

Charles Cotton.

By HENRY KIRKE, M.A., B.C.L.

CHARLES Cotton was the only son of Charles Cotton, son and heir of Sir George Cotton of Bedhampton, Knt., by Olive Stanhope, daughter and heiress of John Stanhope, M.P. The elder Cotton was described in his memoirs by Lord Clarendon, who writes : " he had all their qualities which in youth raise men to the reputation of being fine gentlemen ; such as pleasantness and gaiety of humour, such a sweetness and gentleness of nature, and such a civility and delightfulness in conversation that no man at the Court or out of it appeared a more accomplished person." His marriage with Olive Stanhope must have been a romantic one. The lady was only fifteen years old, and she was apparently carried off without the knowledge or consent of her father. Cotton courted her whilst she was staying with her aunt in London, where he says :—" hee did in short time discover her affection towards him, and thereupon he was emboldened to proceed to move her in the way of marriage. Some messages were interchanged between them whereby she signified her readiness to answer his desires therein, and the difficulty to obtain her but by carrying her away, and did herself appointe to come to him if hee could come for her." So the gallant procured a coach and came to Salusbury Court and the girl ran out to him, when they went away together and were married the same day. Sir John Stanhope was furious when he heard of these proceedings and filed a bill in the High Court against Cotton for conspiracy and abduction. As state-



Charles Cotton Esq^r—

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ments were made in the bill with regard to his position in life and his ability to support a wife, Cotton replies that he was a man of good family and had an estate of £600 per annum besides personal property worth 1000 marks ; that he did not know Olive was under sixteen years of age ; that there had been no riotous assembly as alleged, nor armed force, as he was only accompanied by his personal attendants, and the parson who performed the marriage ceremony, a kinsman of his own.

With such accomplished and spirited parents it is not surprising that their son proved equally talented and charming, and possessed of even greater versatility. The younger Cotton was born at Beresford, 28th April, 1630, and died " somewhere in the parish of St. James', Westminster," in 1688 and during the fifty-six years of his life filled many roles as scholar, poet, soldier, magistrate and sportsman. He inherited Beresford Hall, co. Stafford, from his grandmother, the daughter and heiress of Beresford of Bentley, but he found his estate heavily mortgaged and he was embarrassed by want of money all his life. Charles Cotton was educated at Cambridge, where he improved his knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics, and became a master of the French and Italian languages, which knowledge he improved by travels in France and Italy. In 1656, then being twenty-six years old, he married Isabella, daughter of Sir Thomas Hutchinson, Knt., of Owthorp. This was a rash proceeding on his part as he had no means for supporting a wife and family ; and although his father's death two years after his marriage put him in possession of the family estate it was laden with encumbrances and involved him in law suits.

Cotton was a voluminous writer : his poems are many, but few survive to the present day or appeal to modern readers. He had a certain vogue in his own times ; Sir Aston Cokayne was always singing his praises ; Lovelace dedicated *The Triumph of Philemon and Amoret* to " the

noblest of our youth and the best of friends Charles Cotton Esquire," but Lovelace was under pecuniary obligations to Cotton, which may have stimulated his enthusiasm. Wordsworth in later times found in one of Cotton's poems sentiments akin to his own. A modern writer has called him "a genuine poet as his New Year verses, and his poetical address to Isaak Walton amply testify." To modern ears his poems seem poor stuff, but then we have a higher standard with regard to poetry than our ancestors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who hailed Pomfret and Amos Cottle as inspired writers and enrolled them in the Anthology of English poets. Cotton also wrote some burlesques, travesties and translations. One of his works *Virgil Travestied* had a transient success, no fewer than eighteen editions having been published: it excited the admiration of the great Samuel Pepys, who notes in his Diary: "stopped at S. Paul's Churchyard, and there looked upon a pretty burlesque poem called Scarronides or Virgil Travesty extraordinarily good." Many of his translations from Ovid, Catullus and Ausonius are grossly indecent, which doubtless made them welcome to the profligate age in which he lived. His best work was done in the way of translations from the French for which he received some inadequate remuneration. In 1663 he published *The Moral Philosophy of the Stoics* translated from the French of de Vaix, and in 1670 a translation of the "Life of the Duc d'Esperon." Later on appeared *Les Horaces* of Pierre Corneille, *The Fair One of Tunis* a French novel, and also a translation of the *Commentaries of Blaise de Montluc Marshal of France*. His English edition of Montaigne's Essays is the best yet produced. He also displayed the versatility of his genius by the publication of a book called *The Planters Manual* containing practical instruction for the laying out of garden and orchards.

But setting aside his poems and other works we owe Cotton a great debt for his book *The Complete Angler* (written as he tells us in ten days), which is in reality the foundation of modern fly fishing. It is doubtless an imitation of Walton's well known work, but it fulfils for fly fishing what the older sportsman supplied for the more prosaic bottom fishing.

The art of angling, that is catching fish by means of a rod and line has been practised in England for centuries, but its precepts had been handed down by tradition, and until the fifteenth century no attempt was made to reduce them to writing. The first book on the gentle art was compiled by Dame Juliana Berners, prioress of the nunnery of Sopwell, although there appears to have been earlier ones, for writing anent the baits for catching barbel she says: "but well I wote that ye redde worm and ye menow bee good bayte for hym at all tymes, as I have herde saye of persones credyble, and also founde wryten in bokes of credence." These books may have been known to the curious in such matters, but it was not until Walton and Cotton's works were published that there can be said to have been any reliable books on the subject of angling.

A rude form of fly fishing has been known for ages. The Indians in Guiana have caught fish for hundreds of years by means of a bright feather from a parrot's wing fastened to a hook, and this bait skimmed over the water backwards and forwards; but civilized fish require more tempting baits, and it remained for Walton, Cotton and later writers to elevate this art into a science.

Beresford Hall was built on the banks of the Dove, which divides Derbyshire from Staffordshire, and no doubt the proximity of this stream stocked as it was by trout and grayling turned Cotton's attention to fishing: also it must have afforded much relief to his mind during his harrassed career; for as Sir Henry Wootton says:—

“Angling is a rest to the mind and cheerer of the spirits a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of passion, a procurer of contentedness, which begets habits of peace and patience in those that practice it.”

Though lacking the rustic charm of Walton's immortal work, Cotton's *Complete Angler* is a delightful book to read, apart from its instructiveness. His naive admiration for his native stream, his pleasing descriptions of the surrounding scenery, and his genial hospitality carry us away and we join in his devotion to his beautiful river. Hear how he sings its praise :—

Oh ! my beloved nymph fair Dove
Princess of rivers, how I love
Upon thy flowery banks to lie
And view thy silver stream
When gilded by a summer beam,
And in it all thy wanton fry
 Playing at liberty,
And with my angle upon them
 The all of treachery
I've learned industriously to try.

Such stream Rome's yellow Tiber cannot show
The Iberian Tagus or Ligurian Po
The Maese, the Danube and the Rhine
Are puddled waters all compared with thine :
The Loire's yet too polluted are
With thine much purer to compare :
The rapid Garonne and the winding Seine
 Are both too mean
Beloved Dove with thee
 To vie priority
Nay Thame and Isis when conjoined submit
And lay their trophies at thy feet.

Cotton had studied Walton's book and was well acquainted with the author's suggestions on fly fishing for trout and grayling, but he was not satisfied with the elder

sportsman's methods. Walton's list of twelve flies and instructions for making them were antiquated and differed little from those mentioned by that eminent sportswoman Dame Juliana Berners ; so Cotton determined to improve upon his master, and with that intent made himself acquainted with the nature of aquatic insects, the form and colour of the flies which appear on the water, the times of their appearance, and the best methods for imitating them with furs, silks, feathers and other materials. The result of his labours lies embedded in his book, and he may well be called the father of modern fly-fishing. Not content with telling us how to catch trout and grayling, he also instructs us how to *boil* them. Horresco referens !

As a rest house during his fishing excursions, Cotton erected on the banks of the Dove a kind of classic temple or summer house, as he himself says : " I have lately built a little fishing house dedicated to anglers over the door of which you will see the two first letters of my father Walton's name and mine twisted in cipher." Walton



appreciated this fishing house and his association with it as much as Cotton did for he says : " Some part of the fishing house has been described, but the pleasantness of the river, mountains and meadows about it cannot unless Sir Philip Sidney or Mr. Cotton's father were alive to do it." This little house was built of stone about fifteen feet square ; it was paved with black and white marble and in the middle there stood a black marble table supported

by stone feet. The room was wainscotted, the panels divided by curious moulding up to the ceiling ; the panels themselves were decorated by paintings, the larger with local scenes and persons fishing, the smaller representing tackle and implements for fishing. In the furthest corner to the left was a fireplace with chimney, on the right a large buffet with folding doors on which were depicted portraits of Walton and Cotton : underneath was a cupboard painted on the doors with figures of trout and grayling. On a slab over the door was the inscription " Piscatoribus sacrum 1674 " over the cipher mentioned above. This is a description of the house in its prime ;¹ when visited in 1784 it was found in poor condition, the paintings and wainscoting being much decayed. Mr. Bagster in 1814 found it dilapidated, the windows unglazed and the wainscot and paintings gone. The building has since been more or less restored by its present owner. It were interesting to know whose hand painted the portraits of Walton and Cotton and the other pictures.

Cotton's first wife had died after several years of domestic happiness, for although he wrote an ironical poem on the joys of marriage he was not discontented with his own lot as he writes :—

Yet with me 'tis out of season
To complain thus without reason
Since the best and sweetest fair
Is allotted to my share.

This happy experience in his first union induced him to marry again, his second wife being Mary, daughter of Sir John Russell, countess dowager of Ardglass, who possessed a jointure of £1500, which alleviated to some extent his pecuniary troubles. Before his second marriage and possibly to escape from his numerous creditors, Cotton obtained a commission as captain in the army,

¹ *The Complete Angler*, edition 1784, p. 21.

and was ordered to Ireland. His journey thither, in which he narrowly escaped shipwreck, he described in a humorous poem of original verse entitled "a voyage to Ireland." He especially notes that his fine clothes, including a gold belt he then wore, and his general appearance attracted the attention of the Mayor of Chester as they were leaving the cathedral, and that dignitary invited him to dinner and showed him much civility. We have no knowledge of his military prowess in Ireland, at any rate he did not stay there long. In a letter to Sir Clifford Clifton he states that he "had gone somewhat swab with drinking good ale," and confesses that "his delight is to toss the can merrely round."

As said before Cotton all his life was in pecuniary difficulties. Before his first marriage he and his father vested the manors of Bentley Borrowash and Beresford with other lands in trustees to sell so much of the property as would pay off a mortgage of £1700 and to hold the rest in trust for the younger Cotton and his heirs. In 1665 Charles Cotton was empowered by Act of Parliament to sell part of his estates to pay his debts. To a friend he mournfully writes that his only visitors were duns, whose approach drove him to take sanctuary in the neighbouring rocks. There is evidence that he spent some time in prison, and another in a cave near his paternal home.

His literary productions were financially unprofitable, if we may judge from his revilings of niggardly publishers. He was imprudent, a spendthrift, and somewhat of a rake; he was fond of gambling and published a book called *The Complete Gamester*; but still with all that his character is an anomaly, and to judge him by his writings is to fall into perplexity. In some of his poems he enunciates sentiments not only pure but religious; in others, to quote the words of Sir John Hawkins, he degrades his pen by "such foul imagery, such obscene allusions, such offensive descriptions, such odious comparisons, such

coarse sentiment and such filthy expressions as could only proceed from a polluted imagination, and tend to excite loathing and contempt." Of course some consideration must be given to the age in which he lived, which was coarse and licentious, and he was evidently inoculated by the spirit of the times. On the other hand he was universally liked and had many friends. Walton a man of the utmost probity and purest life, was a bosom friend, and called him his son, and was revered by Cotton as a father. It may be that the common love for angling drew them together, but Walton would never have visited and been on such intimate terms with a notorious rake and gambler. As Cotton says "for my father Walton will be seen twice in no man's company he does not like, and likes none but such as he believes to be very honest men, which is one of the best arguments or at least of the best testimonies I have, that I either am or that he thinks me one of those, seeing I have not yet found him weary of me."

To sum up it may be said that Charles Cotton was a cheerful, witty, accomplished man; kind to the poor, hospitable to all; a warm and steady friend, a versatile, pithy and amusing writer, who only wanted wealth and prudence to have made him one of the leading characters of his day. He died in London on the 16th February, 1688 (Burial Register of S. James' Church, Piccadilly) insolvent, and administration of his effects was granted to his creditors.

Like the cipher over the fishing house, the names of Walton and Cotton will always be associated together with reverence by all true anglers. Disciples of this cult founded in London in 1817 a club called the Walton and Cotton Club, which was re-established in 1840. There are extant two medals which may be associated with its history. One in bronze a little larger than half-a-crown, having on the obverse a bust of Walton with "Isaak

Walton " round it, at the base the date MDCCCXXII and Avern F. On reverse a tomb surmounted by an urn, on each side of the tomb trees and foliage, whilst leaning against it is the figure of an angler with rod and basket. On the tomb itself are the words Isaak Walton born 1593 died 1683 ; at the base T. Gosden and Avern F. Around the whole design the words Piscatoribus Sacrum. The other medal bears obverse bust of Isaak Walton, date MDCCCXXIV Avern F. Reverse, bust of Charles Cotton with breastplate and scarf and the letters of his name ; at base, T. Gosden. Edward Avern was a medallist in Clare Market, and executed the medals for Gosden, who was a sporting bookseller and collector. Gosden in 1823 published a life of Isaak Walton.

Beresford Hall, the home of Charles Cotton, no longer exists. A house on the same spot existed from remote times, which was at different periods altered and enlarged. After Cotton's death it passed through various hands until 1825, when it was purchased together with the manor by Field Marshal Viscount Beresford, the hero of Albuera ; the price was £5500, including £750 for timber. At his death the property passed to his stepson Mr. Beresford-Hope, brother-in-law to the late Marquis of Salisbury, who pulled down the old house. The estate was sold by his son, Mr. Beresford-Hope, a few years ago, and was bought by the present owner Mr. Green, who uses as an occasional residence a small house called Beresford Cottage, built close to where the Old Hall used to be, of which there is now nothing left except a few stones, which were some time ago, collected together.

The Old Hall is thus described in the *Gentleman's Magazine*¹ for 1829 (Part II, pp. 28-31) :—

¹ " The House, built I think by the Beresfords in the 16th century, is large and of respectable appearance The walls are constructed of coarse stone the produce of the neighbourhood, the roof is tiled and the chimneys are stone. Over the entrance is carved the Beresford crest, a bear rampant which is also painted in some of the windows. About 20 yards from the front we passed thro' a gate in a substantial stone wall of recent erection forming

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

Beresford and the fishing house are in the county of Stafford, but no apology is considered necessary for inserting the above in a Derbyshire Journal, as they form part of the well-known scenery of Dove Dale, one of Derbyshire's great attractions, the river Dove being the boundary between the two counties.

A pedigree of the family of Beresford of Beresford and Bentley was published in vol. ix, p. 177, of Jewitt's *Reliquary*, by Mr. Sleigh. Above the article written by him, which accompanies the pedigree, is an exquisite little drawing of a fireplace in Beresford Hall.

the boundary of a vegetable garden and along a path fenced on each side by a privet hedge to the principal door which opens into a large old fashioned hall, having at one end a fireplace of ample dimensions surmounted by antlers and curiously carved work in oak. At the opposite extremity three steps lead into a small room called the green parlour, part of which partitioned off still bears the name of Squire Cotton's study, but the state of the apartment does not evince much veneration for his memory, the walls being decayed and the window partly broken out. Opposite the entrance door a staircase conducts to a lofty drawing-room and a delightfully pleasant bedroom, the latter of which we decided nem : con : must be " my father " Walton's apartment in which Viator sleeps. There are various other chambers on this floor, but they are going fast to ruin, and several of them are in darkness having the windows made up. Above them are garrets from whence another flight of stairs or a ladder rather, gives access to the roof, part of which is flat and surrounded by balustrades but they are much decayed and in a tottering condition. The view here is remarkably pleasant. In front the house is sheltered from the moorland blasts by a steep hill and to the left by another on which are the ruins of a stone building called the Temple and here was the bowling green to which in the second part of *The Complete Angler* Cotton calls the attention of his friend. Far below these hills runs the Dove to which descending by a steep and somewhat hazardous winding path we came about half way down to a dark damp hole in the rock, dignified by the title of Squire Cotton's grotto, a spot which in his fine stanzas on Retirement he has rendered celebrated by those well-known lines commencing—

" O my beloved Cave from Dogstars heat
And all anxieties a safe retreat "

The fishing house of Izaak Walton is 15 ft. square and about 30 ft. in height to the centre of the pointed roof. Opposite the entrance in the right hand corner is an angular excavation wherein it is said Cotton deposited his wine. Our cicerone informed us that soon after Squire Cotton's time his aunt was housekeeper at the hall then occupied by a Mr. Osborn, at which period the fishing house was ceiled and in good condition, and that Mr. Osborn being a devoted angler had a mattress there for the convenience of sleeping near the river which was raised, or let down by pulleys. The Hall he added now belongs to a Mr. Jebb of Chesterfield, whose maiden sister long resided there expending much money to keep the house and grounds in a state differing greatly from their present forlorn condition. It is now inhabited by a labourer and his family, and two or three apartments are occupied by a clergyman named Ward, who does duty at Hartington and Wetton. In July, 1825, it was offered for sale."