

KINGFISHING.

BY JNO. D. PEABODY, M. D.

PERHAPS no sport of its kind carries with it more pleasure than trolling for kingfish, unless it be the similar pastime of "squidding for blues."

The kingfish is rarely found in schools, and then only small ones at certain seasons, when they will not bite with any degree of voraciousness. Occasionally large strings have been captured "still fishing" by large parties on the edge of some favorite turtle grass bank, but the methods employed are not those of true sporting men and lack the interest of trolling. The fish travel in pairs or by threes and fours, and much of the enjoyment, as in most of the pleasures of this life, is in the electric anticipation of the next grab, snap, and mad rush of the beautiful fish.

With a good boat—a "Cape cat" is the best—measuring two and a half to four gross tons, a brisk wind, the exhilarating sport may be indulged in with the certainty of returning with the most satisfying results. The best grounds are along the Gulf coast between Sanibel and Cedar Keys, or in the rougher waters about the Florida reefs. To enjoy the round of sport presented for the delectation of the sportsman let it be suggested that a start be made from Key West in a suitable cruiser and work up the keys to Lower Matecumbe. Thence cross the flats of Barnes' Sound to Cape Sable and take the west coast, as desired, for there are harbors for any vessel drawing not more than three feet at intervals of a few miles.

No live bait is required for trolling for kingfish. A hand-wrought tarpon hook firmly seized to a light copper wire and looped to a three sixteenths soft laid cotton line, is all the apparatus required, save a triangular bit of canvas the length of the hook, which must be firmly sewed about the shank at one angle, and the base dove-tailed or swallow-tailed to prevent raveling and to act as a spinner.

The prime requisite for the enjoyment of the sport and the perfection of results lies in the fact that the boat should be moving briskly. The fish will not stir for a slowly moving bait, but takes his food with the speed of an ex-

press train, when it passes him as if in earnest. The suddenness of the strike is almost startling to the tyro in the sport and loses none of its electric thrill to an old hand at the game. It is not the slow method of the tarpon or the uncertainty of the pike or bass. When a strike is made the angler may feel assured that his hook has gone to that place where it will do him the most good.

If a very heavy fish has struck, say one weighing twenty-five or thirty pounds, the speed of the boat should be slackened by heading into the wind, for a Hercules could not pull the monster over the taffrail unaided, with the boat moving six knots" an hour. A steady hand should be maintained and the line kept taut, for the fish might disgorge the hook, although such an act is rare, the barbs being, in the majority of cases, well set by his first rush and the onward movement of the vessel. Up and down, back and forth, the struggling quarry flies! He one moment gives a pang of deadly anxiety lest he be gone, as the line slackens, and another of a different variety the next, when the line is drawn as rigid as a piano wire and sings in a sidelong cut across the tops of the glistening waves. He may make one or more gigantic springs into the sunlight or he may fight so far below the surface that his glittering armor does not send a thrill of admiration to the sportsman's heart, until, almost exhausted, he is drawn nearly to the vessel's counter.

With the speed at which the vessel is moving no fish, however capable, can prolong such a bitter fight. But no fish of any kind, in any water, fights as hard while he is fighting as our own royal king.

When first taken from the water, the scales of the king are, as those of the tarpon, brilliantly silvered. This soon changes as death sets in and rushes of light, changing as rapidly and in as many varied tints as those of a well-blown bubble, spread over the surface. If the fish is scaled at this moment and some dozens of the scales dropped in absolute alcohol and set in a dark corner, it may be possible that out of the dozens two or three will retain in permanent condition

a motley coloring. This brilliant spectacle is the song of the dying swan in another sense.

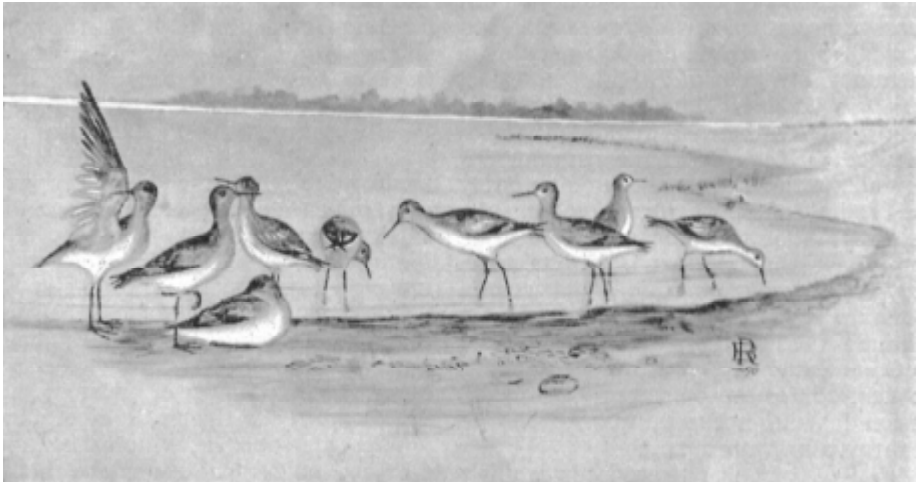
The larger fish are found nearest the shore, as a rule, following up the edge of some grass bank bordering the channel. The smaller fish, better in fighting capacity and as food, are caught off shore in six to ten fathoms, but as this is quite a distance out for a small boat most of the work is done "between passes." A favorite pastime for a morning of this sport is to run out of one pass and in at another, going or returning "inside" as the wind serves. From eight to a dozen fish should be picked up with three lines well served in a trip of this nature, and this, with the glorious weather found nowhere else on the face of the earth in the perfection it is here, the health-giving air and the pleasure of sailing, should be sufficient for any sportsman.

The flesh of the kingfish is a great delicacy if properly served. It is nearly

boneless and resembles the skeletal structure of the pompano in that steaks may be cut in perfect shape from the neck to the tail. The meat is far more delicate than that of the mullet or mackerel, being less oily than the former and richer than the latter. In this respect it differs widely from its great rival, the tarpon, the meat of which is fit food for hogs only.

The kingfish, orcoro (*Scomberomorus cavalla*), is one of the most important of the food fishes of this country, exceeding in value, though not in quantity, the Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus regalis* or *Scomberomorus maculatus*), of which species it is a big half-brother. Lay a large-sized Spanish mackerel and a small-sized king side by side, and a novice would see no distinguishing marks.

In the humble opinion of the writer, trolling for kings will be grand sport when reeling—and waiting—for tarpon is a forgotten subject.



THE BAY-BIRDS OF THE COLORADO.

BY T. S. VAN DYKE.

AMONG the places where game yet lives as in the days of old is the mouth of the Colorado River, one hundred and sixty miles below Yuma. Few parts of North America that are so easily accessible are so little known and so seldom visited even by the Indian. With the exception of a few plumage hunters, who, at long intervals, have gone that far down the

river, scarcely anyone has fired a gun for many years around the head of the Gulf of California. It is over fifteen years since the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad stopped the running of boats to the lower river, and during all that time that territory has lain about as wild as on the day Cabrillo landed.

With a party of ten from Los Angeles I boarded the steamer *Mojave* at Yuma