

ANGLICAN ANGLERS

Though they had known each other for several years, the two men could not have been more different. Izaak Walton, thirty-seven years older than Charles Cotton, was seen as "sober of mien, pious, and simple of dress;" Cotton as "irreverent, irresponsible, a dandy in his dress, courtly in manner." However, the older industrious tradesman and the younger, aristocratic country squire became close friends, which developed into a father-son relationship and a sharing of the love of angling in the "silver" waters of the river Dove on the Beresford estate located near Staffordshire close to the Derbyshire dales.

Charles Cotton was born in Beresford Hall, April 1630. His father, Charles, was a sportsman and country gentleman, who married into the Beresford family. He was also a friend of Izaak Walton. It appeared that young Charles would have all the advantages in life. Having been privately tutored and then attending Oxford, he early turned to scholarship; he also traveled extensively on the continent. In 1656 he married his cousin, Isabella Hutchinson. Following his father's death two years later and, shortly thereafter, his mother's, he inherited the estates of Beresford and Bentley. Country life appealed to the young squire. He loved the outdoors, especially planting in his orchard, hunting, gaming, and fishing. It was by the river Dove that he learned the art of fly-fishing. Although he spent a great deal of time in his study reading and writing poetry, he soon began leading a careless and extravagant life. The money that he inherited was lavished on furniture, decorations, and other non-essentials for Beresford Hall. He also wasted hundreds of pounds on the culture of rare fruit trees, one of his favorite hobbies. One can only imagine how Isabella reacted to her husband's profligate lifestyle. In 1670, after fourteen years of marriage, she died, leaving Charles with three sons and five daughters.

Five years later he took a second wife, Mary, Dowager Countess of Wingfield, who, it was hoped, because of her inherited wealth, would save Charles from financial ruin. However, the more money he had at his disposal, the more he squandered. Harassed by creditors, in order to escape them, so the story goes, the poet/angler would flee Beresford Hall and seek refuge in the caves beneath Beresford Rock, the original

location of the home of the Beresfords. We do not know what Mary thought of all this, but she probably gave him a good tongue-lashing on his return from the cave. Cotton, unable to control his weakness, was forced to sell off a substantial amount of land on the estate. Finally, in 1681, Beresford Hall had to be put up for sale. The estate was bought by a Mr. Woodhouse, but was immediately repurchased by John Beresford, head of the local branch of the family. Charles' life continued its downward spiral. At the end, his inheritance having evaporated, he died penniless in 1687 at the age of 57 and was buried in St. James's Church, London. Of the children by his first marriage, two sons died in infancy; his daughters made wealthy matches. Of Charles' remaining son, Beresford Cotton, little is known, and I have no idea what happened to poor hapless Mary.

What did Cotton leave behind besides his offspring and his debts? During his time, he was recognized as a translator, a writer of burlesque, and poet. As the years passed, his reputation as a poet grew. His poetry, which continued to be popular during the eighteenth century, consisted of a variety of lyric verse - odes, sonnets, elegies -- admired by both nineteenth century poets Coleridge and Wordsworth. To his credit many of his poems reflect a profound love for the Dovedale countryside. In the opening stanza of his poem, "Wonders of the Peak," he describes the river Dove and the area surrounding it, prefaced by a comment on the political climate of the time:

*'Twi'x't these twin provinces of Britain's shame,
The Silver Dove (how pleasant is that name)
Runs through a Vale high crested Cliffs a 'ershade;
By her fair progress only pleasant made.*

In 1664 he published a burlesque in verse on the first book of The Aeneid, which proved so popular that it quickly went through fourteen editions. He translated French classics into English, two being Comeille's "Tragedy of Horace" and Montaigne's essays. However, the work which has lasted through time is the most simple of all. It is Instructions on How to Angle for Trout or Grayling in a Clear Stream. Written in ten

days at his friend Walton's request, it forms the second part of the fifth edition of *The Compleat Angler* and is considered the first modern, detailed treatise on fly fishing.

Now, let us turn to the author of *The Compleat Angler*, Izaak Walton. His life was a long one. He was born in 1593 in Staffordshire and died in 1683 in Winchester at the age of 90, having lived in the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I, and Charles II. His father was an innkeeper, who died when Izaak was only four, after which his mother remarried. Despite a limited education, during his life, he read widely and became associated with men of learning. When he was a young man, he became apprenticed to a London ironmonger. He eventually went into that business on his own and was able to retire at age 50. His home and business was located close to St. Dunstan's Church, where he became active in parish activities and befriended the Vicar of St. Dunstan's, Dr. John Donne, the noted poet, who later became Dean of St. Paul's.

In 1618, Walton married Rachel Floud, a descendant of Archbishop Cranmer. Rachel bore him seven children, none of whom survived beyond infancy. Two years after her death in 1642 Walton would suffer more pain from the turmoil all Anglicans like him were facing during the English Civil War and the Interregnum under the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell. Walton must have keenly felt, as anyone would during a time of war and revolutionary upheaval, the loss of everything he had held most sacred: his king executed, property confiscated and destroyed, Anglican worship proscribed. Life as he had known it had been completely altered. This excerpt from W.B. Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming," reflects, I believe, the situation Walton was facing:

*Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

From his biography of Bishop Robert Sanderson, Walton reflects upon the chaotic political climate of these times: "When I look back upon the ruin of families, the bloodshed, the decay of common honesty, and how the former piety and plain dealing of this now sinful nation is turned into cruelty and cunning, I praise God that He prevented me from being of that party which helped to bring in this covenant and those sad confusions that have followed it."

Being a devoted Royalist, Walton, a widower with no living children, reluctantly left London in 1643 and went to Staffordshire, the place of his birth. He became an exile in his own country. In 1647 Walton, who was 54 years old, married Anne Ken, who was related to Thomas Ken, Bishop of Bath. Anne bore him three children, one of whom, young Izaak, died in infancy, the eighth child Walton had lost. Fortunately, the last child, also named Izaak, lived and survived his father, becoming Canon of Salisbury Cathedral. Their daughter, Anne, married Dr. William Hawkins, who became Canon of Winchester Cathedral. The bloodline ended there. The younger Izaak: died a bachelor, and daughter Anne bore two children, neither of whom bore children of their own.

Before Anne Walton's death in 1662, Izaak had begun writing his great work, the full title being *The Compleat Angler, or Contemplative Man's Recreation Being A Discourse on Rivers, Fish-Ponds, Fish, and Fishing*. The first edition was published in 1653 when the author was 60 years old. The subsequent four editions were enlarged and improved upon, with the final revision appearing in 1676 when he was 83.

Walton had established a close friendship with fellow Anglican and Royalist, Dr. George Morley, a friendship dating back to the time when Morley had taken refuge with Walton in Stafford during the Civil War. After the Restoration, Morley, who was made bishop of Winchester, not forgetting the favor his friend did for him, offered Walton residence in the bishop's palace, where he remained the rest of his life.

Walton died in his 91st year, having left a modest estate. In his will, which he wrote in his own hand, he left property and books to his son and daughter. In one of the paragraphs of his will he expressed his concern for the less fortunate by providing certain

sums of money for "two boys, sons of honest and poor parents, to be apprentices to tradesmen", for "some honest poor man's daughter on the day of her marriage," and to provide coal for poor people of Stafford "during the hardest and most pinching time of winter." Showing his humility, he concludes his will with the following words: "I desire my burial may be near the place of my death; and free from any ostentation or charge, but privately; this I make to be my last will." He is buried in the chapel of Winchester Cathedral, where there is a marble slab declaring his last resting place, above which is a stained-glass window showing him reading a book, fishing tackle by his side, a stream in the background. Below is the inscription, "Study to be quiet," which also appears at the conclusion of Walton's book. A fine oil painting of him at age 79 by Jacob Huysmans hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Before I concentrate on the fifth edition with the second part written by Charles Cotton, I would like to include an important part of Walton's literary output, namely his biographies of prominent men, all but one his contemporaries.

Having become a member of John Donne's parish at St. Dunstan's gave Walton the opportunity of listening to Donne's sermons and getting to form a close relationship with the eminent preacher. In his first biography, *The Life of Dr. John Donne*, published in 1640 and revised in 1658, Walton focused on Donne's sermons and "pious verses," piety being a characteristic shared between author and subject. Walton said that he did not care for Donne's early poetry with its colloquial style, unconventional images, and what he referred to as the poet's "strong lines" on the subject of love. (However, it's hard to imagine his not deriving momentary pleasure from reading one of Donne's early poems titled "To His Mistress Going to Bed" containing these rather "strong" lines: "License my roving hands, and let them go, /Before, behind, between, above, below./ O my America! My new-found land ... Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee./As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be, /To taste whole joys.")

The second biography appearing in 1651 was *The Life of Sir Henry Wotton* (Provost of Eton College), followed in 1653 by *The Life of Mr. Richard Hooker* (minister and author of "Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity"); *The Life of Mr. George Herbert* (1670) (priest

and poet), and *The Life of Dr. Robert Sanderson* (1678) (Bishop of Lincoln). With the exception of Hooker, who died in 1600, Walton knew each of these men intimately. In addition to their being prominent, learned, and pious Anglicans, two of them, Henry Wotton and George Herbert, along with Dr. Donne, were on several occasions Walton's fishing companions. Walton's biographies, which he enlarged and improved upon over time, have been called "warm and moving compositions of literary art." His use of personal anecdotes and dialogue "was an artistic principle enabling him to add life and variety to his narrative."

Walton never considered himself a professional writer. In his introduction to *The Compleat Angler* Walton says that in writing about fishing: "I have made myself a recreation of a recreation." In addressing readers of his discourse, "but especially to the honest angler," Walton states that "I cannot doubt but that most readers may receive so much pleasure or profit by it ... if they be not too grave, sour-complexioned or too busy men, whom anglers pity and contemn." Walton refers the reader to "the more useful part of this Discourse, that is to say, the observations of the nature, and breeding, and seasons, and catching of fish." To the "useful part" he adds, "I have in several places mixed, not any scurrility, but some innocent, harmless mirth."

Walton's love of fishing, which is evident in practically every page of his book, goes back to the time he was a boy fishing the Shawford brook near Stafford and later the south country streams of Lea. In writing *The Compleat Angler*, he was carrying on what was, at the time, a centuries-old tradition in sporting literature going back to Dame Juliana Berner's Treatise on "Fishing with an Angle," published in 1496. Dame Juliana made use of the form of Edward Duke of York, whose "Master of Game" was written around the beginning of the fifteenth century. Although these earlier treatises were technically accurate, Dame Juliana's Treatise in particular was filled with moral arguments. Because of his conversational writing style, Walton provides the reader with characters who come to life and with situations that seem real to us.

Except for salmon, trout, pike, carp, and possibly bream, how many anglers or non-anglers like me have heard of the chavender, the umber, the tench or the barbel, the

gudgeon or the ruffe, the bleak, the bull-head, or the Miller's- thumb? Walton titles each of the chapters covering the third, fourth, and part of the fifth days "Observations of the -----(fill in the blank for each of the above) and Directions how to fish for him." Anglers need to know, he says, how to tie one's own flies, gather bait, and make one's own tackle in order to prepare for what he called "the most honest, ingenuous, quiet, and harmless art of angling." The important phrase here is "the art of angling," a phrase that Walton repeats in the first part of his book: "Angling is an art, and an art worthy the knowledge and practice of a wise man." He says that a good angler must not only bring "an inquiring, searching, observing wit, but he must bring a large measure of hope and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself ... "

In Part I Walton's characters are believable and interesting, learned and literary. Over the five days they are together they not only catch fish with their simple rods made of spliced ash, lines of tapered horsehair, and natural bait such as worms and frogs, but engage in discourses on philosophy, classical literature and the Bible, quote verses of Drayton, Donne, Marlowe and other poets. They listen to songs in praise of a countryman's life and of angling; they sup and down their drinks in a country tavern; they are serenaded by a pretty maiden who sings "The Milkmaid's Song." There is a strong bond here of fellowship, of friends having a jolly good time.

Let us take a look at some of the many allusions in the first part of the fifth edition which invite the reader to savor the richness of Walton's prose style as well as the diversity, depth and practical advice of its content. Interspersed throughout the text are eighty detailed line drawings and illustrations depicting people, places, and fish.

The first chapter begins with a "conference" between an angler (Piscator), a hunter (Venator) and a falconer (Auceps) who are on their way towards a town named Ware on a "fresh May morning." Each in turn elaborates on his particular "recreation." Auceps focuses on the element of air, saying that "every creature that hath life in its nostrils stands in need of my element." He refers to many types of birds, such as the lark, "who quits the earth and sings as she ascends higher into the air;" the nightingale, "who

breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat ... ;" "pigeons that are then "related to carry and recarry letters"; the dove, sent out of the ark by Noah, proving a "faithful and comfortable messenger;" ravens providing meat for the Prophet Elijah;" finally, the Holy Ghost, "when descending visibly upon Our Savior, did it by assuming the shape of a Dove."

The hunter, taking his turn, begins with a commendation of the earth, which he calls "a solid, settled element," an element "most universally beneficial both to man and beast." Earth provides man with recreations such as "the manly exercise" of hunting "the stately stag, the crafty fox, and the generous buck." The earth brings forth "herbs, flowers, and fruits ... and, above all, the fruitful vine, of which when I drink moderately it clears my brain, cheers my heart, and sharpens my wit."

Piscator proclaims that water, the "eldest daughter of creation," is the element he "trades in." It is the element upon which "the Spirit of God did first move." He makes numerous references to the importance of water for the nourishment of everything that grows on earth, for the creatures that are bred and fed in the water (i.e. fish), all benefiting man not only in "the lengthening of his life, but for the preventing of sickness." Excluding fish in our diet, he says, would cause "many putrid, shaking, and intermittent agues." One would benefit from observing the diets of those in other countries "that feed upon herbs, salads, and plenty of fish."

He refers to the ancient Romans, who made fish "the mistress of all their entertainments;" to the account given by Plutarch of the anecdote of Antony angling with Cleopatra; to discourses on Pliny and Aristotle, on Moses and the Prophet Amos, both of whom were anglers. Contemporary fellow anglers mentioned, subjects of two of the biographies, are George Herbert, whom Walton called "that holy poet," whose poem, "Contemplation on God's Providence," is included and Sir Henry Wotton, who is described as "a most dear lover and frequent practice of the art of Angling ... which was ... after tedious study a rest to his mind, a cheerer of his spirits, a diverter of sadness ... a moderator of passions, a procurer of contentedness."

One group of fishermen Piscator wants to emphasize to his companions, or, shall I say, Walton to his readers, are the apostles, the primitive or earliest Christians, who were "quiet men and lovers of peace," the "happy fishermen", whose "hearts were fitted for contemplation and quietness; men of mild and sweet and peaceable spirits," as indeed, he says, are anglers. It is here, I believe, that Walton wants us to see that, to him, the art of angling is spiritual, something that is close to primitive Christianity in its simplicity and humility.

"No life is so happy and so pleasant," Walton wrote in a passage from the 1676 edition, "as the life of a well-governed angler; for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silver streams, which we now see glide so quietly by us."

Could there be some hidden message under the surface of those silver streams that Walton wants to convey to his fellow Anglicans and to his readers? Is his book on angling as innocent as it appears to be? Some Walton scholars write that the book has an encoded message, that angler is a metaphor for Anglican, that the book is "more than an angler's genial guide, that its celebration of rural quietness, of political resignation and retirement to await better times is, when it was first published, a coded warning to its first readers to possess their souls in patience until the king comes home again." Patience, then, was a virtue both to anglers and to Anglicans.

By 1640, Walton had become acquainted with and befriended many of the clergy of England, in addition to Dr. Donne. They formed what was called the Great Tew Circle. During the time the Presbyterians were in power, members of the Circle were under constant threat, forced to express their loyalty to the new regime. Walton named members of this circle of friends "brothers of the angle," who shared with him their love of angling and their Anglican faith.

After he obtained Walton's approval of his manuscript, Cotton dedicated Part 2 of *The Compleat Angler* "To my Dear Father and Most Worthy Friend, Mr. Izaak Walton," closing his epistle with "Your most affectionate son and servant." In his reply, Walton returned Cotton's "pleasant and useful discourse" closing with "Your most affectionate father and friend."

Using the same method as in Part I, Cotton introduces the reader to Piscator Junior and Viator. In the ensuing dialogue, Piscator provides Viator with instructions on the making of artificial flies for various months of the year. The instructions for dubbing, or dressing an artificial fishing fly, are specific and rather quaint. To elaborate on a few of these: In February, for the Great Blue Dun: "The dubbing of the bottom of bear's hair next to the roots, mixed with a little blue camlet, the wings of the dark gray feather of a mallard;" in April for the horse-flesh fly: "dubbing of a blue mohair, with pink-colored and red tammy mixed, a light-colored wing and a dark-brown head;" in May, a month which "affords more pleasure to the Fly-angler than all the rest," for the green-drake mayfly and the stone fly, which Piscator refers to, in a clever metaphor, as "the matadors for trout and grayling". Other instructions for dubbing include those for the white gnat, the dun-cut, the cow-lady, the turkey-fly, the whirling-dun, the thorn-tree fly, and the Plain Hackle or Palmer-fly.

Cotton also provides us with exquisite descriptions of the unspoiled beauty of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire countryside, through which the River Dove flows. Piscator refers numerous times to this river: to the "swiftness of its current," "the delicate, clear river which breeds admirable trout and grayling," "the finest river that ever I saw, and fullest offish." Piscator points out to Viator the "little fishing house" he had recently built. "Over the door," he says, "you see 'Piscatoribus Sacrum' carved in the stone and you will also see the first two letters of my Father Walton's name and mine twisted in cipher," to which Viator responds, "Tis prettily contrived."

One of the poems Cotton dedicated to Walton is titled "Contentation," that is, being content and the way one achieves that state of being, especially during times of turmoil and dislocation. Of the thirty-two stanzas of the poem, here are four of them:

*'Tis contentation that alone
Can make us happy here below,
And when this little life is gone,
Will lift us up to heaven too.*

*Who from the busy world retires,
To be more useful to it still,
And to no greater good aspires,
But only the eschewing ill.*

*Who with his angle and his books
Can think the longest day well spent,
And praises God when back he looks,
And finds that all was innocent.*

*Untrodden paths are then the best,
Where the frequented seems unsure,
And he comes soonest to his rest,
Whose journey has been most secure.*

Izaak Walton's journey through life was not an easy or pleasant one. He endured the pain of the loss of his children and of his first wife. He faced incredible hardship during the trying times of the Civil War and the persecution of Anglicans under the 14 Puritans. In spite of these circumstances, he maintained a calmness of spirit, a delicacy of soul, a "sweetness" and strength of character. A remarkable journey it was for this man of humble background from the Midlands, who became a success in business, who then, to quote Joseph Campbell, "followed his bliss" and began writing his book.

Besides being a devout Anglican, because of his delicacy of soul and, to use his own words describing John Donne, "a soft heart full of noble compassion," he possessed an ability to endear himself to others. Cotton extolled "Father Izaak's" special gift of the art of genuine friendship in this verse which clearly came from the heart:

*But, yours is Friendship of so pure a kind,
From all mean ends, and interest so refined,
It ought to be, a pattern to mankind.
For, whereas, most men's friendships here beneath,
Do perish with their friends expiring breath,
Yours proves a Friendship living after death ...*

Unfortunately, interest in *The Compleat Angler* waned after Walton's death, causing its publication to end Years later, thanks to Dr. Samuel Johnson, who greatly admired the book, publication resumed in 1750. The nineteenth century produced at least 160 different publications; by 1900 it was a best seller and by 2001 at least 500 editions had been printed, which is said to have made Walton's book, aside from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, the most republished book in the English language. It has been translated into several other languages.

Walton's major work, then, can be remembered as an early, practical treatise on fishing, containing advice to anglers on how to go about catching fish in English rivers, where to find the best worms for bait, and, once caught, how to prepare and cook the fish.

The book is remembered primarily for its simplicity and serenity, a certain philosophy of life, where the contemplative man can enjoy the beauty of the countryside and fish the clear streams. It is remembered for the author himself: humble, pious, whimsical, convivial, learned, inventive. Written during the great age of English prose, *The Compleat Angler* is considered one of the finest and most appealing works in the pastoral tradition, serving as a window into mid-seventeenth century English country life.

In addition to Dr. Johnson, essayists William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb thought highly of the book. Lamb, in recommending it to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, remarked: "It breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart. It would sweeten a man's temper any time to read it. It would Christianize every angry, discordant passion. Pray, make yourself acquainted with it." There have been many other favorable reactions to Walton's great work. Sir Walter Scott admired "the beautiful simplicity of the Arcadian language." More recent commentaries include critic Kenneth Rexroth's, "We read Walton for a special quality of soul." This from author Howell Raines: "*The Compleat Angler* is about how to dream, and that is why we love it ... The book has lasted so long because fishing has a mystery at its heart." And from author Stephen Downes: "The quietness he desired, the contemplation that leads to clear vision, is still there for those who desire it ... *The Complete Angler* has acquired a lustrous patina with the passing of the years."

"The Angler's Song," composed in 1653 and later harmonized for four voices in 1844, ultimately captures, I believe, in spite of life's vicissitudes, the feeling of "contentation" Walton found in angling:

*Man's life is but vain; for 'tis subject to pain and sorrow
And short as a bubble; 'tis a hodge-podge of business
And money, and care; and care, and money, and trouble.
But we'll take no care when the weather proves fair,
Nor will we vex now, though it rain; we'll banish all sorrow
And sing till tomorrow, and angle and angle again.*

At the conclusion of Part I, Venator says to Piscator: "So, when I would beget content, and increase confidence in the power and wisdom and providence of Almighty God, I will walk the meadows by some gliding stream and there contemplate the lilies that take no care ... This is my purpose; and so, 'Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord,' and let the blessing of St. Peter's Master be with mine." To which Piscator responds,

"And upon all that are lovers of virtue, and dare trust in his providence, and be quiet, and go a-Angling."

Afterword

In the early 1900's my grandfather, Ethan Bates Stanley, visited a site in Staffordshire, England of the ancestral home of his mother's line, the Beresfords. Beresford Hall, built in the early sixteenth century, had long since been tom down, and only a few weather-beaten stones, thought to be window mullions and still in fairly good condition, along with a few other objects were found among the old Manor house ruins.

Not far from that site Grandfather was able to observe the small fishing house which Charles Cotton had built for himself and his friend, Izaak Walton and which still stands today. Carved in stone over the entrance are "Piscatoribus Sacrum," meaning "Sacred to Anglers" and the initials of Walton and Cotton "twisted in cipher," which, you may recall, Viator observed as being "prettily contrived."

In the mid 1920's, when his residence, which he named Beresford Dale, was being built in Indian Hill, Grandfather recalled the stones that lay about the Beresford manor grounds. From the then- owner of the Beresford property he secured four stones in addition to a piece of oak, which, he said, "would link the present with the past." The stones he had placed in the brick wall of the terrace, the piece of oak in the library paneling.

He was prompted to write a brief history of the Beresford family, titled "Four Stones, A Piece of Oak, and Their Story," which also includes a section on Cotton and Walton. I have one of those copies which he had privately printed. I also have one of those four stones currently placed on our balcony. In Frank Salisbury's oil portrait Grandfather is holding a handsome, leather-bound eighth edition of Walton's *Compleat Angler* published in 1815, containing parts 1 and 2, and engravings of Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton, Esq.

Besides this edition of *The Compleat Angler* Grandfather wanted me to have another special book from his library, namely, *Poems on Several Occasions* by Charles Cotton, published in London in 1689. For over fifty years they have been in my library placed next to each other --- two old friends well taken care of.

Ethan B. Stanley 11

The Literary Club

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IZAAK WALTON



CHARLES COTTON

