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TARPON FISHING IN MEXICO & FLORIDA.

YD 02610

GIFT OF
Prof. Charles A. Kofoid

TARPON FISHING
IN
MEXICO AND FLORIDA.

BY
E. G. S.-CHURCHILL.

LONDON :
HARRISON AND SONS,
45, PALL MALL, S.W.

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Gift of
Charles A. Kefauver

70 1000
ANNOUNCED

Dedication
TO
MAJOR DALRYMPLE WHITE,
FROM WHOM
I FIRST LEARNT OF THE SILVER KING,
AND WHO
BEGUILED MANY OTHERWISE WEARY HOURS
ON THE
SOUTH AFRICAN VELDT
WITH HIS REMINISCENCES,
THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED.

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MEXICO.

TARPON FISHING IN MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.

S I know of no publication which will enable a would-be tarpon fisherman to set forth on his 5,000 mile journey to Mexico with any confidence of success, and as the great majority of sportsmen do not number among their friends any who have caught the silver king, I may perhaps be excused for bringing these reminiscences before the public. If this book is the indirect means through which any of my countrymen can number among their pleasant recollections the grand sport of tarpon fishing, I shall feel that I have amply repaid the goddess of chance to whom I owe my acquaintance with the king of fish.

When I set out from England in December, 1904, I confess that the tarpon had nothing to do with my departure; my intention being merely to travel in the United States and Mexico. However, after visiting some of the many places of interest in Mexico I found that towards the end of March I had a week in Mexico City with no particular engagements. I had heard a great deal of the excellent tarpon fishing to be had at Tampico, and having always taken great pleasure in deceiving any fish from the salmon to the whiting, I resolved to try my luck. I accordingly bought a slender lancewood rod about 6 feet long for fifteen Mexican dollars, *i.e.* 30s., one dozen tarpon hooks, with

piano wire traces attached, at about 2s. 6d. each, borrowed a reel and line, and set forth the next morning. The train left Mexico City for the north at 7 a.m. and travelled for a day and a night through 318 miles of more or less uninteresting country, mostly consisting of great plains covered with magueys, a cactus from which the national drink of pulque is manufactured. We arrived at St. Louis Potosi about 6 a.m. the following day. Here I changed, and heading east straight for the Gulf, began my long descent from an altitude of 6,120 feet to sea level. From this point the scenery begins to improve and soon becomes some of the grandest in the world, and this day in which we gradually descend from a temperate to a tropical climate passes but too quickly. It is, indeed, exhilarating as one passes, surrounded by the most brilliant sunshine, through such a wealth of luxuriant vegetation ; as one worms one's way for miles along the side of a league-wide valley—a foaming river far below often breaking into a Cyclopean staircase of waterfalls ; as one rushes without effort through great jagged buttresses and slabs of rock, flies along precipices 200 or 300 feet sheer—over ravines which leap to meet the train ; and finally arrives at Tampico some hours after dark among innumerable hosts of busy fireflies. And if, added to all these beauties of prodigal nature, the sportsman is contemplating the prospect of either making or renewing in the near future his acquaintance with the king of fish, he will be indeed a melancholy man who will not enjoy this foretaste of his stay on the Gulf of Mexico.

I arrived at Tampico about 10 o'clock in the evening. There were no vehicles. I therefore selected a peon from a clamouring

Tarpon Fishing in Mexico.

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crowd, and bade him follow me with my luggage, a feat which required no herculean strength. After some three minutes' walk we arrived at the hotel Hidalgo, which I found was kept by an ardent tarpon fisherman of American extraction, who provided me with boats, bait, boatman, and anything in the tackle line of which I ran short. After learning that there were numberless and very hungry tarpon in the river, and being promised the grandest day's sport of my life on the morrow, I went to bed wondering whether this promise was due to my host's lack of experience, or whether there really was something rather wonderful in store in the next day's lap.

Tampico is a town of some 16,000 inhabitants and lies on the left bank of the Panuco, about 6 miles from its mouth. The river here is 400 to 500 yards broad, and about 60 feet deep in mid-channel. It flows through very flat country, between low banks, covered with thick vegetation and dotted here and there with palm trees and native huts. There is no delta and hardly any bar, as two long breakwaters have been carried right out into the sea in continuation of each bank of the river, and the ocean currents apparently carry away the sediment as fast as it is brought down. The tides do not affect the fishing, a great consideration, and one of the many advantages possessed by the sport at Tampico over that obtained in the passes between the islands off the coast of Florida; of which more anon. The strong north wind, commonly called a "Norther," which blows in these parts four days out of six during the winter months, is certainly a disadvantage to poor sailors like myself. It is surprising how nasty a river 500 yards broad can be when a strong wind is blowing up it; but

on the other hand there is not an insect on the water, and the temperature is very pleasant.

I propose, with the aid of the reader's imagination, to take him along with me for a few days' sport among the Mexican tarpon.

I had decided to start from the town, and fish my way down to the mouth of the river, so I leave the hotel about 9 a.m., and follow my dark-complexioned boatman. After five minutes' walk we embark in a small row-boat, and set off down a narrow and dirty backwater. The bait consists of some twenty recently killed silvery mullet, as they are locally called, something the shape of a cigar, and varying from 6 to 9 inches in length. I select one of these and pass the barb of the hook, which is over 3 inches long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, through the throat and out through the skull, and notice at the same time that my hand is not quite so steady as usual at 9 o'clock in the morning. Of course I tell myself that I do not expect a strike for at least an hour after entering the river, nor really until I am within a mile of its mouth, as I have been told that spot is a special favourite with the tarpon. Attached to the hook is a piece of piano wire 5 feet long, then come 200 yards of twenty-seven-ply tarpon line. This is wound on a multiplying reel whose only brake consists of a button, by moving which I can apply a small amount of friction to the drum ; and lastly, my 6-foot rod,—a frail enough apparatus, I think, with which to land a fish 6 feet long and every inch a fighter.

After what seems a very long time, but is in reality four or five minutes, we emerge into the river. Over goes the bait and I start letting out line. About 3 yards have gone, when suddenly bang! bang! at the rod, which feels as if it had been hit twice

1.

with a sledge hammer, and almost dips its point into the water. The line flies out, but slackens almost immediately. I realise that my fingers are cut, burnt, and painful ; but am almost too surprised at the incident to regret that my claim on the bait is undisputed. Examination reveals two great dents one on either side, about the middle of the solid little fish, just as if it had been put in a vice. "Sabalo," says my boatman, nodding rapidly, and I presume that "Sabalo" is the Mexican for tarpon. I wrap my handkerchief round my left hand, with which I intend to apply as much friction as possible to the line, let out some 50 feet and take long zigzags across the river towards the sea. During the next hour and a-half I have many touches but do not manage to raise a tarpon. The bait dragged in this way gives a wonderful representation of a disabled mullet making his way slowly and painfully a foot under the surface. It is at the same time very conspicuous as it turns its dazzling sides in every direction. We are now about one mile from the end of the breakwater, and I am fishing away from the sun when once more bang ! bang ! at the rod : I strike as vigorously as my arrangements will allow, and within a second about 15 yards from the boat, up shoots a 7-foot column of silver, which reaches a height at least 6 feet clear of the water. (1) It shakes itself in the air like a huge steel spring, the spray flying from it in all directions, and as the whole of that short line is out of the water, the undulations which the tarpon is sending in quick succession up the line almost shake the rod out of my hands. The bait is hurled 100 feet away, and the fish—but I hardly regard it as one at the moment—plunges back into its native element with a splash that can be heard for over half a mile,

at the same time raising masses of spray which almost dazzle me with the brilliance of their rainbow. Whew ! but what if that thing should fall from such a height into the boat. It is a very ill wind that blows no one any good, and in that case some of those sharks so busily patrolling the river would quickly be less hungry. Though I have retained possession of my rod, which now however seems much smaller than before, I experience once more the pangs of defeat as I reel in my empty line. Too surprised and excited by the incidents crowded into those five seconds to feel any serious disappointment, I soon have another bait trailing behind the boat. But not for long. It is taken almost immediately. Up shoots another tarpon about 8 feet clear of the water, (II) but this time the hook has apparently struck home, and I have still a strong claim upon him. Away he goes and I put as much drag upon him as I can by squeezing the line between the rod and my handkerchief. I feel myself just about as potent to influence his movements as if I had on the end of my line a thoroughly frightened pig running for his life. However with some difficulty I put the end of the rod between my legs and under the edge of my cushion on which I am sitting, and then get a good grip with both hands above the reel. (Is*.) Still out goes the line, but now the point of junction of line and water is going too ; a sure sign that the fish is about to leap. Up goes the line and there he is 6 feet in the air and 40 or 50 yards from the boat. Now of course some of the line sags in the water (IIIs), and so its vibrations are absorbed before reaching the rod. Off he goes again, this time towards me, and I

* See the pocket at the end of the book. A small hand stereoscope can be bought for a few shillings.

11.

III.

concentrate all my energies on winding up the reel. Even though it multiplies two for one, I cannot draw in the line fast enough to prevent its becoming quite slack. However, the fish is soon found again, and his leaps become less frequent and less high. We are now playing a steady game of tug of war, my boatman rowing against the fish and so keeping the boat much in the same position. Although not quite so fresh as when we started, I keep on pumping him, *i.e.*, I have hold of the rod with both hands just above the reel, arms straight, and I put my back into it as if I was rowing. When the rod reaches an almost perpendicular position, I quickly lower the point, at the same time winding in a yard or two of line ; the rod returns to an almost horizontal position and I pump again. After about two hours of this—a tarpon should never take so long with proper tackle—I get him within 10 yards of the boat, and note with grim satisfaction that now he can only get about three-fourths of his length out of the water (III) : so I tell my boatman to row to shore. The fish has a strong objection to the shallow water, so I have to leave him about 50 yards from the bank and make him a present of that amount of hardly-won line. I land, thinking that it will be a simple matter to put the rod over my shoulder, and walk away from the water, till my boatman can catch hold of the piano wire and drag the tarpon up on the sand. I soon find that I have reckoned without my fish. I am wearing no belt with bucket attachment for the butt of the rod and sadly miss the solid support of the seat in the boat for the end of the rod. The tarpon is swimming about backwards and forwards 50 yards away, and absolutely declines to come any nearer to the shore. I am exerting all the power I can, but have not half the influence I had

when in the boat, and the work is three times as hard. He suddenly and for the eighth time hurls himself out of the water. Only half his length gets clear, but his object is accomplished, and my line once more springs back empty. I am convinced that the Fates, and not I, are to blame, and that it will not be long before I get hold of another. We are both quite ready for a rest and some refreshment, so we waste no time in vain regrets but start off to cross the river for some lunch. A kindly disposed sportsman in a neighbouring boat suggests that I am losing my fish owing to the bluntness of my hooks, and produces a small file, which should always be included in a tarpon fisherman's outfit.

This matter is soon put right and we walk a hundred yards to a somewhat grubby little restaurant, which we find extremely popular with the flies of the surrounding country. During a most welcome meal—hunger and thirst being the sauces—we compare experiences. I pick up a few wrinkles, and even though an absolute novice, my experiences have been to me so startling that I am unable to play the part of a mere listener the whole time : but I feel that the truth needs no embellishment and I am not tempted to place so severe a tax on my imagination as would be necessary to improve upon it.

After an hour's interval we set forth again. Some delay is caused by the non-appearance of my boatman. This does not sweeten my temper, especially as the safety valve is screwed down. The only Spanish word I know at all fitting to the occasion is "Caramba." I am totally unable to give that any setting, and feel that in any case it is hopelessly inadequate. He turns up ten minutes later, but is obviously bored by the whole proceedings, and

has a lofty contempt for these mad Englishmen who can take so much trouble to catch a fish which is such poor eating. We are soon on the river again, and immediately we leave the shallow water I am into a fish. I strike as if I was trying to break something, and do my best to drive the hook home in some comparatively soft part of his huge mouth. The tarpon has no teeth, or to be accurate his tongue and palate are covered with minute villiform teeth, but they merely amount to a certain roughness. He has two long rough bony plates one on either side of the roof of his mouth, running parallel with his length. In a 6-foot tarpon these would be about 4 inches long by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad. He has also under the tongue, two more long bony plates which are peculiar to his species, so it is not difficult to understand why he often gets rid of the hook. After an hour's leaping, rushing, and pumping, my reel falls off. I had omitted to lash it on, a precaution which is very little trouble and never a disadvantage. I do my best to arrange a truce with mine enemy, who fortunately is not averse to a few moments of comparative quiet, during which I recover the reel and make it firm enough to last out this contest. After another hour's fight, I land in a small sandy bay, but find that I have once more miscalculated the strength of the fish, who steadily sails out again, towards some posts sticking up in the water. But worse—he rounds a promontory, and I am more than afraid that my line will be caught or cut, as it rubs over the boulders. I leave it as slack as possible and yell for the boat, which is prepared in a very leisurely manner by my boatman.

We re-embark and manage to get the line clear of the rocks

without mishap. The fish then makes for an anchored boat, and though the line touches the cable, we get round in time. The snags too are avoided, but the energy stored in that 6-foot case of silver scales seems well nigh inexhaustible. Every muscle is aching and I have more than once thought that I should never be his conqueror. But now he is showing unmistakable signs of weariness, and I am fairly successful in my endeavours to keep his head towards the boat. Once more we enter the shallow bay. All of a sudden he gives up and turns on his side on the top of the water (IIIs), and I tow him in triumph to the shore (IVs), where my boatman pulls him up on the sand by the piano wire trace. A lovely beast and dazzling to look at. We quickly produce a tape measure and make his length from tip of chin to tip of tail 6 feet 7 inches and his girth 35 inches. A long thin fish, but these are often the best fighters. A method of getting an approximation to the weight of a *Megalops Atlanticus*, as the scientists call him from his large eyes, is as follows:—Square the girth in inches, multiply by the length in inches, divide by 800, and result will be the weight in pounds. The length should always be taken with the mouth tightly closed, as it is sometimes as much as 2 inches less than when the mouth is open. This calculation makes the tarpon 121 lbs., and I find when I get back that it weighs only 2 lbs. less. We leave the fish on the bank and start off again. My next catch is a 10-lb. jack fish, a distant cousin of the great Californian Tuna, and a wonderful fighter for his size, though he never breaks water. (Vs.) In this river they go from 5 to 50 lbs., though both extremes are rare. Almost immediately I am into another tarpon. A small one this time, only about 5 feet long I

guess when I catch a glimpse of his shining side as he turns a foot or two under the surface; and he soon walks into my parlour, the shallow bay. I get him up close to the boat and very tired, then handing my rod to the boatman, as time is of great importance I attempt to gaff him and strike him somewhere amidships, but to my great surprise I only tear off two or three scales. The touch of the gaff revivifies the tarpon, who makes off again with a splash that wets me all over. However, he is soon back, and I try again with the same result; so I give it up and land him on the sand as I had the first. (Vls.) There are only two ways of gaffing a tarpon. The first is to strike the point into the comparatively soft scales under the throat and near the gills, but the great and insuperable drawback to this method is that it invariably causes the death of the fish and does no good to the skin, if it is destined to remind its captor, from a glass case, of a grand day's sport, and to raise aspirations in the minds of the uninitiated. The second method and the one invariably adopted by the writer, when landing is inconvenient, is to place the gaff gently inside the mouth of the tarpon, strike the point through the membrane stretching across the lower jaw, lift his head out of the water up against the side of the boat, remove the hook and wish *bon voyage* to a lovely fish and a grand fighter.

This method has, besides the advantage of causing the minimum of pain to the fish, the still greater advantage of not spilling a drop of blood, for blood to a shark is much like a red rag to a bull, and a bleeding tarpon stands a poor chance: but as a famous author would say, that is another story. Pray pardon this digression, while we were examining our latest catch: and

our delay in re-embarking. I notice that the spans of life granted to mullet in anything like the condition which my bait represents, are to-day exceedingly short. And even amongst the hale and hearty, the great principle of the survival of the fittest and in this case the swiftest, is strenuously and inexorably at work. I often see a small shoal of these little fish suddenly explode from the water in all directions from a particular point, and then catch a glimpse of the cause—a small white cloud a foot under the surface. Many more tarpon are fed freely, or to be accurate, at the price of one wonderful leap, on my account. However I catch one more before the day's sport comes to an end. Three other boats, which had been fishing near by, have done at least as well as I have, and we each feel that there never was anyone more anxious to promote the happiness of all the world, as we leave our boats in the now unforgettable bay, and walk 200 yards to the Barra station. Twenty minutes' journey along the river bank and we are back in the town.

Among the evening attractions of Tampico, there is a room where the worshippers of the fickle goddess will find a roulette table with two zeros, and various other, to me, incomprehensible games of chance; or rather chances of verifying the old saw concerning the unwise man and his money. I am told that this establishment, which I believe to be the only remaining one in Mexico under official recognition—gives the Government £3,000 a year, and I cheerily pay my mite towards that tribute. The windows and the door of the rooms in the hotel are made mosquito proof with screens of wire gauze, which are never left open; so admitting to myself that my host's promise

of the previous evening had been amply justified, I sleep undisturbed the sleep of the successful sportsman till the next morning.

About 9 a.m. my boatman and I take the train for the Barra. Lying on the shore of the sandy bay are the remains of four or five tarpon, the victims of the sportsmen who had made this convenient spot their headquarters during the last day or two. But they were by no means neglected. Mother Nature never discards her kaleidoscopic toys for long, and this is even more quickly true in her watery kingdom than on land. In the water she cannot bear to have any part of what she has wrested from the realm of senseless matter, in any way inferior to that standard of perfection to which she has brought the species into whose mould she has cast it. All the denizens of the ocean, whose health or strength has been impaired, are quickly absorbed into the health and strength of other members of their genus; so that Dame Nature here is usually in such a hurry that she never discards at all. And when she does the time is short before the sharks and hosts of other scavengers, warring against the bacillus and the return to far lower forms of life, change the form of and give back motion to the dead. No miser ever guarded the gold won from his neighbours more jealously than Nature guards what she has won from inorganic matter. Doubtless her opponent will at some future date reconquer all his losses on this planet; only again at some more remote age to play the loser; and so let the game swing on. The dead tarpon were being patiently watched by some hundred carrion buzzards. (Vlls.) These birds are extremely useful all over the country, and have the protection of the law in the United States, and no one molests them in Mexico,

so I was able to take this photograph at a distance of about 20 yards. (VIIIIs.) We embark, and the fish are striking even more rapidly than yesterday. It is never more than a few minutes after I have got out my regulation 60 feet of line, before I have a strike, and my bait is often attacked before. To-day I have taken the precaution to bring out a thick buckskin glove for my left hand, and I have also sewn a stout piece of leather on to one of the cross bars in the circumference of the reel. The tarpon fisherman always fishes with his reel uppermost, and the handle to the right; so that a powerful break can be applied by pressing a piece of leather, secured as described, with the thumb on the line, which is still on the drum of the reel. The line soon cuts a hole in the finger of my glove, and by the end of the day the fingers are only represented by a few shreds; but this is a trifle. A much more serious circumstance is that my line, which is only twenty-seven ply, and a poor one at that, seems to have suffered from the strains and the soaking of yesterday, and breaks three or four times. In spite of these disasters I manage to force the unconditional surrender of four tarpon (IXs); but none of these are over 7 feet long. Since yesterday I have become ambitious and will not think of keeping anything under that length, so I take a memento of two or three scales from each of my captives, and bid them adieu with the hope that they may live to fight again another day. Once more my line breaks, and my last hook is gone. There is still an hour's fishing, and I have five or six mullet left; so I pass the end of the line through the mouth and gills of one of these, and drag it some 20 yards behind the boat. They are tough little fish,

and it takes a good pull to separate their jaws from their bodies.

The bait now will not sink at all, but splashes along in a most unnatural manner on the surface. However, before long a tarpon, who must have been an agnostic with regard to such things as rods and lines, annexes it; discovers that it possesses more power in its small body than a crippled mullet should do, and comes rushing out of the water just as impetuously as if he was hooked. The tarpon certainly do not strike at this insult to their intelligences as freely as before, but I manage to sell each of my remaining mullet at the price of one splendid leap, which is, of course the first, and so the greatest effort of which each fish is capable. But there is an exception, for a large black bird of the gull species is also interested. He doubtless believes in rods and lines, and in the interfering nature of genus homo; but at the same time knows that these things have no connection with his existence. With a graceful swoop he takes the bait, and flies off with it in beak and claws. But he flies too fast. My reel over-runs itself, and the resulting jar causes the fish to fall back into the water. I recover some line, and nothing daunted he comes again, but misses. The third time he has it, and I do my best to prevent a repetition of the previous accident. Away he goes and up, till he has about 150 yards of my line, when its weight causes it to tear through the lower jaw of the fish, which is no more seen.

The other sportsmen have enjoyed themselves no less than I, and Mr. C., an Englishman, who is staying at the same hotel, and has been out after tarpon for the first time, has amongst others a fish 7 feet 2 inches in length, with scales 4 inches across. The

next day I resolve to try to perpetuate some of these aerial antics, so I set out with my camera, a half-plate Ottamar Anchutz, with a Goerz lens, working at 6·8, and a focal plane shutter, capable of a minimum exposure of $\frac{1}{1000}$ second ; and the most rapid films obtainable. We go to the Barra by train, and find the fish as numerous and as hungry as ever. But as my bait is only a foot or so below the surface, and the tarpon makes up his mind to leap with lightning rapidity, I find it extremely difficult to get a photograph of his first effort, which is always the most impressive. It is also nearly always considerably nearer the boat than any other which carries him clear of the water. The moment I have struck a fish I hand the rod to my boatman, and pick up the camera, which is ready at my feet. I know the length of line I have out, and so am able to get the focus of his first appearance with tolerable accuracy. But my boatman is no fisherman, and all but breaks the rod by allowing it to come in contact with the edge of the boat ; and there are many disadvantages in connection with this method, the most serious of which is that I am never in time to take the first leap. I get two or three photographs, but realise that I cannot do much good in this line by myself. (IV.) In spite of my defections to the camera, I have made acquaintance close enough to secure two or three scales of three fair tarpon ; and flatter myself that not one of them feels any worse than one does after a long day's hunting, when it is one's first of the season.

The strength of the wind nearly always increases towards sundown, and now quite a strong " Norther " is blowing right up the river, and the boat seems very small and light. We see many

IV.

V.

VI.

VII.

62
25
25

VIII.

gigantic porpoises, as we do indeed every day, and I feel rather happier when my boatman tells me that there is war between them and the sharks, who invariably come off second best in the encounter. A pocket English-Spanish, Spanish-English dictionary is at times very comforting. We are not forced, however, to trust ourselves to the protection of the porpoises, and arrive at Tampico in time for dinner.

This evening I discover that Mr. C. is also a keen photographer, so I arrange to sit in his boat and photograph some of his fish, and to afford him similar facilities.

In the morning we start fishing just off the town. According to the inhabitants there are not quite so many fish here as at the Barra, but they run larger. Now that I can concentrate my whole attention on photography, it is an entirely different matter. I know exactly how much line C. has out, and as the tarpon seldom runs any distance before his first leap, I focus accordingly, and sit watching with my camera on my knees. I am also aware of the fact as soon as my friend, whenever a fish strikes, and at the slightest touch, I aim my camera in the direction in which the line is pointing, and so manage to pick off five or six first appearances. (V, VI, VII, VIII.) The subsequent leaps too are fairly easy to photograph, the focus being the only real difficulty.

With regard to when and where I am given ample warning by the point of junction of line and water, which rushes away when the fish is about to leap, and of course closely in the direction in which the fish will break water. A tired tarpon can often be induced to leap (Xs), and within

a few feet of the boat, by pulling him vigorously up to the surface, but in these cases he never gets clear of the water, which is nevertheless sent flying in all directions, and my camera and I have often been drenched from this cause. (XIs.) We land and walk along the railway to the hotel for some lunch, and are back by our boats in an hour and a-half.

It is now my turn to fish. The sun is so high that a photograph can be taken in any direction, so C. circles round my boat and tries to get some showing both fish and fisherman. In this he is, I believe, fairly successful. The tarpon now are simply ravenous, so much so, that for a few seconds I have two fish on at the same time. I mean to keep this strain on the reader's credulity for another page or two, that is to say, if, unlike my line, it does not snap at once. My friend lands another tarpon over 7 feet long (XIIs), but does not return it to water, as the natives living in some huts on the bank, intimate that they would be very glad to have it. The roe of the hen fish is considered quite a delicacy by the Mexican peons, but the flesh is still seldom eaten.

There is a certain famous salmon fishery in America, where the boast is made that they eat what they can, and can what they can't. But I think I am right in saying that in this case accuracy was sacrificed on the altar of brilliancy, and that as a matter of cold fact, it is extremely difficult to get anyone to touch salmon there. There is altogether too much, and I am inclined to think that the same thing applies in the case of the tarpon at Tampico. Anyhow, my host told me that increasing numbers of natives were discovering their good eating qualities every year. As the

fish were often full of spawn, I suppose that their journey up the river may have some analogy with that of the salmon, but nothing was known of any spawning beds either in salt or in fresh water.

Before we stop fishing I have taught four more tarpon something of genus homo, and I trust they are none the worse for their experience.

The next morning I set out to take some stereoscopic photographs, as I think it would be interesting to study a model of a jumping tarpon and his splash, even if it could only be seen from one point of view. I do not, however, expect so much from my stereoscopic camera, as the lenses are not so good, and the minimum time of exposure, of which the shutter is capable, is as much as $\frac{1}{100}$ second, and a leaping tarpon alters his position considerably in that time. (XIIIs, XIVs.) I take a great many snapshots, a few of which are appended at the end of this book; but it is altogether a more difficult job than when working with the Ottamar Anchutz, as the finder is very small and of a less convenient pattern, so I score a large number of misses. (XVs.)

On my return in the evening I find in the hotel yard a wonderful array of fish, which have been brought back by the English and American visitors, who are making laudable efforts to restrain their exuberance. An Englishman who has been out after tarpon for the first time, is anxiously awaiting his turn to place his fish, a monster which may have beaten the record, on the one weighing machine in the house. Many willing hands assist in getting the tarpon, which is 7 feet $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and 46 inches in girth, on to a board, and then the board and fish are soon on the scales. 150 lbs. of course, 175 and the fish does not

budge ; a hush as 200 lbs. are impatiently weighed against him ; still no movement ; 225 lbs. and he just rises, but slowly settles down again. The weight of the board is subtracted leaving over 200 lbs. for the weight of the fish. According to the computation before mentioned, the weight should have been considerably greater, but this giant is an all-round exception.

The next day is unfortunately my last, so I make up my mind to devote it mainly to photography, as I am more than doubtful whether any of my previous efforts have been right as regards the four necessary factors ; exposure, focus, direction and time. (IX, X, XI). Although the greater part of the day is spent thus, I have excellent sport and catch four tarpon, but none of an exceptional size, though among many others two proverbial monsters are lost. I tow the last fish to shore just off the town, where the water is only a foot or two deep. The hook is firmly embedded in his throat, and has to be cut out. This takes some time and the fish is very much the worse in consequence. We have doubts as we launch him whether he will survive, apart from the possibility of his falling in with a shark.

We are just about to leave the river when I notice that a man who has for some time been fishing off the end of one of the jetties near by, with a hand line, seems very agitated and begins to shout for assistance. It is now almost dark, and we cannot see the cause of his excitement, but we row out as fast as possible and find a jew fish flopping about helplessly on the surface. These sea perch are so called because they live close to the bottom, open their enormous mouths, and suck in everything that comes within reach. They have no protective armour like the

IX.

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XI.

tarpon, and this one is soon gaffed. But far the hardest part of the work remains to be done. The handle of the gaff is at least an inch and a-half thick, but breaks at once against the side of the boat, and we have a hard struggle to get the fish on board with the lower end. An ugly, fat, dark-coloured, slimy brute, and weighing 150 lbs. It is easy enough to gaff these sea perch, as they live on the bottom in deep water, and when brought to the surface they are rendered helpless by the alteration in the pressure: the air in their air bladder expands and they cannot descend even when released without a considerable effort.

Playing a jew fish is very exhausting, takes a very long time, and is too much like playing a piece of the bottom for the writer, and I find it more profitable to cut loose all but the smallest. One is never troubled with them when fishing near the surface, as one does at Tampico, though it is quite possible to get hung up in one if the bait sinks while the boat is turning. Curiously enough the flesh of the jew fish is considered quite good by the natives, and tastes I believe not very unlike beef. This one was caught with a small dead fish which had been allowed to lie on the bottom. They have been killed in this river up to 500 or 600 lbs., so this one is comparatively quite a baby. My last tarpon has been floundering about and shaking the blood from his gills at intervals on the top of the water a few yards from the shore, and seems very bad indeed. Was it wisdom or impotence that caused him to remain in the shallow water? I fear the latter as I take my leave of the Panuco river.

CHAPTER II.

I WAS fortunate in never having any of my fish attacked by sharks. Molestation from a porpoise is extremely rare, in fact I thought such a thing never occurred ; but it was reported in the papers that a sportsman had a large tarpon taken by one whilst on his line two or three days after my departure. Tarpon have been caught at a distance of 15 miles from the mouth of the river, and they have been seen at El Higo, which is over 100 miles by river from the sea, so, as far as the fishing grounds are concerned, it is not likely that there will be any inconvenience from overcrowding.

Besides tarpon, jack fish, jew fish, an occasional turtle, sharks and porpoises, there is always an excellent chance of harpooning a devil fish, or a giant ray, in the sea just off the mouth of the river ; but I should advise no one to join battle with this species of big game fish without taking all due precautions, as these monsters run up to and over a ton in weight. The best months for the tarpon fishing are those from December to April inclusive, but the fish can be caught till the rains, usually about the middle of May, muddy the river.

The tarpon seem to follow the sun. They appear in the more southern waters of the Gulf of Mexico, such as Vera Cruz

and Tampico in the winter months, and gradually work their way up along the coast of Texas, where some excellent fishing is obtainable round about Corpus Christi. Hence they travel southwards along the west coast of Florida, and appear in force off the southernmost point in June and July. Hence still hugging the coast they turn north and are found among the islands of the East Coast. The best if not the only way to fish these waters is to hire a small yacht at Miami, which is on the railway.

There are, too, a great number of tarpon round the coasts of Cuba, but they run small. The following figures, which were taken from the records of the fish caught from the hotel Hidalgo during the season 1904-1905 will give a tolerably accurate idea of the size of the fish in the Panuco river.

From 4	to 5	feet long	187	22.5	per cent.
„ 5	„ 5½	„ „	213	25.6	„ „
„ 5½	„ 6	„ „	252	30.3	„ „
„ 6	„ 6½	„ „	126	15.2	„ „
„ 6½	„ 7	„ „	50	6	„ „
Over 7	„ „	„ „	3	.4	„ „

Thus there were 831 tarpon captured from this hotel alone, and many others were put back into the water uncounted.

The sportsman who catches two fish out of every five that strike is, in the opinion of the writer, doing very well. On this assumption there were some 2,077 strikes.

From the same hotel in

December 1904	62	tarpon	were	caught.
January 1905	112	„	„	„

February, 1905, 187 tarpon were caught.

March	„	229	„	„	„
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April	„	169	„	„	„
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May	„	72	„	„	„
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These figures would of course vary largely with the number of the guests staying at the hotel, and so cannot be taken to represent the proportion of tarpon in the river during the different months.

There have not been any cases of yellow fever at Tampico for three or four years, and the sanitary improvements make an outbreak less likely as time goes on.

The *Stegomyia fasciata*, commonly called out there the zebra mosquito, is the only agent by which infection is carried. This mosquito is easily recognised by the white stripes longitudinally traversing the thorax, the white bands round the abdomen and the lower half of the legs. He is too seriously handicapped as he only bites in the day, and in order to impregnate a human being with the yellow fever bacillus, he must have bitten a person suffering from the disease at an early stage. Hence no mosquitoes, no danger of yellow fever, and no yellow fever patients, harmless indigenous mosquitoes.

During my stay I did not come across any of these customers, and they are by no means common. I do not attempt to deny the presence of the anopheles mosquito, the carrier of the malarial parasite. This fellow cannot be trusted to refrain from biting by day or night: but it is only a very dissipated anopheles that bites in the middle of the day. They too must have bitten an infected person before they can become infected

themselves, and are easily recognised by the black spots on their wings. The thorax and abdomen are in the same straight line, and when sitting on a wall their bodies are inclined at a considerable angle to the vertical, occasionally almost reaching a horizontal position. The bacillus which they sometimes carry will never have any chance with anyone who takes fifteen grains of chloride of quinine every seventh and eighth day: but I do not wish to imply that this is in any way necessary. During my stay at Tampico I was never troubled with any flying insects while fishing.

On my return to Mexico City I was very surprised to find myself accused in the English paper published there of being a sportsman who had landed two tarpon at once on the same line. It was suggested that this had occurred through my bait wriggling its way up the line, from fear of an approaching tarpon, only to meet its fate in the jaws of another. Talk of the efficiency of the Russian secret police,—why, I would back the American correspondent to discover any events which might be of interest to his readers (the gaps, however large, being filled in by his fertile imagination) long before the Russian agent dreamt that there was anything to discover. And what the American correspondent cannot discover, he invents. Some time ago, celebrities did not always grant interviews to these enterprising newsagents, but they found the next morning that they had been interviewed all the same, and that the statements attributed to them were often far more inconvenient than the interview itself would have been. Now they all bow to the inevitable.

But doubtless even the reader has had and will have his

doubts concerning some of my fishy tales : but "so strong armed am I in honesty" that even the well-known comparison, liar, d——d liar, fisherman, passes by me as the idle wind. However, no man's reputation could stand this sort of thing, so I sent the following letter to that mendacious newspaper :—

"Sir, as you have done me the honour to mention my name in your paper and as no Englishman would wish to raise a feeling of envy in the breast of any of his American cousins, I should like to correct one or two inaccuracies in your story. You suggest that my bait which had been dead some hours, terrified at the approach of tarpon No. 1, wriggled its way up my line ; that this agility and cunning availed it nothing as it was immediately devoured by tarpon No. 2, who succeeded in tying himself securely to the line : that tarpon No. 1, mad with chagrin at the success of his rival, promptly impaled himself on the bare hook, and that then the sportsman landed the two. The prose of the incident is as follows. Tarpon No. 1 took the bait, and discovering some uncanny peculiarities in connection with it, leapt, and to put it vulgarly, expectorated, but failed to get rid of the hook. The small mullet instead of being hurled away as usual, was thrown some 30 feet up the line, which then passed through its mouth and gills. It was thus being dragged about in the water something after the manner of a drop fly. A second tarpon seized it, and for a few seconds both fish were on, but they almost immediately tired of my society and severed all connection with the sportsman, who instead of landing the two lost a hook and many yards of line."

With regard to cost ; boat, bait and boatman should come to

nine to ten shillings a day, room five or six shillings, and food another five or six shillings.

As regards accessibility : by far the quickest route to Tampico is *viâ* New York and thence by rail through Laredo. This involves five days in the train, and the price of the ticket, exclusive of sleeping accommodation, is about 74 dollars, American.

The New York and Cuba mail boat takes ten days from New York to Tampico, and a return ticket costs about £17. Tampico can also be reached by steamer from Galveston, Port Arthur, and New Orleans. It is also possible to leave Liverpool by the Leyland Line and to arrive at Tampico in twenty-seven days, and a single first class ticket will cost about £25.

FLORIDA.

Since the writer was at
Tampico the charges for the boat
and boatman have just about
doubled. CHARGES ARE

THAT ARE HALVED ONE
OR TWO.

CHAPTER III.

IN the following June, I was spending a few days in New York preparatory to my departure for old England, when I chanced to hear that F. was staying at the Holland House. It was not long before I unearthed him, and discovered that he was just off to Florida, and more than keen to catch his first tarpon.

This was the subject on which I had rather a lot to say at the moment, and the upshot of our meeting was, that after some successful negotiations with the White Star Line concerning my ticket, I started with my friend for the south.

It is an interesting journey as one devours the 1,300 miles that separate New York from Punta Gorda on the West coast of Florida.

The difference between the latitudes of the two places is nearly 15 degrees, so one sees on the way the sources of many of the different raw materials, for the production of which America is so famous; at the same time getting an idea of the vastness of her resources. We passed in succession through the corn and grain, the cotton and the sugar-producing countries, until we came to the marshes, the orange groves, and the sweet-smelling pine forests of Florida. Even these are made to pay their yearly toll of gum to genus homo by our energetic cousins.

After a journey of some fifty hours, we arrived at Punta Gorda at ten in the morning. Here we were met by the gentleman who catered for the houseboat in which we had arranged to stay. We asked him how much and to whom we were expected to pay for our accommodation, but we could gather no information on either of these points, and it was not long before we discovered that a tarpon fisherman in Florida is looked upon as a sort of walking gold mine, from whose pockets as much of the precious metal as possible should be extracted on all occasions.

Numerous darkies soon recognised their lawful prey, and lost no time in introducing themselves and producing all sorts of recommendations from other sportsmen, testifying to their excellent qualities as "guide," which is the vernacular for boatman. We at once set about securing a motor boat to take us to our destination, which was some twenty miles further south in the direction of the Boca Grande Pass, where we intended to try our luck. While one of these was being prepared, we took a stroll on one of the jetties and watched the tactics of a porpoise who was busily drawing the shallow water in the vicinity. Without any apparent effort he sometimes doubled or trebled his speed after his terrified victims. We saw a good deal of him as he rose to breathe every twenty or thirty yards, and soon he kindly came within 30 feet of where we were standing, and neatly caught in the air a fish over a pound in weight which had left its element to avoid him. This last *bon bouche* finished his meal and off he went to the deep water.

We were then told that there was some slight temporary

difficulty with the engine of the only available motor boat, and that there were no other means of reaching the Pass. The strength of its position seemed to be fully understood by the motor in question, which absolutely declined to start. For the first two or three hours it was coaxed and petted by its two keepers, who spoke kindly of it and told us of its youth and how it played with the miles and tossed them behind it. They explained that some rain had got down its exhaust pipe and so into its cylinders. This had only to be worked out and then we should see what a motor boat could do, and this motor boat in particular. We waited to see. Enough work was put into those cylinders to eject gallons of water, but the machine showed no more appreciation of these exhausting efforts than it had of the kind words. Next a little massage was proposed and we oiled it in every joint.

Talk of a jibbing horse, one is a hundred times as impotent with a jibbing motor. The horse has certain well-known strong likes and stronger dislikes, but a jibbing motor, well,—there is no danger of being had up for cruelty to animals. I suggested that the oil would have been more profitably used if it had been burnt underneath it, and felt like trying the effect of a sledge hammer. It was then five o'clock and our prospects of fishing the next morning were rapidly disappearing. But here comes the specialist, an irresistible magician, who had watched the evolution of the explosion engine ever since the days of the first gas engine. He murmured the word, electricity. We told him that we had ineffectually kindled many sparks of life; but a little dissection was deemed necessary. Hope springs ever in the human breast, and we considered ourselves practically started.

But the spirits in that infernal machine were by no means subjugated. Three spasmodic kicks and that hot and stuffy little engine room was silent save for the muttered curses of the perspiring and exhausted men. After a few more attempts I left that oily den and that atmosphere of petrol vapour to those that believed in their machine and sat outside in gloomy silence, wondering how many more undefeated tarpon there would be in the world, than there would have been, had this untoward accident not occurred.

That motor did not shake off its tormentors till ten o'clock when they retired admitting that it had won the day. Dame Fortune, however, at last smiled on us, and we embarked about eleven o'clock on a willing motor boat which had just arrived. After a journey of some twenty miles inside the islands, we reached our goal just before daylight. We satisfied our skipper with £5 and hastened to put an end to the feast of the mosquitos, by exchanging the hard deck of the motor boat for the comfortable berths of our floating hotel.

The next morning we found that we shared the houseboat with two American brothers, whom I shall call K, and L. A very fortunate circumstance for us, as in addition to the pleasure their society afforded us, and the, after all, not expensive instruction we received in the national game of poker, we found they were paying a modest $4\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day for their board and lodging, so we could not well be made to give the £8 a day which we shortly discovered had been expected from us. Picquet was not over popular, so I occasionally advanced the view that there was some play in bridge, but none in picquet ; it is merely possible

to make a fool of oneself if one feels so inclined. Someone immediately held that it was by no means necessary for me to wait till I play picquet, and we played in light and airy attire on the veranda. Nor was I a serious loser when we left for New York. Our floating home was very comfortable. A row of cabins on each side of the boat, a dining room between them, at one end a veranda, at the other a kitchen and a bathroom. We did not bathe as each of us had a decided preference in favour of returning to our respective homes *in toto*; and neither the genius of a Portia nor all the gold of Venice would induce the Shylock of the sea to forego one ounce of what he could get.

This bathroom was therefore popular, and besides it forced us to begin the day with ten minutes' hard pumping. All round outside ran a very narrow balcony about two feet above the water. Our cabins and the veranda were well fortified against the ever inquisitive mosquito by doors and screens of fine mesh wire gauze, which served as a most efficient air filter, and the few mosquitoes who did manage to get through were not the most fortunate of their species, as directly they were in sufficient to force merit our attention, they found a smoky grave.

We were anchored in the middle of what looked like a huge lake, five miles from the Captiva Pass and four miles from the famous Boca Grande Pass, but we could in no direction see the open sea. Attached to our stern were four row-boats and a small motor launch, which served to get our letters and food—though fortunately it was not our only source of supply—and to tow us and our small boats out to the Boca Grande Pass. This time, profiting by former experience, I was well set up as regards

tackle. I had two good stout greenhart rods, each 6 feet long without a joint and about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter near the reel, plenty of hooks and traces, two twenty-seven ply tarpon lines each 200 yards long, and a wonderful Vom Hofe reel, with three separate brakes. The first was not very strong, and was applied by sliding a small button half an inch on the outside of the reel ; the second by raising a catch which stopped the revolution of the handle when the line was flowing out. This brake could, in a few seconds, be made with the aid of a small key so powerful as to break the line before permitting it to revolve the drum. At the same time it did not in the least delay the winding in of a fish, as in that direction the handle slid over the catch, causing no friction at all. The third brake consisted of a piece of leather which could be pressed by the thumbs on to the line in the reel as before described. During the playing of a fish one has no time to alter the power of the second, so the special merit of the last was that its resistance could be instantaneously adjusted to suit any circumstances that might arise, and its defect that its application tended to wear the line. One revolution of the handle causes two of the drum which will spin like a gyroscope when all three brakes are taken off. I regret to say that this reel is an American production, and made by Mr. Vom Hofe, of 96, Fulton Street, New York, where the best tarpon outfit can be obtained. There is at present no English made tarpon reel that I can recommend.

With regard to lines I strongly recommend the sportsman to use nothing lighter than thirty ply, even though a twenty-seven ply line will support a weight of twenty-five lbs., when new. A

thirty ply line is not so thick or so heavy as an average salmon line ; it gives a greater sense of security, saves many hooks, and lasts longer.

I do not propose to weary the reader with a detailed account of ten days' fishing, but I shall endeavour to give some idea of the life, at the same time noticing any points or incidents which might be of interest to those who study the sea and its inhabitants.

Time and tide wait for no man, and for the fishing in these passes off the coast of Florida, it is necessary to accurately time the tide. Our houseboat was at least four miles from the Boca Grande Pass, and it was extremely difficult from that distance to tell the exact state of the tide there, as so much depends on the strength and direction of the wind. During the spring tides it is only possible to fish in these channels from one and a-half hours before to one and a-half hours after slack water, for, besides the impossibility of rowing against the stream or of sinking the bait outside these hours, the tarpon seem to travel up and down the pass about slack water and then to amuse themselves among the islands or in the gulf till the next tide. Owing to our distance we often arrived an hour too late or too early, and consequently found our position extremely inconvenient. The authorities told us that the boat had been moved from its position close to the pass, owing to the strength of the currents and the numbers of the mosquitoes near the shore. But as a large sum was demanded for the use of the motor launch, which we had to employ two or three times a day to tow us to the fishing grounds, we thought the currents and the mosquitoes might not be so very formidable after all.

Fortunately there was an English yacht anchored close to the pass, and the party on board were bent on the same mission as ourselves. It is always pleasant to meet an Englishman in a far country, especially so when one can do something for or get something done by him. As soon as the owner understood our predicament he lent us his steam launch, which we promptly harnessed *à la* tandem with our rickety old motor, and with the aid of the wind and tide we soon dragged our residence to within half a mile of the fishing grounds. The mosquitoes never broke through our fortifications in sufficient strength to give us any serious trouble, but the tides were undeniably strong; and owing to the fact that with the changing currents we were continually swinging round, we woke one morning to find that we had dragged our anchor almost a mile, but luckily away from the pass. None of us had any wish to deprive the gentleman who went round the world in a canoe of his well-won laurels, by crossing the Gulf of Mexico in a houseboat; and had we travelled a mile in the other direction we should have found ourselves fairly started on the attempt, and these reminiscences would not have been remembered, or they would have been considerably more thrilling, at any rate to the writer. The natural solution of the difficulty seemed to be to put out an anchor from either end of the boat, and so prevent any swinging at all. But the authorities vetoed this as they feared the upsetting effect of a strong side wind.

We got our boat back on the next tide, and solved the difficulty by dropping both anchors from the same end of the boat; and as we did not intend to have anything to do with weighing them or disentangling their ropes, we thought no more

about the matter. We were now some 200 yards from the inside or eastern shore of the island which forms the north shore of the pass. On this island are three buildings, a small quarantine station, a lighthouse and a wooden cottage belonging to the assistant lighthouseman. These houses were objects of no small interest to us, as they provided us with our fresh water, which they collected in tanks from their roofs. The lighthouseman too was interesting. An educated man who had not for many years been ground in the social mill. He told me he saw almost as little of his assistant as of anyone else. It was not well to become too familiar with one's subordinates. He said that at first he used to read four or five books a day, but that now he scarcely read at all. He had reached a state where the society of his fellows was no longer a necessity to him, but who can tell how painful was the path by which he travelled there. Unlike most Americans he diverted himself with no golden dreams of fortune, and it would be a contradiction to suppose that a man for whom nature was sufficient, should wish for power to influence the lives of his fellows; but this may have resulted from a knowledge of the hopelessness of the struggle. Anyhow from him I learnt of his welcome and unwelcome guests, the three different sorts of turtles, the logger head, sometimes weighing 300 pounds, the green back, and the snapper which crawled up the shore at night and laid their eggs in the sand in May and June; and the rattlesnakes which swam across from Florida and the adjacent islands.

To return to our tarpon; there are four different kinds of fishing on the west coast of Florida. First, there is the still fishing in the river off Fort Myers. This did not sound to me

particularly lively, as when the fish ignore one's blandishments it resembles too closely punt fishing on the Thames. Secondly, there is the fishing in the Boca Grande Pass, between the flat low-lying islands of Gasparilla on the north and La Costa on the south. It is the largest and deepest pass patronised by the tarpon off this coast, being nearly two miles wide and about one mile long. The methods here employed closely resemble harling, except that one's bait is usually 30 feet or more below the surface. Thirdly, there is the surface fishing in the shallow passes such as the Captiva, where one fishes, except as regards the tides, in exactly the same way as at Tampico. Fourthly, there is the sport on the mud flats just inside the Boca Grande. This is at its best, according to the native guides, about half tide, but we found it did not pay to start until we had seen or heard the fish there, as if they are patrolling this comparatively shallow water they will show themselves. Then it was by far the best sport we had. Not only did the tarpon strike more freely, but their leaps were more vigorous and more frequent, and they got more excited than they did in the deep water of the pass. There they were continually travelling backwards and forwards about slack water, but we never saw anything of them inside the islands except on these flats, where they found small fish and crabs in plenty. They never stayed long even here, but always seemed to be making slowly towards the pass. They undoubtedly did not spend the whole of their time inside the islands on these feeding grounds, but they were never seen anywhere else.

One, if not the only advantage, possessed by the tarpon fisherman in Florida over his confrère at Tampico lies in the

superiority of his negro boatman over the peon whom one has to employ in Mexico ; though this latter costs exactly half as much. The only language spoken by these guides, as they like to call themselves, is English, or rather American. They are keen sportsmen and there is considerable emulation between them. The fish, like some hurricanes, seem to travel along a narrow track ; so five or six boats will often be fishing close together, and the guide whose *protégé* is getting the greatest number of strikes, will be the object of many envious glances. The depth at which he is fishing (if ascertained) and even the movements of his boat will be copied. One of our guides, by name Billy Washington (but blacker than any hat), was universally recognised as facile princeps. He was watched from the moment we got on the fishing grounds, as is a particularly brilliant footballer by the players on the other side. Unlike Launcelot his title of " best guide " was a source of great pleasure to him, but like that famous knight to lose it for one day was gall. Any darkey who could boast at the nightly *indaba* after the day's sport that he had beaten Washington, was a proud and happy man. All this was quite satisfactory to us, for though it caused our guides to set their faces against anything in the way of an experiment, and to show an inclination to be autocratic, they tried all they knew and were always ready to go on fishing as long as we were. We paid them $3\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day and 1 dollar a day for their food, but they were too deeply imbued with the prevailing idea that a tarpon fisherman must *ipso facto* be a gold mine, not to attempt to extract a little more. The evening before we left they deputed one Giles, the Ulysses of the party, to squeeze if possible an extra dollar a day.

He came to the point at once : " There is something, sar, we thought you did not understand, sar. We get $3\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day, if we do not fish at night, sar. When we fish at night we get $4\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day, sar. We thought you might not understand that, sar." His manner during the first part of his explanation was full of reproach, and during the second, when he saw we did not quite catch on, almost minatory.

We told him we should give him whatever was right, and consulted our American friends, who we found were doing nothing of the sort. Now L. had taken no trouble to conceal the fact that he was a terrible man with a "gun," and that his equanimity had on two or three occasions become seriously ruffled. It is often convenient to have a well-established reputation for a Berserk temperament. Whether this was the cause, or whether the feel of the notes was so pleasant, I do not know, but when we paid those darkies at the rate of $3\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day, they forgot even to demand a tip, and departed as merry as the proverbial sandboys. This incident we afterwards learnt was due to the fact that a rich yacht owner, who had not perhaps objected to being regarded as an inexhaustible gold mine, had been fishing in these waters just before our arrival. Close to us on the shore were two or three tents, inhabited by some darkies who used to catch our bait. Here there were none of those little cigar-shaped fish which made such excellent bait in Mexico. We used a fish much more like an ordinary mullet about 8 inches long. The scales were scraped off, and each fish provided us with four baits, two from his upper and two from his lower half. These were cut something

the shape of a very acute angled isosceles triangle. Whether the tarpon or some other large fish had discovered their haunts and habits, or whether the sportsmen were the indirect cause, I do not know, but we often had considerable difficulty in obtaining our quota, and on some days we could get no fresh bait at all. The tarpon is apparently something of a gourmet, or else they found it difficult, in spite of all our skill, to believe that a piece of mullet which had been cut the previous day, was a live and succulent fish.

Anyhow, we never had much sport on the days when we had no fresh bait. Our expenses for this necessary article amounted to more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ dollars a day each. I do not intend to ask the reader to accompany me in my small boat during the long hours which were devoid of incident, but I shall try to draw a picture of the sport on two selected days which were in my opinion the most interesting.

The four of us board our small fishing boats, and are rowed off by our several darkies at 4 a.m., so as to catch the first of the tide in the pass at 4.20. F. is armed with a harpoon and I with my camera and Mauser pistol, so that we consider ourselves well prepared for any eventuality. The tide is coming in, so we hug the coast for 15 minutes while going up the pass, and then row out about a mile from the shore at its head. A small shark follows the boat for some distance, but presumably makes up his mind that we are but poor fishermen, and gives us up. The sharks in these waters have had and will have many a splendid meal at the expense of the tarpon fishermen, and they seem to thoroughly understand the game. Nevertheless, my hopes are

undimmed by the opinion of this young and impatient scavenger, and we soon commence operations. Our guides insist on our fishing close to the bottom, so we tie on a lead sinker at the top of the piano wire, and let out 20 to 30 yards of line, according to the depth of the water. There are two boats out from the yacht, and all six keep pretty close together. No tarpon have yet been seen, and all the guides are doing much the same as Washington. Our general policy is to row backwards and forwards over a strip of water, 200 to 300 yards broad, being at the same time carried up or down the pass by the tide. We then row back to the other end and repeat the process. As the tarpon are such rapid movers, no jealousy is occasioned by one boat fishing in front of another. At this time, on a June morning in Florida, the cloud effects are often very beautiful, and I am not much afraid of losing my rod as I lay it down for a moment to take a snapshot. (I.)* Soon one of the boats has a fish which comes rushing out of the water, but now of course there is a convenient interval between the time when he takes the bait 20 or 30 feet below the surface, and his first leap. I snap him off as he emerges, and roll him up quickly in the hope of getting a shot at his second appearance as well. In this deep water, I saw during my ten days' stay, two tarpon which did not show themselves for ten minutes, and when they did, we were of course more than surprised to find they were neither sharks nor jew fish. The rest leapt at once, but this proportion of two out of about 150 is, I believe, above the average. There is a curious little crackling noise which sounds rather as if we were floating on a sea of soda water, and

* See Frontispiece.

innumerable small bubbles were continually striking the bottom of the boat. The guides had many theories as to the cause. They were all agreed that it only occurred when we were over rocks. Some said it was the noise of shell fish feeding, others thought it might be fish or rising bubbles, but there was no trace whatever of these in the water, and I am quite at a loss to account for the phenomenon. But what is that large dark brown object, like the top of a huge water-logged sphere, 100 yards to our left. It is travelling along the surface, and churning the water into a regular breaker in front of its cavernous mouth, which resembles a horizontal slit 2 or 3 feet long between two great perpendicular lips. The devil fish or giant ray is, I presume, enjoying or about to enjoy itself among one of the numerous shoals of small fish which haunt these waters.

F. has the harpoon, so I quickly call his attention to our quarry. The harpoon takes some time to adjust, and I notice that F.'s guide seems suddenly overcome with fatigue. My own guide explains, "He no like devil fish, sar," and goes on to tell me how one of these monsters recently towed a boat for eight miles before it was hauled up on the shore. Fortunately, the fish took them in towards the land, but it is apparently an even chance whether it makes straight for the Gulf of Mexico or goes inside the islands, with a shade of odds in favour of that direction in which the tide is running. It has been recorded that another of these devil fish towed a 14-foot boat for twelve miles, and for six more, three other fishing boats which had attached themselves, in and out among the islands before giving an opportunity for a shot. It is certainly possible to cut loose, but if the end of the

line is tied on to the boat, the bows may be dragged under water if one is unprepared. We had, too, neglected to tie on our line an empty air-tight tin can, which makes a powerful brake when being dragged at a high velocity through the water. I am now within 20 yards of the huge flat fish, which does not alter his course by a fraction of a degree, but takes two or three swims of about 30 feet just under the surface, and sinks out of sight. The fatigue of F.'s boatman at once disappears, and I am given to understand that, when in a small boat, close quarters with a freshly harpooned devil fish are apt to be unpleasant. This was one, I should say, about 10 feet broad, and so by no means a very large specimen, as they have been caught 20 feet, and reported up to 30 feet across. It is surprising what a hard straight blow it takes to drive home a harpoon into one of these giant rays, and how easily it slides off the fish's back. If fishing from an anchored boat, these monsters are a constant source of anxiety, as the consequences would be extremely unpleasant if one got foul of the rope. During my stay, I saw one of these huge flat fish jump about 6 feet clear of the water, and come down again with a loud ungainly flop, but the whip rays, which have been caught up to 200 lbs., and the sting rays often reached this height.

The object of these manœuvres was, I presume, to rid themselves of their suckers. A Remora or "delayer," as the naturalists call it, is a little fish of a muddy blue-black colour all over, here usually 8 or 9 inches long, though they have been caught up to 2 feet in length. They are approximately circular in section, and generally about an inch in diameter. They attach themselves to the back and sides of their unwilling comrades by a

sucker situated on their backs just behind the head, so that their bellies are turned outwards. The light, therefore, is not cut off from this part of the fish to the same extent that it is with vertical swimmers. Hence, were the belly white the fish would defeat its object and become very conspicuous. It is, therefore, about the same luminosity as that part of the skin of the fish to which the sucker is attached. It might be expected that the side of the sucker which is undermost would be of a lighter shade than the side which is uppermost. This, however, is not so, as the head of the sucker always points in the same direction as that of its carrier, and so this would practically confine the sucker to one side of their large friends. The construction of the sucking apparatus is curious and interesting. It is about one inch long by three-eighths broad, and is traversed by several thin flexible bars with rough edges, after the manner of a closed Venetian blind. These bars are so constructed that the sucker cannot be pulled backwards along the body of his large companion. In fact the harder it is pulled backwards or the greater the speed of the carrier, the stronger becomes the suction as these bars tend to assume a position more perpendicular to the backbone of the fish, and so to occupy a larger space than before. The sucker, therefore, is not to be got rid of by any amount of speed on the part of the fish to which it has attached itself. None of these can suddenly jump backwards, so their only chance is to throw the sucker off in the air. The sucking action is automatic and requires no sustained effort on the part of the remora, as it still continues after its death. It is almost impossible to pull a dead sucker backwards along one's wet hand and its weight is quite a sufficient backward

pull to cause it to stick to one's vertical palm. The sucker is a symbiont, not a parasite, and feeds, I presume, on the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, and on the small crustaceans, etc., it meets with on its long and effortless journeys. It attaches itself to all sluggish fish which inhabit these waters, and can of course let go the moment it wishes to do so. I have found them on groupers of 5 or 6 lbs., but they never disfigure the royal tarpon for obvious reasons.

As far back as 1884 the native fishermen of Zanzibar used to rear these suckers, which they employed for the purpose of catching large fish such as sharks, and turtles. They stuck to the skin or shell with extraordinary tenacity, and were held by a line attached to a metal band or wire bound round the thin part of the body just above the tail. It is on record that one of these fish held on to its carrier till this metal band tore through the flesh. There, however, they ran from 2 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length and weighed from 2 to 7 lbs.

The other boats altogether have had a dozen strikes or so, and three or four tarpon, but this is a spring tide, and the water is soon running too fast for further fishing, so we row back to an 8 o'clock breakfast. We start again soon after 10.30. The tide is going out, so it is not long before we are on the fishing grounds. There is nothing to be seen and we fish for half an hour without a strike. I suggest discarding the lead sinker and fishing nearer the surface, as I had done at Tampico; but my guide strongly disapproves and prophesies that it will only be waste of time. However I try it for a bit, but it makes no difference, so I return to the orthodox methods.

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When the tarpon are travelling near the surface in or near these passes my experience is that they always show themselves. Suddenly they put in an appearance. Processions of them are making up and down the pass in narrow streaks. The individuals break water one after another in the same place, much as each sheep of a flock will often jump exactly where the one immediately in front did. So by snapping with my camera at the place in the water where one or two fish have shown I manage to hit off some of their followers. A tarpon does not so often entirely leave the water unless he is hooked, or rather I will say frightened, as they jumped in Mexico when they had taken a bait that was merely tied on to the line ; but they flick their tails up in the air as shown in these photographs (II, III) or roll over like a porpoise. It is then I suppose that they get a great deal of air into their mouths, and this circumstance has given rise to the absurd theory that they breathe like a sea mammal. True, we often see lines of bubbles rising to the surface, and we know well that they come from the tarpon passing underneath ; but I have often seen goldfish and others emit bubbles from their mouths, and the silver king is as far removed from a mammal as any other fish.

We row to cut these processions, but the fish do not seem over hungry, or our baits are far below them. Some of the keener guides try fishing at different depths, in the hope of finding the level at which the fish are travelling, but still this prejudice against trying the surface. There is a lively rod, and within a few seconds out rushes the tarpon. (IV.) Now L. is a mighty fisherman, his tackle is mighty too, and within ten minutes he is making for the shore with his fish in tow. I follow and take a

snapshot of the last episode in that tarpon's life. (V.) The darkey is just about to catch hold of the piano wire, and haul the fish high and dry on the shore. It is surprising how quickly a tarpon changes his world, as the Japanese would say, when once out of the water. This is perhaps largely due to his tremendous exertions before admitting defeat.

Besides the scales the spherical lenses of the eye of a tarpon make interesting trophies. They can be easily removed by cutting about half way round the membrane near the outside edge of the eye, and just inside the cartilage which protects the sides, the knife being held perpendicular to the surface of the eye. The cut should be as shallow as possible in order to avoid all chance of damaging the lens, which can then be easily extracted with the finger. Thus the tiresome operation of removing the whole eye is avoided. The lens when it first comes out looks like a flawless crystal sphere, and is about the size of a marble. It should be pinned by its thin black attachment, to some projecting piece of wood, and left to dry in contact with nothing more solid than air.

Unfortunately, it loses its transparency while drying ; it contracts, and creases appear on its surface ; it remains translucent, and becomes quite hard. The lens then has a sort of spherical cleavage, and broken hollow spheres can be stripped off, but the nucleus is always cracked.

We are soon back in our places among the processions. Now one or other of the boats has a fish on an average of one every fifteen minutes and my camera is kept busy. (VI, VII.) On one occasion two tarpon are 6 or 8 feet clear of the water, within

VI.

VII.

VIII.

IX.

5 yards of each other, but my camera is only a single-barrelled instrument, and I have just shot at the first leap of one of them. (VIII.) The tarpon, however, are not the only objects of interest. Here and there great brown turtles, sometimes 3 feet across, come up and bask on the surface for a few minutes. I learn that they are not difficult to harpoon if one can get within reach, as their shell is of such a texture that, if the iron penetrates but half an inch, it will hold until its purpose is accomplished. I am very keen to add a large turtle shell to my mementos, so we stalk every one we see, but they are too wary, and I was never able to get to sufficiently close quarters ; though the sportsmen from the yacht managed to gaff a large one. It would be easy enough to shoot them, but short of exploding a pound or two of dynamite in contact with them, it is impossible to kill them instantaneously, and they never remain on the surface however good the shot.

At last a good strong pull at my rod ; the bait is far and deep, and the line I presume sagging, so the blow as given by the Panuco tarpon is much modified. A few seconds and out he dashes, splashing the spray in all directions. (IX.) But now it is a very different story ; there is fixed on the seat a leather bucket in which I place the butt of the rod, and it is unnecessary to touch reel or line at all when the fish is rushing away. The brakes are quite sufficiently powerful, so I have a splendid hold on the rod with both hands until the strain is relaxed and I have to reel up. The odds now seem all in the fisherman's favour, so I hand the rod to my guide and prepare to photograph. But the fish sounds, my darkey plays the miser with the line, the rod consequently comes in contact with the side of the boat, and snaps like a straw

a foot above the reel. I keep my opinions to myself *pro tem.* and after half an hour's terrific exercise, manage to tire out the fish from the reel. The tarpon is gaffed through the lower jaw and the hook recovered. By this time my wrath has somewhat subsided, and I return to the houseboat, to the accompaniment of a babel of explanations from my guide.

A somewhat meagre lunch and we start again at 4.45. The fish are now striking freely, but they are also getting rid of the hook freely. (X.) Our sinkers are tied on with very weak wire, the idea being that they might assist the tarpon in his attempts to jerk the hook out of his mouth in the air. (X^A.) Consequently for every strike one loses a sinker. (XI, XII.) My stock of five is soon exhausted, and willy nilly I have to fish on the top of the water. The fish are disporting themselves all round us, and I cannot believe that they all leave their appetites behind them the moment they rise above a certain depth. Sure enough I soon have another. He gives excellent sport (XIII), but it is almost too dark for such rapid exposures as are here necessary. The other boats follow my lead and try fishing on the surface with considerable success.

Suddenly there is a noise as if some extraordinarily heavy rain was striking a patch of water 50 yards away; and there over an area of 10 yards square the surface of the sea is wildly torn in all directions, little jets of water 10 inches high being thrown up from every square foot, and travelling with considerable velocity. This troubled patch soon begins to move, at the same time expanding, so that it assumes something the shape of a fan. The jets of water travel a foot or two at a great pace and

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XI.

disappear, as their causes, the various members of the attacking shoal, seize their prey. Of course, as the area of this conflict or rather massacre, increases, the pursuers become less crowded, and the water for equal areas less agitated, till finally, after a minute or so, there is only an isolated splash here and there, as the few remaining survivors are snapped up. Not a fish has shown above the water the whole time, and now the smaller shoal has been annihilated, or a remnant has sought safety in the depths, and the water is calm as before.

The number of fish has been reduced to increase the size of others. Each victim has doubtless devoured many smaller ones, and may now be regarded as a food collector for his captor; this captor in turn merely collecting his victims to render possible the existence of some larger fish, which could not collect the enormous number of smaller fish which would be necessary to satisfy his needs. We often witnessed these encounters where all ideas save that of ruthless ferocity are unknown. In fact the pursuit was sometimes going on all round the boat. The size of the attackers was, I should say, from 3 to 4 lbs., and the victims weighed $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. On our way back I pick up a nice channel bass of 10 lbs. He is, or rather, would be very lively on any other than tarpon tackle; anyhow a most welcome addition to our commissariat department.

After dinner we sit down to a cheap game of poker, while our guides sit outside watching the flats and listening for the splash of a tarpon. It is not long before Washington comes in and reports the presence of the fish. They seem to pass fairly rapidly over these grounds towards the Boca Grande in one large

shoal, and this fishing never lasts more than two hours. It is too by far the best sport off this coast of Florida, so the game comes to an abrupt conclusion, and we dash for our boats. The moon is full, the sky cloudless, and the atmosphere as clear as if it was not. The dancing ripples which form a brilliant and ever-changing silver road stretching towards the moon, force even a vandal such as the writer, to forget for a moment the tarpon beneath them. The only sounds are those caused by the oars, the water lapping against the side of the boat, and the occasional splash of a tarpon, for which we steer. But I am inaccurate. There is not a breath of wind, and so the mosquitoes from the shore are making merry all over the fishing grounds. They possess a greater power of penetrating clothing than any others I have come across, but a piece of newspaper will of course absolutely defeat them.

The sport now is more like that at Tampico, as the fish take freely, and in this shallow water we dispense with our sinkers, and let out a long line. I soon have a strike, and the leaps and dashes of the tarpon are wonderful in the moonlight. We part company, but it is not long before I am playing another. This one has a great idea of reaching the deep water. He does not waste much time or energy in leaping, but makes for the pass in a most determined manner; so much so, that at one time he has out over a hundred yards of line. But this sort of thing soon tires him. I follow, and get him within 3 or 4 yards of the boat. He is now very tired, and flopping about spasmodically on the surface. I have already numbered him among my captives, when suddenly, quite close to the boat and right in the centre of the

moon's reflected light on the water, up rises the huge dark back of a shark. He is making, calmly as a snake for a fascinated rabbit, and inexorably as fate, for my luckless tarpon. Whew! but I am not at all prepared to do battle with that brute. He is considerably longer than the boat, and would certainly take the whole of my line if not the rod as well; and after all the boat itself is only half an inch or so thick. I immediately release all the brakes, and give my tarpon as fair a chance as I can. He summons up energy for another rush. I cannot any longer see the shark, but as the line flows out I can very vividly imagine the desperate race going on a few feet beneath the surface, and am fully prepared for a pull on my line as if I had hitched on to a runaway locomotive.

The tarpon is now 40 feet from the boat—I feel the slightest jerk, and the line is slack; there are two great swirls in the water, and then the silvery ripples are calm and peaceful as before. Somewhat relieved, I reel up and find that the piano wire has been cleanly cut a foot from the hook. The severed end is curled round, much like a piece of wire that has been cut by a small bore bullet. The edges of the teeth of these large sharks are like fine saws, or the edges of a large triangular file, and there is not much doubt as to how this wire was so quickly and so easily severed. Now tarpon hooks are not particularly wholesome food even for sharks, and I think it more than probable that my tarpon will be avenged by the instrument that caused his death. My guide has not at all appreciated the incident, especially as we are now some way from the other boats; and none of our boatmen cared to go out alone at night on the flats. After all they were not entirely un-

reasonable. Sharks, rays, tarpon, and porpoises abound, and these latter have a most unpleasant way of rising to blow within a few feet of the boat. If they happen to charge it from a flank or to rise underneath it, in a blind or playful moment, the consequences might be such that the "subsequent proceedings would" very soon "interest us no more." In any case at the moment nothing seems to me so repulsive as a porpoise with a penchant for practical jokes. We row back towards the houseboat and lose one more tarpon on the way. But the shoal now seems to have passed on to the deep water, so we tie up our bark and exchange it for the good solid old houseboat. I have only been back a few minutes when in comes L. covered with slime and filth, his rod smashed to splinters at the strongest place near the butt. He is not long about telling the story of his discomfiture. He had just put the bait over the side of his boat preparatory to letting out line, when a tarpon seized it. He struck with his usual vigour, and the tarpon after the manner of his kind, leapt, and straight at his enemy. L. at once took in the situation, and attempted to ward off the shock with the thickest part of his rod. This the tarpon treated much as an equestrian treats a paper hoop in a circus; he then hit L. full and square on the chest, knocking him back into the bilge water in the bottom of the boat; next he came in contact with the oar, and rejoicing in his victory over his redoubtable opponent, slithered back into the sea, a free fish. L.'s respect for the power and weight of a tarpon was so enhanced by this incident, that ever afterwards he invariably cast his bait as far as he could from the boat when fishing at night on the flats. The other two sportsmen soon arrive. They have each got two or

XIII.

XIII.

XIV.

XV.

XVI.

three fish, and are very pleased with themselves, but their adventures seem somewhat pale and are only once told.

A few days later we start at 7.30 a.m. There are many streaks of tarpon travelling up and down the pass, and they are striking well. (XIII^A, XIII^B.) Soon one of the boats has a small one *hors de combat*. (XIV.) Time is precious and cannot be wasted in rowing $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the shore, so after three attempts he is gaffed under the throat and let go bleeding.

(XV, XVI, XVII.) These photos do not all represent the same fish, but they give an idea of what occurs. Within five minutes there is a great commotion in the water. I have learnt to look quickly when I hear any unfamiliar sound, and there is a tarpon blundering desperately along the surface, and closely followed by a greater mass of swirling water in the middle of which appears a large dark fin. He hurls himself three-quarters of his length out of the water, and falls back into the jaws of a huge shark. But now something interests itself in my piece of cut fish, and out go three or four yards of line, as if I had tied on to a traction engine. Time is valuable this morning, and this is a punishment for allowing my bait to sink too near the bottom. I can feel at once that this brute will take me the rest of the tide, and possibly the day, or a week to subdue. I can too well imagine the old jew fish opening and shutting his enormous mouth, and wondering at the extraordinary tendency of his last meal to rise. My guide, by way of encouragement, tells me how some fifty hooks have been lost by various fishermen in a colossal jew fish which lives near by. It is more than ignominious to admit my inability to cope with this robber by cutting him loose, so I work hard at the rod, which

bends like a bow ; but the tip remains absolutely stationary. After five or ten minutes the fish again takes the initiative. Out slowly goes the line, my puny efforts having not the slightest effect on either his velocity or direction. He doubtless wishes to discover whether this curious force possessed by his last captive will follow him to his deeper den. Down he goes, and the line, which is as tight as I dare make it, communicates to the rod a series of ominous little jerks and thrills as it rubs on the edge of some submarine precipice. It is soon cut, and there has been no surrender. I have been defeated in fair fight.

Within a quarter of an hour I am playing a tarpon ; a grand fighter, and my camera is forgotten for the first fifteen minutes ; but this tackle is heavy and the fish has been making tremendous exertions. At his fifth leap he fails to get clear of the water. (XVIII.) I manage to get him to rise three or four times close to the boat, and attempt to perpetuate his memory with my Anschutz. He now sinks back on his side like a stricken warrior whose body alone is defeated (XIX), and no great stretch of the imagination is required to detect something very like a groan. I wish I could persuade him that I am as anxious to set him free as he is to regain his freedom, and that even the Black Prince could not outdo me in courtesy to my captive, for whom I have a great respect. But he knows no law save that of *vae victis*, and so continues to waste his energies in trying to avoid a would-be benefactor, when as the result he may not have sufficient strength to escape the inexorable shark. A shark would no more think of molesting a tarpon in full enjoyment of his wonderful powers in the open, than would a crocodile of starting on a stern chase after a grey-

XVII.

XVIII.

XIX.

XX.

hound along a river bank, or I, now, of setting out to catch a robin with the aid of a pinch of salt. But Dame Nature, here where her scavengers abound, makes hardly any distinction between temporarily and the permanently disabled; and an absolutely uninjured tarpon, who is even for a short time so tired that he cannot travel faster than a shark, stands a poor chance of retaining his individuality. Within forty minutes from the time when my fish was hooked, he is free, and will not, I hope, owe a shortened existence to my sport. The tides are not now as high as they were, so it would be possible to fish on considerably longer than before; in fact, during the neap tides one can fish almost all day. The tarpon, however, are not striking so freely as before, and we start back. I do not reel in as I hope to pick up on the way one of the good eating fish which inhabit these waters; that is to say, a pompaneau, a channel bass, a red or a black grouper, or a king fish. Soon I have a good pull, and off goes the fish a fair pace for 50 feet, a moment's rest, a kick, and off again in another direction. But nothing smaller than a tarpon can long withstand this tackle, and I soon haul up on the sand a shark, between 4 feet and 5 feet long. No mercy for this brute, and in any case it would be hardly possible. If one put one's hand into the mouth of a live shark, in order to extract a hook, one would certainly be more unwise than the stork who extracted the bone from the fox's throat. It is illegal to leave dead fish on the shore, so we tow his body some distance out and leave it to feed his relatives. All four of us make an attempt to smarten up a bit before rowing over to lunch on the yacht. F. somehow manages to appear spotless, and I discard my huge straw headgear which I wear over my panama.

The hottest sun can make no impression whatever on this combination, but on the other hand it is not very apt to impress the ladies. Our American friends are very talkative and entertaining. For the calm of the Vere de Veres they have a decided contempt, but I notice that after our return they are anxious to know whether our hosts regarded them as some new and interesting species of humanity.

We are fishing again by 1.30. It is very hot, and the sea is full of what looks like small pieces of white fluff. The tarpon are not yet showing, but many of the incidents I have before mentioned are taking place, and it is by no means dull. Two or three small crabs come crawling along on the surface with the assistance of their hind legs which are fitted with paddles. I pass my line over the back of one which promptly grabs it, and holds on till he drops in the boat. One of the ladies gets hung up in a jew fish, with which she struggles manfully. Here goes my rod, out goes the line, and I am certain I have the first tarpon of the tide; but he is rather long about showing himself and I get less certain in inverse ratio with the seconds. After ten minutes the fish is beat, and I haul into the boat a 4-foot king fish. A lovely beast with his iridescent hues of blue, purple and white. He is shaped like a huge mackerel, and his skin is of the same texture. After all, I can understand the pleasure the epicureans of Rome took in watching the changing colours of the dying fish, which they were about to eat. The king fish has teeth set after the manner of a crocodile, and is as game for his size as the tarpon, with the exception that he confines his fight to the water. My next catches are two or three groupers of 5 or 6 lbs. each, and a

XXI.

XXII.

XXII.

XXIV.

XXIVa.

wise sucker leaves one of them as he comes to the surface. But here are the tarpon merrily breaking water 100 yards to our left. Off we all go, with the exception of the lady who is still leading a strenuous life with her jew fish. My nearest neighbour has one and it is not long before I have the (XX, XXI) satisfaction of seeing an undoubted silver king in the air on the end of my line, (XXII) but I have tried a dangerous experiment in bringing out on these waters the small rod I used at Tampico. Not that the fish are on an average larger or more lively than those of the Panuco river, because they are neither, but the tides run stronger and one does not want to have to follow a tarpon out into the open sea. This one is not much of a high jumper, but obviously a very fine long distance runner (XXIII). He pays my rod but scant respect, (XXIV, XXIVa) and within five minutes he has out nearly the whole of my 200 yards of line. It is almost uncanny to think that I have any connection with that fish jumping about there, over all that expanse of water. The force necessary to drag 200 yards of tarpon line at any velocity through the water is very great; but the brute is not stopping, and the line breaks; fortunately near where the strain is greatest, so I do not lose much of it. The other boats too are well employed. The lady is approaching the shore and seems to have got the upper hand of her quarry, when a cry is raised for the assistance of my Mauser. I am too far, however, and the jew fish is beached with only a small piece lacking from his tail. The shark followed him ever since he was raised to the surface, but apparently thought such an ugly brute should be sampled before being eaten, or more probably he was considerably smaller than the jew

fish, as the members of his species are gourmands and not gourmets.

After my first rebuff I manage to defeat two tarpon (XXV, XXVI) but only after two long struggles, and as we fish our way back to the houseboat I feel that I have had some splendid exercise. On this occasion by far the greater number of fish that struck were caught. In fact, one of our American friends to-day converted 13 strikes into 12 fish: on another tide out of 13 strikes but one fish would be caught. A shoal of cat fish had taken up their abode round and under the houseboat and almost as we arrive one takes my bait. These fish are unwholesome looking brutes with green backs and white bellies. Those in our shoal were on an average 8 inches long, and they would scramble for anything that was thrown overboard. They are protected by three strong sharp spines each about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long; one on the back just behind the head, and one on each side of the neck. These they can erect at will. I do not immediately pull my cat fish out of the water, but drag him about dead beat among his comrades, who promptly do their best to devour him. They have however nothing worth mentioning in the way of teeth, and can do him no harm. A small shark has also been waiting around to see if anything was to be picked up; he spots the disabled fish, and up he comes to further investigate. All the spines are stiffly erected. "Bah, spikes!" says the shark, as he sullenly returns to wait for something less prickly. I get rid of the cat fish with some care, as our guides inform us that the spines are poisonous, and I have no wish to experiment in person. Here comes the ladies' jew fish (XXVII) which we weigh with

XV.

XVI.

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XXVII.

some difficulty and find to be about 250 lbs. The calculation for getting the weight of a tarpon by no means applies here, though it probably would with some alteration of the constant. Just after dark we hear some shots from the yacht, which had induced a 13-foot hammerhead shark to swallow half a tarpon plus an enormous hook. It was afterwards towed ashore and found to contain 35 young ones, each a little over a foot long. On another occasion a 17-foot leopard shark was caught and shot from the yacht. It had six rows of teeth, and its jaws could pass over the head and shoulders of a man.

We are quite ready when Washington summons us for the flats at 9 o'clock. The temperature is delightful, there is a delicious breeze and not a mosquito in the place. There is no trace of either moon or cloud, and Sirius, Aldebaran, the stars of Orion and their less imposing brethren are as brilliant as I have ever seen them. The sea is as I have never seen it, and hardly believed it possible to be before. Our boat for some yards leaves behind it a gradually fading wake of light, and the oars where they touch the water stir it to a brilliant phosphorescence. I pay out the line, and watch my luminous bait as it gradually recedes from and then follows the boat. But here we are on the edge of a shoal of tarpon. A great fish passes without a sound within 3 feet of the boat, leaving behind him a watery comet's tail; then another, and another passes underneath us, and we are in the thick of them. There is a great luminous column after the bait—bang at the rod, splash as he raises masses of spray which almost dazzle us—a wild 20-foot rush along the top of the water, and up again with a sound that seems louder in

the silence of the night, and our brief acquaintance terminates for ever. As I reel in a great white cloud floats under the boat, and I suppose that in addition to the tarpon and the porpoises, whose elephantic gambols are causing me some uneasiness, I have found the rays at home as well. Another bait is ready and we feel a jar as something strikes the boat near the bow. I look round in time to see a glowing splash as the tarpon dives. Whether this was an accident or curiosity on the part of the tarpon, I am not sure ; but I am not at all anxious that the fish should take the least interest in the boat. My guide tells me how last year a sportsman fishing at night was struck in the back of the neck by a frisky porpoise, and how he was still on his bed ; but porpoises or no porpoises, this is not a sight to be missed. For a moment or two the water seems almost a network of moving light, and I am soon engaged with another tarpon. He is captured after an exciting tussle, during a great part of which his position in the water is plainly visible. We take his measurements on the shore and his weight works out at 165 lbs., but the mosquitoes accelerate our movements, and we are soon back on the fishing grounds. The thickest part of the shoal now seems to have passed over, but I still see an occasional fish, and capture one more before a wonderful night's sport comes to an end.

On another day one of the sportsmen from the yacht broke his rod with a very vigorous tarpon, and consequently took some three hours to tire him out. The fish was within a few feet of the boat when a hammerhead saw his chance and made a dash for it. A shark is by no means a lightning mover, and the darkey

neatly shoved the butt end of the oar into its mouth. The result was that about a foot of the handle end was broken off, and was not seen again ; but even this, as one would think, " too, too solid " meal did not satisfy the shark ; for without a moment's hesitation he turned again and swallowed the tarpon whole, cutting the piano wire trace as easily as mine had been cut before.

On another occasion the owner of the yacht was occupied with a weighty jew fish which was slowly towing him inland, when the boat belonging to one of his guests started rushing backwards through the water, and raising a foamy wave in front of its stern. The reel was locked, and this, as may be imagined, was a fine demonstration of the strength of the line. It was not long before the sportsman felt that he was being made a fool of by this foul hooked devil fish, and decided that he had had enough of it, and resigned all claim to the disputed hook.

Another of the large fish met with off this coast is the saw fish, which is sometimes 20 feet long with a 6-foot saw, 12 inches in width across the base. It would be a fine sight to see him slashing about among a shoal of his victims and rapidly snapping up the pieces.

And now a truce to these fishy tales. Suffice it that in the opinion of the writer, anyone who spends a fortnight on these waters will not regret his glimpse of the wonders of the sea.

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