is a curious and unaccountable thing that the autumn pier and shore fishing all along this coast was extremely poor in 1919 and not much better in 1920 ; and here, as elsewhere on our coasts, fingerling whiting were a perfect pest. In a normal year, however, the pier and shore fishing for whiting, codling and cod at Gorleston, Lowestoft and other places is excellent. It is at its best about December, and naturally is more practised by resident than by visiting

anglers. Like boat fishing it has its disappointments, for sometimes a week or more will go by during which the shore is unfishable by reason of storms or weed.

As regards Lowestoft, something has been said in a previous Chapter about the fishing from the Claremont pier. There are two piers at Lowestoft, but for some reason the fishing from the harbour pier is usually not so good as from the Claremont. There is of course boat fishing at Lowestoft also, and some remarkably good catches of codling and cod have been made in this way in the roadsteads; but in an average year the pier and shore fishing is so good that it is hardly necessary for the angler to go afloat.

Passing over several places—such as Southwold, Aldeburgh, Felixstowe, Walton-on-the-Naze and Clacton—where the fishing does not call for any particular remark, we come to the mouth of the Thames. There are one or two curious things about the fishing in the Thames estuary. One is that although there are at times a fair number of mackerel there it seems to be almost impossible to catch one on a spinner. Exactly why this should be is difficult to understand, but it is a fact. Another circumstance which cannot be accounted for—at least not entirely—is that the fishing is almost uniformly better on the Kent than on the Essex side. No doubt the nature of the bottom accounts in part for this superiority; there is some rocky ground on the South shore, whereas this is absent on the North. But there must be more in it than this, for the superiority extends to those fish which live and are caught on sand. Dabs and tope alike seem to run larger on the Kent than on the Essex side. As far as Southend, Westcliff and Leigh (all close together) are concerned the fishing may truthfully be said to be very poor. Southend's speciality is the dab of from 2 oz. to 3 oz., and fish of this weight are so very much more the

rule than the exception there, from pier and boats alike, that "Southend size" has passed into a byword among those anglers who know what sea fishing really is.

Crossing over to the opposite shore, Herne Bay is probably the best place in the Thames estuary for tope, and there are a good many dabs there, usually of fair size; while in the summer good catches of bass are at times made from the pier by one or two of the local experts, sometimes in very ingenious ways, although the fish as a rule do not run large. Margate is without much question the best sea angling station in the estuary of the Thames. The tope fishing there is nearly as good as at Herne Bay, while the bass fishing is probably better. Conger, flatfish, whiting, pouting, pollack (not running very large), codling and cod—all of which may be taken at their proper seasons—make a fairly varied list, and the cod and codling fishing in the autumn is often really good.

Between Margate and Ramsgate is Broadstairs. Here there is boat fishing for a fair variety of fish, including bass; and the angler in the summer months has more than a sporting chance of getting hold of a good one. Ramsgate is more attractive to the London holiday maker than to the serious sea angler. But there are sometimes good grey mullet in the harbour in the summer, and early morning, before there is much boat traffic about, is the best time to try for them; while the autumn fishing for whiting and cod is often very fair. In Pegwell Bay, not far from the entrance to the "mystery" port of Richborough, there are sometimes some good flat fish. Deal has been very closely associated with sea angling for at least a quarter of a century, or longer; and the autumn competitions of the British Sea Anglers' Society, which were commenced soon after the Society was founded, were held there regularly every year down to the outbreak of the war. The fishing is not now so good as it used to be

twenty years ago, but then the autumn fishing for whiting and cod was excellent ; and at one time there were a good many pollack around or under Deal pier. One drawback to the boat fishing at Deal is that tides run strongly there, and another is that one has to go afloat from an open beach ; but there are good boats there in plenty, and the Deal boatmen have a deservedly great reputation for their capability, and some of them (latterly) for their charges ! There are one or two old wrecks off Deal which often hold good conger, but not all the men know the marks of these ; and in the summer there are generally a good many tope near the Goodwins, although tides run so strongly out there that comfortable rod fishing is out of the question except during slack water, so that the game is hardly worth the candle. Some very good bass have been taken pretty close to the beach at both Deal and Walmer, in some cases by anglers fishing from the shore.

At Dover there is fair boat fishing for whiting, codling, flatfish, etc., while sometimes the boat angler who is trying specially for pollack on the rough ground between Dover and Folkestone will get hold of a good one, although they are not exactly thick ; and a very keen and capable sea angler who lives at Dover has caught a good many bass—among them some very good ones—from the harbour pier, usually baiting with a small live pouting. At Folkestone the angler will find some very fair mixed fishing, and sometimes in the autumn some good fish are taken there ; although the fishing there in the autumn of 1919, like that at Deal and some other places along this coast, was on the whole very disappointing.

South West of Hythe lies Romney Marsh, a very interesting and " old world " part of our country which is not very well known to the average Briton. At Dungeness there is not much boat fishing, for boats are difficult to get ; but the beach fishing for whiting, cod and conger in

the autumn and early winter is sometimes very good, although it is always rather uncertain. Much depends on the weather conditions, and as a general rule the fish do not bite well during the day, at any rate in calm weather. Long casting is not usually necessary to success, and the angler who tries it will find that if he can get out thirty or forty yards of line this will generally be sufficient. The place is not too easy to get at for the Londoner, as the journey is rather troublesome; but a good many anglers from the surrounding district fish this beach at the appropriate season.

West of Dungeness is Rye, one of the Cinque Ports, once on the sea, but now some way up a small river—an old fashioned place reminiscent of some of the delightful stories of Mr. W. W. Jacobs. Rye Bay is a famous place for flatfish, but it is heavily trawled by the smacks from Folkestone, Rye itself and Hastings. At Hastings the angler will find good angling in the summer and autumn months for a considerable variety of fish. There is pier fishing at Hastings too, and the angler has the choice of two, of which the Palace pier is usually the better; although here, as at some other piers round our coast, he will often find that there are more anglers than fish. One advantage about Hastings is that bait is usually not difficult to obtain. The next place along the coast to be mentioned is Eastbourne, where there is fishing, from both boat and pier, although it is not particularly good. But Eastbourne is the best place from which to fish the Sovereign rocks—best reached in a motor boat—where some good fish have been taken. Tides run pretty strongly out there, so that if the angler tries it he had better arrange to do so at the neaps.

West of Beachy Head lie Seaford and Newhaven, not far apart. At the former there is fair boat fishing for a considerable variety of fish; but Newhaven used to be

(for the fishing is said to have deteriorated since the war) one of the best places along this coast for bass. The fishing is either from a boat or from the breakwater, and like all bass fishing it is uncertain ; but in the summer months there are often numbers of bass both in the harbour itself and on the rocky ground to the West. A little farther along the coast is Brighton, where there is fishing from both boat and pier for a fair variety of fish, and in the latter part of May and early June a good number of black bream are generally caught there on the rocky ground, although as the fishing is in fairly deep water the angler has to use lead—which spoils the fun.

Both Southwick and Shoreham, which lie between Brighton and Worthing, were rather popular places in the earlier days of sea angling ; but the fishing is not now so good as it was. All along this coast the angler will find spots at which bass may sometimes be caught from the beach. Worthing is a pleasant little town, although the fishing there is not particularly good. There is a well known pouting rock off Worthing where the fish often run to a good size, and in the short black bream season there is good angling for those fish, although here, as at Brighton, one has to use lead. Littlehampton, at the mouth of the Arun, is famous for its fine bass and mullet, although the latter are extremely difficult to catch ; the bass often run a long way up the river on the flood, and at times some have been caught above Arundel. Littlehampton is also the best place from which to reach the Kingmer rocks, where there are plenty of black bream during the season, although the lead one has to use out there completely kills the sport. Bognor is a place which has very decidedly come into its own as a sea angling station during the last fifteen years or so, but so much has been said in a previous Chapter about the fishing there for black bream that nothing need be added to it here. There is often

good bass fishing at Bognor from June onwards, and three or four years ago an old friend of the writer's caught a good many there by whiffing. It is one of the places round our coast where float fishing for bass, as practised at Sandown and described in a previous Chapter, would probably pay well. There are some good conger on the Bognor rocks, but the water is shallow; so that the angler, if he wants to try for them, had better do so at night. Pagham harbour, between Bognor and Selsey Bill, contains flounders; and at the little village of Selsey there is some bass and pollack fishing, although the very strong tide makes sporting fishing impossible. And now we are getting close to the Isle of Wight, where sea fishing generally is not particularly good, although the Sandown bass fishing, previously referred to, makes up for a great deal from the point of view of the sporting sea angler. There is also some good bass fishing at times on the North East side of the Island, near one or other of the Spithead forts, although the fish are not always there.

At the mouth of the Hampshire Avon is Muddiford, a small place where the fishing for grey mullet in the summer used to be quite good, but it is said that this fishing is now more or less a thing of the past. There are often however a good many tope hereabouts in the summer. Bournemouth is a well known and favourite watering place which has grown out of all recognition since the late 'eighties and early 'nineties. There is a good deal about the fishing there in one or two of the books of the late Mr. Aflalo, who knew the place well, and in years gone by had some very good catches of plaice and whiting from a boat anchored off the end of the sewer. The fishing generally has deteriorated in more recent times, although the boat fishing for whiting is often quite good still. Speaking generally, the bottom in Bournemouth Bay is sandy; but off the Canford Cliffs, to the West of Bourne-

mouth, is Poole Head rock, while farther on, not a great way from the entrance to Poole harbour, are two more rocky patches known as the Inner and Outer Woodberries respectively. These rocks often hold fair pollack, as well as good conger and other fish; and an old friend of the writer's, now dead, who knew these grounds well, once landed on a handline a conger of 61 lb. at the first named mark. At the Woodberries the bottom is particularly rough, the formation of the ground apparently resembling a closely packed collection of miniature church steeples; so that if the angler ever reaches this ground and does any bottom fishing there he will probably find himself getting "hung up" repeatedly. Poole harbour, which lies some four or five miles to the West of Bournemouth, is an imposing sheet of water at high tide; but it is not nearly so extensive at low water, for a good deal of it is pretty shallow. It is not at all a bad fishing ground, but there are some practical difficulties in the way of fishing it. However Mr. F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, who fishes "on his own," and has a bungalow at the Sandbanks, where he keeps his boat, has had some very good fun there in that way, and has caught some remarkably good tope in quite shallow water outside the harbour mouth. The sea angler who follows this example will do well to acquire a good working knowledge of the tides beforehand, for the mouth of the harbour is a pretty narrow "bottle neck," and the run of the tide there, particularly at the ebb, is very strong. The "double" tides caused by the Isle of Wight, which are such a familiar feature on this part of the coast, affect the whole of Bournemouth Bay and extend South Westward as far as Old Harry Head. The flatfish to be found in the harbour comprise plaice and brill (often running to a good size), together with flounders and dabs. Grey mullet abound at one or two spots—for instance, round Jennings' pier, where there are often some very large ones

—but here, as elsewhere, these big fellows are extremely difficult to catch. There are plenty of pouting at one or two small marks not a great way from the mouth, but rather hard to find ; and in the fairway at the entrance is a wreck which often holds good conger, as well as other fish, including cod up to about 10 lb. or 12 lb. in the autumn. This is an excellent mark, but can only be fished in comfort on the slack of the tide. At Old Harry Ledge, in Studland Bay, there are generally some good conger and fair pollack.

Weymouth, with the adjacent place of Portland, is probably one of the best stations for all round sea fishing on the South coast. The angler will find there at the appropriate seasons a considerable variety of fish, including bass, pollack, conger, whiting, pouting, skate, wrasse, etc., while there are some really large plaice. The ground fishing is often excellent, and some good conger have been taken there, the best the writer knows of on rod and line being a fish of 43 lb. landed there not so very long ago by Mr. T. Lewis. The bass fishing too is good, and Weymouth and Portland will appeal specially to the bass fisherman by reason of the fact that it is possible there to fish in any weather, no matter how stormy. In July, 1919, two expert bass fishermen landed sixty four fish there in eight days, in spite of the fact that the weather was very calm and the water gin clear all the time.

As Weymouth is one of the two principal ports of embarkation for the Channel Islands it will be convenient here to say a word or two about the fishing there. Every sea angler who has read *The Sea Fisherman*, by the late Mr. J. C. Wilcocks—and few have not—knows something from that standard work on the sport about the fishing at Guernsey ; but the present writer thinks that the soundest advice he can give to the angler who is thinking of trying the Channel Islands as a fishing ground is that of Mr.

Punch to those about to marry—"Don't." There are some good fish to be caught there, it is true; the mullet fishing, for instance, in parts of Guernsey and Alderney is as good as is to be found anywhere in our seas. But tides, generally speaking, are strong and treacherous, and sporting fishing in the open sea is consequently difficult. Expert local knowledge is very necessary, and the angler who goes there must not think of fishing without a skilled and reliable boatman.

And now we come to "glorious Devon." The first place to be mentioned is Seaton, which is just over the county border, and rather less than a mile to the West of the mouth of the Axe. About two miles farther West is Beer, situated in a cove. Both Seaton and Beer are pleasant little spots, but the angler who visits either must not expect anything great in the way of sporting fishing. There are generally some bass at the mouth of the Axe in summer—as indeed is the case with most of these Devonshire rivers; and one hears tales sometimes of good pollack on the rocky ground scattered about this part of the coast. But in practice the angler will find that if he gets hold of any over about 3 lb. or 4 lb. hereabouts he may count himself lucky. He will probably get plenty of pouting—locally known as blins—and these will constitute the bulk of his catch in the summer months, unless the mackerel are in. Farther West is Sidmouth,^u where the fishing is much the same, although there are probably more bass there. A few miles West of Sidmouth is the stretch of shingle where Mr. Lewis R. W. Loyd has been so successful with beach fishing for bass with an unleaded line fished in the manner described in a previous Chapter. A little farther on is the mouth of the Exe, where there is still some bass and mullet fishing at the appropriate spots, with fair flat fishing in pretty shallow water on the sandy ground. One advantage about the coast from here down

to Berry Head, and on to the Start, is that for the most part it is protected from the prevailing South West wind, so that at a good many places along here one is not so likely to be weatherbound as where the coast faces West or South. The next estuary is that of the Teign, and the Teignmouth bass fishing of course is well known to all sea anglers through the medium of the late Mr. Aflalo's writings. There are still a good many bass there in the summer, although the fishing is not so good now as it was some years ago ; June and July are the best months.

And now we come to Tor Bay, a good sea angling centre. Here will be found a variety of fish, with the choice of three places at which to stay—Torquay, Paignton and Brixham—each of which has a harbour from which the angler can go afloat. At Paignton there is said to be good whiting fishing from the beach sometimes in the autumn, and a writer in one of the daily papers a year or two ago mentioned the case of a lady angler who in the previous autumn took eighty fish there on one tide in this way. At Brixham, and between there and Berry Head, is some bass fishing, while "round the Head" (as the Brixham people put it) and on to the mouth of the Dart there is more, although one cannot very well get at it except in a yacht or a good sized sailing or motor boat. In fact the man fond of both yachting and bass fishing will be able to get a good deal of fun on this part of the coast by combining the two sports. In the summer there are often literally thousands of bass round the Mewstone and the Blackstone, which are best reached from Kingswear. In Start Bay some good bass and quite respectable congers have been landed by anglers casting out from the splendid stretch of beach which flanks the bay, between Dartmouth and the Start. Between the Start and Prawle Point is Lannacombe Bay, where there are sometimes a good many bass in the summer months ; and now we are at

Salcombe harbour—an excellent centre for the sea angler who likes boat fishing but is a bad sailor. There are some interesting particulars of the fishing at Salcombe in Mr. C. O. Minchin's book *Sea Fishing*, and as he knows the place well the information about it given there will probably be found to be accurate and reliable; but the angler who thinks about visiting Salcombe in the early summer may be warned that the fishing there in June is generally disappointing.

All along the iron bound, precipitous coast between Bolt Head and Bolt Tail there is fair pollack ground; and just inside the Tail is Hope, which Mr. Minchin calls "a charming fishing village, an excellent station for summer fishing." A charming little spot Hope certainly is; it is very much off the beaten track, as yet quite unspoiled, and comes very near to the ideal as a place at which to spend a quiet, delightful summer holiday. But as a fishing station it would be very much better if tides were easier and there were a harbour from which one could go afloat. During springs the whole sweep of the flood tide in Bigbury Bay runs round the Tail almost like a mill race. At Bantham, a tiny village on the little river Avon near its mouth, is some bass fishing. It is not particularly good, and a greatly exaggerated statement about it appears in a certain guide book. At the mouth of the Erme is more bass fishing, not easy to get at and in consequence probably good; and farther on is Newton Ferrers, on the Yealm, where there is good bass and fair pollack fishing, although the pollack do not run large. Plymouth is a place which offers the angler a considerable variety of fishing from boat, pier and shore. It is also about the best spot from which to reach the Eddystone, which Mr. Minchin says "affords the finest fishing on the English coast"; a statement which is probably only approximately correct, for the present writer would be disposed

to put the Wolf first for really heavy fish. It is probably true to say that almost all the commoner kinds of British sea fish may be caught at some time or other during the year in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, and the bass, pollack and conger fishing are at times excellent. Bass fishing from the rocks is sometimes successful, Penlee Point and Rame Head being two favourite spots for the game. If the angler tries the latter place he will find that he must exercise a good deal of caution, and he should not go there alone, especially in the evening, which is sometimes the best time. The late Mr. Aflalo, who had a great command of striking expressions which live in the memory, calls the Rame Head a "grisly playground." If the angler can make up a party to fish the Eddystone he may be advised to do so, although he should understand beforehand that fishing there is rather a "chancy" business. The trip should be made in a good sea going motor boat, and it goes without saying of course that it should only be done in calm, settled weather, and that a skilled pilot should be on board. The tides out there are very strong, and therefore some time when the neaps are at their smallest should be chosen if possible. West of Rame Head is Whitesand Bay, once a famous hake ground, from which, alas, the glory has departed; and the next place one comes to along this coast is Looe, which is a famous sea angling station. Looe to-day is a very different place from what it was when some old friends of the writer's first fished there, more years ago (probably) than they would care to think about. It was quiet enough in those days, but as the years have rolled by it has developed into something very much like a fashionable watering place. Looe is a famous pollack fishing station, and the names of some of the marks—such as Benin—are household words among sea anglers. There is bass fishing at Looe also, although it is not particularly good; and in a

previous Chapter mention was made of the big wrasse which have been caught there in the late autumn. The mark for these fish is not a great way from the Banjo. A year or two ago a friend of the writer's had some very good whiting fishing at Looe. They ran up to 3 lb. each, and were often taken three at a time ; but the fishing was in nearly forty fathoms of water, which is a long way to wind up whiting ! The Eddystone may be reached from Looe as well as from Plymouth, although as the crow flies it is a little nearer to the latter place. About four miles West of Looe is Polperro, a quiet little spot where the fishing is quite as good as at Looe ; indeed the bass fishing is probably better. There is a small harbour there, but unfortunately, like many of these Cornish harbours, it dries out, or almost so, at low water. The next place to be mentioned is Fowey, which, like Looe, is very well known, at any rate by name, to all sea anglers in this country. It is a bustling little town standing on a broad estuary which forms a very good natural harbour. The fishing is very similar to that at Looe, and the angler who decides to sample it will probably find Polruan, which is on the Eastern side of the estuary, opposite Fowey, a more convenient place to stay at than Fowey itself. The bass fishing at Golant, above the town, is sometimes quite good ; it is reputed locally to be at its best about October.

Mevagissey is a quaint, " old world " little spot which is quite one of the best of the Cornish sea angling stations. It has three great advantages over a good many other places on this coast. One is that tides are comparatively easy. Another is that it faces East, and is extremely well protected from the prevailing South West wind, so that the angler is not nearly so likely to be weatherbound there as at most places. The third advantage is that of Mevagissey's two harbours, the inner and the outer, the

latter does not dry out ; indeed there is a depth of two fathoms there at low water, spring tides. Mevagissey is an excellent station for the sea angler who has retired or is of independent means, for there he will be able to get fishing of some kind almost all the year round. There is a big fleet of mackerel and pilchard drifters there, so that usually one can get plenty of fish bait. Accommodation ashore is however distinctly limited. In the summer months there are often literally thousands of bass at the Gwingeas rocks, which lie to the South of Mevagissey, beyond Chapel Point ; but there, as elsewhere, the angler who tries for them will find that they are not too easy to catch. In September there is usually a run of large mackerel, locally known as "Gwingeas mackerel," at these rocks ; the fish sometimes scale up to 3 lb. apiece.

Not far from the Dodman, and about eight miles North East of the mouth of Falmouth Harbour, is the Gull Rock, a splendid place for bass in the summer months, although rather an awkward one to get to. An angler made a good catch of bass at the Gull some years ago by landing on the rock and casting an unleaded rubber eel with a salmon rod into the tide race between the Gull and another and smaller rock close by ; but it is not always of course that one can do this. There are some big pollack at the Gull too, and the late Mr. R. Davey, who was very fond of bass and pollack fishing, and lived at Falmouth for some years, caught some heavy fish at this rock, as well as at the Manacles. There are some excellent fishing grounds off the Gull, although tides run strongly there, necessitating the use of heavy leads.

In Gerrans Bay is Portscatho, a pretty little place where the fishing is good, although getting there involves rather a roundabout journey ; and now we are at the entrance to Falmouth harbour.

Of Falmouth itself as a sea angling centre much might

be written. Like Salcombe, it is a good station for the man who likes boat fishing but is a bad sailor ; for there is a large area of protected water available in the harbour, in parts of which fish are plentiful enough, although they do not run large. A good deal of the fishing for the smaller pollack in the harbour and about the mouth is done by whiffing with ragworm, locally known as " wol-frey." The Falmouth quay punts are well known, at any rate by repute, to all sea anglers ; and in recent years a good many of these boats have been fitted with motors, a circumstance which every sea angler who has had the experience of trying to row a boat into the harbour mouth, under Pendennis, against the gathering ebb tide will appreciate highly. Of the various marks outside the harbour the best known are the Bizzies, a good pollack ground about four miles North East of the harbour mouth, although this, like so many of these Cornish marks, can only be fished in comfort during the neap tides ; and the Old Wall reef, which is some two or three miles South of St. Anthony's Lighthouse. The latter is a good mark for pollack, bream and other fish ; such as conger, bass, ling, cod, wrasse and gurnard. Off the mouth of the Helford River too there is some good pollack and bream ground. This river, with its many creeks, is extremely pretty, although it is not very well known to sea anglers or indeed generally. It is salt water for practically its whole length, and deserves to be better known, for the bass fishing there is at times distinctly good. In a motor boat one has a wide range of good fishing ground from Falmouth, extending from the Gull Rock on the North East to the far famed Manacles and the Black Head on the South West. The Manacles is a famous ground for coalfish and pollack, and some large fish of both species have been taken there.

Between the mouth of the Helford River and the

Manacles are two little villages, Porthallow and Porthoustock, from which there is some fishing, although the fact that neither has a harbour is a great disadvantage. On the other side of the Manacles is Coverack, which is not at all a bad fishing station, for one has the Manacles on one hand and the Black Head on the other, both excellent fishing grounds and both within easy distance. There is a small harbour at Coverack which dries out (as usual !) at low water, spring tides, although in calm weather one can land at the lifeboat slip at any state of the tide. There is a good and comfortable hotel at Coverack—the Headland. We are now in the Lizard peninsula, and the whole coast on both sides of this is very good for fish if not for fishing. The congers in this district run large, and fish of 50 lb. and upwards are not uncommon ; while there are probably as many good pollack on the rocky reefs hereabouts as on any other part of the English coast. But tides run fiercely at the Lizard, a circumstance which anyone who does not happen to know this part of the coast will readily appreciate by looking at a good map of the district and observing how the Lizard headland juts out into the Channel. Most of the pollack fishing hereabouts is done by towing for them. There are some well known beauty spots, such as Mullion and Kynance Cove, in the Lizard peninsula ; but the sea angler who is fond of sporting fishing will find it a difficult district to fish by reason of the facts previously mentioned.

And now we come to Mount's Bay, which one writer calls " the English Mecca of sea anglers "—a description with which the present writer entirely disagrees. The Mount's Bay fishing was quite good twenty or more years ago, when there were some excellent catches there ; but for a good many years before the war it had been slowly but surely deteriorating. Penzance is very well known, at any rate by repute, to all sea anglers in this country,

and the names of some of the marks there, such as Gaddy-madden, the Gullasses and the House and Hole, are household words among them ; as is so often the case in Cornwall, these outer marks can only be fished during the neap tides. The winter cod and whiting fishing at Penzance has recently been quite good ; December and January are usually accounted the best months for this, but at that time of year of course the sea angler is very liable to be kept ashore by bad weather, while anyone who tries this fishing will find that in clear water the whiting are not "eating"—as the Cornishman says—during the middle of the day, but only in the early morning and late afternoon. The most enjoyable sport to be had in Mount's Bay is the driftline fishing for big mackerel on some ground off St. Michael's Mount, and not a great way from it. Really large mackerel, going up to 2 lb. each and sometimes a little over, may be caught there at the appropriate season ; and with a fly rod one gets most delightful sport, as the angler will find out for himself if he tries it. The sea angler who samples Mount's Bay and wants to try for bigger fish will find either Newlyn or Mousehole a better place to stay at than Penzance ; not only will he be nearer his fishing grounds, but at Penzance is another of these wretched Cornish harbours which dry out at low water—although Mousehole harbour, for the matter of that, is tidal too ! Proceeding Westward along "the foot of England" the only other place that need be mentioned is Porthgwarra, a very out of the way little spot near the Land's End which the man who likes to get off the beaten track will appreciate, although the accommodation there is limited. Here there are some good bass and heavy pollack to be caught, in a tide to match ; as well as some "hefty" congers at a curiously named mark (Epsom) some five miles or so out, which can only be fished in anything like comfort on the slack of the neap tides. And

now we are at the Land's End—for Sennen Cove, although pretty close to it, is "round the corner."

About nine miles South South West from Land's End stands the Wolf Lighthouse, a solitary sentinel in the waste of waters. As every one knows, the Wolf is an extraordinary pinnacle rock rising, almost sheer in parts, out of deep water; and it is said that soundings have established the fact that in size and shape it resembles St. Michael's Mount rather closely. It is a magnificent ground for big fish; the writer thinks it about the best in English waters, although it is not easy to get there. There are many congers there, among them some huge ones, as well as heavy ling, cod and fish of other species; and the place simply swarms with big pollack, although partly owing to the heavy tide, but principally to the remarkable formation of the ground, it is practically impossible to catch them on the driftline—and if the angler ever gets there, and tries this game, he will probably give it up (as the writer did when he fished there) after losing three or four sets of gear in the rock. The fishing at the Wolf cannot be said to be either very comfortable or very sporting; but it is rather a unique experience for the average sea angler, and anyone who visits the rock with plenty of fresh mackerel, herring or pilchard will probably get a catch of fish which, if he has never fished in Irish or Scottish waters, will make him open his eyes. The trip should only be made in calm settled weather and during the neap tides.

The Scilly Islands remain to be spoken of. A good deal might be written on the subject of the sea angling at the Scillies, but want of space prevents the writer from saying much about it. If the angler be staying in the Land's End peninsula he will find that a two or three day trip to these islands will make a pleasant interlude in a sea angling holiday in Mount's Bay; and now that the little steamer

is running again from Penzance, as in pre-war days, the journey can be made easily and comfortably enough. But as a place for a serious sea angling holiday the Scillies can hardly be recommended, and the sea angler who likes sporting fishing, if he goes there once, will hardly be likely to repeat the visit. There are some extremely prolific fishing grounds in that neighbourhood, it is true; a well known reef some three miles from the Bishop, for example, is famous far and wide as the haunt of large pollack, and a friend of the writer's who has fished there described the bottom of the boat, at the end of the day, as "covered with fourteen pounders." But deep water, furious tides and (sometimes) lack of bait are the serious difficulties which will confront the angler who goes to the Scillies intent on catching big fish; so that he had better leave the place alone.

The North coast of Cornwall is not nearly so good for sea fishing as the South. The heavy tide, which becomes worse the nearer one gets to the mouth of the Severn, is a great drawback; and probably the best advice that can be given to the angler on the look out for a good fishing station is to leave this coast alone. The estuary of the Taw and Torridge is a famous place for bass fishing, but sport there has on the whole been distinctly disappointing during the last few years. Ilfracombe is the best known and most popular watering place on the North coast of Devon. There is a variety of fishing there from boat, pier and shore, and if it were not for the heavy tide the place would be a really good sea angling station. Off Lee, to the West of Ilfracombe, is some rocky ground which is, or was, famous for large red bream.

And now we come to the coast of Wales, on some parts of which there is good bass and pollack fishing, although Welsh pollack do not run large. Swansea is a place at which there is little fishing, although it is the centre for

a good deal of sea angling which goes on in the district, chiefly from the shore. Tenby used to be an excellent sea angling station, although the strong tide is a great drawback; but the fishing has deteriorated a good deal in recent years. There are several places on Cardigan Bay—such as Aberporth, Aberayron, Borth, Aberdovey, Towyn, Barmouth, Abersoch and some others—at which the bass fishing at times is quite good. Mention has been made in a previous Chapter of the bass fishing in the Menai Straits. In the Island of Anglesey there are one or two places where there is good boat fishing, and among the fish to be met with hereabouts are black bream. Llandudno to-day is probably the most popular watering place in Wales. There is fishing there from both boat and pier for a fair variety of fish, but the angler had better not expect to get hold of anything very “hefty” in the district. The remainder of the English coast does not call for any special remark, although there are a good many places where flatfish, etc., may be caught in the summer months. Something must be said, however, about the fishing in the Isle of Man. There are some good fish to be caught there, and if it were not for the heavy tide—especially round the Southern end of the Island, where some of the best grounds are—the district would be an excellent one for the sea angler. Probably Port St. Mary, Port Erin, Peel and Ramsey are the best places from which to fish. A point that should be borne in mind is that on the Eastern side of the Island one is much less likely to be weather bound than on the West and South. Ramsey is an excellent fishing station, for some very good grounds are available there, especially if one has the use of a motor boat; and on the inshore marks tides are easy.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHERE TO FISH: THE SCOTTISH COAST

SPEAKING broadly and generally, not a great deal of sea angling has up to the present time been done in Scotland, and a good deal of the country is an unexplored region, or nearly so, to the sea fisherman. There is some magnificent sport to be had on some parts of the coast of Scotland and the surrounding islands *when one can get at it*; but there are often a good many practical difficulties in the way of a successful sea fishing holiday there, as the angler will be quite likely to find out for himself if he goes to a new and untried place. Not the least serious of these is the lack of fresh fish bait, which will often be encountered in localities which are not fishing ports. The leisured sea angler, to whom a wasted visit is not a matter of very much moment, will often find a good deal of fascination in breaking fresh ground, and trying places which have not been fished before, or have not been fished much; but to the busy man, who can only afford the time for one sea angling holiday a year, the risk of wasting his time will always loom rather large, especially if he has had one or two experiences in that direction previously. And it is probably to this feeling quite as much as to the circumstance that a sea angling holiday in Scotland often involves a long and (in these days) fairly expensive journey, that one may attribute the fact that the

"Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,"

has hitherto not been so popular with sea anglers as, for instance, Ballycotton and other famous sea fishing stations on the Irish coast ; although there are probably places on the Scottish coast where the fishing, when one can get at it *and can get fresh bait*, is just as good as at Ballycotton. There is one advantage about sea angling in Scotland which deserves to be mentioned. At a good many places there one has salmon or trout fishing in either loch or river to fall back on when the sea is too rough to allow one to go afloat ; and every angler who has experienced wasted days by the sea when weather bound will appreciate this as a very real boon. In some parts of Scotland, more especially in the mountainous regions found on a good deal of the West coast, weather conditions sometimes change with startling rapidity from fine, calm fishing weather to something like half a gale of wind. The author would therefore earnestly warn the angler who may be fishing in those parts never to go afloat without skilled, reliable, local men, and at the first hint from them that it is time to be off home he should invariably up-anchor and make for harbour immediately. If the angler likes to fish on Sunday, by the way, it is perhaps unnecessary to warn him that he will not be able to do this in Scotland ; indeed in some parts of that country it is considered almost a crime even to "whistle" on the Sabbath.

With these preliminary observations about sea fishing in Scottish waters generally, it is intended to mention a few—a very few—places on the coast of Scotland where the angler may hope to find sport ; for lack of space prevents any attempt to deal at all exhaustively with the subject.

One of these is Tobermory, in the Island of Mull, which is at the Northern end of the Sound of Mull, and lies on a

fine bay which is well known for the safe anchorage it affords to ships of any tonnage. There is a wide range of good fishing ground at Tobermory, and although some of the marks are eight or ten miles away the fact that there is a motor boat there enables the angler to reach them in suitable weather without much difficulty. The bait used locally at Tobermory, as at a good many other places on the Scottish coast, is mussel, and mackerel when obtainable, which is not always ; occasionally a boat will put into the place with herring, but this source of supply cannot be relied on, so that if the visitor wants to use herring bait he will have to arrange for it to be sent from Mallaig or elsewhere. Many kinds of fish are to be found at Tobermory, and two friends of the writer's who fished there a few years ago captured some fifteen or sixteen varieties in the course of a stay of about three weeks. In an average year the pollack fishing in particular is very good indeed.

Almost opposite the Northern extremity of Skye is Gairloch, on the Bay of that name. It is best reached by train to Achnasheen, and hence by a hilly but gloriously beautiful drive, the road for miles winding along the side of Loch Maree. Pollack, cod, coalfish, haddock and whiting are the fish most likely to be met with at Gairloch, and the fishing is at times quite good ; the best grounds are around the Island of Lunga, at the mouth of the Bay, but one cannot always get there. One or two members of the British Sea Anglers' Society have enjoyed some good sport at Gairloch. Ullapool, on Loch Broom, is a beautiful place at which friends of the writer's have spent enjoyable sea angling holidays in years gone by, and if the bait difficulty can be got over it is an excellent station for sea fishing. It is best reached by train to Garve, a station on the Highland Railway, and thence by a motor drive of about thirty two miles. In September there is a

mackerel and herring fishery at Ullapool, but at other times of the year the angler will probably find it hard to get fresh fish bait there, except such as he is able to catch himself. The lovely Summer Isles lie out to sea, off the mouth of Loch Broom, and there are some splendid fishing grounds around them ; but they are too far from Ullapool to be accessible from that place except in a motor boat. A year or so ago Mr. G. W. Morrison, the proprietor of the Caledonian Hotel at Ullapool, wrote that he had a motor boat on order ; but whether or not this boat has been delivered yet the present writer does not know. If it be available then—given fresh fish bait—he thinks Ullapool quite one of the best sea angling stations on the whole of the West coast of Scotland, which is saying a good deal. There is a large variety of fish in the district, and those most likely to be met with include coalfish, pollack, haddock, cod, ling, conger, whiting, skate and wrasse. Halibut too are sometimes taken there. The Summer Islands may also be reached from Achiltibuie, a little place where there is some grand pollack fishing. Lochinver, on the loch of that name, is a famous place for salmon and trout fishing, but probably not many anglers would think of going there for the sake of the sea fishing alone, although this is excellent. In a good season—and provided one can get to the outer fishing grounds—the sport obtainable is almost equal to that to be found at Ballycotton when at its best, which is pretty high praise. As at a good many other places on the Scottish coast however the difficulty of obtaining fresh fish bait is one which will often confront the visitor. If this can be got over Lochinver is an excellent sea angling station. A considerable variety of fish is to be found there, and on the outside grounds they are said to run large. Two or three members of the British Sea Anglers' Society have fished at Lochinver a good deal, but in every instance the loch and river fishing,

rather than the sport in salt water, has been the primary attraction. The scenery in the district is magnificent ; and unless one goes there by sea the last stage—a pretty long one—of the journey is by road, for Lochinver is about forty seven miles from the nearest railway station, Lairg.

North of the Pentland Firth lie the Orkney Islands, with the Shetlands farther away—localities very seldom visited by the sea angler. The best halibut grounds in the United Kingdom are in the tide races between the Islands, and in the Pentland Firth. These are wild and stormy waters, but occasionally small boats fitted with motor engines can fish the nearer grounds ; and the man with an ambition to break the British rod and line record for halibut, *and a good deal of time on his hands*, has probably as good a chance of achieving his object in this district as anywhere round our coasts. A visit to these grey and desolate Islands is the sort of thing the average sea angler, if he does it at all, does once, and once only, in a lifetime. The sea angler who makes up his mind to try these waters will probably find either Kirkwall or Stromness in the Orkneys, or Lerwick in the Shetlands, the best place to make his headquarters. An old friend who fished in the Orkneys a good deal thirty or more years ago tells the writer that his outstanding recollection of Stromness is that it is the only place—and he has had a long experience of sea angling on many parts of our coast—at which he has caught pollack with a plain rubber eel from an anchored boat, fishing in a race of tide so strong that they were obliged to have two heavy killicks down, as one was not enough to hold her. Other friends of the writer's who fished at Lerwick a good many years ago had rather an unfortunate experience. They caught some remarkably fine dabs, but not very much else ; and it is a long way to go for dab fishing—one can get that (of a kind) at South-end ! On the other hand another friend—the present

honorary Curator of the British Sea Anglers' Society—has put it on record that far and away the best sport he has ever had in salt water was with sea trout in some of the "Voes" of Shetland.

CHAPTER XXX

WHERE TO FISH: THE IRISH COAST

IRELAND presents some splendid opportunities of sport to the sea fisherman, although in the appalling state of that unhappy country during the last two years or so few sea anglers from England have cared to cross St. George's Channel. As these lines are being passed for the press the prospects of peace for that distracted country seem brighter than they have been for a long time, and on every ground one hopes very earnestly that happier days are about to dawn for Ireland. For the Irish are a charming people; how charming only those who have been to Ireland really know.

Sea angling in Ireland presents some curious and remarkable contrasts. On the one hand Ballycotton, in Co. Cork, is without much question the most famous sea angling station in our waters, and has probably been more systematically fished during the last twenty years or so by sea anglers in quest of big fish than any other place in the whole of the British Isles; while in a lesser degree places like Valentia, Kilmore Quay, Derrynane, Waterville and some others have seen a fair amount of sea angling in recent years. On the other hand there is a good deal of salt water round Ireland, particularly on the West coast, which even to-day (as an Irishman would say) is virgin ground, or nearly so, so far as rod and line fishing is concerned.

As in the case of parts of the Scottish coast various difficulties, even in normal times, often confront the sea angler in Ireland when he gets off the beaten track. There is a lot of fine sea fishing in Ireland, but much of it, especially on the West coast, is not easy to get at except in a sea going yacht; and the difficulties of obtaining suitable accommodation ashore and afloat and a plentiful supply of fresh fish bait will crop up again and again at a good many of the more out of the way places.

But perhaps the greatest drawback to sea angling in Ireland, so far as the actual fishing is concerned, may be said to be the dogfish plague. This is a feature from which a good many parts of the Scottish coast, and of the English one too for the matter of that, are by no means always exempt; but nowhere in our waters is the plague more widespread, more general, more continuous or more severe than it is in Ireland to-day. Many of the best grounds there outside the twenty fathom line or thereabouts, especially on the South and West coasts, are often almost unfishable, from about July onwards through the year, from this cause. The particular dogfish the sea angler will almost invariably meet with in Irish waters is the spur dog (*Acanthias vulgaris*); they generally average about 5 lb. apiece. As every sea angler knows, these dogfish afford no sport whatever, nor is any skill involved in catching them. For they are always hungry, and bite ravenously under all conditions and at all states of the tide; ebb, flood or slack water—as they say in Ireland about so many things—“Sure, ’tis all the same.” Spur dogs are also extremely destructive alike to the angler’s fishing and his tackle. Weather conditions affect the movements of these fish a good deal, and it has been observed that they invariably swim to the lee of a heavy blow of wind. For example, at Ballycotton a strong North West wind (which is a land wind there) will drive

them out to sea, and conversely a South East, South or South West wind sends them into the coastal waters again. A friend of the writer's who was fortunate enough to visit the little place in October, 1911, experienced on arrival a strong blow of wind from the North West for four or five days in succession. Although the dogs had previously been extremely thick this wind drove them all away from the coast ; it was succeeded by two or three days of almost flat calm, during which the angler in question enjoyed some truly magnificent sport with heavy pollack and other fish. From which it will be seen that there is a good deal of luck about sea angling in Ireland nowadays.

As in the case of the Scottish coast, lack of space prevents the writer from attempting to deal with many sea angling stations in Ireland. He can only mention a few places where good sport may be looked for. Naturally the first of these is Ballycotton—that "great little place," as some one has christened it. It is of course extremely well known by repute to every sea angler in this country, while a good many have actually fished there. Indeed it is hardly too much to say that to-day the name of the place is a household word among sea anglers wherever the English language is spoken ; and the late Dr. C. F. Holder refers to it more than once in one of his books. On one page he calls Ballycotton "a place where good anglers go before they die" ; and it is a pathetic circumstance that in the last letter the present writer received from him, written not many months before his death, he wrote that he hoped to revisit England and in that case to fish at Ballycotton, which circumstances had prevented his doing when he was here in 1910. Every sea angler in this country must regret that he was prevented by death from realizing that wish.

Ballycotton possesses in a marked degree each of the

essentials which go to the making of a good sea angling station for heavy fish, viz., good fishing grounds, good boats and boatmen, decent accommodation on shore close to the fishing and (usually) a good and plentiful supply of fresh fish bait. Perhaps best of all, tides there are easy—many times the writer has fished a tide through on the Ledge for pollack with an unleaded driftline—and one goes afloat from a capital little harbour which never dries out. What more can any sea angler want? There is a huge expanse of fine fishing ground there—indeed there are probably few places in the United Kingdom which can boast of such an extent of rocky ground available to the sea angler; and a great deal of this has never been trawled, and never will be, for the simple and all sufficient reason that the operation is impossible. If, and when, the greater part of our seas should be trawled out Ballycotton will be one of those places which will always remain to afford sport in salt water; for much of the sea bottom there is a natural and impregnable feeding ground for big fish.

It may be said without any exaggeration or fear of contradiction that the Ballycotton boats and men are as good as any to be found anywhere round the coast of the United Kingdom; and it is in this respect that the place has such a great advantage over some other sea angling stations that might be named, and particularly over Valentia, which is at present Ballycotton's most serious rival in Ireland. The boats mostly used for sea angling at Ballycotton are whaleboats, from 27 ft. to 30 ft. in length. They are fine sea boats and very comfortable to fish from; they carry one large sail—a dipping lug—with a jib headed mizzen at the stern on a small mast. There are some eight or nine of these boats at Ballycotton; there are also three or four larger sailing craft which are often used for sea angling. These latter boats are of

course a good deal more roomy, and after fishing for a season or two in one of them one feels rather cramped in a whaleboat ; but a serious disadvantage about them is that if the wind happens to die away towards evening it is a terrible job to row home—it is bad enough in a whaleboat.

The Ballycotton men are worthy of the boats ; all are good sailor men and good fishermen. Most of them have now had something like twenty years' experience in attending on sea anglers, and know nearly as much about rod fishing in the sea as some of their patrons. They have only one really serious fault ; but it is a bad one. When gaffing a big fish—which otherwise they do remarkably well—they *will* insist on catching hold of the line ; as they say, just to " shteady " it. Most sea anglers who have fished much at Ballycotton have seen more than one fine fish lost through this pernicious and apparently incurable habit.

The fish caught belong to the men. This is a feature to which in general the writer has a strong objection on principle ; but of course in a place like Ballycotton, which is ten miles from the nearest railway station, the catch is of little or no use to the angler, for he cannot send it away. But the men never object if one wants to take a fish or two up to the hotel. The fish are sold to local buyers, who drive their small donkey carts down on to the harbour pier to carry them away—a picturesque feature of the place.

In the third essential of a good sea angling station Ballycotton is particularly fortunate. There are three hotels in the place, the Sea View, the Bay View and the Pier ; all are close to the harbour, the first named and the third being literally within a stone's throw of it, while the Bay View is only quite a short distance up the road leading down to the harbour pier. Of the Sea View and the Bay View the writer can speak from personal experience ; both are clean and comfortable, which is not always

the case with Irish hotels. The Pier is a smaller hotel of which he can say nothing, as he has never stayed there and does not happen to know anyone who has.

In the fourth essential Ballycotton as a rule is also fortunate. The baits used there are mackerel and herring, and—more rarely—sprat ; and as the place is a fishing port there is generally plenty of fresh bait available for sea angling. There are exceptions to this rule of course, for all fishing is an uncertain business ; but one may fairly summarize the bait question at Ballycotton by saying that the supply of fresh fish bait there through the summer is as good as at any place in Ireland and better than at many, and that in an average year the visitor from the latter part of May onwards is likely to have no trouble in getting it.

The remaining essentials—the tides and the harbour—are as nearly ideal at Ballycotton as at any place the writer knows of where the sea angler is likely to catch big fish.

One may fairly sum up the place by saying that so far as the actual fishing grounds are concerned they are probably second to none among those generally known to sea anglers to-day ; while the other advantages mentioned combine to make Ballycotton the best station for all round sea angling—except for bass—in the United Kingdom. Every advocate knows that it is a great mistake to over state his case ; and the writer is anxious to avoid misleading his readers by using the language of exaggeration. The seasons vary at Ballycotton, and one experiences poor and disappointing days there, just as at other places ; indeed if this were not so there would be little attraction in sea angling anywhere. But it is approximately true to say that at its best the fishing is so good that it quite spoils one for that at most other stations.

Having said that, it must be confessed that on the

whole the place was not fishing particularly well in 1919 and 1920 ; there was a *comparative* scarcity of big fish, and particularly of big ling, while in the first named year there was a swarm of codling there, quite an unusual feature. It is rather fascinating, although not particularly helpful, to theorize as to the cause of this, and the writer has his own ideas on the point. He has not by any means lost faith in Ballycotton, but on the contrary has just as much confidence in the place as he has always had since the first year he fished there.

The latest news he has received, just as this book is going to press, is that the fishing was good and several halibut had been taken by the professional handliners. It only remains to be said that decidedly the most comfortable way of reaching the little place is to cross from Fishguard by the steamer to Cork, and thence (if possible) to motor to Ballycotton—a distance of about twenty five miles—over a road which, although rather hilly in parts, is a good one throughout.

The next place to be mentioned is Valentia Island, in Co. Kerry—of all the Irish sea angling stations generally known to fishermen from England the only one which hitherto has seriously challenged the supremacy of Ballycotton as a place to catch big fish. It has been known to some for a good many years—at least twenty—but leaped into popularity in 1911 in consequence of some remarkably good catches made there in that year by Messrs. W. R. Harrison, J. F. Eldridge and one or two other sea anglers.

The fishing grounds are not so extensive as at Ballycotton, for the general character of the sea bottom around the Island is sandy, although there is a good deal of rocky ground. Now that there is a good motor boat at Valentia however there is a lot of ground on the other side of Dingle Bay which is available to the sea angler in fine weather ; and much of this no doubt holds good fish and

is practically virgin ground so far as rod and line fishing is concerned. An advantage of the place is that there is a large expanse of protected water available, so that one can get some sort of fishing in almost any weather, although fish in the harbour itself do not as a rule run large. Outside the water is deeper, generally speaking, than the grounds usually fished at Ballycotton, and in more than one place there is a depth of approximately thirty fathoms pretty close to the cliffs. The bait supply is excellent, except during the latter part of July, the whole of August and the early days of September. Indeed in May it is better than at Ballycotton, for there is a big professional mackerel fishery carried on at Valentia every spring by motor drifters from Arklow and Peel ; so that the sea angler is assured of fresh mackerel unless the weather is too bad for the drifters to put to sea. This spring fishery usually finishes in July ; and as the autumn fishery does not commence until September the sea angler visiting Valentia in August, as the writer knows by bitter experience, is quite likely to find himself in desperate straits for bait. Tides are easy except in the harbour itself, where the run of tide is very strong, particularly at the ebb.

As far as the writer is aware the only place on the Island where there is any accommodation for the visitor is at Knights Town, a small village at its Eastern end. The Royal hotel there is a good sized one, clean and comfortable, and fully up to the standard of a good class English hotel.

A weak spot about Valentia is the boat accommodation available for the sea angler. If the motor boat be available well and good ; but if she happens to be engaged by another angler the visitor has to fall back on other craft. There are one or two boats in the place which are nearly as large as the whaleboats at Ballycotton, although not so

well found, so seaworthy or so comfortable. And the men available are decidedly not up to the standard of the Ballycotton men either as fishermen or as attendants on sea anglers. *There is no professional hook and line fishery on the island*, although there is at Portmagee, on the mainland; and every practical sea angler knows what that means.

Paradoxical as it may perhaps seem when one remembers the large area of protected water available to the sea angler at Valentia, the writer thinks the place is likely to fish best in very fine weather. Under these conditions the water does not usually fine up to such an extent as it does at Ballycotton; this is probably due partly to the greater depth of water, but mainly to the larger extent of sandy bottom at the Kerry station. There are *very great possibilities* at Valentia to the sea angler who is lucky enough to encounter a persistent and continuous anticyclone there.

There is a large variety of fish to be caught at Valentia, and in the main the sea angler will probably make much the same catches of mixed fish there in a normal year as will come his way at Ballycotton. There are more skate at Valentia than at the famous little place in Co. Cork, a fact due no doubt to the greater extent of sandy ground at the Kerry station. There are both bass and grey mullet in the harbour, as well as any number of small to medium sized pollack and a fair quantity of bream, gurnard, wrasse and flatfish; with many skate—mostly small, but sometimes large.

Under existing conditions of the dogfish plague these pests are just as great a nuisance at Valentia as they are at Ballycotton and a good many other places on the coast of Southern Ireland; indeed in an average year they are probably rather worse at Valentia than at Ballycotton. In spite of the comparative shallowness of the water at the Perch Rock in the harbour, for instance, an angler

who fished there in August, 1911, found it simply swarming with spur dogs. However, by fishing at Valentia in May or early June—decidedly the best time of year to visit the place—the sea angler can avoid the dogfish.

So far as the writer's rather limited experience of Valentia goes—for he has only made two visits to the place—he is disposed to consider it a somewhat erratic and uncertain sea angling station ; the sort of place at which one has considerably more than a sporting chance of doing remarkably well, with a distinct possibility of failing rather badly. But then there is a good deal of "glorious uncertainty" about most sea angling—especially in Ireland. The best way of reaching Valentia is *via* Fishguard and Rosslare, and thence by train to Valentia Harbour, changing at Mallow and Faranfore. The last stage of the long journey is very picturesque.

Another place fairly well known to English sea anglers who fish in Ireland is Kilmore Quay, in Co. Wexford. Its rise to such fame as it has acquired has been fairly rapid, for ten years ago it was unknown, or nearly so, to the general body of sea anglers in this country. There are fish there in plenty ; in fact it is perhaps the best place for bass, and one of the best for pollack, in Ireland. But it has one great drawback—a drawback which all sea anglers who think as the writer does will consider a very serious one—*tides are very heavy there*. Every one to his taste of course, but personally the writer would never knowingly visit a place which involved fishing in a four knot current at springs. It is best reached *via* Fishguard and Rosslare.

Derrynane, in Co. Kerry, is another place where there is good sea fishing, and if there were more boats there of a size suitable for sea anglers' requirements the place would rank as quite one of the best of the Irish sea angling stations, for there is some excellent fishing ground there. In fact Mr. F. N. P. Lee, who has had a wide and varied

experience of Irish sea angling, says it is the place which he liked best of all those at which he has fished in salt water in Ireland. It is best reached by train to Cahirciveen, and thence by coach or motor omnibus—a long and tiring journey from England. Another place which has been well spoken of, although it is even more inaccessible, is Ballinskelligs; indeed a friend of the writer's who has fished a lot on the coasts of Cork and Kerry says he had the greatest fishing of his life for "big stuff" at Ballinskelligs, and usually caught more fish there than at Ballycotton. There is many another place on the coast of Ireland where there is good sea fishing, but enough has been said to show the possibilities of that country for the sea angler.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME NOTABLE CATCHES

THE best all round catch on rod and line in the sea which the writer ever heard of in our waters was made by Mr. J. W. C. Fegan on September 7th, 1907, at Ballycotton, but although some of the individual fish were weighed the aggregate weight of the catch was not ascertained ; which is a pity, for there is little doubt that if it had been it would be a record so far as sea angling here is concerned. It is described by Mr. C. O. Minchin in his book *Sea Fishing* in these words :—" In order to give an idea of what may be done by a skilled angler when he gets on good ground and the fish are feeding in earnest, the following well-authenticated record of a single day's catch made at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, in September, 1907, by one angler may be repeated here. He used two rods, one for the bottom and the other for mid-water, and on five or six occasions when large fishes were hooked on both rods at the same time the boatman had to play one of them ; all the others he caught himself. Two skate—147 lb. and 119 lb. ; five cod—largest 23 lb. ; seventeen ling—largest 26 lb. ; twelve conger—largest 27 lb. ; four pollack, and a basket of bream, gurnard, haddock, etc.—and then the bait gave out. The total weight came to over 1,000 lb."

An angling record, like Cæsar's wife, should be above suspicion, and for this reason it is rather a pity that Mr. Minchin embroidered the story of this magnificent catch

with the incorrect addition of his own that one of the rods was fished at mid-water. As a matter of fact of course (as the catch shows) both were fished at the bottom. The total weight of "over 1,000 lb." is only an estimated one, but there is little doubt that actually it was well over the figure, for Mr. Fegan told the present writer that none of the cod was under 16 lb., while the ling averaged about 22 lb. and the conger about 21 lb. apiece; the pollack ranged between 6 lb. and 8 lb. each.

Another good catch was made by Mr. E. Graham-Falcon at the same place on August 10th, 1910. It comprised twenty five conger, which weighed 334 lb., and included fish of 42 lb., 24½ lb., 21¾ lb. and many in the neighbourhood of 18 lb. each; five ling weighing 15 lb., 19 lb., 20 lb., 24½ lb., and 27¾ lb. respectively—106¾ lb. in all; three pollack, weighing 15 lb.; and 10 lb. of bream. The total weight of the catch was 465¾ lb., and as it included neither skate nor shark—both fish which help so much to swell the aggregate weight of a catch—it ranks as a remarkably good one. The writer happened to be in Ballycotton at the time, and he recalls that it was made in extremely clear water and on a very warm day, when practically every other angler then in the place had disappointing fishing. On June 19th, 1914, Mr. Graham-Falcon and Mr. G. Rowell, fishing together, had another fine catch of fish at Ballycotton, the aggregate weight of which however does not seem to have been ascertained. It consisted of eleven conger (heaviest fish, 34 lb.); seven ling from 19 lb. downwards; a halibut of 60 lb.; a cod of 23 lb.; sixty four pollack, ranging from 12½ lb. downwards, and about half of them 7 lb. or over; a skate, about a score of bream, and some oddments. The fish were not kept separate, but the writer believes that about two thirds of the pollack, two of the conger and one ling were caught by Mr. Rowell, and the remainder of the fish by Mr. Graham-Falcon.

On the previous day (June 18th, 1914) Mr. E. M. Mallett had a remarkable day's sport at the same place. He was fishing with an old friend with whom he has spent many sea angling holidays, but Mr. Mallett caught nearly all the fish. It was one of those extraordinary and unaccountable occurrences of which probably a good many sea anglers have had an experience at some time or other; when one angler is busy all day long and the other hardly gets a bite—and yet the two are fishing within a few feet of one another and with similar tackle and bait, while even changing places in the boat makes no difference. The aggregate weight of the catch was not ascertained: it comprised twenty four conger, a very level lot, twenty of them ranging between 15 lb. and 20 lb. apiece; twenty pollack, from 11 lb. downwards; two cod, of 15 lb. and 23 lb.; eight ling, weighing respectively 18 lb., 20 lb., 22 lb., 22½ lb., 24 lb., 25 lb., 25 lb. and 30½ lb.; two skate, a blue shark and a score and a half of bream and gurnard.

Mention has been made in a previous Chapter of an occasion at Ballycotton in October, 1911, when a North West wind blew the dogs out to sea. Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Dunn, fishing together on the Ledge at that time, had some grand sport. On October 11th, 1911, they took between them thirty one pollack. Thirty of these were over 9 lb. in weight, twenty six were over 10 lb., while seven were 14 lb. or over. The thirty one fish weighed 346 lb., an average of just over 11 lb. 2½ oz. each. In addition the anglers accounted for four large skate, a cod of 23 lb. and a quantity of smaller fish. The total weight of the bag does not seem to have been ascertained with accuracy except as regards the pollack, but Mr. Dunn told the writer that it was well over 800 lb.

All records of pollack fishing of which the writer ever heard however sink into insignificance in comparison with some amazing sport enjoyed by Captain and Mrs. Hugo

Millais in the Land's End district, details of which reached the writer a short time only before this book goes to press. On June 16th, 1921, they fished together from 5 p.m. to about 7.30 p.m., and in that time took on rods twenty four coalfish and pollack which weighed 269 lb. Among them were a pollack of 21 lb. (caught by Captain Millais), and fish of 14 lb., 13 lb., 11 lb., 10 lb. and smaller. The two largest coalfish weighed 20 lb. each, and there were fish of 19 lb., 18 lb., 16 lb. and smaller. On the following day Captain Millais and his wife fished with rods, while the boatman (J. Roberts) used a handline. The sport lasted from 5 p.m. to 8.40 p.m., and in that time 119 coalfish and pollack, weighing 1,403 lb., were taken. Of these fish Captain Millais caught thirty four which weighed 416 lb. among them being coalfish of 23½ lb., 20½ lb., 18 lb., 18 lb., 14 lb. and smaller, and pollack of 17 lb., two of 16 lb., 15 lb., 14 lb., 13½ lb., two of 13 lb., 12 lb., four of 11 lb., two of 10 lb. and smaller. The fish caught by Mrs. Millais on her rod and by the boatman on his handline were mixed together; they included coalfish of 21 lb., 20 lb., 18½ lb., three of 18 lb., 17 lb., two of 16 lb., 15½ lb., two of 15 lb., 14 lb., 13 lb. and smaller, and pollack of 20½ lb., 19½ lb., 17 lb., 16 lb., three of 15 lb., seven of 14 lb., two of 13½ lb., four of 13 lb., 12½ lb., two of 12 lb., five of 11 lb. and smaller. Of these Mrs. Millais caught the two biggest pollack, and coalfish of 20 lb., 18 lb., etc. Captain Millais says he thinks the secret of their phenomenal sport lies in the fact that the first of the herrings were crossing the spot where they fished, and all the local coalfish and pollack, as well as those which were following the herring, seemed to be feeding at once. For a quarter of a mile in every direction he says the sea was boiling with big fish, while the air was swarming with every kind of seabird, all intent on seizing herring. It was of course the opportunity of a lifetime, of which the anglers took full advan-

tage. The fly in the ointment is that the fish were caught by whiffing with 6 oz. leads from a motor boat with her engine running at $3\frac{1}{2}$ knots.

In taking leave of his readers the writer would say as a final word that anyone deciding to take up the sport of sea angling seriously may be counselled to join the British Sea Anglers' Society. Inasmuch as the writer, for his sins, has been for some five or six years the honorary Secretary of that body, he confesses frankly that the advice is not disinterested. But he believes it is sound, and if followed he does not think it will be regretted.

CHAPTER XXXII

TUNNY

By HAROLD J. HARDY

THIS book begins by describing mackerel fishing. When it was written no one imagined that a new kind of angling for big game fish would be possible in the already much depleted seas off our coasts. It is fitting that the first and last chapters should be devoted to mackerel, for the tunny is a huge mackerel.

This fish* is known as the red tunny, probably because its flesh is red. It resembles a mackerel very closely, except in the zig-zag marks on the back of the latter. These are absent in the tunny. The colour in the water is blue on the back, shading away to white on the belly. The dorsal and pectoral fins fit into sockets and can be tucked away to offer no resistance to the water. The tail is very powerful and scimitar shaped. The tunny is obviously built for speed, and is a fine example of Nature's streamlining.

The writer is indebted to Mr. W. J. Clarke, F.Z.S., for a good deal of the following short history of this fish. Briefly, it is chiefly found in the tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. On the American coasts it is found from Nova Scotia to Florida, and on the western side on the

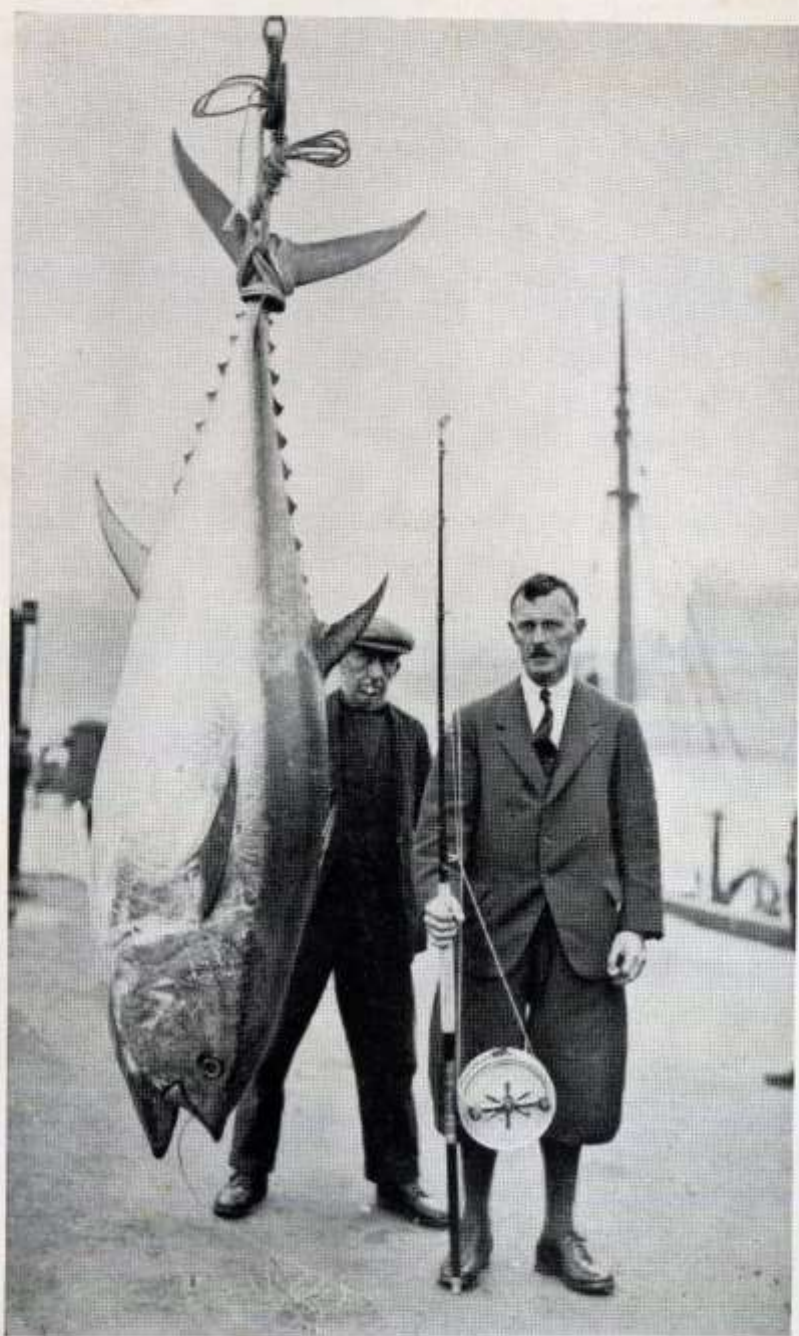
* *Thynnus Thynnus*, the short-finned tunny.

coast of California. It has also been identified in the waters of Tasmania and New Zealand.

It is an important food-fish and has been the object of extensive fisheries in the Mediterranean from time immemorial.

The first record of it here was in 1769 when Pennant says there was one killed off Inverary. A book written by Jenkins in 1853, and called *The Vertebrate Fauna of Yorkshire*, records two, one at Bridlington and the other at Tees mouth. From then till the end of the nineteenth century only one was recorded which was caught in the herring nets off Whitby. Since 1914, however, many reports have been received of large fish off Scarborough, which were probably tunny. The first was landed in 1929, and was harpooned by a herring drifter. The first rod-caught tunny was killed by Mr. Mitchell-Henry in 1930, followed shortly afterwards by four others. Their captors and weights were—Mr. Fred Taylor, 735 lb.; Colonel Stapleton Cotton, 630 lb.; Mr. Hannam, 591 lb.; Mr. Mitchell-Henry, 560 lb.; the Writer, 392 lb. In 1931 only one fish was killed, the angler being Mr. Mitchell-Henry. This fish, by a remarkable coincidence, again weighed 560 lb. The weather was extremely bad throughout this season. Mr. Taylor's fish was 9 ft. 3 in. long and 5 ft. 11 in. in girth. The world's record tunny killed by Mr. Zane Grey in Nova Scotia weighed 758 lb., only 23 lb. more.

Tunny not only run up to great weights, but are very powerful and fast swimmers, fighting from the time they are hooked until quite exhausted, usually dying on the bottom, and having to be hauled up. This necessitates special tackle. The writer will describe, for the benefit of the novice, the tackle required for this most fascinating sport, but would preface his remarks by stating that he does not pose as an expert, though he has had as much



MR. HAROLD J. HARDY AT SCARBOROUGH WITH HIS TUNNY
OF 392 LB.

experience as anyone in our home waters. Nor is it suggested that the tackle described is the last word for this class of angling. It has, however, killed many large fish, both tunny and other sorts of big game fish, and is in his opinion the best that is at present known to deal with them.

The Rod.—As the fishing is done from a boat this is necessarily short. The length is usually some 6 ft. 10 in. It is made in two parts, the tip and a detachable handle, and is as strong as possible, commensurate with its bending and so helping to take the strain and playing the fish. The best materials are split bamboo—with or without a steel centre. The steel centre indubitably adds to the strength. Next we come to hickory and bamboo, built in sections, the hickory on the outside of the rod. Hickory bends easily, but is extremely hard to break, and combined in this manner with bamboo makes a very resilient and tough rod. Hickory alone makes a good rod but, as stated, bends easily; it is cheaper of course than either of the others. The writer is against the use of green-heart as it is liable to snap when subjected to any sudden strain.

The reel fitting should be made so that the reel fits into a fixed housing at the higher end of the butt and is secured at the lower end by some device such as a screw nut, this being prevented from slipping by a locking nut. Both of these should be tightened by means of a spanner. This class of fitting makes it impossible for the reel to move. As an additional precaution the reel may be further held to the rod by metal braces fitted on to lugs on the reel, and thence to the rod, and tightened by screws. To the novice it may seem that all these precautions are rather unnecessary, but it must always be remembered that we are dealing with a huge and powerful fish, and the tackle must be not only of the very best, but also capable of standing up to the tremendous strain which

will be put on it when playing a tunny without coming adrift.

The rod rings may be of agate, porcelain, or even steel rollers. Agate is far and away the best. It is advisable to have as little friction as possible when the line is running out. A double steel pulley instead of an end ring is useful, and can be had made in such a way that the reel may be fished either on top of the rod or under. Most anglers eventually end up by fishing the reel on top of the rod as it enables them to see the amount of line left on the reel at a glance, and in other respects is altogether handier. Finally, the rod butt has a hole drilled through it to take a bolt. The reason for this will be explained later.

We now come to the reel, which must be capable of holding some 500 yards of line. To do this it has to be large, and to have either a large contracted drum, or a drum with a smaller diameter but much wider between the plates. The contracted types suitable for this purpose have a diameter of about 9 in., the others 6 in. The former on account of their depth have a quick wind in, especially when fairly full up with line. To give a quicker wind in when a fish is running towards the angler, the latter are provided with gears. It is as well to see that, as in all reels used for sea work, it is made of some metal that will resist the action of the salt water.

Some sort of brake is essential. This is provided in a variety of ways. For instance, it may be of the slipping clutch type, operated by a capstan wheel on the drum, or of a direct nature. It would be easy to provide a brake of an absolutely non-slipping type, but the strength of the line has to be considered. In any case the writer thinks it is more sporting to limit both the brake and the strength of the tackle. In addition to the capstan brake, those reels that are fitted with it have a leather brake

which operates directly on the line and may be pressed down on it by the thumbs. This is a useful attachment, particularly during the first run of the tunny, as the thumbs are much more sensitive than any mechanically operated device.

It is absolutely imperative that the handles should not revolve when a fish is running or one's fingers would suffer. This is a point that the novice should ascertain before providing himself with a reel. It is also an advantage to have all the working parts encased so that sea water cannot penetrate ; and to be able to do all the oiling from the outside without taking any of the parts down.

The British Sea Anglers Society limit the length of the line, under their rules, to 500 yards. There is no limit, however, to the strength. It has been usual to use 200 yards with a breaking strain of 108 lb. as fore line, and a backing of 300 yards breaking at 72 lb. These are made of the finest Irish flax.

The trace is made of twisted steel wire and should be longer than the fish to minimize any chance of his being tangled up in the line. Also it is permissible to take hold of the trace to bring the tunny near enough to the boat to gaff. A length of from 14 to 20 ft. is desirable. Two or three rustless big game swivels should be used to prevent any twisting.

The hook is attached to the trace by a soldered wire loop or by a special metal link. If a link is used the hook can be changed without changing the trace. The size of hook should be from 4 in. to 6 in. There are several types, but the Limerick is probably as good as anything. There are many knots in use by which the trace may be fixed to the line. The main thing to avoid is a cutting knot. A straight pull is wanted ; and there are many ways in which this can be obtained. The writer does not propose to describe any knot, but if necessary any com-

petent boatman can tie one, though it is much better that the novice should do this himself. A few minutes spent in learning a secure fastening from some friend or professional fisherman will not be time wasted.

A good tip is to use a piece of raw hide, passing it through the metal ring at the top of the trace and doubling it. Then thread the line through the ring, bind it round the raw hide, and finish off with a knot on the raw hide in such a manner as to leave a straight pull. By this means there is a double connection, and if, for instance, the line parts at the ring—there is a certain amount of wear there—the raw hide will still be holding.

It is not possible to play these huge fish without a harness of some sort. The best type is made of leather. It has shoulder straps, a backpiece, a belt to go round the waist, and straps with clips to connect up to lugs on the reel. It is designed to help the angler to take the pull of the fish on his shoulders and back, and thus relieve the strain on his arms. The pull of a tunny is too much for the arms alone, and must be experienced to be believed. All the straps of this harness should be adjustable, and the novice should try it on and fit it to his figure before going out to fish. He should do this in a fishing position, with the rod in its socket, taking up or letting out the straps as the case may be, until he feels he can comfortably use both his arms and back at the same time to play a fish. It will be obvious from the above that the angler and his tackle are married and form one unit in the fighting of the tunny.

The next item is a swivelling brass socket either alone or fitted with a board. In either case this is lashed on to the seat on which the angler sits when fishing. When doing this it is important that the novice should make certain that the socket has room to swivel round, which will not be the case if it is too close to the seat. The

absolute essence of comfort is a swivelling chair, fitted up with this socket. This is, however, not a necessity.

It may be remembered that earlier in this chapter the writer mentioned that the rod butt had a hole drilled through it to take a bolt. There are also two corresponding holes in the brass socket. Through these holes and the rod a bolt is passed and secured with a nut. By this means the rod is held firmly fixed in the socket. The writer was not using this bolt when he hooked his first tunny, and in the excitement of the moment struck the fish and pulled the rod out of the socket. It took the help of two others to get it back, and then it was done only with great difficulty. This is mentioned to show how important it is to keep the rod in this position.

A gaff is a necessity. A wide choice is possible, of both barbed and plain. The writer has a distinct preference for the plain. It can also be had in one or two pieces. The latter are fitted together by means of a socket, and have metal lugs which come together when this is done. These lugs are joined together by a piece of medium string, just strong enough to give additional resistance when the gaff is sent home, but not so strong that it will not break. When this gaff is used the shaft comes away, leaving the hook in the tunny. A stout rope should be spliced to the gaff, whatever kind is used, to hold the fish after it has been secured.

A bamboo pole of some 20 ft., in sections, is a useful thing to carry. It will readily be understood that the angler has little or no control of his tackle except to let out or reel in line. The trace also will not pass through the end ring or pulley; and it is not possible to fish higher in the water than the length of the trace from the rod point. The pole is used, not by the angler, but by some other person to hold the bait higher in the sea or further away than it could be held otherwise. It is attached to

the line or trace with a piece of weak string, which breaks the moment a fish is hooked. The writer hooked a tunny by this means. It was a very shy fish, and he had been unable to get it to look at his bait by any other method. The bait was almost put into its mouth, the boatman placing it close to a herring the tunny was about to take. The fish was plainly seen to change its mind and swerve to the baited hook.

Balloons—such as can be bought at Woolworth's for a penny—are used to float the line out, either with the tide or wind. One or more can be used as required. The extra ones will act as pilot floats.

There is a large, untried field for spinning, using both natural and artificial baits. The writer made a rough spinner out of sheet tin. It was merely an affair of three fins to spin the hook, and was baited with a herring. With a little adjustment it worked very attractively in the water. Unfortunately, it was late in the season when it was tried, and though two tunny were hooked on it the first and only time it was used they both got off, probably because the fins were too long and masked the point of the hook. The thing that appealed in using this spinner was that the fish were not spotted first, but that it was spun around some Dutch herringers on chance, the tunny appearing suddenly and lunging to the top of the water after it. Well-made spinners can now be bought. The only ones the writer knows of are as follows: The first is in the form of a crocodile spinner, which is baited with a dead bait. The second type is a wobbler and is also for dead bait. A herring, kipper, bloater or any other fish will do at a pinch. The third is an imitation of a herring and has a true spin. The tunny is a mackerel, and mackerel are caught in quantity on spinners. There would appear to be every reason in favour of tunny taking them. If from any cause bait is short it would still be

possible to fish ; and a change from the constant still fishing is not to be despised.

A good deal of space has been devoted to a description of tackle ; but the writer trusts that he has not bored his readers too much in doing so. The reason for his being so discursive is that, so far as our home waters are concerned, this is a new sport, and the novice and a number of seasoned sea anglers have never had the opportunity either to see it or practise it. It is not within the scope of this chapter to go fully into the reasons, even if they are known, for the presence of tunny in large numbers on our shores. It will be sufficient to state that it is said to be due to a small tail of the Gulf Stream, which comes round the north of Scotland, and finally peters out somewhere near Spurn Head ; and also to the extra salinity of the water, caused by the mixing of the ocean water with the waters of the North Sea.

Three years have now elapsed since tunny were definitely ascertained to be off Scarborough, and it is strange that they have not been located at any other place during this period sufficiently near to make it worth while to fish for them. Flamborough Head would appear to be the limit of their southerly migration in our waters. They have often been reported many miles out at sea, north of Scarborough.

There have been only two seasons of this fishing so far, and it is not possible to be dogmatic on the question of its length. The reports of tunny by fishing vessels are all that there is to act as a guide. In 1930 and 1931 the first reports were on July 7th and July 3rd respectively and the last on October 24th and October 26th. This would give a season of some three and a half months, though early in the season the fish would appear to be further out. So far the first tunny have not been killed till the end of August and the beginning of September,

but this was probably on account of the bad weather experienced in both seasons. Like mackerel, they take best in fine weather. In fact, even if it were possible to go out after them at any other time, it would not be worth it, as they have not been reported in rough spells. Tunny fishing is a fine weather sport, especially if angling from a rowboat.

The distance from the shore an angler may have to go is one of the most important factors governing the sport. When one says this it should be borne in mind that though fish may be reported, say, twenty miles north-east, this does not necessarily mean that they are this distance out to sea. The writer killed his fish only about five miles out, though it was at least ten miles from port. A friend of his hooked one fish within three miles of Scarborough, but not nearly that distance out. This tunny was found travelling with Dutch herring boats. There were two ships, one towing the other (which was disabled) back to port. On the other hand these fish have been hooked forty to fifty miles away. Their position, from a fishing point of view, depends entirely on where the various fishing boats are operating: and this again, and the presence of other fish including herring on the various grounds, depend almost entirely on the weather.

The tunny is a predaceous fish, and on our coasts his prey would seem to consist principally of herring. He follows the shoals, and is usually, if not always, found in their vicinity. He is, however, quite willing to eat other sorts of fish. The writer was in the neighbourhood of some trawlers which were getting large catches. One of them burst the trawl net. This liberated some tons of dead and dying fish, consisting principally of cod, haddock, whiting, gurnard, squid, and some flat fish. In a short time two shoals, formed of literally hundreds of tunny, came to the surface and began devouring these

fish. They did not appear to show any discrimination but went for them all, keeping at it for some hours until sated.

Herring rise near the top of the water at nights. That is why they are caught in the herring nets, which are not fished very deep, though the depth is altered, from time to time, to a certain extent, according to the height at which the fishermen consider the herring will be found in varying circumstances. The tunny follow the herring and also rise at night. They hang about outside the nets till they are hauled, usually at daybreak, when the tunny take any fish falling out during this operation. It is seldom they get on the wrong side of the nets. They are quite fearless so far as boats are concerned, and in fact appear to prefer to be with one. The Dutch herringers and other foreign herring boats remain at sea till they have filled their holds, salting down their catch and throwing the offal overboard. Tunny are with them, often lying under the ship. During the day the herrings go to the bottom, and tunny are not seen on the surface as a rule, except where there are trawlers or line fishing boats.

Trawlers—tunny are attracted by this chance of easy food and follow the net, presumably picking up any fish which are disturbed or fall out of it. They come to the surface when the net is taken up and take any fish thrown overboard, and the small stuff which is shovelled over after.

Liners—that is, boats which fish long lines—may have five or more miles of line out and bait with herring. As they haul the line in they throw overboard any bait that may be still on the hook. Tunny are sometimes attracted and follow these boats.

From the above it will be seen that tunny are found in the vicinity of three kinds of ship. It is little use fishing at large in the sea except as a last resource, and the novice would be well advised to confine his attentions to these.

There are inner and outer harbours at Scarborough, both of which are tidal, but it is always possible for small boats to get in and out. The entrance is protected except from the east and south-east. There is no other harbour as good in a long stretch of coast northwards till the Hartle-pools are reached. Again, on the important question of being able to get bait, it is a recognized port for herring fishing and always has drifters using it, in addition to the local boats, from the middle of June up to the early part of October. The usual quantity of bait taken for a day's angling is a basket of herring (some 250). Where there are established big game angling resorts there are usually to be found specially built boats for the use of anglers. So far there is nothing of this sort here, and it is therefore necessary to take what is to be had. The choice at Scarborough lies between two types, the decked and the undecked boat. The former are used as line-fishing boats and run to some 45 ft. in length. They are generally driven by a paraffin engine and have usually some sort of fo'c'sle containing a coal stove and some bunks. Their smell is the least attractive thing about them. When fishing they carry a crew of some six men, but for tunny fishing three should be sufficient. The undecked boat or coble, as it is called, runs from 30 ft. to 35 ft. in length. It is driven by a petrol or paraffin engine and is used all the year round by the local fishermen. These boats are similar to the Northumbrian coble, than which there is no better sea boat of its kind on our coasts. A crew of two men is sufficient.

In addition to hiring one of these boats a rowboat should be taken. It is absolutely essential if a decked boat is taken, as these are too big and clumsy to manœuvre to kill a tunny from, except by what may almost be termed a fluke. For the novice a rowboat should be a necessity as it is the easiest craft to kill a fish from. The

writer's personal opinion, for what it is worth, is that it is more sporting and more difficult to kill a fish from a coble than from a rowboat. To begin with, a rowboat can be and is towed, and the angler is able to bear the strain. With a coble neither the angler nor the tackle would stand up to being towed. On the other hand there is no question of towing the fish while it is still alive. The writer contends that it is harder work and takes more skill, not only on the angler's part, but on the part of the boatman to kill a fish from a power boat, which is similar to the playing of a fish from the banks of a river, with the ability to follow it. He has not yet had the opportunity of testing this out with a coble, though he has played a tunny two hours from a decked-in boat.

It has already been stated that tunny are found in the vicinity of certain classes of boat. It follows that the angler will have to ascertain where these boats are fishing before setting out; and also whether they have seen tunny, and where. If, after these enquiries, herring drifters are the objective, this will govern the hour of departure, for it will be necessary to arrive on the fishing ground before daybreak. If the angler gets there later than this he will probably be too late, as the drifter will have hauled her nets and gone off. If these fish have been reported by trawlers, it is not essential to arrive at dawn, though this is the best time. If fish are about, the angler will have a chance all day, especially when the nets are hauled. Liners generally shoot their lines in the early morning with the tide and haul them when it turns. This is when they see tunny; and it will probably be late morning or early in the afternoon before they begin to haul.

There are several methods of baiting a herring. The hook can be put through the tail, the lips, threaded

through the gills and then stuck in over the back, or in any other manner that the angler's ingenuity may suggest. The most general method appears to be to insert it in the back longitudinally, bringing it out towards the head, in such a manner that the herring will be in a horizontal position as if swimming when the baited hook is in the water. The actual fishing may be done in one position, or the boatman may pull slowly around. In the latter case the bait may be made to wobble by putting the hook through the mouth of the herring and sticking it in at the far side of the tail, first bending this a little. A tying of fine wire or rubber thread over the shank brought round the body of the bait will prevent it from slipping. This makes a very useful looking lure.

One of the attractions of the sport is that the fish are in full view, and it is not much use to begin fishing until a tunny is spotted. As soon as this occurs it is a good plan to throw over a few herrings to attract him, and afterwards keep him with you by the same procedure. The angler will have his harness on and all his tackle ready and the seat will be lashed down. This can be done on the way out. The next thing will be to get into a fishing position, either in the rowboat facing the stern, or in the coble. It is advisable to have a rope loosely knotted round the angler's middle and secured to the ribs of the boat. See that this is done now. It is a precaution, more especially for the novice, and will prevent any chance of his being pulled overboard, attached to his tackle, in, for instance, an overrun. An open knife should be near the boatman to cut the tackle if this occurs. If using a reel fitted with a capstan brake, this should be slightly on to guard against an overrun. The hook will meanwhile have been baited. Place the rod butt in its swivelling socket and secure it; and attach the reel to the harness. Before dropping the bait into the sea make

sure that everything is clear, in particular that the line has not got wrapped round the rod. As soon as the hook is in the water, place the thumbs—if there is a leather brake on the reel—tightly on it, and keep them there all the time the bait is fishing. It is a good plan, when the bait is dropped in, to throw with it a dozen or two of herrings, and allow the lot to sink with the hook. The tunny should then be fed, but not so freely as to gorge him. If he does not take by these means leave the bait in the sea, and stop throwing in ground bait—if he will stay with you—and he may take it. Do not, however, in doing so, run any risk of losing him. A good place to fish is in the shadow between the two boats, and practically under the keel of the parent one. A tunny will often take here. These fish are particularly keen-sighted and unless hungry fight shy of a baited hook; or even of a herring suspended on a piece of thin cotton.

If the novice is lucky enough to hook a tunny he should brake with his thumbs as hard as he is able until after the first run, which will probably take out most of his line. The boatman's job is to get after the fish as quickly as he can, and before the line is all out he will have got way on and be following the tunny. The first rush of one of these fish is a wonderful experience, and one feels almost as helpless as if hooked on to a submarine, and as hopeful of the result. Until the tunny is dead or dying he is complete master, and the angler has to go where he is taken. After the first run the novice should use both the capstan brake and his thumbs at discretion, and should fight the fish always. As soon as he can he should strike the hook home. The hook often comes away; and it is most important to try to obtain a secure hold. A favourite trick of the fish is to change direction and without any warning appear on the opposite side of the boat to that on which he was last seen. When this

occurs the angler finds the line go slack ; and it seems he has lost the fish. A sudden pull, coming from where he least expects it, almost jerks him over. The tunny has travelled some hundreds of yards—as one might say, in a flash—and has in doing so probably gone right under the boat. In the course of a fight the boat may be dragged some miles. When the fish begins to tire he swims in circles, gradually decreasing as he becomes completely exhausted. Sometimes he sounds, and goes to the bottom ; at other times he is near the surface, but he never ceases to fight while he has a kick in him. Usually he sounds at the last and dies on the bottom and has to be hauled up, and the effort of getting one of these fish to the top is tremendous. Several times it may be almost there, but will sink again, and the work has to be done again. Hauling a tunny up in this way is called “pumping,” and is usually done by heaving up and immediately lowering the rod point, and winding in, and heaving again and winding until the fish is near enough to the boatman for him to seize the trace, and pull the fish in to the gaff. If a medium-sized fish, the crew will succeed in getting him aboard, but if a very large one a ship with block and tackle is necessary, though it could be towed home.

In conclusion, the writer has seen some very large fish off Scarborough, much larger, in his opinion, than any killed so far—and he saw Mr. Taylor's big one in the water before it was hooked. If the tunny is not exploited commercially (a thing which in other waters has almost completely spoilt this sport), there is every possibility of some lucky angler in the near future bringing in a fish which will be a world's record.



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