

THE SALMON FISHERIES

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The Salmon Fisheries by Charles E. Fryer

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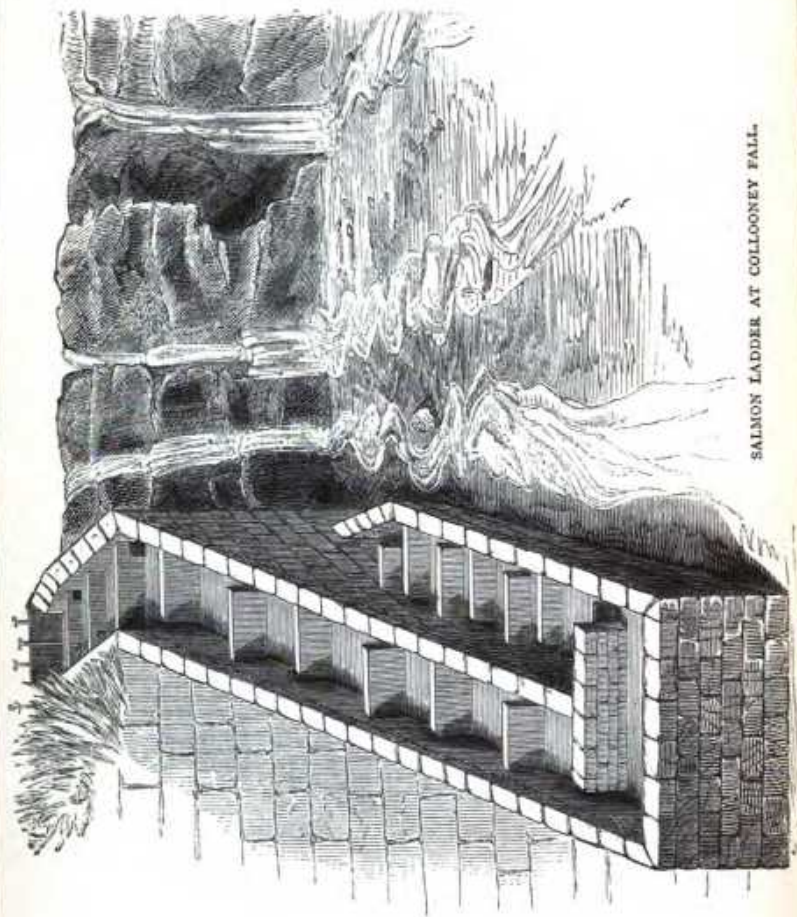
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CHARLES E. FRYER

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SALMON LADDER AT COLLOONEY FALL.

International Fisheries Exhibition

LONDON, 1883

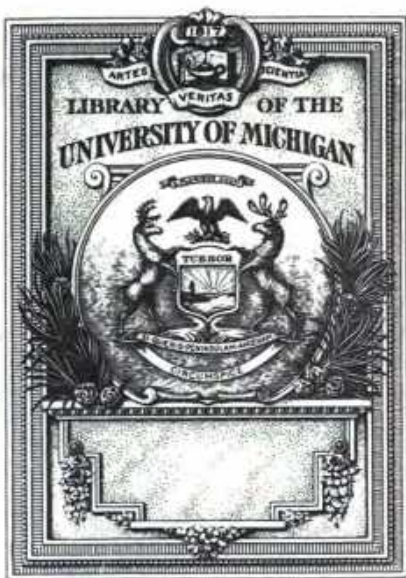
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BY
CHARLES E. FRYER

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED
INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES EXHIBITION
AND 13 CHARING CROSS, S.W.

1883



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well. These islands, indeed, watered by numberless moderately rapid streams, with gravelly beds and capacious estuaries, and surrounded by seas teeming with just such living creatures as form the favourite food of the salmon, would, if only the natural characteristics of the rivers could be restored, still rank, area for area, second to no salmon-producing country in the world.

What the salmon fisheries of this country were in times past may be partly gathered from old records, and may be partly imagined after a comparison of their condition within living memory with their condition now. Take the Thames for example. The old legend which connects the dedication of Westminster Abbey with the salmon fisheries of the Thames is worth recalling here. According to the version given by the late Dean Stanley in his "Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey," "It was on a certain Sunday night in the reign of King Sebert, the eve of the day fixed by Mellitus, first Bishop of London, for the consecration of the original monastery in the Isle of Thorns, that a fisherman of the name of Edric was casting his nets from the shore of the Island into the Thames. On the other side of the river, where Lambeth now stands, a bright light attracted his notice. He crossed, and found there a venerable personage, in foreign attire, calling for some one to ferry him over the dark stream. Edric consented. The stranger landed and proceeded at once to the church, standing ready for its impending consecration. The air suddenly became bright with a celestial splendour. The building stood out clear, without 'darkness or shadow.' A host of angels descending and reascending with sweet odours and flaming candles assisted, and the church was dedicated with the usual solemnities. The fisherman remained in his boat so awe-struck by the sight that when

the mysterious visitant returned and asked for food he was obliged to reply that he had caught not a single fish. Then the stranger revealed his name. 'I am Peter, keeper of the keys of Heaven. When Mellitus arrives to-morrow tell him what you have seen and show him the token that I, St. Peter, have consecrated my own church of St. Peter, Westminster, and have anticipated the Bishop of London. For yourself go out into the river; you will catch a plentiful supply of fish, whereof the larger part shall be salmon. This I have granted on two conditions, first, that you never again fish on Sundays; secondly that you pay a tithe of them to the Abbey of Westminster.' Whether or not disobedience to the injunctions of the saint has had any share in the combination of causes which have led to the general result, it is certain that the "plentiful supply of fish, whereof the larger part shall be salmon," is no longer to be obtained in the Thames. This grand river does not at the present moment contain a single salmon; yet so recently as the beginning of the present century—when a single net-maker in Fenchurch Street is said to have been paid £800 a year for salmon nets to be used in the Thames—it was nothing unusual for twenty salmon to be taken at a single haul in Chelsea Reach. Again, a fisherman stated in evidence before the Royal Commission on Salmon Fisheries in 1861 that so recently as 1820 he frequently took "some hundreds" of salmon at Laleham, where a boy in a ferry-boat used to take 60 or 70 a day with a rod and line, which he hung over his boat while plying to and fro across the stream. The same witness deposed to having seen "twenty salmon lying dead" after spawning "along the course of a hedge not more than 200 yards long." Another witness handed in documents showing that from 15 to 66 salmon were taken nearly every year between