CHAPTER IV.

Fish exceedingly abundant in the Upper-Country—Ancient shoals of Herrings—Old Legislative enactment for the protection of Shad Fisheries in Broad, Saluda, Ennoree, Tiger and Pacolet Rivers, and Stevens' Creek, of Edgefield—The Fish Sluice Law violently enforced—Incident at Lorick's Mill, on the Saluda—The Historian Adair and Indians harpooning Sturgeon in Savannah River, &c.

At the period to which our history relates, and even in later times, the rivers and smaller streams of the upper-country abounded in fish. The Catawba, Savannah, Saluda, and Broad, were not surpassed in this respect by the most prolific streams of the teeming south-west. Besides the numerous well-known varieties that live constantly in the fresh waters, vast numbers of shad came up every spring, and filled not only the rivers, and their larger tributaries, but the smaller creeks and rivulets; the waters of Bullock's and Stevens' Creek, of the Long-Cane, and Seneca, and Sandy Rivers, were famous with the early sportsmen and settlers for their shad fisheries. In the earliest periods, even shoals of herring were annually expected by the Indians to come a great way up into the fresh waters of the upper-country. Their time of running was in March and April.

Lawson says, that the savages took vast quantities of them at those seasons in crails and artificial ponds

into which the fish were directed by means of hedges. It is not generally known, at least in the upper-country, that the shores of Carolina are the utmost southern limit of the migrations of those vast shoals of herring, which, for ages, have annually rolled from within the arctic circle to the warmer seas of the south, for the purpose of depositing their spawn. Why they so early discontinued their visits up the rivers and fresh water streamlets of the country, described by Lawson, we are unable to give any information. The herring is the most valuable fish yet discovered.*

Just previous to the Revolution, or immediately after, the gradual increase of population, and the consequent erection of dams and mills on the streams, so obstructed the ancient passages through which the shad were accustomed to run up to the numerous fisheries, famous from the time of the earliest settlers for their productiveness, and manly sport, that the communities, which were interested, complained loudly of the failure of their annual supplies of fish. This was particularly the case on the Broad, Saluda, Ennoree, Tiger, and Pacolet Rivers, and Stevens' Creek, in the present territory of Edgefield. The matter became a subject of Legislative investigation, and resulted, in March, 1784, in the following enactment, entitled an Act "to prevent the damming up of Broad, Saluda, Ennoree, Tiger, and Pacolet Rivers, and Stevens' Creek, or otherwise obstructing the fish from passing up the said rivers, and to oblige

* Encyclo. Amer.

such persons as had already dammed them, to remove the obstructions, so that the fish could pass up."

Such, however, was the value of good mills, and the necessity of stopping every passage at the river falls, in order to have them, that the "fish sluice statute" proved gradually, from the beginning, a dead letter. And the people, though greatly regretting the loss of their time-honored luxury and sport of spring fish and fishing, aware that the sacrifice must be made to greater interests that had sprung up in the rapid development of their section of the State, at length silently acquiesced, and nothing more was heard of fish sluices, or of shad catching, at the old fisheries, except at certain points on the Broad and Savannah Rivers.

The last two or three generations of the upper-country population have scarcely heard, from tradition, of those ancient migrations from the ocean, as far up even as the little streams and brooks that lie above the dashing shoals which stretch across the entire width of the State, in a magnificent series of foaming cataracts—an imperishable granite breakwater of God's building that separates the lands of oaks, and hickory, and luxuriant grain, from the sombre pines and alluvial sands of the middle and lower country.

It must not be supposed, however, that these important fishing privileges of the upper-country were yielded without a struggle. The innate selfishness of even enlightened men blinds them often to the legiti-

mate results of the very progress which they themselves love, and are earnestly striving to promote.

In 1824, a company of twenty men, living near the Saluda, in the Districts of Abbeville and Laurens, assembled at the old Swansey's Ferry, with a boat in readiness to proceed down the river, according to a previous agreement, for the purpose of cutting through a dam that had effectually prevented the passage of shad to the long-established fishery at that point. At the head of the party were Dr. John ——, of Abbeville, and Captain Robert ——, of Laurens, and among them Nimrod Overby, Thomas Harris, Harrison Long, and —— Jolly.

Their point of destination was Lorick's Mill, some forty miles lower down, between the Districts of Newberry and Edgefield. The dam at this place had been built with public funds, under the auspices of Colonel A. Blanding, and in connection with his splendid folly of river and canal navigation of the Saluda.* A strong frame-work, supported by pens of rock, formed the material of the dam in which, with a semblance of respect to the statute, a small gap had been left, but not so deep as to afford, in the spirit of the Act, a sluice for the passage of fish.

The ardor of the party abated somewhat, on a close view of the work before them; they were not men, however, to be driven from a purpose once deliberately formed, and went resolutely to the task of throwing out the rip-rapped stone, and cutting away

* We shall speak of this fully in its proper place.

the timbers with their axes. Numerous spectators collected, in the meantime, on both banks of the river to witness the process of demolition; but no opposition was offered. Thus they toiled for three days, and in that time succeeded in opening a deeper passage not more than some six feet wide; but thinking this sufficient for their purpose, the party desisted, and returned home. A short time after the breach in the obnoxious dam was more effectually closed than before, and not a shad perhaps since that day has extended its migrations in the Saluda as far as Swansey's Ferry. This was doubtless the last attempt made in the up-country to enforce the fish sluice statute of 1784.

The gigantic rock fish—a delicacy for the table of a king—lurked especially in the deep waters of the Broad, while the sturgeon, trout, sucker, and perch, the fierce pike and voracious cat, were yet more numerous in that river, and the others that have been mentioned. Says an old writer: "Those Indians who are unacquainted with the use of barbed iron are very expert in striking large fish out of their canoes, with long, sharp-pointed green canes, which are well bearded, and hardened in the fire. In Savannah River, I have often accompanied them in killing sturgeons, with those green swamp harpoons, and which they did with much pleasure and ease; for when we discovered the fish, we soon thrust into their bodies one of the harpoons. As the fish would immediately strike deep, and rush away to the bot-

tom very rapidly, their strength was soon exhausted by their violent struggles against the buoyant force of the green darts; as soon as the top-end of them appeared again on the surface of the water, we made up to them, renewed the attack, and in like manner continued it, till we secured our game."*

Fish was one of the staple articles of food with the Cherokees and other Indians in this region. When they were unable, by their simple methods, to take the usual supply of game from the woods, they seldom failed to procure, at all seasons, an abundance of fish in the rivers and creeks.

And it was chiefly for this reason that all their towns and settlements were situated on the banks of considerable streams. And these were then clear and beautiful—as limpid as transparent crystal; the clay and loosened soil, from a thousand wasting fields and plantations, had not yet imparted to them their modern turbidness. In such waters the simple spear and net served all the purposes of a complete fishing tackle.

No where in the up-country are the remains of a single Indian town found in a spot remote from a creek or river; and two historical facts may be safely inferred for every such locality: it was once abundantly supplied with fish, and possessed a soil admirably adapted to the production of corn.

"There is a favorite method among them of fishing with hand nets. The nets are about three feet

---

* Adair.

deep, and of the same diameter at the opening, made of the wild hemp, and knotted after the usual manner of our nets. On each side of the mouth, they tie, very securely, a strong elastic green cane, to which the ends are fastened. Prepared with these, the warriors abreast jump in at the end of a long pond, swimming under water with their net stretched open with both hands, and the canes in a horizontal position. In this manner they will continue, either till their breath is expended by want of respiration, or till the net is so ponderous as to force them to empty it ashore or in a basket, fixed in a proper place for that purpose; by removing one hand the canes instantly spring together. I have been engaged half a day at a time, and half drowned with this diversion. When any of us was so unfortunate as to catch water-snakes in our sweep, and emptied them ashore, we had the ranting voice of the whole company whooping against us, till another party was so unlucky as to meet with the like misfortune. During this exercise the women are fishing ashore with coarse baskets, to catch the fish that escape our nets. At the end of our friendly diversion, we cheerfully return home, and in an innocent friendly manner eat together, studiously diverting each other on the incidents of the day, and make a cheerful night."

There was another primitive method of taking fish, so much like one still in vogue with the whites, that there is no doubt, it was originally borrowed from the Indians, who were accustomed to use it in the iden-

tical places in the streams of the upper-country, where our people use it at the present day.

It consisted in laying long, tapering baskets, precisely similar, it seems, to those now called "fish baskets," but much larger, and constructed chiefly of canes, in the middle of a shoal or slight waterfall, at a point where two sloping rows of stones, running, one from each bank, are made to meet. The fish, following the natural swift current of the stream, would pass into the baskets, and, in those prolific times, soon fill them up. When a larger number than usual was wanted, as on the occasion of a village feast, the Indians used to expedite the process by what may be called a *drive of the fish*. They stretched a grape-vine across the stream, above the baskets, which they contrived to sink by hanging stones to it, that dragged the bottom; thus prepared, they sometimes swam a mile, plunging and whooping, and driving the fish before them into the baskets. In this way they frequently succeeded in taking incredible numbers, of which, according to Adair, they sometimes made a feast of love—every one in the village partaking of it in the most friendly manner—and afterwards they dance together, singing *halelujah*, and the rest of their usual praises to God for his bountiful gifts to the beloved people.

Another method not unfrequently practiced by the Cherokees in the art of taking fish, is somewhat curious, and illustrates not only their ingenuity, but that acute observation of the nature and properties of plants for which they have ever been celebrated.

It is thus described: "In a dry summer season, they gather horse-chestnuts, and different sorts of roots, which, having pounded pretty fine, and steeped awhile in a trough, they scatter over the surface of a middle-sized pond, and stir it about with poles, tlll the water is sufficiently impregnated with the intoxicating bitter. The fish are all soon drunk, and make to the surface of the water with their bellies uppermost. They are then gathered in baskets, and the largest barbacued—being carefully covered over at night to preserve them from the supposed putrifying influence of the moon. It seems that the fish caught in this manner, are not poisoned,* but only stupified; for they prove very wholesome food. By experiments, when they are speedily moved into good water, they revive in a few minutes."†

With these facts before us, it is no difficult task for the imagination to reanimate a thousand scenes in as many spots on the streams of the upper-country, that were the realities of the period, when it was yet the possession of its aboriginal people, and long before the restless foot of the white man had desecrated the soil. Those whose dispositions are sufficiently antiquarian to find delight in the study of the past—in deciphering through its associations with the present, a language and a history, too subtle for types

---

*The horse-chestnut is better known as the common "buck eye" of our woods—the Aesculus glabra of the botanists.

† Adair.

or even for the comprehension of less curious minds—may here enjoy a feast peculiarly their own. They may sit and muse by the Fairforest, the Tiger, the Ennoree, and the beautiful Savannah, and fancy they hear mingling, with the dashing roar or gentle murmur of their waters, the joyous shouts of the red men once more at their sports, or gladsome toil in the element they loved so well.

To complete this picture of luxuriant animal production, the usual varieties of wild foul were not wanting to the woods and waters. The rivers and their tributaries abounded with duck and wild geese; but not only did the former bird swarm in those streams, it was also found in great numbers in every woodland lake. In the vicinity of Greenwood, and Cokesbury, in the Flatwoods, and many other localities of the entire country, there were found in old times innumerable ponds or lakes, long since dried up, in which they collected in such quantities as to attract the attention of the early, and even more recent hunters. Possibly none may now live; but we are assured, that there were men, who shot duck on the elevated ridges of Greenwood and Cokesbury.

The noise, and denudations of civilized life, have affected this game, as they did the buffalo and elk, have driven it away forever from its ancient haunts. To see, at the present day, a flock of wild geese quietly feeding upon the ground or gamboling in the waters of the upper-country, would be an event surprising enough, while the peculiar whistle, and splashing roar of the great duck, gathering by

thousands at night-fall in the creeks and woodland lakes, are heard no more.

The incredible numbers of wild turkeys that once existed in this region, is sufficiently attested both by tradition, and the fact that, although they are exceedingly shy, and the forests, their natural coverts, are well nigh cut away, they are still in many places quite numerous, and are likely to continue to subsist in the country as long as any portion of secluded woods is suffered to stand. Lawson declares, in his History of Carolina, published as early as 1718, that he had seen in the forest as many as five hundred wild turkeys in a single flock; indeed, they seemed to be seldom out of his sight, as he traversed the country from Charleston towards North Carolina. Bartram, the botonist and traveler, also mentions the astonishing numbers he encountered, of this bird, while traversing Carolina and East Florida. "Having rested very well during the night, I was awakened in the morning early, by the cheering converse of the wild turkey-cocks, saluting one another from the sun brightened tops of the lofty cypresses. They begin at early dawn, and continue till sun-rise, from March to the last of April. The high forests ring with the noise, like the crowing of the domestic cock, of these social sentinels; the watchword being caught and repeated from one to another, for hundreds of miles around; in so much that the whole country is, for an hour or more, in an universal shout. A little after sun-rise they quit the trees, and alighting on the earth, strut and dance around the coy

female, while the deep forests seem to tremble with their shrill noise."*

In the methods of taking this splendid fowl, the Anglo-American hunters made no improvements on those practiced by the Indians in the earliest periods. No artificial contrivance, and no other human mouth, could surpass their imitations of the natural call of both the male and female. It was then, too, far less shy than after it had become frightened into a habitual wariness by the constant report of the pioneer's rifle. The Indians were also accustomed to entrap it in what are still known as "turkey pens," which they baited with maize.

The dried breast of the wild turkey, is said to have been frequently used, by the early settlers, as a substitute for bread.

The history of the partridge is similar to that of the bee and red fox, it rather followed than preceded the footsteps of the pioneers. When these western wilds were first penetrated by the whites, it was seldom, if ever seen; even in luxuriant Kentucky,† it was not till after the forest had been partially cleared away, and waving fields of golden grain had taken its place, that flocks of this, now familiar bird, began to gather around the cabins and farms of the settlers. The cry of "bob white," and the buz of the bee, became warning notes to the Indians of coming white men, and civilization.

* Bartram's Carolina, p. 81. † Hall's Sketches of the West.