

If any criticism might be ventured upon, in considering such an acutely painful poem, it would be that this stark rehearsal of intimate grief is intolerable. Just the same absolute note is heard in *A Farewell*, mitigated by those casual touches of pure beauty which make even such grief endurable, and by the remote hope of rencounter (to quote one of the most magical of single lines):

Seasoning the termless feast of our content  
*With tears of recognition never dry.*

### Siberia.

'The earth is full of the habitations of cruelty'—well, at any rate Siberia is. Mr. I. W. Shklovsky travelled *In Far North-East Siberia* (Macmillan; 8s. 6d. net) among the people who inhabit the Kolyma, and surely a more undesirable land to live in or a more undesirable people to live among, the earth has not.

A truly terrible story is told—and it is told as all the stories are, with the inescapable impressiveness of the dreadful reality itself—a story of what comes of banishing criminals to these inhospitable regions. The official title for the Kolyma region is 'Unsuitable for human habitation.' The experience of the haillak, as the exiled criminal is called, is intolerable; but even more intolerable is the experience of the people among whom he is sent to live.

'In their reckoning each haillak costs the Oulooss ten or twelve roubles per month, and this, when the Yakuts themselves are obliged to live on bark, flavoured with a little sour milk, and when in the Verkhoysk region they are obliged to eat field-mice so that they may not die of starvation. In order to protect their wives and daughters from the haillak, the Yakuts give him

an orphan girl with whom to cohabit. Pitiable indeed is the plight of this wretched girl! Her terrible tyrant rules her with fist and cudgel, and her face is never free from bruises. The haillak so despises the Yakuts that, though he may live for years among them, the only word of their language which he will condescend to learn is "give!"

'Life under these conditions is equally intolerable on both sides. The Yakuts regard the haillak as vermin, as a savage, wicked beast that drains their life; as an evil satyr who will violate wives and daughters in the presence of their husbands and fathers. On the other hand, the criminal forced to live among savages, who do not understand him, feels his position to be worse than solitary confinement. Finally, driven to desperation, he does something terrible in order to compel the authorities to remove him from this accursed region. While I was in the Kolymsk district one of these criminals, without any reason, threw the child of a small chieftain into a fire and held him there with an iron rod until he was burnt to death. Despair gave courage to the Yakuts. They sprang upon him, bound him, and took him to Sredne Kolymsk, and from there to Yakutsk, where he was sentenced to twelve years' hard labour.

'Near Nijne Kolymsk there is a clan of eighteen Yakuts who have to maintain fourteen of these transported criminals. It is difficult to believe, but it is a fact that the entire clan are the slaves of the haillaks. The Yakuts give to each haillak everything necessary—draw-nets, nets, dogs, sledges, etc.; the savages themselves, having no nets of their own, work for him, receiving for themselves only one-third of the total catch. Very often the haillak will trade all the things for drink, and then demand new ones.'

## The Fisherman as Expositor.

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It is a strange thing that, considering the number and importance of the disciples who were fishermen, no scholar seems to have studied the Bible, and especially the Gospels, from the fisherman's point of view.

Biblical students have given the fullest attention to the agriculture of Palestine, but the cult of the fisherman seems to have been neglected. This is surprising, because from a fisherman's standpoint many things assume a different aspect.

## I.

It is an accepted belief that John, for instance, must have been unlettered and poor, because he was a fisherman.

That Peter and John were 'unlearned and ignorant men' according to the standard of the Scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem we all know. But no one who knows what their standard was would accept their dictum as applying, say, to the ability to write the life and sayings of Christ. From the fisherman's point of view it is seen that neither Peter nor *John* could have been poor men.

This is shown in the accounts of fishing operations in the New Testament. In practically all the pictures of the fishing work sketched for us there, the method is what is known as *seining*; as a matter of fact the very identical word of which this English term is the lineal descendant—*sagene*—is used in Mt 13<sup>47</sup>. In Matthew and Mark the term used of the fishing apparatus is 'circle-net' (*amphiblestron*), whilst Mark, according to Westcott and Hort, gives the 'twist' to the verb by making it 'circle-casting' (*amphiballo*).

The general interpretation put on this by landmen is that the disciples were fishing with a draw-net, in quite shallow water, dragging it ashore like a small salmon-net. That this was not the case, however, is seen by their references to 'their partners in the other boat' (Lk 5<sup>7</sup>), and by the fact that there was a difference in the size of the boats, the second craft being described in Jn 21<sup>8</sup> as the 'little boat.' This is an exact description of fishing with what is known as the 'stop seine,' a large, swift-rowing boat, and a small tender or 'follower.'

Now a seine of this description was the most expensive piece of machinery known in that calling. It is a very expensive thing nowadays; it was far more so then, when net had to be braided by hand. Moreover, it requires a big crew to work it, and consequently has always been financed by either a wealthy capitalist or a number of fairly well-to-do men in partnership.

If the father of James and John was able to finance that type of fishery and to have hired servants to manage the craft (Mk 1<sup>20</sup>) he could not have been a poor man; and in the district of Capernaum such educative facilities as were common to Greek-speaking communities would certainly have been within the reach of a family

such as his. This gives us a different impression of the standing, and therefore education, of Zebedee, James, and John at least, and also has some bearing upon the position of Peter, since Simon was partner with them (Lk 5<sup>10</sup>). Their partnership must have constituted a fairly well-to-do company, and these well-known disciples were the capitalists.

## II.

Another matter in which the fisherman's viewpoint is illuminating is in the interpretation of certain New Testament words.

There is, for instance, the word *huperoon*, rendered in the A.V. 'upper room,' and in the R.V. 'upper chamber.' Those who are acquainted with the habits of the fisherman and his methods of work would be inclined to put it in one word, like the Greek, and translate it 'loft.' In that case it would call to mind, not a small room easily lit after sunset, where everything which occurred would be plainly visible to all, but a long, dark loft, with a small lamp of cheap oil—probably fish oil—and tow. Such a lamp would be enough to show the faces of those met around it, but nothing more. How easy it would be in such a place, most of it in darkness, and its best light but semi-darkness, to misunderstand and therefore to misinterpret what was seen.

Then there is that word *sunalizomenos* (R.V. 'being assembled together,' Ac 1<sup>4</sup>), which has been such a puzzle to etymologists. The Vulgate renders this by *convalescens*, 'eating together'—'as if,' says one commentator, 'the word were derived from *hals*, salt.' Some of the Greek fathers interpreted the word in this sense, Chrysostom expounding it by *trapedzes koinon*, 'the table of fellowship.' The commentator referred to, however, traces it to *halls*, 'close-packed.' Might not a knowledge of fishery have provided the key to this word, and solved the difficulty?

It is often stated nowadays that for a proper understanding of New Testament Greek we ought to study, not the Greek of the schools and the literati, but the Greek of the merchant, the shopkeeper and the man of affairs, and that when the mass of Greek bills of lading, commercial correspondence, agreements, etc., now in the possession of the scholars has been classified, it will revolutionize our conception of certain New Testament words and phrases. A better illustration of this

and a better example of colloquial Greek could perhaps hardly be found than the word *sunalizomenos*.

It is manifestly the equivalent (Greek) of our modern saying 'packed like sardines,' though without the humorous element, because it was an ordinary concept; moreover, it is not our way of packing sardines, but the method of the Eastern Mediterranean littoral. For, although the word is traced back to *halés*, that word in its turn must be further referred to its undoubted original, *hals*, 'salted.' Literally the word means 'salted together.'

The explanation of so strange a term is found in the importance of the trade in salted fish, and the method by which the salting was done. Data are plentiful, but must be looked at with the fisherman's eyes.

We know that the Phœnicians had an export trade in salted fish as far back as the time of Nehemiah.

'There dwelt men of Tyre therein, which brought fish and all manner of ware and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem' (Neh 13<sup>16</sup>).

It would have been impossible to get fish from Tyre, or even from Joppa to Jerusalem in a fresh state; they must therefore have been salted, and as the journey from Tyre was largely overland, weight would naturally have been an important factor, hence the dry method of salting would have been the one favoured.

It is pretty certain, from the remains which still exist, that the Phœnicians carried out this method of 'curing' fish all along the Mediterranean coasts and into Spain. The very name of Malaga (Hebrew, *malach*—the *ch* being guttural—'salt') means a salting place.

From Spain this trade seems to have been carried by the Spanish Phœnicians even to the most westerly parts of Britain, since the Palestinian method and the Palestinian press are common to all.

The method of 'curing' was to place a layer of salt on the ground, generally under cover, and on this to deposit a layer of fish. After some time the salt gradually turned to brine, which, slowly percolating through the mass of fish, effectively salted them.

When this process was complete, they were packed in light barrels, and the brine and oil squeezed out of them by heavy stones hung on one end of a long pole. The inner end of the pole was stuck in a hole made for it in the wall of the press-house, and, in cases where the house was on a rock foundation, a hole in the rock did equal service. In this way the fish, in addition to being pressed dry, were *packed closely together*.

The press used for this purpose in Cornwall and West Devon, up to about thirty or forty years ago, was precisely similar to that in use in Palestine in Biblical times for pressing grapes, and is still in use in most country districts of the Holy Land today. (See *Encyclopedia Biblica*, col. 5314; Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 45.)

It is fair to assume that where these press-holes are found in the rocks and ruined walls along the coasts, and where the Syrian form of press has been used, they may be taken as an indication of Syrian influence and trade.

The connexion between Galilee and Phœnicia must have been pretty intimate; see Lk 6<sup>17</sup>, Ac 12<sup>20</sup>.

The term 'salted,' therefore, to the Syrian, whether Phœnician or Galilean, would mean, as the word *halés* suggests, close packed together; but the knowledge of the etymology of the word gives a more vivid picture than is conveyed without it.

In these ways—and possibly in others, as, for instance, the study of weather phenomena and its bearing on certain so-called miracles of the Old Testament especially—a close study of Scripture from the fisherman and mariner's standpoint may cause 'Yet more light. . .'