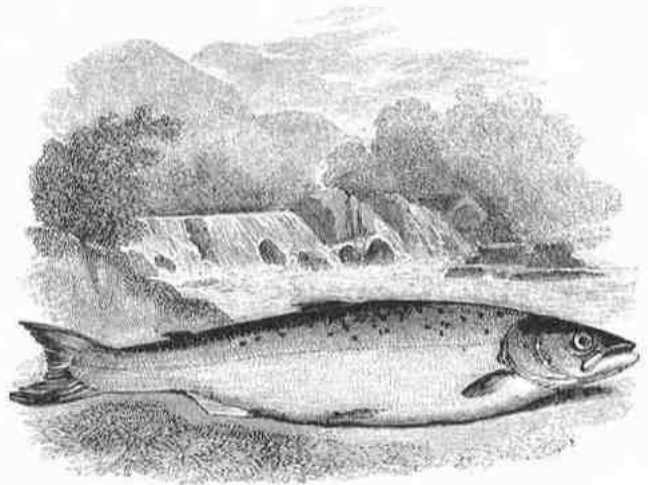


THE HISTORIC AMERICAN ATLANTIC SALMON FISHER

The first to appreciate the merit of the American Salmon were the British officers sent to the new country on tours of duty. The waters were unrestricted and it is not strange their Indian guides found fly fishing both novel and exciting. A few decades later American business men trekked into Canada to make their own voyages of discovery and by the 1860's upper class Canadians and Americans had formed an elite society who leased Crown Lands, built comfortable lodges and enjoyed the royalism of the Atlantic salmon in a fashion similar to that of Great Britain. The following three articles have been selected to illustrate this historical development.



Salmon Fishing in Gold River, Nova Scotia

PISCATOR

The Province of Nova Scotia is par excellence the domain of the Angler. From its great inequality of surface and geological formation; particularly the long parallel ridges trending from north to south, which form eight tenths of its area—innumerable lakes dot the country in all directions, which generally communicate with each other, and end in a considerable river. In all these Trout abound whilst Salmon run up from the Sea in most of the streams; and the Province, happily for the angler, not yet being very populous, enough of these noble fish find their way up the rivers to afford good sport. I am afraid however, that in this Saturnian age, it will not be of long continuance, and soon be sadly thinned, and the finny natives of this country, like the other American aborigines, or disappear altogether before advancing settlement and population.

Having heard a good report of a salmon stream called Gold River, about sixty miles to the westward of Halifax, a party of four Officers of this garrison was formed to visit it as early as the first run of salmon should take place. One of the number who had fished at the place several times before, volunteered to proceed as our avant courier, in the month of March, to secure us the shelter of a house of some description; the idea of living in a tent, so early in the season not being entirely agreeable. Our partie quarrie consisted of Major General Sir J - - - -h D - - - -n, Captain C - - - -y, Mr. A - - - -n, and myself.

We reached our headquarters, a farm house on a creek of Chester Basin, on the evening of Saturday the 23rd of April; and found that our eatables and drinkables and other heavy baggage, which were sent by water, had already arrived. The house had been vacated for our accommodation,

and there was no furniture; but we borrowed a few chairs and tables, and the servants soon shook down our Buffalo skins and blankets in the nooks and corners appropriated by each. Soon after our arrival an Indian made his appearance with a salmon; which was plumped into boiling water, and in half an hour we were regaling on its curdy flakes. After a temperate quantum of what the learned term "diffusible stimulus" and the common people "Whiskey Punch", with the accompaniment of a cigar or two we retired to rest.

Next morning being Sunday, we strolled towards the river after breakfast, which was distant a mile and a half, with the object to ascertaining the nature of the locale, and the character of the stream, before commencing operations on the following day. We found it a very fine stream - bold and rapid and considerably flooded - the water having that clear brownish tint to full promise for the fisher. A wooden bridge crosses the river two or three hundred yards above the tide; and we found the fishing ground reached from this to the Falls, in successive streams, eddies and holes, a distance of about three miles.

We discovered a small camp of Mic Mac Indians near the bridge, who migrate every summer to Gold River, during the fishing season from the neighborhood of Windsor. These Indians are the lords of the solid here; a grant of some hundred acres of land having been made to them by the Government about thirty years ago, with a view of leading them to agricultural habits. This has only been attended with partial success, for it is not easy to wean the red man from his peculiar tastes; and more over the land here is poor. But the condition of these people is prosperous—

they possess some good land near Windsor, fatten bullocks for the Halifax market, and come here every summer to catch salmon; partly to cure and smoke them, which they do admirably - but chiefly, I suspect, for the enjoyment such pastime affords them, as amateur fishermen, uniting the utile with the dulce. Of one of them I can say - "omne tulit punc - Tom". Excuse the pun, Tom; but poor Tom only shines in Mic Mac.

We found this identical Indian, whom I have apostrophized by anticipation, fishing with a rod at the bridge, and two or three squaws were exulting over a salmon he had just killed. As this person, yclept Tom Copp, is destined to cut a figure in this narrative, I may as well describe him briefly—indeed, considering he is only five feet high, I could not describe him in any other way. At some not remote period there must have been a cross, legal or illegal, between our little hero's ancestors and some Esquimaux tribe, for the low stature, square build, broad fishy face, and shark like mouth of the hyperborean race distinguished Mr. Thomas from his Mic Mac brethren here, who are generally tall, and some of them fine looking men. From this diminutive tribe, too, in all probability, Tom Copp inherited his skill and luck in fishing, his rare appetite, his love of dogs, his amphibiousness, his abhorrence of cleanliness, and several other good qualities.

Be this as it may, the active little Mic Mac soon gave us a taste of his quality as an angler. Shortly after our arrival at the bridge, whilst gazing into the rapid stream from the battlement, raging and foaming through the arches, we saw him hook a salmon with the fly immediately above. After some violent struggles and leaps, the fish took down the stream, under an arch, and Tom's line being run out to the last turn of the reel, he gallantly followed. It appeared doubtful for half a minute whether or not the fisherman would be obliged to take to swimming like his quarry, for the current was deep and powerful, but by dint of clinging with his nails or talons, to the masonry of the pier, and scrambling and jumping from one rock to another, he at length emerged at the lower side of the bridge with the salmon still firm on his line. Here new difficulties met him. The line got foul of a large tree that had been carried down by the flood, and the exertions of the fish threatened to break it at any moment. Again Mr. Tom committed himself to the stream - disengaged his tackle, and after a long and brilliant struggle, at length secured his fish.

Previous to setting to work on the Monday morning we found it expedient to engage an Indian attendant each, as well as to neutralize his rival fishing, as to secure a guide to the best holes. Two of my companions chose Johnny and Jemmy - fine looking Mic Macs, of high character as skillful rod fishers; but as Tom Copp has only begun to fish with the fly the season before, he seemed to be somewhat in the background, notwithstanding the illustrious passage at arms and (legs) that had just taken place. However, having a presentiment that Tom would prove a valuable acquisition, I enlisted him on the spot, and promoted him at once to be my principal aid-de-camp and quartermaster general.

We were all early afoot on Monday morning, the 25th of April, and the dawn broke on me walking on the bridge, watching my arms, lying against the battlement, like a Paladin blowing my benumbed fingers and waiting until Tom Copp should emerge from an adjoining wigwam. At length he protruded his shaggy and coal black head, gave a slight "heough" and was soon by my side.

Gold River has only been fished with the rod about nine years, and one of our party C---y had been amongst the

first fishermen. His descriptions of the glorious sport then enjoyed by the primitive anglers, vulgo dicers, made our mouths water, when contrasted with the comparative paucity of fish at the present day. For six or seven years the Indians confined themselves to the net and spear; but latterly they began to copy the proceedings of the white fisherman, and some of them are now learned in the mysteries of fly and rod. The thickly wooded banks were in the way of the first fishers; but many trees have been cut down and good stands cleared at the best fishing spots. Immediately below the Falls, which are very fine, is a circular excavation called "Cumberland's Basin" in itself a beautiful piece of water, affording good fishing. Next to this is another excellent stand called "The Point". A little farther down is "Inces Hole", so called from a Commissariat officer, who in the good old times killed fourteen salmon in one day. Below this famous spot are several good streams ending in "Oak Pool", a stand of great merit. In descending the river by the left bank from this point to the "Salmon Pool", at the head of the meadow, the stream is very rapid; but there are three or four eddies behind rocks where one is sure of finding fish. The meadow is a strip of alluvial land, extending three quarters of a mile above the bridge where the current is strong, and contains large boulders, each of which affords in its wake a convenient resting place for the salmon in ascending the stream. Close to the bridge, and down to the brackish water, are several good points, where, when the river is high fish are often caught.

My Indian ally and I first tried the meadow up in the "Salmon Hole", but without seeing anything, for Tom said, "Him not rise yet. Him cold." On returning towards the bridge, I saw one fine eddy behind a rock; which indeed we had fished before, but I thought it probable as the sun had now risen, that the fish would be on the move, and therefore suspected some traveller might halt here to take a breath. At the first cast of my fly, a large salmon dashed at it greedily but missed it. The unmeaning countenance of Tom Copp would have been a study for a painter at that instance; for its vacuity and phlegm suddenly merged in an expression of intelligence and the keenest interest. The small black eyes sparkled, and the face became that of a lynx preparing for a spring on its prey; whilst he exclaimed under a mistaken apprehension that I would cover the fish too soon. "Give him time - give him time -".

Due time (which be it known in the fishing fraternity is one minute) was given and Mr. Salmo Salar was permitted to resume his position near the bottom, when the fly again was lightly cast over him. He seized it and I struck and hooked him, when he made a desperate rush up the stream, across and down the stream, and then commenced a course of most active dancing and leaping; whilst he was furnished with all the music my reel could yield. All this time the Mic Mac watched the proceedings with a critical eye, and although absorbed in the sport, I could not help smiling at his strange advice, when he feared I was pressing the fish too hard - "Let him go - let him go", and my rejoinder "I will see you hanged first, Tom." After much lively play this salmon was adroitly gaffed; it was a fish of thirteen pounds in prime season.

Our party met at breakfast at ten o'clock. Seven hours active exercise in a cold morning, gave a peculiar zest to a meal; and ardent and persevering were our attacks on dried salmon, a colossal veal pie, and a mighty round of beef, to say nothing of parallelograms of toast without number, and fresh eggs by the dozen. I make no account of liquids and therefore shall slur over the four or five gallons of tea

and coffee expended on the occasion.

Some of the quadumvirate resumed the fishing soon after breakfast, but others took a siesta, and went to the river at two o'clock. It was agreed that we should dine at eight, and that each of us - catch him how we might, by hook or crook - should furnish in turn a salmon for dinner.

We were all busy at the river side until dusk, but our first day's sport was inconsiderable, being only three fish - though we hooked and lost several. At dinner each of us had his own misery to tell. Our worthy chief had not seen a fish. C - - y had all but caught three - A - - n had four rises, but it was no go; and as for myself, although I had secured three, I ought to have bagged a half dozen. However one unquestionable salmon, the produce of our sport, was smoking on the table and to it we set with the appetites of Harpies; whilst the cold round, and the pie looming in high relief on the side table, (an inverted wooden box) supplanted in due time the remnants of the fish.

We had of course a rechauffee of our dinner conversation over our grog and cigars; such repetition being conceded by universal suffrage to sportsmen of all grades and descriptions, with only this proviso, that no two versions of the same exploit should exactly tally. One lucky salmon that been hooked and escaped, weighed thirteen pounds at dinner, was fully close to fifteen by the close of the second cigar and would have reached twenty in the course of the evening if we had not gone early to bed.

On approaching Oak Pool, along the left bank of, on the second day of our fishing, I found that C - - y had hooked a salmon, which took down the powerful rapid at the lower end of the hole. Having accidentally hurt his knee, C - - y was unable to pursue the fish along a most impracticable bank, as the water was high; he therefore gave the rod to Johnny, his clever Indian henchman, who plunged at once up to his middle in the water, and followed the fish as fast as he could down the stream. At one place a long fir tree had fallen into the river and extended half across; threatening a non plus to Mr. Johnny. No such thing. Johnny waded and floundered out to the farthest branch, and conducted the salmon safely around it. Again, two rocks stood up like two obelisks in the middle of the stream - the Indian manoeuvred to lead his fish between them, and to hoist his line clear of the nearer rock. Lower down was a large rock with a fallen tree athwart it, in whose branches the line stuck fast; and here I thought Johnny must inevitably lose his fish. But I underrated the dexterity of an Indian; for he cleverly overcame this difficulty also; and on C - - y coming up, returned him the rod when the salmon was gaffed. It turned out only ten pounds in weight but had been hooked by the tail which gave it three fold force, and enabled it to drag Johnny down the river *nolo volens*.

Salmon have bad memories, and I recollect in my boyish days catching one one Monday in a hole where I had hooked a fish on the Saturday previous which had carried off my fly. On inspecting the mouth of the captive I found my lost fly sticking in it, by the side of the fly that just caught it. An incident somewhat similar occurred to C - - y during the trip. He hooked a fish which felt very heavy and took the liberty of sailing off with his fly, and a piece of his casting line. Two days after he caught the same fish, a little higher up the river, with the identical fly firm in his side.

At our second dinner and through out the remainder of our visit, there was more general satisfaction in talking over the adventures of the day, for our success had been more balanced, and we had all been tolerably lucky, killing many fine fish. The salmon tasted as well as the first to two of the

party but the other two were beginning to exclaim or look "toujours perdix". As for myself I have the misfortune to be on all similar occasions, so far as salmon is concerned, a most persevering ichthyophogist; and I believe the Major at Gold River a similar heretical taste. In fact I estimate very lightly the man who wantonly abandons a classical dish; for such a person can never be a firm friend. What patriotic Englishman ever turned his back on a sirloin, or abjured a rump steak, or declined plum pudding and mince pies in their season? I might easily run over all civilized nations, connecting them indissolubly with their national dishes - but I forbear.

I am not about to inflict on the readers of the ALBION a dull diary of our proceedings, but shall confine myself to the chief incidents.

One day my Aid-De-Campe, Tom Copp and myself went up the river to Oak Pool, where after a few casts I hooked a good fish. When he had been played properly, I brought him near to the shore, where Mr. Tom stood, gaff in hand ready to receive him. I led the salmon close to his feet, but after making three futile attempts, the fish dashed out into the middle of the river and plunged violently. Tom looked very foolish grinning with extraordinary vacuity when I rated him for his unusual awkwardness. Indeed hitherto he had gaffed brilliantly. At last my henchman thought of looking at the gaff, "where gaff was none" for it had been wrenched from its fastenings and carried off by the fish. Luckily the wounded salmon continued fast on the hook and when after a little more play, it was once more brought to the edge, and Tom seized it by the tail; he pulled the gaff out of its side and held it for my notice, with a visible expression of face worthy of an ogre.

Another day, after breakfast I proceeded alone to a favorite stream beneath a rugged bank, where the fishing was very difficult from the overhanging trees, the rapidity of the current and the number of huge boulders amongst which it wound. Under these circumstances and deprived of Tom Copp's services, it might be inconvenient to hook a large salmon, who no doubt would avail himself of the protecting rock. However I dared the combat, and threw out my fly as a gauntlet. The gage was soon taken up, for scarcely had the simulated insect alighted on the water when a huge mouth swallowed it, and I found I had got hold of a tartar. The salmon first shook his head gently as if he wished to get rid of the strange thing in his jaw by fair means and then more hurriedly and violently. After these ineffectual attempts he got into a passion and made a running leap of six feet in the air, followed instantly by a succession of six or eight more; all the time striking the line most scientifically with his tail, as if he had been reading a chapter in dynamics. At length on finding this course of saltation was useless and exhausting, he rushed out into the middle of the main stream, brought his right shoulder forward, and away he went down the river at the rate of twenty knots an hour, whilst from my particular position I could not follow him without jumping up to my chin. When nearly a hundred yards of line had run out, occupying two seconds, the fish shot to his left, described a fine curve in the stream and brought up in the wake of a large rock. There he remained immovable, not withstanding all my efforts. Like Marshall Soult behind the Garrone, before the battle of Thoulouse.

Now, I was situated so that I could not move down without making a turn to my left, which would wind the line around the rock where the salmon lay recruiting his strength, and an intermediate boulder also. Thus circumstanced I had

no alternative but to remain where I stood, keep him well in hand, long for Tom Copp, and trust to the nature of accidents.

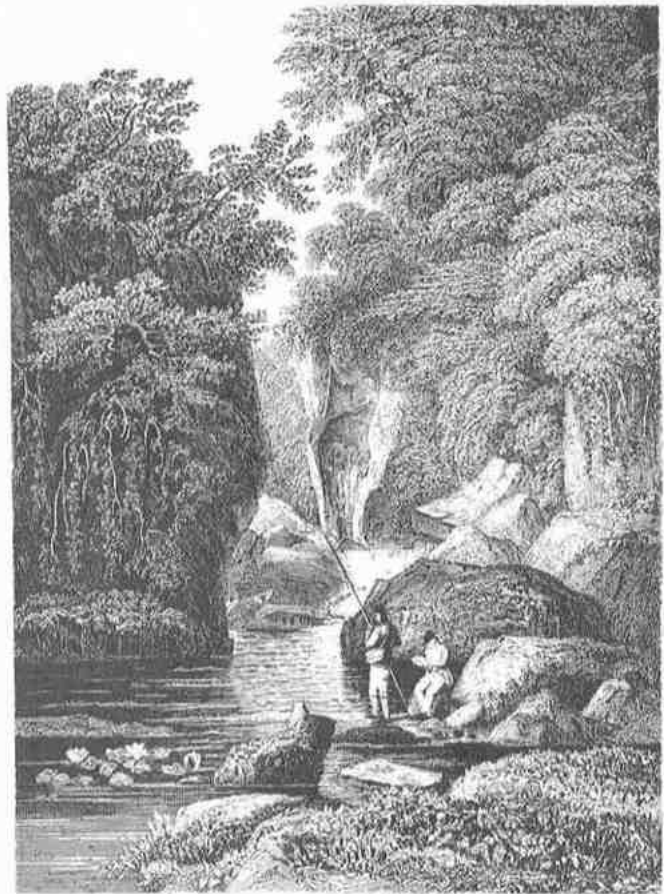
It was part of the river seldom visited by anyone but myself, from the great difficulty of approach, and there was little hope of assistance from any brother Angler. But when things are at their worst, we know what a pleasant turn they sometimes take, and so it proved now; for on looking up the bank a fisher hove in sight a quarter mile distant. I instantly made a signal of distress, which he acknowledged promptly and came running to my assistance. He then waded along a ledge and a fallen tree to the rock, and gaffed the salmon - a fat fine fish of sixteen pounds. This friendly brother of the angler is Colonel C - - - n, M.P.P. to whom here I offer my public thanks; wishing him all imaginable luck both on the banks of Gold River and in the Provincial Parliament.

About the end of the first week the General and C - - - y were a little discomfited by losing the services of their Indian attendants. The measles attacked the camps of the Mic Macs and poor Johnny and Jemmy were put hors de combat as fishermen. Fortunately one of our party was a medical man. He used to amuse us with accounts of the insatiable and most uncivilized fondness of his patients for the few simple articles of the pharmacopie he had brought with him, but of course they will get rid of this, like other traits of barbarism, as they become more enlightened. One box of pills was grand medicine - but the sick Mic Macs wished to be helped on Morrisonian principles, in doses of ten or twelve pills at once - a greediness for galenicals quite inconsistent with the limited contents of the box.

From one plague of anglers on this continent we were quite exempt - there were no flies - but as counterbalance it was generally very cold in the morning - our wet lines were once or twice frozen to the rods; and the frigid wading was by no means agreeable if no salmon rose; but with good luck, no inconveniences of any kind ever annoys a good fisherman.

During our stay at the river we lunched twice after the Indian fashion - once near the head of the meadow, and again at Ince's Hole; on both occasions we had a salmon roasted. The process is this. A large fire is made on some pleasant spot by the bank generally near some fishing ground. A salmon fresh caught is split open, cleaned and the backbone is taken out. It is then spitted longitudinally on a piece of wood, with three or four skewers across, and the spit is thrust into the ground before the fire. First one side is done, and then the other and when the whole roast is accomplished the fish and spit are placed on a birch bark dish, and placed on the knees of the master of the feast. The inexpressibles of the angling brotherhood ought not to be offended at salmon fat, therefore if a little exudes, unless it is scalding it is of no consequence.

The correct mode on such occasions is to eat with the fingers but we used forks; and moreover instead of imitating our Mic Mac Friends, who are all teatotalers, in lapping from the river, each man produced a bottle of Porter from his pocket, handed the Indian attendant a foot or two of tobacco, and then complacently lighted his own cigar. All this time a second salmon was roasting for our red staff, and certain bottles of tea prepared for their use were distributed amongst them. These poor people appeared to enjoy their meal immensely, cramming their capacious mouths with long portions of the fish, dropped in endways as the Neapolitans eat macaroni; and as for Mr. Thomas Copp who possessed great natural advantages for this, he pitched in the



The American salmon fisher inherited his technical know how from practises developed along the banks of Irish, Scotch and English rivers.

fragrant flakes at a rate that distanced all competition.

Mais revenons a nos moutons, although our littoral moutons do not deserve it; for those which our friend C - - - y had purchased for us consisted without a figure of nothing but wool, and skin and bone and horns; and were only fit to make a meagre broth, when the bones were well pounded to extract the marrow. About the end of the second week we found that rounds of beef and veal pies, however vast will not last forever, exposed to the assaults of four hungry fishermen and their servants, white and red, however eked out by the friendly salmon. There was nothing but eggs and potatoes to be had in the neighborhood. An innocent calf, indeed of the genus "staggering bob" having come to an untimely end, we obtained a side of the veal which kept us alive two days. At length we found ourselves under the necessity of visiting Chester one day in quest of a dinner, which we ate at Smith's comfortable Inn in the pleasant society of two brother anglers of our acquaintance who had their headquarters there. When about to start home, A - - - n, like an excellent purveyor bethought of visiting the larder, where he found the remains of the dinner. He pounced upon a leg of roast pork, a breast of veal, three quarters of a ham and remorselessly carried off these, telling the bereaved Mrs. Smith to add them to the bill.

Towards the close of the third week the fishing had considerably fallen off - the first run of large fish was nearly over, and so many fishers were exercising their vocations

in all directions, that it was no easy matter to catch a salmon. At this time the poor fish were sadly persecuted, and it was a very lucky individual who steered clear of the four or five tiers of nets on each side of the mouth of the river, escaped from Tom Copp at the bridge, evaded the spears of the other Indians along the meadow, and the flies of thirteen or fourteen rod fishers thrashing Cumberland Pool and at the bottom of the falls. Moreover we found we had enough now of exercise and amusement. Rising at three or four o'clock in the morning, and twisting and twining every muscle in the body amidst rocks jungle, full of the horrid American thorn, and floundering in the water amphibiously until ten, and again from two till dusk, might be admirable training for a pugilist or a runner against time, but was detrop for grave and steady gentlemen of fifty or over, or even younger people. Consequently on morning of Sunday the 15th of May, we resolved to start for Halifax via Windsor, after first trying to catch a fish to take home with us.

But the fates were adverse. The morning was cold and wet and the salmon lazy. I rose one but it would not stir a second time. A - - - n hooked two and lost them. C - - - y after a cast or two wisely went to bed. And our excellent chief had the mortification to lose a fine fish after long play by the bungling of his Indian, who was the only bungler in the camp.

A list of fish killed daily by each of us, with their weight had been regularly kept and hung over the mantel-piece

of our mess room. On summing up they amounted to a hundred and fourteen, weighing about eleven hundred pounds. This was an average of about ten pounds apiece. We had caught several fine salmon of fourteen and fifteen pounds apiece, full of marine strength and vigor, with the parasitic insects of the salt water still adhering to their skin; and on the whole had passed the three weeks most agreeably.

A tinge of melancholy shades the mind on leaving the scene of recent enjoyment. And I believe we all felt something like this when tying up our fishing rods and parting with the Mic Macs. As for my friend Tom Copp, he and I had virtually concluded a treaty offensive and defensive - or rather he swore allegiance to me on all future occasions when visiting Gold River, and promised to come to see me at Halifax. Perceiving that his much worn blanket coat was become a coat of mail with the encrusted blood of a hectacomb of salmon, and that his other nondescript garments were in most miserable plight; I indued his squat figure with a cast off fishing jacket, waistcoat and trousers, presented him with divers superannuated pairs of shoes and stockings, and placed a straw hat wreathed around with flies and casting lines on his greasy head. I then dismissed him with a present of money. I hope this active Mic Mac will not entertain any unseemly feeling of vanity in his new dress; although of this I have some doubts, for Tom's wardrobe is now beyond all question the first in his tribe.

N. Y. ALBION (1843)



Spearing salmon was once considered a British gentleman's game and practised in North America for many years during and after pioneer settlement.