

A PARISIAN FISHING GROUND

BY R. F. HEMENWAY.



“THIS not all of fishing to fish,” Thaddeus Norris used to say. The remark suggests brawling brooks, crystal water, overhanging foliage, green, damp mosses and all the beautiful phenomena of nature, together with the mid-day meal and the favorite pipe, whose large bowl held a “good charge” and whose

short stem brought the fragrant fumes gratefully near one's nose, But the big, benevolent heart that loved to be quiet and “go a-fishing” took in all, and would undoubtedly include the placid Parisian anglers who wait so patiently on the quays of the Seine, as well as his own countrymen. And the wonderful history of the French capital would have interested him as deeply as the natural beauty of the banks of his native American fishing grounds.

How unlike a river is the Seine! It has a river's graceful curves and perhaps its banks were once fringed with verdure. But the always perverse currents are now confined between substantial, sloping embankments of stone or splendid broad quays piled high with merchandise. The water is green, but with a milky cloudiness contributed largely by the *blanchisseries* and bathhouses. The surface is continually churned by boats of the two lines of Bateaux Parisiens, and heaves and splashes over stone slants, slippery with shiny green moss and reeking with moisture. Laboring tugs breast the current with tows of deep-loaded canal-boats, shrilly screeching a warning as they approach a turn or a bridge, and now and then an adventurous oarsman tempts the dangers of the crowded channel where steamers neither turn nor stop for anything smaller than themselves. Everywhere is life and action on the river and on the quays. Only the fisherman is quiet, silently, patiently watching his float.

The anglers include all ages, all classes

and both sexes. They fish all days and all hours. They have all sorts of rig and as many degrees of luck. There are always more spectators than fishermen and more fishermen than fish. A catch is an event. A slimy, wriggling little thing not more than three inches long will invariably be held in the air long enough to attract attention. The angler is looked upon as an expert and wins the admiration of the crowd. One day at the Pont de la Concorde a young fellow caught a reddish hued fish of about half a pound. It came near being the end of him. People rushed down from the bridge and the sidewalk of the Quai de la Conférence, and almost crowded him into the water. The throng choked the gangways to the steamboat *embarcadere* and a policeman was obliged to clear the way.

The favorite rod is a cane contrivance of telescopic capabilities. When closed it makes a small, neat bundle and when extended it is about nine feet long, possesses a good taper, is strong enough for its work and very light. The stores on the quays sell other rods of which the instrument *de luxe* is an American split bamboo. The lines that one sees are most commonly of silkworm gut. A bunch of one hundred pieces, each about eighteen inches long, costs one to two francs in the stores, or a better quality sells for four francs for an equal number. First-class tackle stores in New York ask not less than fifty cents for a nine-foot trout leader of as good quality as a gut line, which in Paris can be made for less than a franc. Skillfully knotted, it makes a dainty line. One has no need, for a reel. The hooks are infinitesimal. Bait is sold in the stores or in little kiosks on the quays. Maggots are the favorite, bred in red and white by processes unnecessary to consider. They are sold in boxes having perforated tops resembling ladies' *bonbonnières*. Liquid lures are also popular. One fisherman has an electric contrivance which sounds a bell when he has a bite. Others, perhaps less fortunately endowed with this world's goods, content themselves with tiny quill bobs, gayly painted. In every detail the rig is *petite*, bright, neat and essentially *comme il faut*. One pities

the bad taste of the little fishes of the Seine that prefer the river's murky depths to such pretty tackle.

There is no discrimination as to the devotees of the gentle art. Boys in chic costumes from the Champs Elysées elbow for places on the quay alongside of gamins from Montmartre, through the holes of whose ragged trousers a portion of undergarment waves defiance to confinement like the flag of a frightened Virginia deer. Hard-looking youths, whose features tell of a subsistence gained more or less by the exercise of wits, watch moodily beside unsophisticated students from the Sorbonne, freshly arrived from the provinces. And the older men like it too. Worthies, in white nightrobe-like blouses protecting other clothing and telling of economical habits, exchange bait with blue-jeaned laborers whose intentness upon their bobs suggests dependence upon their luck for the coming meal. One exquisite has a nice clean towel with which he wipes from his hands the Seine water and the smell of fish and bait; another, a natty case whose orderliness is as much his pride as his catch. Some keep their fish alive and others unconcernedly toss them into a net to gasp and die on the stones. But whatever their outfit they fish industriously, unconscious of all but the tantalizing bit of a gay bob dancing on the water.

If one is fortunate in his friendships he secures a seat in a small boat and drops his hook in the shade of one of the great floating bathhouses, perhaps at the Hironnelles. It is a family party and the madame knits serenely while her husband and the guest fish. Another couple prefer a place on the quay. In the man's mind it is probably a better "place." What fisherman does not have his favorite "place," a spot where he has sometimes been lucky and which he flatters himself no one else knows? The wife brushes off the stone with her apron and, careless of display, gathers her draperies about her ankles, seating herself beside her better half, feet hanging over the water. Always industrious, she is as likely to take out a stocking to darn as anything else. Nor is the river scene without sentiment. Very close beside a young fellow at the Pont des Arts a girl is seated on the quay. She is not particularly interested in fishing, though she tries to be. She

puts a hand on his shoulder and leans her cheek upon it, pensively watching the little bob, the water, the passing boats, the mansions opposite. She is dreaming. A shrug of the shoulder rudely destroys her air castle. How can one fish with a girl hanging on one? There is a time for cooing and billing and a time for fishing.

Elsewhere the fishermen are in groups doing more talking than fishing, or standing silent and alone under the arches of the splendid bridges, or distributed along the quays. Of a Sunday morning in summer one may often see fifty rods on the quays of the Ile de la Cité. This is a favorite resort, possibly by reason of the situation between two arms of the Seine with the current on the north and the still water of the canal on the south. But from one of the little steamboats one may see a similar line of rods on both sides of the river from Charenton to Auteuil.

On the Seine it is especially true that "it is not all of fishing to fish." Physically considered, the catches, provided there are catches, are not important. If one wants to study ichthyology he may learn 'more in an hour at the aquarium of the Jardin des Plantes, the Trocadero, or the Jardin d'Acclimation than on the Seine quays in a lifetime. And if he regards the fish in a more material aspect any one of the little restaurants along the quays will, for a franc, serve the customer with fried sole in a manner to sustain fully its reputation as a Paris specialty. Those correlative pleasures of fishing which Thad Norris alludes to lie in the monuments of history. One feels perfectly at liberty therefore, while waiting for bites, to go off and explore the neighborhood which has been immortalized by Lamartine, Hugo, Balzac and Zola, and where every street and house and stone has a story.

One of the finest views of the Seine is at the head of Ile St. Louis where the boys scramble over the charcoal barges and the curious market boats from central France, and perch on the timbers of the wooden footbridge which continues Quai de Bethune across to Quai Henri IV. To the south is the foliage of the Jardin des Plantes, the low buildings of the Halles aux Vins and the Orleans station. If wine were food, the Parisians would have had no need to

surrender to the Germans by reason of hunger, so large is the stock constantly carried at the Halles aux Vins and at the Entrepôts Général on the Bercy Quai opposite. To the north stretch the magnificent Bercy quays, in the foreground broken by the entrance of the Lyons canal, into which a tug is pulling a queue of canalboats.

Avoiding the ghastly suggestions of the Morgue, the Quai aux Fleurs will lead one past the most interesting features of the isle which in itself has been the center of Paris since its foundation. The first is Hôtel Dieu, the great hospital of Paris established in the Middle Ages. Its great structures occupy the sites of many interesting buildings and streets. Racine lived in a house on the south side of Rue d'Enfer. Here was the church of the butchers, Capella Sancti Petré de Bobus, where Hermon de la Fosse attacked the Host in 1503, and proclaimed the worship of Jupiter. He had his tongue branded, his hand cut off and was finally burned alive. In a house in the Rue des Marmousets, now disappeared, it is said a barber and a pastry cook formed a business alliance. Customers of the barber were precipitated through a trap door into the cellar of the pastry cook, who afterward served them up in little patties, which became very popular.

Lower down stream, over the feathery tops of the trees in the Tuileries Gardens rises the Obelisk of Rameses II., on the spot where two thousand eight hundred persons were decapitated between January, 1793, and May, 1795. Here died Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, Mme. Roland, Mme. Elizabeth, and finally, Robespierre.

To the left, on the other bank of the Seine is the Institut de France, the seat of the Academics. The buildings are on the site of the Tour de Nesle, from the top of which lovers of Jeanne de Bourgogne and her sisters-in-law, Princesses Blanche and Marguerite, were thrown into the Seine, sewed up in sacks. Brantôme's "Dames Galantes" gives a queer history of the loves of royalty of those days. A little further down are the only remaining ruins of the Commune, the building of the Council of State, while beyond rises the fine Greek façade of the Corps Legislatif, a part of the Palais Bourbon.

And so, fishing in the Seine is not un-

interesting even though one catches few fish. The gray towers of Notre Dame look down with seven centuries of history, the oldest monument on the Ile de la Cité; the sewer opening, near which one casts a line, may be the very one from which Hugo's Jean Valjean emerged, and the playground of the fish one is catching may be strewn with the bones of victims of the Revolution or of the intrigues that preceded it. Perhaps one has caught no fish and is sensitive about going home empty-handed. It can be arranged. A couple of men with a net have picked up a few of the river stragglers and will sell the lot for a few sous. They aren't exactly the traditional small boy of American trout streams, but they answer the purpose.

When it is all over, the tackle folded and the fisherman en route for home, there are many things besides the fish that have contributed to his day's pleasure. Perhaps the day was hot. He has not noticed it. A straw sombrero with gay ribbon has protected him, or the shadow of the bridge afforded shelter. He has been thirsty perhaps, but his thirst has been slaked by a cup of wine, cheap but wet, which an old lady in a blue gown and black bonnet has peddled all day along the quays in a brown stone jug, and sold him for a couple of sous. His bait gave out, but the supply was replenished by a garçon who, from a neighboring kiosk on the quay or store above, brought a fresh supply in a nice box, neatly labeled and put up. The fish did not bite well. What matters it? The steamboats have hurried to and fro in front of him all day with their loads of interested and sympathetic spectators of the fisherman. Within eyeshot a tondeur has been working upon frisky black poodles, pets of the rich dames of the aristocratic quarters. Troops of boys and girls have passed him to respective bathhouses and he has heard their shouts of laughter from within the latticed inclosures. Across the river a powerful iron crane has lifted sand from the canalboats with graceful sweep, strewing it on the quay. Steamers from London and Havre and Bordeaux have passed up to their quays. In fact there is always something interesting going on and one is satisfied, even though one caught few fish, and those hardly large enough for American pickerel bait.