# The Salmon Clause in the Indentures of Apprentices

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EVERYONE interested in folk-lore is fully aware, that assertions are frequently made of practices once current which have passed into oblivion in comparatively recent times, of whose origin and cessation nothing is known. Whether such statements are altogether true, or are wholly false; whether they contain a substratum of truth sufficient to act as the foundation to a great superstructure, are matters of great uncertainty. They may ultimately be proved to be founded on fact, or to be entirely mythical, present evidence in either case being wanting.

These remarks are especially applicable to a belief, generally received as a truism throughout England, and by no means confined to it, that at one time Salmon was so exceedingly plentiful, that it was a common practice for the indentures of apprentices and agreements with servants to contain a clause, stipulating that they should not be required to partake of that fish for dinner more than a certain number of times weekly.

Although the subject has been frequently alluded to in works and periodicals, it has not, as far as is known to the writer, formed the text of a special paper, in which the various facts, assumed or otherwise, with the

various comments, have been brought together with a view to their full and proper consideration. Although a definite result may not be arrived at on the present occasion, and perhaps may not be obtainable owing to the dearth of facts, it is hoped that it may be the means of eliciting further information on this curious subject.

The tradition is a matter of common report in towns and places situated in the proximity of rivers and estuaries that are, or were formerly, frequented by Salmon. Buckland remarks, "That there is almost invariably a cathedral town or towns upon the chief of our salmon rivers"; and by way of explanation adds, that the founders of monasteries "selected sheltered localities where, for the most part, they could get a good water-carriage, and, at the same time, a plentiful supply of fresh-water fish, especially salmon, for the use of the table on fast days."[1]

Without desiring to multiply examples of the prevalence of the tradition, it is necessary to cite some relating to various places in this and in other countries.

According to Ormerod, "it has been said that this fish was so plentiful formerly at Chester, that restrictions were imposed upon the feeding apprentices improperly with it, in consequence of its cheapness."[2] A similar statement was made by Hanshall, with the additional remark that its use was restricted to twice weekly.[3] And Mr. Ayrton (a former Secretary of this Society) related as to the practice in the same city, that he was "assured by some who . . . had it orally from their predecessors."[4]

[1] *British Fishes* (1873), 339, 341.

[2] *History of Cheshire*, II. (1882), 148.

[3] *History of Cheshire* (1823), 86.

[4] *Adventures of a Salmon* (1853), 30.

In 1740, R. Brookes recorded the Lancashire river Lune to be "so overstocked with salmon that the servants make . . . agreement that they will not eat it above twice a week."[1]

Formerly in Berwick, "when Salmon sold at 2/- the fish stone (of nearly nineteen pounds), servants stipulated with their masters that they should not be compelled to make frequent meals of it."[2]

The tradition is common in the chief towns on the Severn,[3] and is still prevalent in places on the principal rivers of Devonshire, *e.g.*, on the Axe,[4] the Dart,[5] the Taw,[6] the Avon,[7] and at Plympton.[8] That the indentures contained the salmon clause was "a matter of common notoriety" in Exeter, Mr. John Gidley, the Town Clerk, stated in his evidence (answer to 14476) before the Salmon Fisheries Commission in 1860, but, he added, "I have never seen one." The Newcastle apprentices are recorded to have made the same stipulation, and Bewick, the well-known wood engraver, is believed to have been one of this number.[9]

It is by no means confined to England. In his account of Herefordshire, Fuller records plenty of Salmon in this County, "though not in such abundance as in Scotland, where servants (they say) indent with their masters not

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1 *Art of Angling*, 21.

2 *Agric. of Berwick*, by R. Kerr (1813), quoted in *N. and Q*, 2nd S., III., 406.

3 Counsel's *History of Gloucestershire*, 157; Nash's *Worcestershire*, lxxxv.; *Standard*, Feb. 27th, 1883.

4 Pulman, *Book of the Axe*, 42.

5 *West Antiquary*, I., 117.

6 Vancouver, *Agric. of Devon*, 76.

7 Fox, *Kingsbridge* (1874), 206.

8 Ind. of Mr. J. Brooking Rowe.

9 *Monthly Chronicle of North Country Lore*, II., 138; and A. Dobson's *Bewick, and his Pupils* (1889.)

to be fed therewith above thrice a week."[1] In Scotland, Dr. Rogers relates, that when engaging his farm-labourers, his grandfather, at Coupar Grange, "became bound not to give them salmon to dinner oftener than thrice a week. In the river Ericht, which bordered his farm, salmon were procured in large quantities, and were consequently deemed of little value."[2]

A similar practice is stated to have taken place in Ireland[3]; and according to a correspondent in the *Standard* (February 27th, 1883), "Many a north-western Irishman still living can . . . testify to the truth of the servants at Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, having, less than fifty years ago, bargained" that they should not have salmon for dinner more than three times weekly.

That it extended to the Continent is thus told by Bertram :—

"Although salmon are now comparatively scarce in Holland, I was told the old story of its having been once so plentiful that apprentices used to bargain against eating it oftener than twice a week."[4]

At Dordrecht, between April 15th, 1620, and the end of 1621, a similar undertaking is said to have been entered into, owing to the great abundance of salmon there during that period.[5]

We have the authority of Elihu Burritt that it was not unknown in America. Once, he wrote, salmon

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1 *Worthies* (1662), II., 34; cf. J. Brome, *Travels over England* (1707), 176; In *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., XI., 123, a correspondent misquotes the passage from Fuller's work.

2 *Leaves from my Autobiography* (1876), 4, 6; other authorities are quoted in *The Salmon*, by A. Russel (1864), 91-4; cf. *Salmon Fishery of Scotland*, by M. MacKenzie (1860), 6.

3 Halls' *Ireland*, I., 339.

4 *Harvest of the Sea* (1873), 42.

5 *Les Delices des Pay Bas* (1785); quoted in *N. and Q.*, 8th S., VI., 125.

"headed in Connecticut in such multitudes that a special stipulation was inserted in the indentures of apprentices in the vicinity of the rivers, that they should not be obliged to eat salmon more than a certain number of times in a week."[1]

In the majority of instances, the salmon dinner is stated to have been restricted to two days weekly. Occasionally three days are mentioned;[2] sometimes four;[3] and in one exceptional case is extended to five days.[4]

Although, according to one writer, the tradition "must, we suppose, be true, since everybody has always been telling it," there are various stumbling blocks to be overcome before we can attach full credence to it. We have to ascertain how far it can be corroborated by, and bear the test of, a full and searching examination. We have to consider the various statements and facts in favour of, and against it, and although their relation, and the comments upon them, may be tedious, this proceeding is absolutely necessary to enable us to form a conclusion of any kind.

The extraordinary quantity of salmon said to have been yielded by the Scotch rivers during the 17th and 18th centuries, together with the lowness of prices obtained for them, appears at first sight to favor the tradition; but though this is alluded to by various authorities,[5] none record any direct evidence of the practice.

At Kendal, as noted by Nicholson (251), "We have not been able to find one of these indentures, but there

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[1] *Walk from London to John o' Groats* (1864), 304.

[2] Pulman, 42.

[3] *Monthly Chronicle*, II., 285.

[4] Notes to *Old Mortality*, Wav. Nov., IX. (1830), 350.

[5] Quoted in A. Russel's Work, '91-96.

is no doubt of the fact. Brockett mentions Newcastle and Kendal as towns where the apprentices had the saving clause in their favour." As to the latter place, it is stated in the *Westmorland Note Book*, I. (1888), 188, that "Mr. Thomas Jennings has gone through a large mass of old apprenticeship indentures at the Blue Coat School, and could find no mention whatever of fish diet in any of them; and if there were any documentary evidence at Kendal on the subject we may be sure it would have been produced before now." Respecting Newcastle: the work of Brockett affirmed to contain the assertion has not been found by the writer; it is certainly not in his *Glossary of North Country Words* (1846.) Nevertheless, the Rev. J. C. Bruce alludes to the salmon clause as being "well known" in that town, and that "the late Mr. Kell, formerly Town Clerk of Gateshead," informed him "that he had seen one to this effect."[1] On the other hand, Mr. R. Welford, the historian of Gateshead and Newcastle, had never seen a copy of an indenture containing it, nor had even heard of anyone who had. Mr. B. Ferrey[2] affirms the clause to have been common in Christchurch, Hants., and adds, "I am not at this moment able to get access to the documents in the corporation chest of the town, but I will endeavour shortly to obtain an extract from one of the indentures, with the exact words employed." This was written in 1865, but the "extract" has yet to be published.

The following instances of personal testimony appear to afford strong presumptive evidence in its favour:—

The *Standard* of March 2nd, 1883, contains a letter, signed "Thomas Holyoakes, Surgeon," of "Aylesford,

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[1] *Handbook to Newcastle*, '68, 9.

[2] *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., VIII., 298.

Kent," from which the following extract is taken: "An apprentice's indenture in 1856, when I was apprenticed to my father as a surgeon, was drawn up by a firm of lawyers, and that indenture distinctly said, 'You must not allow salmon to be given more than three times a week!' I refused to sign the document, not that I disliked salmon . . . but for other reasons."

When acting as Counsel on the Herefordshire circuit (1828), Mr. C. S. Greaves records that "an appeal was tried in which the question turned upon a settlement by apprenticeship; the indenture was given in evidence, and I had it in my hands and read it, and it undoubtedly contained a stipulation that an apprentice should not be compelled to eat salmon more than three days a week . . . of the fact of there having been such a stipulation in the indenture I am perfectly certain."[1]

One of the Conservators of the Wye, and a magistrate of Herefordshire, in his evidence before the Salmon Fisheries Commission, made this statement (1555):—"I must mention the fact [*sic*] that in all the indentures of apprentices of the period there was a stipulation that the apprentices should not eat fish more than so many times a week. You will find that in the Hereford Charter, and in many other places."

Mr. Greaves was informed by one "who had been educated at Shrewsbury School . . . that in the old rules of that school there was a clause" of this kind. "His memory as to his having seen this rule in a book in the school library seemed perfectly clear, and left no doubt whatever on my [Mr. Greaves] mind that such a rule existed; but," he adds, "after making the best enquiries in my power, I have failed to discover any

[1] *N. and Q.*, 4th S., I., 322 (1868.)

such rule." Another writer, who had been educated in the same school, "had never heard of it," and "was disposed to think it a myth."[1]

The Rev. R. Polwhele, in his *History of Cornwall* (VII., 88), alludes to such "covenants which I have seen in this County, and in Devon"; and in Halls' *Ireland*, I., 139, is the assertion, "We have seen one of the contracts that contained the singular stipulation."

Of this salmon clause, G. Pulman (42) remarks, "It is a fashion to say that this is merely a fiction. . . . It happens that I have myself seen two indentures containing it. One was that of Mr. Emanuel Dommett, apprenticed to the late Mr. Francis Dight, fell-monger, Axminster, and the other that of the late Mr. John Bowdage, baker, of the same place. Unfortunately it is impossible to produce either of the documents, as they were both destroyed, along with other papers, soon after the death of the parties mentioned. Surviving members of both families can corroborate my statement."

A strong opinion expressed in print, as to the truth of the tradition, is not often retracted by the author. One memorable instance to the contrary may be cited here. In *N. and Q.* (1st S., VI. (1852), 217), the Rev. E. Bradley ('Cuthbert Bede') affirmed: "I may mention—*a propos* to the Severn salmon—the singular fact, that not more than fifty years ago the indentures of the Bridgenorth apprentices set forth that their masters, under pain of certain penalties, were *not* to give them Severn Salmon for dinner more than three times a week." Thirteen years later, in the same periodical (3rd S., VIII. (1865), 174-5), he thus revised this statement:—"I have lived for eight years in Worcestershire and

[1] *N. and Q.*, 4th S., I., 321, 518.

Shropshire, in the immediate vicinity of the Severn, and have made numerous enquiries into this 'Salmon and Apprentice' subject. From these inquiries I have come to the conclusion that the statement is erroneous, and the popular belief a vulgar error." He further owned that his "authority for the [earlier] statement was derived, partly from popular belief and partly from published reports in a variety of books."

According to Nash,[1] "the salmon was formerly in such plenty at Worcester as to render necessary the employment of the special clause in the indentures, and this appears to have been the authority for the assertion made by several writers, *e.g.*, the one made in *Gent's Magazine* (1788, I., 480), that there are many old indentures now in Worcester" containing this covenant. Again, in the following paragraph taken from the *Manchester Evening News* of July 13th, 1888: "Tradition asserts, and documentary evidence in support of the allegation exists," of such obligatory indentures having been in force at "Worcester, Gloucester, and other towns on the Severn"; but notwithstanding this, no documentary evidence is yet forthcoming. Now, it is certain, as Mr. Bradley noticed, that a statement of this kind "once made by the county historian, subsequent writers may have felt themselves at liberty to adopt it without question." His later opinion, just recorded, is thus corroborated by Mr. J. J. Burgess, in the *Standard* of March 3rd, 1883:—"I have a series of indentures of apprenticeship dating from James I. to William IV., a period of two hundred and fifty years. They relate to a variety of Trades in the City of Worcester; amongst others, to clothiers, glovers, cordwainers, gardeners, and home-lace weavers, but beyond the covenant for whole-

1 *Worcestershire*, lxxxv.

some food and two suits of clothing, 'according to the custom of the City of Worcester,' there is no mention of food in any of them. . . . The most diligent inquiries I made thirty years ago, in the towns near salmon fisheries in Ireland, failed to elicit the slightest corroboration of the prevalent story."

Although the tradition is well-known on the shores of the Dart, the Town Clerk of Totnes, Mr. E. Windeatt, remarked, "I have never come across an indenture containing the clause, nor have I ever heard of anyone who has."[1]

Very recently the writer was informed by an old Chester resident, that early in the present century his father served his apprenticeship in the city, and although his own indentures did not contain a fish clause, "he had heard and believed it to have been a common provision" in them "shortly before his time, and that it was aimed against the habit of feeding apprentices too freely with cured or salt salmon, and not against fresh-caught salmon."

My friend, the late Mr. Thomas Hughes, F.S.A., informed me that he had seen and examined many Chester indentures of the 17th and 18th centuries, without having found any such clause; and enquiries in the *Cheshire Sheaf*, edited by him, failed to obtain any local information relating to it. This is further borne out by the examination of about 150 indentures, mostly on printed forms, preserved among the Municipal Records, that had been "left for enrolment, in order to claim Freemanship of the City," and range from 1768 to 1829. In none of them is there any reference to fish diet, the

[1] *Western Antiquary*, I., 117.

only allusion to board, &c., being in such general terms as—"sufficient and suitable meat, drink, &c."[1]

Mr. W. Ayrton could learn nothing more than the oral tradition, and yet no one during his life-time studied the literature and all that related to the salmon and to the Dee Fisheries more than he did, as shown in his work, *The Adventures of a Salmon*, published in 1853; as well as in his paper, entitled, "Records relating to the River Dee and its Fisheries," read at a meeting of the Chester Archæological Society, and published in their *Transactions* (I., 234-250.) It may be noted that the Rev. Canon Morris' *Chester during the Plantagenet, &c., Periods* (1894), does not refer to it.

The following is recorded by Mr. J. R. Chanter as the result of his examination of the *Barnstaple Municipal Records*, No. XCVII.:—

"No. 18. Apprentices indentures, 1600 to 1700. These have all been opened out for examination to ascertain if any proviso about salmon existed, but nothing of the sort occurs."

In their report on the Salmon Fisheries, the Commissioners note having heard the tradition "in every locality" visited by them. They further remark, "We endeavoured to obtain sight of one of these instruments, but without success, though we met with persons who stated they had seen them, and the universal prevalence of the tradition seems to qualify belief in it" (VI.)

Rewards have on several occasions been offered for the production of an indenture containing the clause, but hitherto without success; one, of a sovereign, was

[1] For the examination of these documents, and for many other acts of courtesy in connection with the same subject, the writer desires to acknowledge the able and willing assistance rendered him by the present Town Clerk, S. Smith, Esq.

repeatedly tendered by the editor of the *Worcester Herald;* another, of £5, by Mr. Ffennell, one of the Inspectors of Salmon Fisheries; but although this "was advertised and stood open for one or two years, no such copy ever turned up."[1]

Frank Buckland said he was tired of hearing about such indentures, and "almost weary of hunting" for a copy; but that he was "once very near getting it," and this is the story he relates of his non-success:—

"Stopping to bait the horses at a little road-side inn near Exeter, the landlady told me this old, old story; and moreover, said she knew an old woman who had a copy of an indenture, only she lived 'a bit off,' and it was too far for her to walk and fetch it. I stopped the driver from taking the horses out of the carriage, and made 'mine hostess' jump in, and drive off instantly to the old woman's cottage. She was a long time gone, and I hoped that she and the old woman were looking for the indenture. At last the messenger returned. 'The old woman had burnt the papers last week!'"[2]

On several occasions the writer had somewhat similar hopes of success, but as "man never is, but always to be blest," failure at the last moment has been the invariable result. The actual possessor could not find it, or it had been recently destroyed, &c. The grandfather of one imformant "had possessed such an indenture, which he kept as a curiosity," but what ultimately became of it is uncertain. He was once informed of a copy being preserved in a country church, but on further enquiry the vestry had been pulled down some time before, and the "papers," one of which was the indenture in question, were now missing.

A personal friend, formerly in extensive practice as a medical man in the North of England, has supplied

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[1] *Standard*, March 3rd, 1883.

[2] *British Fishes*, 359-60.

the following information in a letter dated September 15th, 1896:—

"In the year 1852 I was apprenticed to my uncle, a surgeon in Yorkshire, and when signing the indenture, the solicitor, who had drawn up the document, remarked to my uncle, 'this is almost a verbatim copy of your own indentures, with the exception of one clause, which I have omitted, thinking it unnecessary in the present day, *viz.*, "he is not to have salmon more than two days a week."' My uncle was apprenticed to a surgeon in the east-end of London, and supposing him to have been bound at the age of seventeen, the indenture would have been drawn up in the year 1825."

Negative evidence is at the best unsatisfactory, and the production of one example of a positive character, such as a single indenture containing the clause in question, would be held sufficient proof that the tradition was founded on fact, although its universality might be doubted. Those best acquainted with the subject, and who have given a large amount of attention to all matters relating to the salmon, are of opinion that the whole story is a myth.

Is the tradition founded on fact, or is it altogether mythical? If the latter, what were the circumstances that originated it? Or is there any *via media* that may serve to explain it? These are the questions to which answers are sought, and in the present investigation several minor side-issues, which bear more or less upon them, will also have to be considered.

Assuming, for the moment, that it was based on actual facts, attention has already been directed to the circumstance, that the principal reason assigned for its existence was the extraordinary abundance of that fish at a former period. Hence, owing to its extreme cheapness, it was given to apprentices and servants several times weekly, for their principal meal, as a substitute for some other

kind of food; and their disapproval of it culminated in the insertion of the clause alluded to.

In these days, assertions are not accepted as truisms, unless they bear the test of a rigorous examination. Although it is customarily asserted that formerly the rivers of England, &c., yielded a far greater abundance of salmon than is the case at the present day, the correctness of this assertion is doubted by some who have devoted much time to its consideration. This point has such an important bearing on the subject of this paper, as to render it necessary to make some extended remarks upon it.

A previous plentiful supply is necessarily inferred from the allegation, "that the supply of salmon from the rivers and fisheries of England and Wales had of late years considerably diminished," and which led to the Commission of Inquiry into the Salmon Fisheries, in 1860-1. The first object of the Commissioners was to ascertain whether this statement had any real foundation, and they arrived at the conclusion that it was "fully substantiated by the evidence" (VI.) The following were the principal causes of the diminution enumerated by them:—pollutions from various causes, such as sewage, discharges from gas-works and factories, poisonous drainage from mines; non-observance of close time; poaching and illegal fishing generally; obstructions created by weirs,[1] stake nets, &c.; navigation by steamers; &c. During the present century, the effect of some of these has been to diminish the number of fish in

[1] The tenants of the manor of Ennerdale and Kinniside, in Cumberland, formerly "claimed a free stream, in the River Eden, from Ennerdale lake to the sea, and assembled once a year on horseback to 'ride the stream.' If obstructions were found, such as weirs or dams, they were at once destroyed." ("Ancient Customs, &c., in Cumberland," by A. C. Gibson, in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, X., 100.

certain rivers, *e.g.*, those of Lancashire and Yorkshire; to exterminate them from others, such as the Mersey and Clyde; and to cause some rivers, like the Thames, to hold an intermediate position. The Commissioners were of opinion, that "the cheapness in former days was in great measure due to the absence of those destructive agencies that have been developed in modern times" (VII.); but the former "cheapness" is open to comment, as the inference to be drawn from their statement is that it was constant, whereas, even under the most favourable circumstances, it must have been variable—differing greatly from year to year. Moreover, a glance at the list of "destructive agencies" just enumerated, will show that some of the principal probably date back several centuries.[1]

This is especially true of weirs that are so constructed as to prevent salmon passing to the upper waters, excepting under exceptional circumstances. One of the most notable examples is the one at Chester, adjoining the Dee Mills, which has existed for many centuries, and has formed the subject of continued complaint by the Inspectors of Salmon Fisheries in their Annual Reports, commencing in 1862. While on the one hand they express their opinion of the river in such favourable terms as these:—

"The River Dee possesses natural capacities equal, if not superior, to any river of its size . . . for the production of salmon" (*7th Annual Report* (1868), 10.)

"The Dee enjoys natural advantages which are shared by few of our English rivers" (*14th Annual Report* (1875), 101.)

[1] It is curious that one of the witnesses examined before the Salmon Fisheries Commission accounted for the river Wye being less productive now than when the salmon clause was in vogue, by stating that it was due to the great destruction of fish that took place during the close season (2343.) There is great reason to believe that in all periods this season was not respected by poachers or by any others.

On the other hand, their Report of the weir or causeway, owing to the absence of a proper fish pass, is one of condemnation. Here is a transcript of their remarks in 1862:—

"The weir, indeed, is a bad impediment, and would long since have destroyed the breed of salmon in the River Dee, but for the high spring tides, which once a month rise completely over it" (*1st Annual Report*, 21.)

In 1870, when they praised the generality of weirs, that of Chester formed the "one prominent exception." (*9th Annual Report*, 70.) The only thing needed appears to be a properly constructed salmon ladder, so as to permit of the fish having at all times a free passage up or down the stream.

Formerly, as we learn from the history of the Cheshire Dee, salmon fisheries were most strictly preserved. From an early period, certainly from the time of the Normans, among the manorial rights, that of fishing in streams and rivers was always deemed a highly important one, and was enforced under very severe penalties. Fisheries ("piscariæ") are especially mentioned in the Doomsday Book, and according to one entry in it, Eaton ("Etone") "renders a thousand salmon."

In 1289, the Dee fishery "immediately attached to the bridge and the mills [Chester], was valued at about £20 a year; a great sum in those days."[1] In 1293, a man was sued for fishing in the King's Pool, below the bridge at Chester, and catching twenty salmon, worth twenty marks, and one salmon worth 10/-.[2] At a solemn feast held at the Monastery of Vale Royal in 1339, two salmon cost 6/-, "where an ox is only rated at 13s. 4d., and the highest priced bull at 4/-."[3]

[1] *Adventures of a Salmon*, 19, 20.

[2] *Ibid* 30, from *Harl. MS.*, 2020.

[3] Ormerod's *Cheshire*, II. (1882), 148; from the same MS.

At Finchale Priory, Durham, the price of ten salmon was 11/- in 1367, while in the same year a cow was sold for 7s. 6d. In 1407 the Bursar of Durham paid 50/- for five dozen of salmon for salting.[1] In 1486, at the feast of the Brotherhood of Corpus Christi at Maidstone, "one fresh salmon" cost 6s. 8d.[2]

The expenses of the Sheriff of Yorkshire, at the Lent Assizes in 1528, included:

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| "in great fresh salmon, twenty-eight - | 3 | 16 | 8" |

and at the Lammas Assizes, in 1529—

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|---|---|---|---|
| "Salt Salmon - - - - - - | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| fresh Salmon and great - - - | 3 | 6 | 8"[3] |

The Municipal Regulations of Chester, made in 1555, "forbade the selling of salmon except as a whole fish, for eight persons are fined 3/4 each, 1569, for buying salmon and selling them again in pieces (*per pecias*), dividing the profits of the same amongst the fishermen" (Canon Morris' *Chester, &c.*, 424.)

In *The Shuttleworth Accounts* (edited by J. Harland, Chet. Soc.), annual purchases of salmon are entered between 1583 and 1617. In 1589, "Fyvfe salte samons" cost xx^s.^, and three in the following year xvij^s.^ ij^d.^ In February, 1593-4, was bought at Preston Fair, "one salte salmon viij^s.^ vj^d.^; at that time, judging from other items, fish was very dear, *e.g.*, "fower salt iles [eels] ij^s.^ iiij^d.^" The majority of entries are for *salt* fish; here, however, is one to the contrary:—1598. "halfe a freshe salmon" xxij^d.^ After 1600 the price diminished, the lowest being the following, in 1617: "a salmon fishe, xviij^d.^"

1 *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., VI., 13.

2 *Ibid* XI., 116.

3 J. Croft, *Excerpta Antiqua* (1797), 84, 87.

In the Account Book of "The Drawers of Dee" (an extinct trade guild), under date 1606, is this entry:—

"20 Augustij.
paid for a fish geven to Mr. Glaseor iij$^{s.}$ vj$^{d.}$
geven to one to bring him the fish vi$^{d}$"

Mr. Hugh Glasier was M.P. for Chester at that date.[1]

The following is extracted from the Exeter Municipal Records:—

"1612. September 10. Mr. Recorder, and every member of the Common Council that has served the office of Mayor, shall have yearly two Salmons of the Farme of the Fishery, the said Farmer to be allowed for every Salmon 3s. 4d."[2]

The foregoing will sufficiently illustrate the statement, that down to the period of the Reformation, salmon, whether fresh or salted, fetched a high price; and many similar quotations might be made to corroborate it; the difficulty being to find an example where the price could be deemed "cheap." Some monastic establishments held salmon fisheries, and increased their incomes by selling at a good price their surplus fish. Owing to the number of fish days prescribed by the Roman Catholic Church, the demand for, and consumption of, all kinds of this article of diet must have been very great, as it still is in those countries where the same form of religion is generally followed. The great demand continued in England long after the Reformation. Although it is generally but erroneously assumed that the change which then took place in the forms of religious worship, was attended with an early falling off in the use of fish as an article of diet, "whatever may have been the state of the trade elsewhere," remarks Canon Morris, "the traffic in fish at the Port in Chester does not appear to

1 *Cheshire Sheaf*, I., 315.

2 "Exeter Miscellanea," in *Western Times*, 1849.

have suffered any diminution . . . during the reign of Elizabeth" (472.)

Judging from the few entries in *The Shuttleworth Accounts*, the price lessened under the Stuarts.

It is a difficult matter to reconcile these constant high prices for salmon with the assumption of its superabundance, as the asserted clause in the indentures of apprentices would lead us to believe. This very difficulty is thus noticed in a Review of *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, 1513-1522, in the *Times* of September 30th, 1893:—

"We are puzzled by the cost of salmon. We know [*sic*] that long afterwards the salmon were so common that domestic servants in many districts bargained that they should only be fed on them on certain days in the week. Yet, according to these lists, a salmon fetched twice as much as an average sheep, and something more than half the price of the cheaper cattle."

A remarkable statement, considering that the rivers of Scotland have always been regarded as yielding enormous numbers of this fish, of which large quantities were exported. "From Scotland . . . there was in old times a large export of salmon (chiefly salted), many curious proofs of the fact being found among the old Scottish Statutes."[1] According to the Statutes of the Fishmongers of London, early in the 13th century, dues are noted to be paid by "a vessel of Scotland that brings salmon"—no other is mentioned.[2] "A considerable export of Scotch salmon (pickled) chiefly to Flanders and France, took place as early as 1380.[3] A letter dated October 30th, 1761,[4] records that salmon caught in the

[1] Russell. The Salmon, 4.

[2] *Liber Albus*, tr. H. J. Riley (1861), 325.

[3] Russell, 91.

[4] Printed in *Gent's Magazine*, 1788, i., 127-9.

Tweed were sent to London fresh; or if any delay occurred, some were boiled and pickled; others (when abundant) being salted "for a foreign market." In 1707, J. Brome,[1] described the "great store and plenty" yielded by the same river. Oddly enough, while he mentions the circumstance of a salmon being sold for a shilling, and alludes to the salmon clause as a proof of plenty and cheapness, he adds, "as for all other Provision they are scarce enough here." On the other hand, in the letter of 1761, just quoted, is this passage:—

"The produce of this river [the Tweed] is variable, being seldom two years alike, and for many seasons together unproductive . . . while another time, for many subsequent seasons, the salmon are remarkably plenty." (127.)

Of the former abundance of the fish yielded by the rivers Ayr and Doon, the following testimony is recorded in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, V. (1845) 51:—

"That salmon were caught in much greater abundance in the rivers Ayr and Doon than at present, and that they constituted a principal part of the food of the poor, is evident from printed regulations which we have seen of the Poor's house, about the time when it was established, in 1759. In these it is directed that this fish was to form the diet of the paupers twice every week."

Then follows a paragraph that the writer had "seen it recorded somewhere" of the salmon clause having been stipulated by "farm-servants in the vicinity of the Forth, in Stirlingshire."

According to some authors, a large supply was obtained from the Irish rivers. That the fish was abundant and cheap in Limerick is shown, according to Halls' *Ireland*, by the existence of this clause in indentures; but the following significant remark follows:—

"the increased facilities for exporting to England have of course materially raised the price of the fish. (I. 339.)

[1] Travels over England, &c., 176.

The dues from the Blackwater fishery were received by the great Earl of Cork in the earlier half of the 17th century. According to his Diary, printed in the *Lismore Papers*, the salmon in that locality must have been deemed a valuable article. It contains many entries relating to it, of which these are examples :—

"1628, July 28. Sir Geddon Anshams daughter sent my wif a whole Salmon baked in a pastie, which I sent thearle of Manchester, L. president of ye counsell."

"1641, Aug. 30. I gave Rich. Holworthy my letters of credit to Roger Carew to supply him with so much salmon as will satisfy this money [£250]."[1]

Russell states that England formerly "had an over-abundant supply, except in those districts far removed from the fisheries" (4, 5.) The latter part of this statement is no doubt correct enough; but the "over-abundant supply" may be questioned. If salmon were so plentiful, why (as remarked upon previously), was its price so high, even in places contiguous to the fisheries? We must not assume that this large yield (if correct) was constant from year to year; nor that because the supply exceeded the requirements of the population at or near the fisheries, it of necessity implied the yield to be actually greater than at a late date, when it was generally reported to be diminishing. True it is, that there is, and always has been, a general complaint as to the gradual diminution of the supply. The fishermen and others examined before the Salmon Fishery Commissioners complained of a great falling off within their recollection—that is to say, well within the present century. But as far back as 1808, Vancouver commented upon "the alarming deficiency of late years in the salmon fishery" of the Taw (*Agric. of Devon*, 75.) The

[1] Ed. Grosart, 1st S., II., 269; V., 187.

most telling remarks that have yet been made on this point emanated from the Editor of the *Worcester Herald*, when commenting upon the clause in question :—

"Such statements have been made to me on the banks of the Ness, the Spey, the Tay, the Forth, and the Tweed, in Scotland; and here, in Worcester, on the Severn. How is this to be reconciled with the fact that, from an early portion in the Henry series of our English Statutes, passing downwards through the reigns of Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, and Guelphs, to the 24 and 25 Vict., c. 109, there are, in the Statutes at large, a great number of Acts of Parliament, all declaring that the salmon fishery had decreased, and was constantly diminishing? So far as England is concerned, this seems to be conclusive."[1]

One of the marked characteristics of the annual yield of salmon in any one river is its extreme variability; and, as shown in the case of the Tweed, while there may be a great glut in some years, in others there is a great scarcity. This has probably always existed. Side by side with the reputed great diminution, we have the following authentic statement:—At Limerick, in 1832, such "an immense quantity of fish were caught that the price in the shops was two pence per pound."[2]

Although, as already observed, we possess no evidence that formerly salmon was low priced, even in localities where there was at times an unusually large catch of that fish, it can be readily understood that under such circumstances the selling price might have been very low; but we must bear in mind that there was always a great demand for salted fish, and a ready sale for it at all markets and fairs—this alone would keep up the price. But occasional abundance and cheapness locally were too commonly attended with scarcity and dearness

[1] *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., VIII., 234.

[2] *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., VII., 322.

elsewhere, owing to there being no facilities for transit, except by sea; higher prices being obtained when the latter was improved; as already pointed out was the case at Limerick.

The present rapid communication between all parts of the Kingdom, aided by the telegraph, have virtually made the whole country into one market, with a general levelling of prices. Fresh fish is now obtainable in the remotest parts of the country, to which, in the early part of the century, it was impossible to be conveyed; the increased demand creating and maintaining the comparatively high price of the fish, apart from any question of diminution of supply.

One of the asserted proofs of the former abundance of salmon is worth noting here, *viz.*, that in the first half of the 14th century, "salmon fry was taken from the Thames and given to the pigs."[1] But in 1808, Vancouver reported that a similar form of destruction took place in fry from the Taw river (75-6); and in 1860, one of the witnesses examined before the Salmon Fishery Commissioners, testified (671) that "quantities" of them from the Severn were disposed of in a similar manner.[2] According to Pulman, "such enormous quantities" of the fry were taken in the River Axe in 1835, or following year, "that, after supplying tables far and near, the residue were thrown about the fields for manure." (549) In Scotland, Mackenzie affirms that yairs, "the fore-runners of the stake-nets," destroyed "immense quantities of the fry of all fishes."[3] These statements serve to show that centuries ago, equally

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[1] *N. and Q.*, 3rd S., VIII., 234.

[2] In *Brittany and its Byways*, 151, Mr. Palliser records another instance at Pontaven, in Brittany.

[3] *Salmon Fishery of Scotland* (1860), 92.

with the present one, there was an occasional glut of the salmon fry.

The following singular passage is transcribed from the work of Mackenzie, and may fitly be noticed here:—

"It is of grown fish that there is the greatest scarcity, because from the multiplicity of fishings, and modes of destruction, the salmon are not allowed to attain their full size." (11)

This point does not appear to have attracted the attention of the Salmon Fishery Commissioners in 1860, but it is one that deserves further enquiry.

Not as a proof of plentiful supply, but in explanation of the salmon clause, if a reality, F. Buckland advanced the following opinion:—

"In the spring months the good folks used to go out and catch the kelts which came helpless and emaciated down the river after spawning operations. . . . . Salmon in this condition are easily captured, . . . and dreadfully nasty, tough unwholesome food they invariably afford. Now, provided citizens who had apprentices to feed would buy large numbers of these kelts, salt them down, hang them up in a dry place to dry, and use them as food, upon which the unfortunate apprentices might be fed at a cheap rate for many months to come."[1]

The suggestion is a very probable one, if we could only tide over the difficulty of verifying the correctness of the tradition. That kelts are still caught and used for food, generally in the kippered form, is affirmed by a correspondent (*N. and Q.*, 8th S., VII., 312); also by two of the witnesses at the Salmon Fisheries Enquiry (1588, 1632, 2056.) According to the experience of Mr. Ayrton, the kelt is "either dried for red salmon in the cottager's chimney, or sold for three-halfpence a pound to some neighbouring farmer."[2] A statement corrobo-

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1 *British Fishes*, 360.

2 *Adventures of a Salmon*, 74.

rated in the 4th Annual Report of the Inspectors of Salmon Fisheries (1865):—

"Salmon appear to be killed in some rivers in great numbers during the close season, for the purpose of supplying the dried fish market; two or three days in the cottage chimney render their sale legal, and as the price they command in this condition is a high one, the trade is very profitable" (32.)

One highly important side-issue connected with this subject is the intimate relationship said to exist between fish eating generally and the production of leprosy; especially as it is asserted that salmon especially was a direct cause of this disease. Should this be capable of proof, we can readily understand that the terrible dread of becoming a leper—cut off from association with his fellows, socially and religiously, and dead in the eye of the law—would be a sufficient reason for the apprentices' stipulation, should such be shown to exist. On this matter the Rev. R. Polwhele makes the following assertions in his *History of Cornwall*, VII. (1806), 88:—

"As this disease of leprosy is now extinct, it must have sprung from some cause which is . . . done away . . . The more prevailing notion is that the leprosy was generated by the eating of salmon too frequently, and at unseasonable times. That our forefathers thought so, is evident from covenants which I have seen in this county, and in Devon, stipulating that no apprentices or servants shall be obliged to dine on salmon more than once or twice a week. And we are told, that in consequence of a due abstinence from salmon, lazar houses became no longer necessary. In the same manner this disease is said to have prevailed in Ireland, till the English laid the Irish under restrictions in their use of salmon."

Two writers have adopted, as being correct, the first portion of Polwhele's statement. Counsel, in his *History of Gloucester* (1829), 157, alludes to the well-known clause as being "undoubtedly intended as a precaution against this grievous disorder [leprosy]." And a corres-

pondent of *N. and Q.* (3rd S., VIII., 298) suggests, "the prevalence of leprosy at that period may have been occasioned by partaking too freely of fish [salmon]."

It would be advantageous to know whence Polwhele obtained his information, as unfortunately he cites no authorities. There is no evidence that salmon (or any kind of fresh fish) *per se* produced leprosy; that abstinence from it rendered unnecessary the use of lazar houses; or that the disease was arrested in Ireland by the English in the manner stated.

In the middle of the 17th century, Dr. Tho. Muffett [Moufet] affirmed, "hot salmon is counted unwholesome in England, and suspected as a leprous meal, without all reason."[1]

Newman[2] states, that, excepting Cornwall, leprosy "approximately disappeared" from England in the 16th century (109), whereas it continued in Scotland and Ireland until nearly the middle of the eighteenth. It is singular that in Newman's list of leper or lazar hospitals only two are recorded as being in Cheshire (he mentions three, but two of the instances refer to the same institution), while Devonshire had eight.

We are too apt to regard the leprosy of the early and middle ages as a single disease, whereas, as Dr. Creighton has shown in his *History of Epidemics*, the term included (so far as the occupancy of lazar houses is concerned) not only true leprosy, but also those suffering from aggravated cutaneous and other repulsive diseases, who formed three-fourths of the entire number. All these, as a rule, resulted not from one, but from a combination of causes, of which the chief factors were

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1 *Health's Improvement* (1655), 187.

2 *Decline of Leprosy in the British Islands* (1895 )

the general uncleanliness and want of the most common sanitary arrangements, the restricted amount of fresh vegetables, the employment of mouldy (the disease known in Italy as "pellagra," is allied to leprosy, and is caused by eating bread made of damaged maize) and even of ergotised grain, frequent famines and plagues, and the excessive amount of salted, or rather of imperfectly salted food.

Down to the latter end of the 16th century, and in many places extending to a much later date, a large proportion of the flesh and fish was salted and stored for winter use. Amongst the better classes salt was freely used, and the provisions so treated kept well. But to the poor it was a serious matter; salt was an expensive commodity, and "a couple of bushels . . . often cost as much as a sheep," so that being imperfectly salted, the food had to be eaten in a state "only half-cured or semi-putrid."

Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson is of opinion that "the evidence as regards this disease [leprosy] points to fish as being probably the vehicle by which the poison of leprosy gains access to the human body." He supports it by extracts from many authorities of the influence of fish-eating combined with insanitary surroundings; and more especially "all kinds of preserved or salted fish, or fish in a state of partial decomposition."[1]

"It is strange, if not significant," writes Dr. Newman, "that the decline of leprosy and the decline of excessive eating of salt and bad as well as fresh fish, should occur at the same period. Also that the endemic leprosy areas and the fish areas were largely identical" (74.)

[1] "The Leprosy Problem," appended to *Archives of Surgery*, I. (1890), xi.-xvi.

The gradual substitution of fresh for salted or imperfectly salted provisions; the greater employment of fresh vegetables, with better bread; in addition to the marked improvements in personal cleanliness and sanitation, have not only resulted in the diminution and ultimate cessation of true leprosy in England, but have also lessened, to a very considerable extent, the number of cases of aggravated cutaneous affections.[1]

If, as is asserted, genuine leprosy continued in Scotland for nearly two centuries later than it did in England, we can scarcely wonder at it, if the following order of the Scots' Parliament, held at Scone in 1386, continued to be acted on :—

"Gif ony man brings to the market corrupt swine or salmond to be sauld, they sall be taken by the Bailie and incontinent without ony question sall be sent to the lepper-folke; and gif there be no lepper-folke, they sall be destroyed alluterlie" (Creighton, 113.)

We intuitively feel that a tradition so wide-spread must have been based on some fact or facts, all actual knowledge of which, although it may be surmised, is unknown; and it must also be borne in mind that we possess no positive evidence it was ever carried into practice. Notwithstanding the numerous local verbal traditions, and the statements by authors respecting it, no apprentices' indentures containing this singular clause, or even a copy of the clause itself, have yet been produced, despite all the enquiries that have been made, and the pecuniary inducements offered for the discovery

[1] It is beyond the scope of the present paper to pursue further the causation of leprosy by certain articles of food, especially salted or imperfectly cured fish. Those who desire additional knowledge concerning it, may consult the Works of Dr. Creighton and Dr. Newman, already quoted; Dr. Jessopp's "Village Life 600 years ago," in his *Coming of the Friars*, &c.; White's *Selborne* (1876), I., 213-5; and J. Hutchinson's "Leprosy as a Problem," as well as his articles in the *Lancet* of 1890, vol. I.

of one. Its very foundation, *viz.*, the assumed former superabundance of salmon, is scarcely borne out by the facts now brought forward, testifying to the high repute in which it was always held, and of the high prices it almost invariably commanded.[1] Nevertheless it is quite possible that some tacit or verbal agreement existed between apprentices and their masters, limiting the number of weekly dinners of fish, whether fresh or salted, the latter especially, during those occasional years when it was extraordinarily cheap owing to its unusual abundance; of this, however, we have no evidence or knowledge whatever. In connection with this, it must not be forgotten that salt fish was required in large quantities all over the kingdom, and was sold at a good price at the various large fairs, to purchasers who came from a considerable distance. For example, the following entry is taken from the Steward's Accounts of Haddon Hall, Derbyshire:—

"1549. It allso delyvered ye xiij^th^ of februarye by my masters Comandment into ye hands of Mast^r^ agarde to by fysshe at lychefylde fayer the some of xi^li.^"[2]

It would naturally be thought, that after an unusually large catch of fish, such as is implied by "superabundance," when, in the fresh condition, the wants of the immediate locality had been supplied, and facilities for its transit to the inland districts were wanting, that the residue would have been salted, for which there was at all times a ready sale.

Should the salmon clause tradition be subsequently found to be based on some substantial facts, one or

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[1] In the early part of the 15th century Dame Berners wrote: "the samond ys the most goodly fyche that man may angle to in fresche water." *Treatyse of Fyfshynge with an angle* (reprinted 1883, 21.)

[2] *Transactions of Derbyshire Archæological Society*, XVI., 64.

more of the following may prove to be the *raison d'être* :—

1. The occasional superabundance;
2. The use of unclean fish (kelts), as suggested by F. Buckland;
3. The dread of leprosy.

Personal testimony of its existence has been cited, and this at first sight appears to demonstrate the correctness of the tradition, but the evidence (if it can be accepted as such) is considerably weakened by the circumstance that in every instance many years had elapsed since the indentures containing, or said to contain, it had been seen, and we are all fully aware that the memory of events long since past is apt to be misleading and treacherous. ("The current of belief is commonly a stream formed by the union of many rills of conjecture and sentiment.") It is certain that authors have frequently assumed the tradition to be correct on hearsay evidence alone.[1]

It is noteworthy that the indentures are said to have referred to no other fish than salmon, but whether in the fresh or salted condition is never mentioned.[2] We can hardly realise that apprentices would object to fresh salmon twice weekly, especially when other kinds of food were dear, and therefore to them almost unobtainable. Other fish, however, both fresh and salted, were in common use as food, and if apprentices objected to salt fish at all, we should naturally suppose that it would

[1] When collecting materials for his recently published *History of Horn-books*, the author, G. W. Tuer, met with some curious examples of asserted facts proving to be illusory, which led to his remark that "personal statements are often to be received with a heaped cellar-ful of salt" (I., 42.)

[2] Excepting in one Chester instance already related, where "cured or salt salmon" was believed to be the form specified.

rather be to cheap and coarse varieties like cod, ling, &c. A greater objection might have been raised to stockfish —dried without being salted, and as hard as a piece of wood; or to fish imperfectly salted, or half-putrid. "Stockfish, whilst it is unbeaten, is called buckhorne, because it is so tough; when it is beaten upon the stock, it is termed stockfish."[1]

No allusion to the salmon clause has been discovered in any mediæval work, and the earliest notice of it yet found is contained in Fuller's *Worthies*, published in 1662.[2] As already pointed out, it is said to have continued to a very recent period, without, however, leaving any proof that it once existed; "documentary evidence" in its favor being entirely wanting.

It would be remarkable if it commenced with the 17th century, as it would be coincident with a gradual diminution in the yield of salmon throughout England (according to some authorities), and with a gradual and progressive improvement in the character of the food supplied to the lower classes.

The only conclusion at which we can arrive, after a due consideration of the preceding remarks, is, in the present state of our knowledge of the subject, an unsatisfactory one; and until we are able to obtain, as a result of further researches, some direct positive evidence in support of this tradition, now entirely wanting, we are unable to regard the asserted salmon clause in the indentures of apprentices in any other light than as a myth.

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[1] *Health Improvement*, (1655), 187.

[2] Kingsley asserts it was in use at Winchester 300 years ago (*Water Babies*, 1886, 113), but gives no authority.