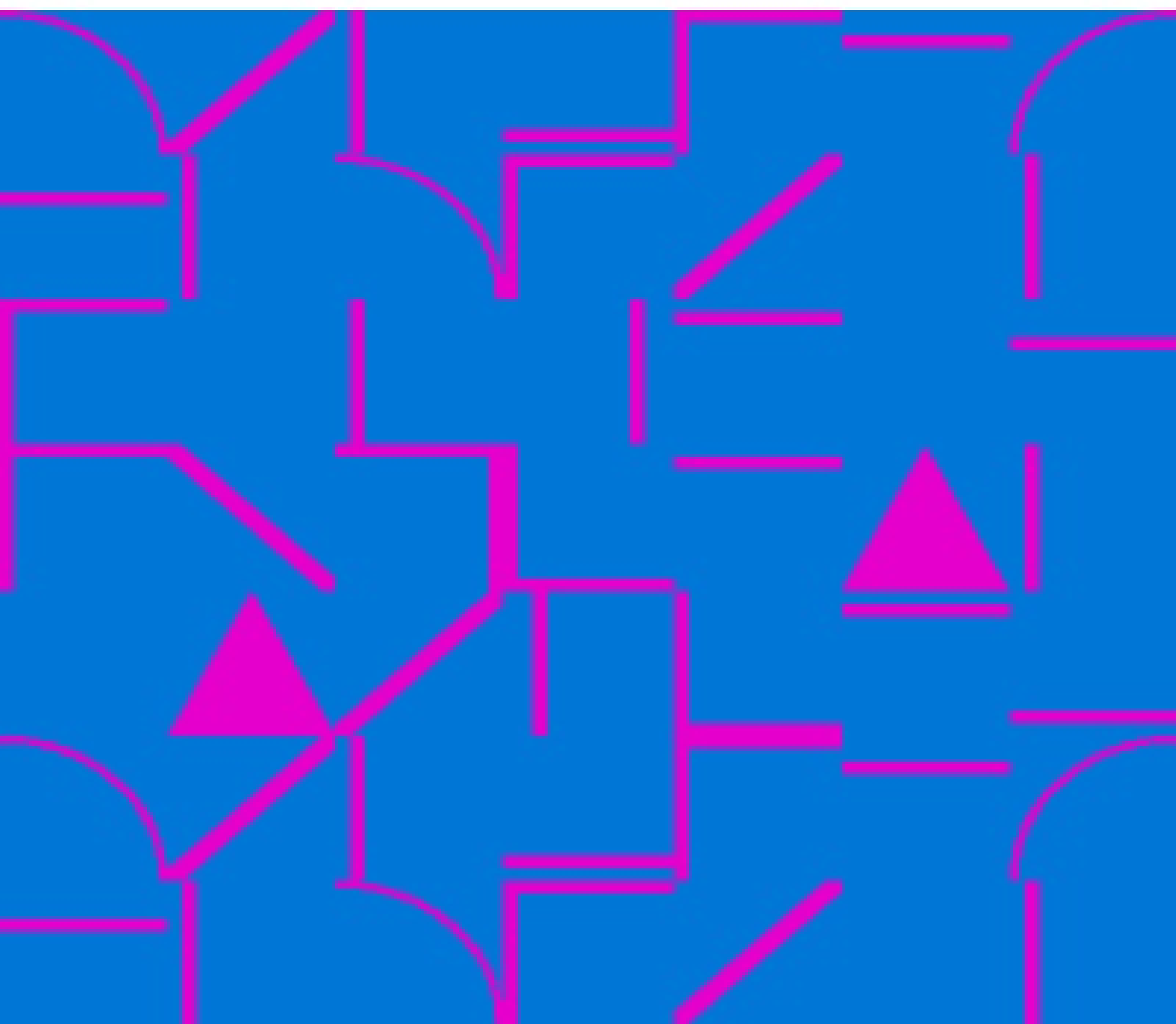


Introduction to the Compleat Angler

Andrew Lang



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ANDREW LANG'S INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPLEAT ANGLER

To write on Walton is, indeed, to hold a candle to the sun. The editor has been content to give a summary of the chief or rather the only known, events in Walton's long life, adding a notice of his character as displayed in his Biographies and in *The Compleat Angler*, with comments on the ancient and modern practice of fishing, illustrated by passages from Walton's foregoers and contemporaries. Like all editors of Walton, he owes much to his predecessors, Sir John Hawkins, Oldys, Major, and, above all, to the learned Sir Harris Nicolas.

HIS LIFE

The few events in the long life of Izaak Walton have been carefully investigated by Sir Harris Nicolas. All that can be extricated from documents by the alchemy of research has been selected, and I am unaware of any important acquisitions since Sir Harris Nicolas's second edition of 1860. Izaak was of an old family of Staffordshire yeomen, probably descendants of George Walton of Yoxhall, who died in 1571. Izaak's father was Jarvis Walton, who died in February 1595-6; of Izaak's mother nothing is known. Izaak himself was born at Stafford, on August 9, 1593, and was baptized on September 21. He died on December 15, 1683, having lived in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., Charles I., under the Commonwealth, and under Charles II. The anxious and changeful age through which he passed is in contrast with his very pacific character and tranquil pursuits.

Of Walton's education nothing is known, except on the evidence of his writings. He may have read Latin, but most of the books he cites had English translations. Did he learn his religion from 'his mother or his nurse'? It will be seen that the free speculation of his age left him untouched: perhaps his piety was awakened, from childhood, under the instruction of a pious mother. Had he been orphaned of both parents (as has been suggested) he might have been less amenable to authority, and a less notable example of the virtues which Anglicanism so vainly opposed to Puritanism. His literary beginnings are obscure. There exists a copy of a work, *The Loves of Amos and Laura*, written by S. P., published in 1613, and again in 1619. The edition of 1619 is dedicated to 'Iz. Wa.':—

'Thou being cause *it is as now it is*';

the Dedication does not occur in the one imperfect known copy of 1613. Conceivably the words, 'as now it is' refer to the edition of 1619, which might have been emended by Walton's advice. But there are no emendations, hence it is more probable that Walton revised the poem in 1613, when he was a man of twenty, or that he merely advised the author to publish:—

'For, hadst thou held thy tongue, by silence might
These have been buried in oblivion's night.'

S. P. also remarks:—

'No ill thing can be clothed in thy verse';

hence Izaak was already a rhymers, and a harmless one, under the Royal Prentice, gentle King Jamie.

By this time Walton was probably settled in London. A deed in the possession of his biographer, Dr. Johnson's friend, Sir John Hawkins, shows that, in 1614, Walton held half of a shop on the north side of Fleet Street, two doors west of Chancery Lane: the other occupant was a hosier. Mr. Nicholl has discovered that Walton was made free of the Ironmongers' Company on Nov. 12, 1618. He is styled an Ironmonger in his marriage licence. The facts are given in Mr. Marston's *Life of Walton*, prefixed to his edition of *The Compleat Angler* (1888). It is odd that a prentice ironmonger should have been a poet and

a critic of poetry. Dr. Donne, before 1614, was Vicar of St. Dunstan's in the West, and in Walton had a parishioner, a disciple, and a friend. Izaak greatly loved the society of the clergy: he connected himself with Episcopal families, and had a natural taste for a Bishop. Through Donne, perhaps, or it may be in converse across the counter, he made acquaintance with Hales of Eton, Dr. King, and Sir Henry Wotton, himself an angler, and one who, like Donne and Izaak, loved a ghost story, and had several in his family. Drayton, the river-poet, author of the *Polyolbion*, is also spoken of by Walton as 'my old deceased friend.'

On Dec. 27, 1626, Walton married, at Canterbury, Rachel Floud, a niece, on the maternal side, by several descents, of Cranmer, the famous Archbishop of Canterbury. The Cranmers were intimate with the family of the judicious Hooker, and Walton was again connected with kinsfolk of that celebrated divine. Donne died in 1631, leaving to Walton, and to other friends, a bloodstone engraved with Christ crucified on an anchor: the seal is impressed on Walton's will. When Donne's poems were published in 1633, Walton added commendatory verses:—

'As all lament
(Or should) this general cause of discontent.'

The parenthetic 'or should' is much in Walton's manner. 'Witness my mild pen, not used to upbraid the world,' is also a pleasant and accurate piece of self-criticism. 'I am his convert,' Walton exclaims. In a citation from a manuscript which cannot be found, and perhaps never existed, Walton is spoken of as 'a very sweet poet in his youth, and more than all in matters of love.' [\[1\]](#) Donne had been in the same case: he, or Time, may have converted Walton from amorous ditties. Walton, in an edition of Donne's poems of 1635, writes of

'This book (dry emblem) which begins
With love; but ends with tears and sighs for sins.'

The preacher and his convert had probably a similar history of the heart: as we shall see, Walton, like the Cyclops, had known love. Early in 1639, Wotton wrote to Walton about a proposed Life of Donne, to be written by himself, and hoped 'to enjoy your own ever welcome company in the approaching time of the *Fly* and the *Cork*.' Wotton was a fly-fisher; the cork, or float, or 'trembling quill,' marks Izaak for the bottom-fisher he was. Wotton died in December 1639; Walton prefixed his own Life of Donne to that divine's sermons in 1640. He says, in the Dedication of the reprint of 1658, that 'it had the approbation of our late learned and eloquent King,' the martyred Charles I. Living in, or at the corner of Chancery Lane, Walton is known to have held parochial office: he was even elected 'scavenger.' He had the misfortune to lose seven children—of whom the last died in 1641—his wife, and his mother-in-law. In 1644 he left Chancery Lane, and probably retired from trade. He was, of course, a Royalist. Speaking of the entry of the Scots, who came, as one of them said, 'for the goods,—and chattels of the English,' he remarks, 'I saw and suffered by it.' [\[2\]](#) He also mentions that he 'saw' shops shut by their owners till Laud should be put to death, in January 1645. In his Life of Sanderson, Walton vouches for an anecdote of 'the knowing and conscientious King,' Charles, who, he says, meant to do public penance for Strafford's death, and for the abolishing of Episcopacy in Scotland. But the condition, 'peaceable possession of the Crown,' was not granted to Charles, nor could have been granted to a prince who wished to reintroduce Bishops in Scotland. Walton had his information from Dr. Morley. On Nov. 25, 1645, Walton probably wrote, though John Marriott signed, an Address to the Reader, printed, in 1646, with Quarles's *Shepherd's Eclogues*. The piece is a little idyll in prose, and 'angle, lines, and flies' are not omitted in the description of 'the fruitful month of May,' while Pan is implored to restore Arcadian peace to

Britannia, ‘and grant that each honest shepherd may again sit under his own vine and fig-tree, and feed his own flock,’ when the King comes, no doubt. ‘About’ 1646 Walton married Anne, half-sister of Bishop Ken, a lady ‘of much Christian meeknesse.’ Sir Harris Nicolas thinks that he only visited Stafford occasionally, in these troubled years. He mentions fishing in ‘Shawford brook’; he was likely to fish wherever there was water, and the brook flowed through land which, as Mr. Marston shows, he acquired about 1656. In 1650 a child was born to Walton in Clerkenwell; it died, but another, Isaac, was born in September 1651. In 1651 he published the *Reliquiae Wottonianae*, with a Memoir of Sir Henry Wotton. The knight had valued Walton’s company as a cure for ‘those splenetic vapours that are called hypochondriacal.’

Worcester fight was on September 3, 1651; the king was defeated, and fled, escaping, thanks to a stand made by Wogan, and to the loyalty of Mistress Jane Lane, and of many other faithful adherents. A jewel of Charles’s, the lesser George, was preserved by Colonel Blague, who intrusted it to Mr. Barlow of Blore Pipe House, in Staffordshire. Mr. Barlow gave it to Mr. Milward, a Royalist prisoner in Stafford, and he, in turn, intrusted it to Walton, who managed to convey it to Colonel Blague in the Tower. The colonel escaped, and the George was given back to the king. Ashmole, who tells the story, mentions Walton as ‘well beloved of all good men.’ This incident is, perhaps, the only known adventure in the long life of old Izaak. The peaceful angler, with a royal jewel in his pocket, must have encountered many dangers on the highway. He was a man of sixty when he published his *Compleat Angler* in 1653, and so secured immortality. The quiet beauties of his manner in his various biographies would only have made him known to a few students, who could never have recognised Byron’s ‘quaint, old, cruel coxcomb’ in their author. ‘The whole discourse is a kind of picture of my own disposition, at least of my disposition in such days and times as I allow myself when honest Nat. and R. R. and I go a-fishing together.’ Izaak speaks of the possibility that his book may reach a second edition. There are now editions more than a hundred! Waltonians should read Mr. Thomas Westwood’s Preface to his *Chronicle of the Compleat Angler*: it is reprinted in Mr. Marston’s edition. Mr. Westwood learned to admire Walton at the feet of Charles Lamb:—

‘No fisher,
But a well-wisher
To the game,’

as Scott describes himself. [\[3\]](#)

Lamb recommended Walton to Coleridge; ‘it breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart; . . . it would sweeten a man’s temper at any time to read it; it would Christianise every angry, discordant passion; pray make yourself acquainted with it.’ (Oct. 28, 1796.) According to Mr. Westwood, Lamb had ‘an early copy,’ found in a repository of marine stores, but not, even then, to be bought a bargain. Mr. Westwood fears that Lamb’s copy was only Hawkins’s edition of 1760. The original is extremely scarce. Mr. Locker had a fine copy; there is another in the library of Dorchester House: both are in their primitive livery of brown sheep, or calf. The book is one which only the wealthy collector can hope, with luck, to call his own. A small octavo, sold at eighteen-pence, *The Compleat Angler* was certain to be thumbed into nothingness, after enduring much from May showers, July suns, and fishy companionship. It is almost a wonder that any examples of Walton’s and Bunyan’s first editions have survived into our day. The little volume was meant to find a place in the bulging pockets of anglers, and was well adapted to that end. The work should be reprinted in a similar format: quarto editions are out of place.

The fortunes of the book, the *fata libelli*, have been traced by Mr. Westwood. There are several misprints (later corrected) in the earliest copies, as (p. 88) 'Fordig' for 'Fordig,' (p. 152) 'Pudoch' for 'Pudock.' The appearance of the work was advertised in *The Perfect Diurnal* (May 9-16), and in No. 154 of *The Mercurius Politicus* (May 19-26), also in an almanack for 1654. Izaak, or his publisher Marriott, cunningly brought out the book at a season when men expect the Mayfly. Just a month before, Oliver Cromwell had walked into the House of Commons, in a plain suit of black clothes, with grey stockings. His language, when he spoke, was reckoned unparliamentary (as it undeniably was), and he dissolved the Long Parliament. While Marriott was advertising Walton's work, Cromwell was making a Parliament of Saints, 'faithful, fearing God, and hating covetousness.' This is a good description of Izaak, but he was not selected. In the midst of revolutions came *The Compleat Angler* to the light, a possession for ever. Its original purchasers are not likely to have taken a hand in Royalist plots or saintly conventicles. They were peaceful men. A certain Cromwellian trooper, Richard Franck, was a better angler than Walton, and he has left to us the only contemporary and contemptuous criticism of his book: to this we shall return, but anglers, as a rule, unlike Franck, must have been for the king, and on Izaak's side in controversy.

Walton brought out a second edition in 1655. He rewrote the book, adding more than a third, suppressing *Viator*, and introducing *Venator*. New plates were added, and, after the manner of the time, commendatory verses. A third edition appeared in 1661, a fourth (published by Simon Gape, not by Marriott) came out in 1664, a fifth in 1668 (counting Gape's of 1664 as a new edition), and in 1676, the work, with treatises by Venables and Charles Cotton, was given to the world as *The Universal Angler*. Five editions in twelve years is not bad evidence of Walton's popularity. But times now altered. Walton is really an Elizabethan: he has the quaint freshness, the apparently artless music of language of the great age. He is a friend of 'country contents': no lover of the town, no keen student of urban ways and mundane men. A new taste, modelled on that of the wits of Louis XIV., had come in: we are in the period of Dryden, and approaching that of Pope.

There was no new edition of Walton till Moses Browne (by Johnson's desire) published him, with 'improvements,' in 1750. Then came Hawkins's edition in 1760. Johnson said of Hawkins, 'Why, ma'am, I believe him to be an honest man at the bottom; but, to be sure, he is penurious, and he is mean, and it must be owned he has a degree of brutality, and a tendency to savageness, that cannot easily be defended.'

This was hardly the editor for Izaak! However, Hawkins, probably by aid of Oldys the antiquary (as Mr. Marston shows), laid a good foundation for a biography of Walton. Errors he made, but Sir Harris Nicolas has corrected them. Johnson himself reckoned Walton's *Lives* as 'one of his most favourite books.' He preferred the life of Donne, and justly complained that Walton's story of Donne's vision of his absent wife had been left out of a modern edition. He explained Walton's friendship with persons of higher rank by his being 'a great panegyrist.'

The eighteenth century, we see, came back to Walton, as the nineteenth has done. He was precisely the author to suit Charles Lamb. He was reprinted again and again, and illustrated by Stoddart and others. Among his best editors are Major (1839), 'Ephemera' (1853), Nicolas (1836, 1860), and Mr. Marston (1888).

The only contemporary criticism known to me is that of Richard Franck, who had served with Cromwell in Scotland, and, not liking the aspect of changing times, returned to the north, and fished from the Esk to Strathnaver. In 1658 he wrote his *Northern Memoirs*, an itinerary of sport, heavily cumbered by dull reflections and pedantic style. Franck, however, was a practical angler, especially for salmon, a fish of which Walton knew nothing: he also appreciated the character of the great Montrose. He went to

America, wrote a wild cosmogonic work, and *The Admirable and Indefatigable Adventures of the Nine Pious Pilgrims* (one pilgrim catches a trout!) (London, 1708). The *Northern Memoirs* of 1658 were not published till 1694. Sir Walter Scott edited a new issue, in 1821, and defended Izaak from the strictures of the salmon-fisher. Izaak, says Franck, ‘lays the stress of his arguments upon other men’s observations, wherewith he stuffs his indigested octavo; so brings himself under the angler’s censure and the common calamity of a plagiarist, to be pitied (poor man) for his loss of time, in scribbling and transcribing other men’s notions. . . . I remember in Stafford, I urged his own argument upon him, that pickerel weed of itself breeds pickerel (pike).’ Franck proposed a rational theory, ‘which my Compleat Angler no sooner deliberated, but dropped his argument, and leaves Gesner to defend it, so huffed away. . . .’ ‘So note, the true character of an industrious angler more deservedly falls upon Merrill and Faulkner, or rather Izaak Ouldham, a man that fished salmon with but three hairs at hook, whose collections and experiments were lost with himself,’—a matter much to be regretted. It will be observed, of course, that hair was then used, and gut is first mentioned for angling purposes by Mr. Pepys. Indeed, the flies which Scott was hunting for when he found the lost Ms. of the first part of *Waverley* are tied on horse-hairs. They are in the possession of the descendants of Scott’s friend, Mr. William Laidlaw. The curious angler, consulting Franck, will find that his salmon flies are much like our own, but less variegated. Scott justly remarks that, while Walton was habit and repute a bait-fisher, even Cotton knows nothing of salmon. Scott wished that Walton had made the northern tour, but Izaak would have been sadly to seek, running after a fish down a gorge of the Shin or the Brora, and the discomforts of the north would have finished his career. In Scotland he would not have found fresh sheets smelling of lavender.

Walton was in London ‘in the dangerous year 1655.’ He speaks of his meeting Bishop Sanderson there, ‘in sad-coloured clothes, and, God knows, far from being costly.’ The friends were driven by wind and rain into ‘a cleanly house, where we had bread, cheese, ale, and a fire, for our ready money. The rain and wind were so obliging to me, as to force our stay there for at least an hour, to my great content and advantage; for in that time he made to me many useful observations of the present times with much clearness and conscientious freedom.’ It was a year of Republican and Royalist conspiracies: the clergy were persecuted and banished from London.

No more is known of Walton till the happy year 1660, when the king came to his own again, and Walton’s Episcopal friends to their palaces. Izaak produced an ‘Eglog,’ on May 29:—

‘The king! The king’s returned! And now
Let’s banish all sad thoughts, and sing:
We have our laws, and have our king.’

If Izaak was so eccentric as to go to bed sober on that glorious twenty-ninth of May, I greatly misjudge him. But he grew elderly. In 1661 he chronicles the deaths of ‘honest Nat. and R. Roe,—they are gone, and with them most of my pleasant hours, even as a shadow that passeth away, and returns not.’ On April 17, 1662, Walton lost his second wife: she died at Worcester, probably on a visit to Bishop Morley. In the same year, the bishop was translated to Winchester, where the palace became Izaak’s home. The Itchen (where, no doubt, he angled with worm) must have been his constant haunt. He was busy with his *Life of Richard Hooker* (1665). The peroration, as it were, was altered and expanded in 1670, and this is but one example of Walton’s care of his periods. One beautiful passage he is known to have rewritten several times, till his ear was satisfied with its cadences. In 1670 he published his *Life of George Herbert*. ‘I wish, if God shall be so pleased, that I may be so happy as to die like him.’ In 1673, in a Dedication of the third edition of *Reliquiae Wottonianae*, Walton alludes to his friendship with a much younger and gayer man than himself, Charles Cotton (born 1630), the friend of Colonel Richard Lovelace,

and of Sir John Suckling: the translator of Scarron's travesty of Virgil, and of Montaigne's *Essays*. Cotton was a roisterer, a man at one time deep in debt, but he was a Royalist, a scholar, and an angler. The friendship between him and Walton is creditable to the freshness of the old man and to the kindness of the younger, who, to be sure, laughed at Izaak's heavily dubbed London flies. 'In him,' says Cotton, 'I have the happiness to know the worthiest man, and to enjoy the best and the truest friend any man ever had.' We are reminded of Johnson with Langton and Topham Beauclerk. Meanwhile Izaak the younger had grown up, was educated under Dr. Fell at Christ Church, and made the Grand Tour in 1675, visiting Rome and Venice. In March 1676 he proceeded M.A. and took Holy Orders. In this year Cotton wrote his treatise on fly-fishing, to be published with Walton's new edition; and the famous fishing house on the Dove, with the blended initials of the two friends, was built. In 1678, Walton wrote his *Life of Sanderson*. . . . 'Tis now too late to wish that my life may be like his, for I am in the eighty-fifth year of my age, but I humbly beseech Almighty God that my death may be; and do as earnestly beg of every reader to say Amen!' He wrote, in 1678, a preface to *Thealma and Clearchus* (1683). The poem is attributed to John Chalkhill, a Fellow of Winchester College, who died, a man of eighty, in 1679. Two of his songs are in *The Compleat Angler*. Probably the attribution is right: Chalkhill's tomb commemorates a man after Walton's own heart, but some have assigned the volume to Walton himself. Chalkhill is described, on the title-page, as 'an acquaintant and friend of Edmund Spencer,' which is impossible. {4}

On August 9, 1683, Walton wrote his will, 'in the neintyeth year of my age, and in perfect memory, for which praised be God.' He professes the Anglican faith, despite 'a very long and very trew friendship for some of the Roman Church.' His worldly estate he has acquired 'neither by falsehood or flattery or the extreme crewelty of the law of this nation.' His property was in two houses in London, the lease of Norington farm, a farm near Stafford, besides books, linen, and a hanging cabinet inscribed with his name, now, it seems, in the possession of Mr. Elkin Mathews. A bequest is made of money for coals to the poor of Stafford, 'every last weike in Janewary, or in every first weike in Febrewary; I say then, because I take that time to be the hardest and most pinching times with pore people.' To the Bishop of Winchester he bequeathed a ring with the posy, 'A Mite for a Million.' There are other bequests, including ten pounds to 'my old friend, Mr. Richard Marriott,' Walton's bookseller. This good man died in peace with his publisher, leaving him also a ring. A ring was left to a lady of the Portsmouth family, 'Mrs. Doro. Wallop.'

Walton died, at the house of his son-in-law, Dr. Hawkins, in Winchester, on Dec. 15, 1683: he is buried in the south aisle of the Cathedral. The Cathedral library possesses many of Walton's books, with his name written in them. {5} His *Eusebius* (1636) contains, on the fly-leaf, repetitions, in various forms, of one of his studied passages. Simple as he seems, he is a careful artist in language.

Such are the scanty records, and scantier relics, of a very long life. Circumstances and inclination combined to make Walpole choose the *fallentis semita vitae*. Without ambition, save to be in the society of good men, he passed through turmoil, ever companioned by content. For him existence had its trials: he saw all that he held most sacred overthrown; laws broken up; his king publicly murdered; his friends outcasts; his worship proscribed; he himself suffered in property from the raid of the Kirk into England. He underwent many bereavements: child after child he lost, but content he did not lose, nor sweetness of heart, nor belief. His was one of those happy characters which are never found disassociated from unquestioning faith. Of old he might have been the ancient religious Athenian in the opening of Plato's *Republic*, or Virgil's aged gardener. The happiness of such natures would be incomplete without religion, but only by such tranquil and blessed souls can religion be accepted with no doubt or scruple, no dread, and no misgiving. In his Preface to *Thealma and Clearchus* Walton writes, and we may use his own words about his own works: 'The Reader will here find such various events and rewards of innocent

Truth and undissembled Honesty, as is like to leave in him (if he be a good-natured reader) more sympathising and virtuous impressions, than ten times so much time spent in impertinent, critical, and needless disputes about religion.' Walton relied on authority; on 'a plain, unperplexed catechism.' In an age of the strangest and most dissident theological speculations, an age of Quakers, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Fifth Monarchy Men, Covenanters, Independents, Gibbites, Presbyterians, and what not, Walton was true to the authority of the Church of England, with no prejudice against the ancient Catholic faith. As Gesner was his authority for pickerel weed begetting pike, so the Anglican bishops were security for Walton's creed.

To him, if we may say so, it was easy to be saved, while Bunyan, a greater humorist, could be saved only in following a path that skirted madness, and 'as by fire.' To Bunyan, Walton would have seemed a figure like his own Ignorance; a pilgrim who never stuck in the Slough of Despond, nor met Apollyon in the Valley of the Shadow, nor was captive in Doubting Castle, nor stoned in Vanity Fair. And of Bunyan, Walton would have said that he was among those Nonconformists who 'might be sincere, well-meaning men, whose indiscreet zeal might be so like charity, as thereby to cover a multitude of errors.' To Walton there seemed spiritual solace in remembering 'that we have comforted and been helpful to a dejected or distressed family.' Bunyan would have regarded this belief as a heresy, and (theoretically) charitable deeds 'as filthy rags.' Differently constituted, these excellent men accepted religion in different ways. Christian bows beneath a burden of sin; Piscator beneath a basket of trout. Let us be grateful for the diversities of human nature, and the dissimilar paths which lead Piscator and Christian alike to the City not built with hands. Both were seekers for a City which to have sought through life, in patience, honesty, loyalty, and love, is to have found it. Of Walton's book we may say:—

'Laudis amore tumes? Sunt certa piacula quae te
Ter pure lecto poterunt recreare libello.'

WALTON AS A BIOGRAPHER

It was probably by his *Lives*, rather than, in the first instance, by his *Angler*, that Walton won the liking of Dr. Johnson, whence came his literary resurrection. It is true that Moses Browne and Hawkins, both friends of Johnson's, edited *The Compleat Angler* before 1775-1776, when we find Dr. Home of Magdalene, Oxford, contemplating a 'benoted' edition of the *Lives*, by Johnson's advice. But the Walton of the *Lives* is, rather than the Walton of the *Angler*, the man after Johnson's own heart. The *Angler* is 'a picture of my own disposition' on holidays. The *Lives* display the same disposition in serious moods, and in face of the eternal problems of man's life in society. Johnson, we know, was very fond of biography, had thought much on the subject, and, as Boswell notes, 'varied from himself in talk,' when he discussed the measure of truth permitted to biographers. 'If a man is to write a *Panegyrick*, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write a *Life*, he must represent it as it really was.' Peculiarities were not to be concealed, he said, and his own were not veiled by Boswell. 'Nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.' 'They only who live with a man can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination; and few people who have lived with a man know what to remark about him.' Walton had lived much in the society of his subjects, Donne and Wotton; with Sanderson he had a slighter acquaintance; George Herbert he had only met; Hooker, of course, he had never seen in the flesh. It is obvious to every reader that his biographies of Donne and Wotton are his best. In Donne's Life he feels that he is writing of an English St. Austin,—'for I think none was so like him before his conversion; none so like St. Ambrose after it: and if his youth had the infirmities of the one, his age had the excellencies of the other; the learning and holiness of both.'

St. Augustine made free confession of his own infirmities of youth. With great delicacy Walton lets Donne also confess himself, printing a letter in which he declines to take Holy Orders, because his course of life when very young had been too notorious. Delicacy and tact are as notable in Walton's account of Donne's poverty, melancholy, and conversion through the blessed means of gentle King Jamie. Walton had an awful loyalty, a sincere reverence for the office of a king. But wherever he introduces King James, either in his Donne or his Wotton, you see a subdued version of the King James of *The Fortunes of Nigel*. The pedantry, the good nature, the touchiness, the humour, the nervousness, are all here. It only needs a touch of the king's broad accent to set before us, as vividly as in Scott, the interviews with Donne, and that singular scene when Wotton, disguised as Octavio Baldi, deposits his long rapier at the door of his majesty's chamber. Wotton, in Florence, was warned of a plot to murder James VI. The duke gave him 'such Italian antidotes against poison as the Scots till then had been strangers to': indeed, there is no antidote for a dirk, and the Scots were not poisoners. Introduced by Lindsay as 'Octavio Baldi,' Wotton found his nervous majesty accompanied by four Scottish nobles. He spoke in Italian; then, drawing near, hastily whispered that he was an Englishman, and prayed for a private interview. This, by some art, he obtained, delivered his antidotes, and, when James succeeded Elizabeth, rose to high favour. Izaak's suppressed humour makes it plain that Wotton had acted the scene for him, from the moment of leaving the long rapier at the door. Again, telling how Wotton, in his peaceful hours as Provost of Eton, intended to write a Life of Luther, he says that King Charles diverted him from his purpose to attempting a History of England 'by a persuasive loving violence (to which may be added a promise of £500 a year).' He likes these parenthetic touches, as in his description of Donne, 'always preaching to himself, like an angel from

a cloud,—*but in none.*’ Again, of a commendation of one of his heroes he says, ‘it is a known truth,—though it be in verse.’

A memory of the days when Izaak was an amorist, and shone in love ditties, appears thus. He is speaking of Donne:—

‘Love is a flattering mischief . . . a passion that carries us to commit errors with as much ease as whirlwinds remove feathers.’

‘The tears of lovers, or beauty dressed in sadness, are observed to have in them a charming sadness, and to become very often too strong to be resisted.’

These are examples of Walton’s sympathy: his power of portrait-drawing is especially attested by his study of Donne, as the young gallant and poet, the unhappy lover, the man of state out of place and neglected; the heavily burdened father, the conscientious scholar, the charming yet ascetic preacher and divine, the saint who, dying, makes himself in his own shroud, an emblem of mortality.

As an example of Walton’s style, take the famous vision of Dr. Donne in Paris. He had left his wife expecting her confinement:—

‘Two days after their arrival there, Mr. Donne was left alone in that room in which Sir Robert and he, and some other friends, had dined together. To this place Sir Robert returned within half an hour, and as he left, so he found Mr. Donne alone, but in such an ecstasy, and so altered as to his looks, as amazed Sir Robert to behold him; insomuch that he earnestly desired Mr. Donne to declare what had befallen him in the short time of his absence. To which Mr. Donne was not able to make a present answer: but, after a long and perplexed pause, did at last say, “I have seen a dreadful vision since I saw you: I have seen my dear wife pass twice by me through this room, with her hair hanging about her shoulders, and a dead child in her arms; this I have seen since I saw you.” To which Sir Robert replied, “Sure, sir, you have slept since I saw you; and this is the result of some melancholy dream, which I desire you to forget, for you are now awake.” To which Mr. Donne’s reply was, “I cannot be surer that I now live than that I have not slept since I saw you: and I am as sure that at her second appearing she stopped, and looked me in the face, and vanished . . .” And upon examination, the abortion proved to be the same day, and about the very hour, that Mr. Donne affirmed he saw her pass by him in his chamber.

‘ . . . And though it is most certain that two lutes, being both strung and tuned to an equal pitch, and then one played upon, the other, that is not touched, being laid upon a table at a fit distance, will (like an echo to a trumpet) warble a faint audible harmony in answer to the same tune; yet many will not believe there is any such thing as a sympathy of souls, and I am well pleased that every reader do enjoy his own opinion . . . ’

He then appeals to authority, as of Brutus, St. Monica, Saul, St. Peter:—

‘More observations of this nature, and inferences from them, might be made to gain the relation a firmer belief; but I forbear: lest I, that intended to be but a relator, may be thought to be an engaged person for the proving what was related to me, . . . by one who had it from Dr. Donne.’

Walpole was no Boswell; worthy Boswell would have cross-examined Dr. Donne himself.

Of dreams he writes:—

‘Common dreams are but a senseless paraphrase on our waking thoughts, or of the business of the day past, or are the result of our over engaged affections when we betake ourselves to rest.’ . . . Yet ‘Almighty God (though the causes of dreams be often unknown) hath even in these latter times also, by a certain illumination of the soul in sleep, discovered many things that human wisdom could not foresee.’

Walton is often charged with superstition, and the enlightened editor of the eighteenth century excised all the scene of Mrs. Donne’s wraith as too absurd. But Walton is a very fair witness. Donne, a man of imagination, was, he tells us, in a perturbed anxiety about Mrs. Donne. The event was after dinner. The story is, by Walton’s admission, at second hand. Thus, in the language of the learned in such matters, the tale is ‘not evidential.’ Walton explains it, if true, as a result of ‘sympathy of souls’—what is now called telepathy. But he is content that every man should have his own opinion. In the same way he writes of the seers in the Wotton family: ‘God did seem to speak to many of this family’ (the Wottons) ‘in dreams,’ and Thomas Wotton’s dreams ‘did usually prove true, both in foretelling things to come, and discovering things past.’ Thus he dreamed that five townsmen and poor scholars were robbing the University chest at Oxford. He mentioned this in a letter to his son at Oxford, and the letter, arriving just after the robbery, led to the discovery of the culprits. Yet Walton states the causes and nature of dreams in general with perfect sobriety and clearness. His tales of this sort were much to Johnson’s mind, as to Southey’s. But Walton cannot fairly be called ‘superstitious,’ granting the age in which he lived. Visions like Dr. Donne’s still excite curious comment.

To that cruel superstition of his age, witchcraft, I think there is no allusion in Walton. Almost as uncanny, however, is his account of Donne’s preparation for death

‘Several charcoal fires being first made in his large study, he brought with him into that place his winding-sheet in his hand, and having put off all his clothes, had this sheet put on him, and so tied with knots at his head and feet, and his hands so placed as dead bodies are usually fitted, to be shrouded and put into their coffin or grave. Upon this urn he thus stood, with his eyes shut, and with so much of the sheet turned aside as might show his lean, pale, and death-like face, which was purposely turned towards the east, from which he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus. In this posture he was drawn at his just height, and, when the picture was fully finished, he caused it to be set by his bedside, where it continued, and became his hourly object till death.’

Thus Donne made ready to meet the common fate:—

‘That body, which once was a temple of the Holy Ghost, is now become a small quantity of Christian ashes. But I shall see it reanimated.’

This is the very voice of Faith. Walton was, indeed, an assured believer, and to his mind, the world offered no insoluble problem. But we may say of him, in the words of a poet whom he quotes:—

‘Many a one
Owes to his country his religion;
And in another would as strongly grow
Had but his nurse or mother taught him so.’

In his account of Donne's early theological studies of the differences between Rome and Anglicanism, it is manifest that Izaak thinks these differences matters of no great moment. They are not for simple men to solve: Donne has taken that trouble for him; besides, he is an Englishman, and

‘Owes to his country his religion.’

He will be no Covenanter, and writes with disgust of an intruded Scots minister, whose first action was to cut down the ancient yews in the churchyard. Izaak's religion, and all his life, were rooted in the past, like the yew-tree. He is what he calls ‘the passive peaceable Protestant.’ ‘The common people in this nation,’ he writes, ‘think they are not wise unless they be busy about what they understand not, and especially about religion’; as Bunyan was busy at that very moment. In Walton's opinion, the plain facts of religion, and of consequent morality, are visible as the sun at noonday. The vexed questions are for the learned, and are solved variously by them. A man must follow authority, as he finds it established in his own country, unless he has the learning and genius of a Donne. To these, or equivalents for these in a special privy inspiration, ‘the common people’ of his day, and ever since Elizabeth's day, were pretending. This was the inevitable result of the translation of the Bible into English. Walton quotes with approval a remark of a witty Italian on a populace which was universally occupied with Free-will and Predestination. The fruits Walton saw, in preaching Corporals, Antinomian Trusty Tompkinses, Quakers who ran about naked, barking, Presbyterians who cut down old yew-trees, and a Parliament of Saints. Walton took no kind of joy in the general emancipation of the human spirit. The clergy, he confessed, were not what he wished them to be, but they were better than Quakers, naked and ululant. To love God and his neighbour, and to honour the king, was Walton's unperplexed religion. Happily he was saved from the view of the errors and the fall of James II., a king whom it was not easy to honour. His social philosophy was one of established rank, tempered by equity and Christian charity. If anything moves his tranquil spirit, it is the remorseless greed of him who takes his fellow-servant by the throat and exacts the uttermost penny. How Sanderson saved a poor farmer from the greed of an extortionate landlord, Walton tells in his *Life of the prelate*, adding this reflection:—

‘It may be noted that in this age there are a sort of people so unlike the God of mercy, so void of the bowels of pity, that they love only themselves and their children; love them so as not to be concerned whether the rest of mankind waste their days in sorrow or shame; people that are cursed with riches, and a mistake that nothing but riches can make them and theirs happy.’

Thus Walton appears, this is ‘the picture of his own disposition,’ in the *Lives*. He is a kind of antithesis to John Knox. Men like Walton are not to be approached for new ‘ideas.’ They will never make a new world at a blow: they will never enable us to understand, but they can teach us to endure, and even to enjoy, the world. Their example is alluring:—

‘Even the ashes of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.’

THE COMPLEAT ANGLER

Franck, as we saw, called Walton 'a plagiary.' He was a plagiary in the same sense as Virgil and Lord Tennyson and Robert Burns, and, indeed, Homer, and all poets. *The Compleat Angler*, the father of so many books, is the child of a few. Walton not only adopts the opinions and advice of the authors whom he cites, but also follows the manner, to a certain extent, of authors whom he does not quote. His very exordium, his key-note, echoes (as Sir Harris Nicolas observes) the opening of *A Treatise of the Nature of God* (London, 1599). The *Treatise* starts with a conversation between a gentleman and a scholar: it commences:—

Gent. Well overtaken, sir!

Scholar. You are welcome, gentleman.

A more important source is *The Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle*, commonly attributed to Dame Juliana Barnes (printed at Westminster, 1496). A manuscript, probably of 1430-1450, has been published by Mr. Satchell (London, 1883). This book may be a translation of an unknown French original. It opens:—

'Soloman in hys paraboles seith that a glad spirit maket a flowryng age. That ys to sey, a feyre age and a longe' (like Walton's own), 'and sith hyt ys so I aske this question, wyche bynne the menys and cause to reduce a man to a mery spryte.' The angler 'schall have hys holsom walke and mery at hys owne ease, and also many a sweyt eayr of divers erbis and flowres that schall make hym ryght hongre and well disposed in hys body. He schall heyr the melodies melodious of the ermony of byrde: he schall se also the yong swannes and signetes folowing ther eyroures, duckes, cootes, herons, and many other fowlys with ther brodys, wyche me semyt better then all the noyse of houndes, and blastes of hornes and other gamys that fawknars or hunters can make, and yf the angler take the fyssche, hardly then ys ther no man meryer then he in his sprites.'

This is the very 'sprite' of Walton; this has that vernal and matutinal air of opening European literature, full of birds' music, and redolent of dawn. This is the note to which the age following Walton would not listen.

In matter of fact, again, Izaak follows the ancient *Treatise*. We know his jury of twelve flies: the *Treatise* says:—

'These ben the xij flyes wyth whyche ye shall angle to the trought and graylling, and dubbe like as ye shall now here me tell.

'*Marche.* The donne fly, the body of the donne woll, and the wyngis of the pertryche. Another donne flye, the body of blacke woll, the wyngis of the blackyst drake; and the lay under the wynges and under the tayle.'

Walton has:—

‘The first is the dun fly in March: the body is made of dun wool, the wings of the partridge’s feathers. The second is another dun fly: the body of black wool; and the wings made of the black drake’s feathers, and of the feathers under his tail.’

Again, the *Treatise* has:—

Auguste. The drake fly. The body of black wull and lappyd abowte wyth blacke sylke: winges of the mayle of the blacke drake wyth a blacke heed.’

Walton has:—

‘The twelfth is the dark drake-fly, good in August: the body made with black wool, lapt about with black silk, his wings are made with the mail of the black drake, with a black head.’

This is word for word a transcript of the fifteenth century *Treatise*. But Izaak cites, not the ancient *Treatise*, but Mr. Thomas Barker. [\[6\]](#) Barker, in fact, gives many more, and more variegated flies than Izaak offers in the jury of twelve which he rendered, from the old *Treatise*, into modern English. Sir Harris Nicolas says that the jury is from Leonard Mascall’s *Booke of Fishing with Hooke and Line* (London, 1609), but Mascall merely stole from the fifteenth-century book. In Cotton’s practice, and that of *The Angler’s Vade Mecum* (1681), flies were as numerous as among ourselves, and had, in many cases, the same names. Walton absurdly bids us ‘let no part of the line touch the water, but the fly only.’ Barker says, ‘Let the fly light first into the water.’ Both men insist on fishing down stream, which is, of course, the opposite of the true art, for fish lie with their heads up stream, and trout are best approached from behind. Cotton admits of fishing both up and down, as the wind and stream may serve: and, of course, in heavy water, in Scotland, this is all very well. But none of the old anglers, to my knowledge, was a dry-fly fisher, and Izaak was no fly-fisher at all. He took what he said from Mascall, who took it from the old *Treatise*, in which, it is probable, Walton read, and followed the pleasant and to him congenial spirit of the mediæval angler. All these writers tooled with huge rods, fifteen or eighteen feet in length, and Izaak had apparently never used a reel. For salmon, he says, ‘some use a wheel about the middle of their rods or near their hand, which is to be observed better by seeing one of them, than by a large demonstration of words.’

Mr. Westwood has made a catalogue of books cited by Walton in his *Compleat Angler*. There is Ælian (who makes the first known reference to fly-fishing); Aldrovandus, *De Piscibus* (1638); Dubravius, *De Piscibus* (1559); and the English translation (1599) Gerard’s *Herball* (1633); Gesner, *De Piscibus* (s.a.) and *Historia Naturalis* (1558); Phil. Holland’s *Pliny* (1601); Rondelet, *De Piscibus Marines* (1554); Silvianus *Aquatilium Historiæ* (1554): these nearly exhaust Walton’s supply of authorities in natural history. He was devoted, as we saw, to authority, and had a childlike faith in the fantastic theories which date from Pliny. ‘Pliny hath an opinion that many flies have their birth, or being, from a dew that in the spring falls upon the leaves of trees.’ It is a pious opinion! Izaak is hardly so superstitious as the author of *The Angler’s Vade Mecum*. I cannot imagine him taking ‘Man’s fat and cat’s fat, of each half an ounce, mummy finely powdered, three drains,’ and a number of other abominations, to ‘make an Oyntment according to Art, and when you Angle, anoint 8 inches of the line next the Hook therewith.’ Or, ‘Take the Bones and Scull of a Dead-man, at the opening of a Grave, and beat the same into Pouder, and put of this Pouder in the Moss wherein you keep your Worms,—but others like Grave Earth as well.’ No doubt grave earth is quite as efficacious.

These remarks show how Izaak was equipped in books and in practical information: it follows that his book is to be read, not for instruction, but for human pleasure.

So much for what Walton owed to others. For all the rest, for what has made him the favourite of schoolboys and sages, of poets and philosophers, he is indebted to none but his Maker and his genius. That he was a lover of Montaigne we know; and, had Montaigne been a fisher, he might have written somewhat like Izaak, but without the piety, the perfume, and the charm. There are authors whose living voices, if we know them in the flesh, we seem to hear in our ears as we peruse their works. Of such was Mr. Jowett, sometime Master of Balliol College, a good man, now with God. It has ever seemed to me that friends of Walton must thus have heard his voice as they read him, and that it reaches us too, though faintly. Indeed, we have here ‘a kind of picture of his own disposition,’ as he tells us Piscator is the Walton whom honest Nat. and R. Roe and Sir Henry Wotton knew on fishing-days. The book is a set of confessions, without their commonly morbid turn. ‘I write not for money, but for pleasure,’ he says; methinks he drove no hard bargain with good Richard Marriott, nor was careful and troubled about royalties on his eighteenpenny book. He regards scoffers as ‘an abomination to mankind,’ for indeed even Dr. Johnson, who, a century later, set Moses Browne on reprinting *The Compleat Angler*, broke his jest on our suffering tribe. ‘Many grave, serious men pity anglers,’ says Auceps, and Venator styles them ‘patient men,’ as surely they have great need to be. For our toil, like that of the husbandman, hangs on the weather that Heaven sends, and on the flies that have their birth or being from a kind of dew, and on the inscrutable caprice of fish; also, in England, on the miller, who giveth or withholdeth at his pleasure the very water that is our element. The inquiring rustic who shambles up erect when we are lying low among the reeds, even he disposes of our fortunes, with whom, as with all men, we must be patient, dwelling ever—

‘With close-lipped Patience for our only friend,
Sad Patience, too near neighbour of Despair.’

O the tangles, more than Gordian, of gut on a windy day! O bitter east wind that bloweth down stream! O the young ducks that, swimming between us and the trout, contend with him for the blue duns in their season! O the hay grass behind us that entangles the hook! O the rocky wall that breaks it, the boughs that catch it; the drought that leaves the salmon-stream dry, the floods that fill it with turbid, impossible waters! Alas for the knot that breaks, and for the iron that bends; for the lost landing-net, and the gillie with the gaff that scrapes the fish! Izaak believed that fish could hear; if they can, their vocabulary must be full of strange oaths, for all anglers are not patient men. A malison on the trout that ‘bulge’ and ‘tail,’ on the salmon that ‘jiggers,’ or sulks, or lightly gambols over and under the line. These things, and many more, we anglers endure meekly, being patient men, and a light world fleers at us for our very virtue.

Izaak, of course, justifies us by the example of the primitive Christians, and, in the manner of the age, drowns opposition in a flood of erudition, out of place, but never pedantic; futile, yet diverting; erroneous, but not dull.

‘God is said to have spoken to a fish, but never to a beast.’ There is a modern Greek phrase, ‘By the first word of God, and the second of the fish.’ As for angling, ‘it is somewhat like poetry: men are to be born so’; and many are born to be both rhymers and anglers. But, unlike many poets, the angler resembles ‘the Adonis, or Darling of the Sea, so called because it is a loving and innocent fish,’ and a peaceful; ‘and truly, I think most anglers are so disposed to most of mankind.’

Our Saviour’s peculiar affection for fishermen is, of course, a powerful argument. And it is certain that

Peter, James, and John made converts among the twelve, for ‘the greater number of them were found together, fishing, by Jesus after His Resurrection.’ That Amos was ‘a good-natured, plain fisherman,’ only Walton had faith enough to believe. He fixes gladly on mentions of hooks in the Bible, omitting Homer, and that excellent Theocritean dialogue of the two old anglers and the fish of gold, which would have delighted Izaak, had he known it; but he was no great scholar. ‘And let me tell you that in the Scripture, angling is always taken in the best sense,’ though Izaak does not dwell on Tobias’s enormous capture. So he ends with commendations of angling by Wotton, and Davors (Dennys, more probably) author of *The Secrets of Angling* (1613). To these we may add Wordsworth, Thomson, Scott, Hogg, Stoddart, and many minor poets who loved the music of the reel.

Izaak next illustrates his idea of becoming mirth, which excludes ‘Scripture jests and lascivious jests,’ both of them highly distasteful to anglers. Then he comes to practice, beginning with chub, for which I have never angled, but have taken them by misadventure, with a salmon fly. Thence we proceed to trout, and to the charming scene of the milkmaid and her songs by Raleigh and Marlowe, ‘I think much better than the strong lines that are now in fashion in this critical age,’ for Walton, we have said, was the last of the Elizabethans and the new times were all for Waller and Dryden. ‘Chevy Chace’ and ‘Johnny Armstrong’ were dear to Walton as to Scott, but through a century these old favourites were to be neglected, save by Mr. Pepys and Addison. Indeed, there is no more curious proof of the great unhappy change then coming to make poetry a mechanic art, than the circumstance that Walton is much nearer to us, in his likings, than to the men between 1670 and 1770. Gay was to sing of angling, but in ‘the strong lines that are now in fashion.’ All this while Piscator has been angling with worm and minnow to no purpose, though he picks up ‘a trout will fill six reasonable bellies’ in the evening. So we leave them, after their ale, in fresh sheets that smell of lavender.’ Izaak’s practical advice is not of much worth; we read him rather for sentences like this: ‘I’ll tell you, scholar: when I sat last on this primrose bank, and looked down these meadows, I thought of them as Charles the Emperor did of the city of Florence, “that they were too pleasant to be looked upon, but only on holy-days.”’ He did not say, like Fox, when Burke spoke of ‘a seat under a tree, with a friend, a bottle, and a book,’ ‘Why a book?’ Izaak took his book with him—a practice in which, at least, I am fain to imitate this excellent old man.

As to salmon, Walton scarcely speaks a true word about their habits, except by accident. Concerning pike, he quotes the theory that they are bred by pickerel weed, only as what ‘some think.’ In describing the use of frogs as bait, he makes the famous, or infamous, remark, ‘Use him as though you loved him . . . that he may live the longer.’ A bait-fisher *may* be a good man, as Izaak was, but it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. As coarse fish are usually caught only with bait, I shall not follow Izaak on to this unholy and unfamiliar ground, wherein, none the less, grow flowers of Walton’s fancy, and the songs of the old poets are heard. *The Practical Angler*, indeed, is a book to be marked with flowers, marsh marigolds and fritillaries, and petals of the yellow iris, for the whole provokes us to content, and whispers that word of the apostle, ‘Study to be quiet.’

FISHING THEN AND NOW

Since Maui, the Maori hero, invented barbs for hooks, angling has been essentially one and the same thing. South Sea islanders spin for fish with a mother-of-pearl lure which is also a hook, and answers to our spoon. We have hooks of stone, and hooks of bone; and a bronze hook, found in Ireland, has the familiar Limerick bend. What Homer meant by making anglers throw 'the horn of an ox of the stall' into the sea, we can only guess; perhaps a horn minnow is meant, or a little sheath of horn to protect the line. Dead bait, live bait, and imitations of bait have all been employed, and Ælian mentions artificial Mayflies used, with a very short line, by the Illyrians.

But, while the same in essence, angling has been improved by human ingenuity. The Waltonian angler, and still more his English predecessors, dealt much in the home-made. The *Treatise* of the fifteenth century bids you make your 'Rodde' of a fair staff even of a six foot long or more, as ye list, of hazel, willow, or 'aspe' (ash?), and 'beke hym in an ovyn when ye bake, and let him cool and dry a four weeks or more.' The pith is taken out of him with a hot iron, and a yard of white hazel is similarly treated, also a fair shoot of blackthorn or crabtree for a top. The butt is bound with hoops of iron, the top is accommodated with a noose, a hair line is looped in the noose, and the angler is equipped. Splicing is not used, but the joints have holes to receive each other, and with this instrument 'ye may walk, and there is no man shall wit whereabout ye go.' Recipes are given for colouring and plaiting hair lines, and directions for forging hooks. 'The smallest quarell needles' are used for the tiniest hooks.

Barker (1651) makes the rod 'of a hasel of one piece, or of two pieces set together in the most convenient manner, light and gentle.' He recommends the use of a single hair next the fly,—'you shall have more rises,' which is true, 'and kill more fish,' which is not so likely. The most delicate striking is required with fine gut, and with a single hair there must be many breakages. For salmon, Barker uses a rod ten feet in the butt, 'that will carry a top of six foot pretty stiffe and strong.' The 'winder,' or reel, Barker illustrates with a totally unintelligible design. His salmon fly 'carries six wings'; perhaps he only means wings composed of six kinds of feathers, but here Franck is a better authority, his flies being sensible and sober in colour. Not many old salmon flies are in existence, nor have I seen more ancient specimens than a few, chiefly of peacocks' feathers, in the fly-leaf of a book at Abbotsford; they were used in Ireland by Sir Walter Scott's eldest son. The controversy as to whether fish can distinguish colours was unknown to our ancestors. I am inclined to believe that, for salmon, size, and perhaps shade, light or dark, with more or less of tinsel, are the only important points. Izaak stumbled on the idea of Mr. Stewart (author of *The Practical Angler*) saying, 'for the generality, three or four flies, neat, and rightly made, and not too big, serve for a trout in most rivers, all the summer.' Our ancestors, though they did not fish with the dry fly, were intent on imitating the insect on the water. As far as my own experience goes, if trout are feeding on duns, one dun will take them as well as another, if it be properly presented. But my friend Mr. Charles Longman tells me that, after failing with two trout, he examined the fly on the water, an olive dun, and found in his book a fly which exactly matched the natural insect in colour. With this he captured his brace.

Such incidents look as if trout were particular to a shade, but we can never be certain that the angler did not make an especially artful and delicate cast when he succeeded. Sir Herbert Maxwell intends to make

the experiment of using duns of impossible and unnatural colours; if he succeeds with these, on several occasions, as well as with orthodox flies, perhaps we may decide that trout do not distinguish hues. On a Sutherland loch, an angler found that trout would take flies of any colour, except that of a light-green leaf of a tree. This rejection decidedly looked as if even Sutherland loch trout exercised some discrimination. Often, on a loch, out of three flies they will favour one, and that, perhaps, not the trail fly. The best rule is: when you find a favourite fly on a salmon river, use it: its special favouritism may be a superstition, but, at all events, salmon do take it. We cannot afford to be always making experiments, but Mr. Herbert Spencer, busking his flies the reverse way, used certainly to be at least as successful with sea trout as his less speculative neighbours in Argyllshire.

In making rods, Walton is most concerned with painting them; 'I think a good top is worth preserving, or I had not taken care to keep a top above twenty years.' Cotton prefers rods 'made in Yorkshire,' having advanced from the home-made stage. His were spliced, and kept up all through the season, as he had his water at his own door, while Walton trudged to the Lee and other streams near London, when he was not fishing the Itchen, or Shawford Brook. *The Angler's Vade Mecum* recommends eighteen-foot rods: preferring a fir butt, fashioned by the arrow-maker, a hazel top, and a tip of whalebone. This authority, even more than Walton, deals in mysterious 'Oyntments' of gum ivy, horse-leek, asafoetida, man's fat, cat's fat, powdered skulls, and grave earth. A ghoulish body is the angler of the *Vade Mecum*. He recommends up-stream fishing, with worm, in a clear water, and so is a predecessor of Mr. Stewart. 'When you have hooked a good fish, have an especial care to keep the rod bent, lest he run to the end of the line' (he means, as does Walton, lest he pull the rod horizontal) 'and break either hook or hold.' An old owner of my copy adds, in manuscript, 'And hale him not to near ye top of the water, lest in flaskering he break ye line.'

This is a favourite device of sea trout, which are very apt to 'flasker' on the top of the water. The *Vade Mecum*, in advance of Walton on this point, recommends a swivel in minnow-fishing: but has no idea of an artificial minnow of silk. I have known an ingenious lady who, when the bodies of her phantom minnows gave out, in Norway, supplied their place successfully with bed-quilting artfully sewn. In fact, anything bright and spinning will allure fish, though in the upper Ettrick, where large trout exist, they will take the natural, but perhaps never the phantom or angel minnow. I once tried a spinning Alexandra fly over some large pond trout. They followed it eagerly, but never took hold, on the first day; afterwards they would not look at it at all. The *Vade Mecum* man, like Dr. Hamilton, recommends a light fly for a light day, a dark fly for a dark day and dark weather; others hold the converse opinion. Every one agrees that the smallness of the flies should be in proportion to the lowness of the water and the advance of summer. [\[7\]](#)

Our ancestors, apparently, used only one fly at a time; in rapid rivers, with wet fly, two, three, or, in lochs like Loch Leven, even four are employed. To my mind more than two only cause entanglements of the tackle. The old English anglers knew, of course, little or nothing of loch fishing, using bait in lakes. The great length of their rods made reels less necessary, and they do not seem to have waded much. A modern angler, casting upwards, from the middle of the stream, with a nine-foot rod, would have astonished Walton. They dealt with trout less educated than ours, and tooled with much coarser and heavier implements. They had no fine scruples about bait of every kind, any more than the Scots have, and Barker loved a lob-worm, fished on the surface, in a dark night. He was a pot-fisher, and had been a cook. He could catch a huge basket of trout, and dress them in many different ways,—broyled, calvored hot with anchovaes sauce, boyled, soused, stewed, fried, battered with eggs, roasted, baked, calvored cold, and marilled, or potted, also marrionated. Barker instructs my Lord Montague to fish with salmon roe, a thing prohibited and very popular in Scotland. 'If I had known it but twenty years agoe, I would have gained a

hundred pounds onely with that bait. I am bound in duty to divulge it to your Honour, and not to carry it to my grave with me. I do desire that men of quality should have it that delight in that pleasure: the greedy angler will murmur at me, but for that I care not.' Barker calls salmon roe 'an experience I have found of late: the best bait for a trout that I have seen in all my time,' and it is the most deadly, in the eddy of a turbid water. Perhaps trout would take caviare, which is not forbidden by the law of the land. Any unscrupulous person may make the experiment, and argue the matter out with the water-bailie. But, in my country, it is more usual to duck that official, and go on netting, sniggling, salmon-roeing, and destroying sport in the sacred name of Liberty.

Scots wha fish wi' salmon roe,
Scots wha sniggle as ye go,
Wull ye stand the Bailie? No!
Let the limmer die!

Now's the day and now's the time,
Poison a' the burns wi' lime,
Fishing fair's a dastard crime,
We're for fishing *free*!

'Ydle persones sholde have but lyttyl mesure in the sayd dysporte of fysshynge,' says our old *Treatise*, but in southern Scotland they have left few fish to dysporte with, and the trout is like to become an extinct animal. Izaak would especially have disliked Fishing Competitions, which, by dint of the multitude of anglers, turn the contemplative man's recreation into a crowded skirmish; and we would repeat his remark, 'the rabble herd themselves together' (a dozen in one pool, often), 'and endeavour to govern and act in spite of authority.'

For my part, had I a river, I would gladly let all honest anglers that use the fly cast line in it, but, where there is no protection, then nets, poison, dynamite, slaughter of fingerlings, and unholy baits devastate the fish, so that 'Free Fishing' spells no fishing at all. This presses most hardly on the artisan who fishes fair, a member of a large class with whose pastime only a churl would wish to interfere. We are now compelled, if we would catch fish, to seek Tarpon in Florida, Mahseer in India: it does not suffice to 'stretch our legs up Tottenham Hill.'

FOOTNOTES

- {1} The MS. was noticed in *The Freebooter*, Oct. 18, 1823, but Sir Harris Nicolas could not find it, where it was said to be, among the Lansdowne MSS.
- {2} The quip about 'goods and chattels' was revived later, in the case of a royal mistress.
- {3} Sir Walter was fond of trout-fishing, and in his *Quarterly* review of Davy's *Salmonia*, describes his pleasure in wading Tweed, in 'Tom Fool's light' at the end of a hot summer day. In salmon-fishing he was no expert, and said to Lockhart that he must have Tom Purdie to aid him in his review of *Salmonia*. The picturesqueness of salmon-spearing by torchlight seduced Scott from the legitimate sport.
- {4} There is an edition by Singer, with a frontispiece by Wainewright, the poisoner. London, 1820.
- {5} Nicolas, I. clv.
- {6} *Barker's Delight; or, The Art of Angling*. 1651, 1657, 1659, London.
- {7} I have examined all the Angling works of the period known to me. Gilbert's *Angler's Delight* (1676) is a mere pamphlet; William Gilbert, gent., pilfers from Walton, without naming him, and has literally nothing original or meritorious. The book is very scarce. My own copy is 'uncut,' but incomplete, lacking the directions for fishing 'in Hackney River.' Gervase Markham, prior to Walton, is a compiler rather than an original authority on angling.

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