

The Tithe of Salmon at Westminster Abbey in the Middle Ages.

THE DERIVATION OF "SALMON."

IN the thirteenth chapter of Flete's history of Westminster Abbey, edited in 1909 by the late Dean of Westminster, Dr. J. Armitage Robinson, now Dean of Wells, there is a very interesting account of the Tithe of Salmon, offered at the high altar of the church. The Dean informs us in his preface, that John Flete is the only mediæval writer who has attempted a history of Westminster Abbey. He was a monk of that house from 1420 to 1465; and his writings thus handed down to us are entirely in Latin. All these salmon were caught, Flete informs us, "within certain limits and bounds of the river Thames." This tithe was offered by the Thames fishermen of the neighbourhood, and "is said to have belonged by ancient right and custom from the dedication of this sacred place of Westminster to the same place and still altogether to belong to it."

In attestation of the offering of the tithe referred to, various brethren of the Abbey are quoted by name as having witnessed this offering of the salmon at the high altar at different times,—such as the prior, the chamberlain, the cook, and the keeper of the bier of St. Edward the Confessor. And our author further tells us that on a certain occasion in the reign of King Richard II., one large salmon was offered at the great altar of the blessed Peter of Westminster by the fishermen underwritten, viz.: Richard Halle, John Elyot, Thomas Cook and William Newton; of whom the master was Gilbert, citizen and fisherman of London, residing on the ancient fishery; and they were serving under him for ten years past and more; and they confessed that they had offered at the altar of St. Peter of Westminster tithes of Salmon well and faithfully for the said ten years, namely six tithe Salmon, of which they had offered three in one week (*videlicet sex salmones decimales, unde tres in una obtulerunt septimana*).

At that time John de Fernago was marshal of the Refectory (*Refectorario*) at the Abbey, and on his making enquiry of Richard Halle, the senior fisherman (aged sixty), as to what were the limits, up stream and down stream, of the Thames fishery, from which, by

ancient and modern custom, Tithe of Salmon was due to the Abbey, the old man told him that Staines bridge was the boundary up stream, and that Yenlade beyond Gravesend was the boundary down stream, and all the others agreed that such were the limits traditional amongst them from their fathers. Yenlade is the north inlet in the parish of All Hallows, Hoo, in the Isle of Grain, in Kent.

And then our author mentions a quaint and interesting custom as recorded in the book of Customs (*in libro Consuetudinarii*), under the title of the kitchen rules, as follows :—" If it happen that any fisherman bring a salmon, already offered as tithe at the great altar of St. Peter, into the kitchen—when the said fish shall have been gutted, the Sacrist in lieu of the candle of one pound in weight which he has to make a present of to the fisherman, or in lieu of the two candles of half a pound each which he shall give to his [the fisherman's] two attendants, if such shall be there, shall have half the head of the fish, and of the half immediately below the gill as much as three fingers of breadth or as the fin of the fish extended includes. This fish, when it shall have been cooked, ought to be carried in a dish up the middle of the Refectory to the prior's table, at which the prior and all [the brethren] resident in that house ought to stand up. The fishermen, too, ought that day to feed at the prior's table, and after dinner to have a measure of liquor and bread from the cellarer ; and for this the said cellarer ought to have [as his perquisite] as much of this fish—from the tail end of it—as his four fingers, with his thumb erect, can span."

It may be supposed that "half the head" (in this translation from the original Latin) means half the head cut lengthwise ; and altogether the fisherman would thus have as his perquisite half the head and jowl, so to speak.

At the end of the chapter Flete quotes from the *Topographica Hibernica* (Irish Topography) of Giraldus Cambrensis (Rolls Series, v. 125) concerning the derivation of "Salmon." His quotation is headed—"Giraldus, in his history of the Irish, in chapter xli. says that the salmon naturally takes its name 'a saliendo' (*from leaping*) as is clear below"; and then he goes on to tell of a certain river in South (*sic*) Munster, full of fish—principally salmon—"between the hill of St. Brandon and the spacious sea which flows between Spain and Ireland," in which river wherever the salmon encounter an obstacle "*valde præruptum*" (*i.e.*, very steep, a high salmon leap), they bend their tails towards their mouths (*caudam ad os replicant*). "Sometimes too," Giraldus adds, "in order to give greater impetus

to their leap (*ad majorem saltus efficaciam*) they hold back their tails in their mouths (*caudam ipsam ore comprimunt*); and whilst they suddenly let themselves go (*se subito resolvunt*) from this sort of circular attitude they shoot themselves up (*transmittunt*) from the depths [beneath] to the heights [above] to the astonishment of those who stand by, with a sort of spring like that [caused] by the sudden unbending (*explicatione*) of a rod bent round into a circle," and the writer adds "the same kind of leaping is found in other rivers, but not on so large a scale."

The history of Westminster is a varied and a chequered one. According to Widmore the first benefactor was King Offa in 785. According to Flete, the first church ever built there was dedicated by King Lucius, the first Christian King of Britain and of the world, in 184. Then when the Diocletian persecution was over, it was degraded to be a temple of Apollo. Reconstructed by the Saxon King Sebert, this church was consecrated by St. Peter the Apostle 'in the spirit'; and, I have thought it not altogether uninteresting to draw attention to these quaint and interesting episodes in the monastic life of this Thames-side Abbey of Westminster.

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HURLEY VICARAGE, BERKS.

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The late Mr. James Parker, Hon. M.A., F.G.S.

WHE tragically sudden death of Mr. James Parker, on October 10th, 1912, at the hotel in the Strand which he had frequented for over sixty years, removes one of the most familiar figures in Oxford. Born on May 5th, 1833, in Turl Street, in the house of his father, the well-known antiquary, John Henry Parker, C.B., he was educated at Winchester, under Moberley. From a very early age he was drawn towards his father's pursuits. I have seen a sketch of a bench-end from a Gloucestershire Church made by him at the age of nine, and his youthful diaries show quickly a growing interest in architecture. A series of driving tours with his father through Normandy, Brittany and Southern France in 1850-51 helped to