

moment drove on to Caledon. where we had a little adventure.

The rule of passage by the mail-cart is, that those coming the longer distance have the preference of going on, to the exclusion of those who take their berths or passage from any given point on the road, or from one intermediate station to the other.

At this time it happened that from Caledon to Cape Town there was a separate and rival contractor, and two of his friends had taken their passage to Cape Town in the mail-cart from Caledon; but we insisted on our right to go on, and it was about to become a question of some importance to us, as

the two gentlemen had already mounted the cart and possessed themselves of the only two places. Near the starting-point there was a bridge, which it was necessary that the cart should pass over; and on looking round I saw my friend Currie on the bridge, revolver in hand, declaring that he would shoot one of the horses rather than let the cart pass over the bridge without us; and he was just the man to do what he said. At this moment the Dutchmen's pluck failed them, and the two passengers quietly dismounted and gave us the seats.

On, on, on we went, as fast as horses could go; and reached Cape Town that night, at about nine o'clock.



THE PERCH FAMILY.

THE perch (*Perca fluviatilis*) is too well known to need any detailed description. It is distributed over the whole of Europe, living in rivers, lakes, and large ponds; it is remarkable for beauty, and the sharpness of the spines of the first dorsal fin, by which latter the hands of incautious or inexperienced fishers are often severely lacerated. These spines serve as very efficient defensive weapons, so that a good-sized perch need not fear even the ferocious pike. The perch is gregarious in its habits, and frequents the still and quiet parts of rivers, rather than the rapid and turbulent. Worms, small fish (as minnows), and frogs, are its usual prey; it is bold and ravenous, and eagerly seizes the bait; and, says Walton, "as one has wittily observed, if there be twenty or forty in a hole, they may be at one standing all caught one after another, they being, as he says, like the wicked of the world, not afraid, though their fellows and companions

perish in their sight." During the winter, however, excepting the day be warm, the perch can seldom be taken by the angle; nor does it bite freely till the mulberry-tree buds, that is, until the chilly portion of the spring is over.

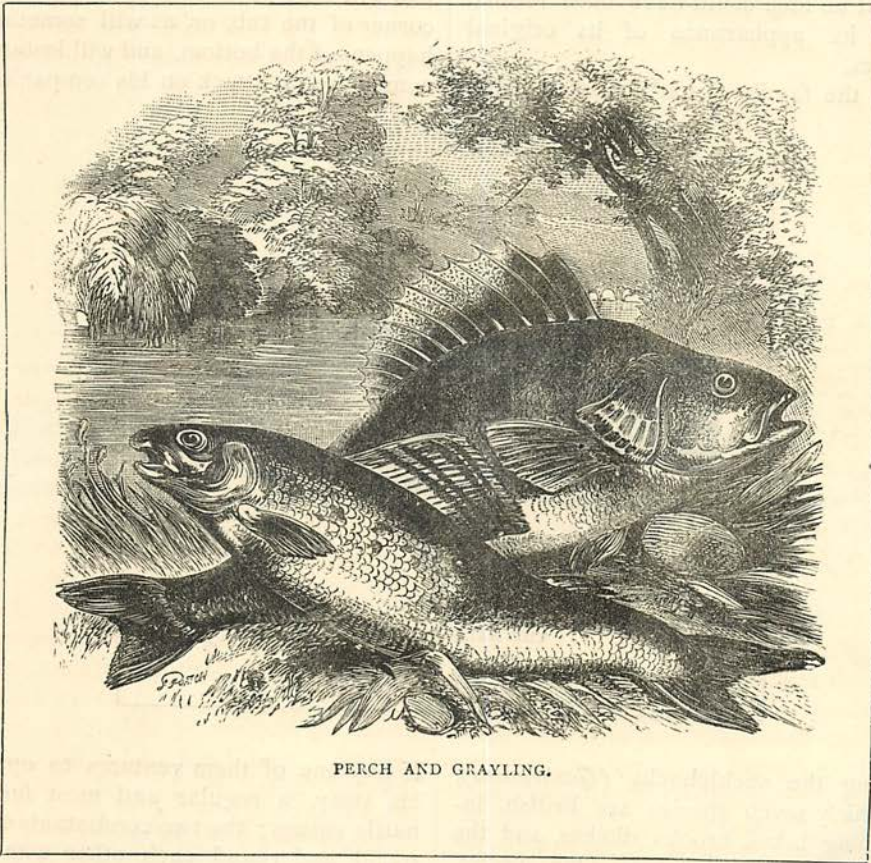
The perch will live long out of the water, and in a basket of wet moss may be carried to a very great distance, especially if a little water be occasionally poured over it. On the continent, where fresh-water fishes are much in request, perch are often carried in this manner to market, and if not sold at the close of the day, taken back, replaced in the pond, and thus reserved for another occasion. The breeding season of this fish is about the beginning of May.

The perch seldom attains a very great size; a fish of the weight of half a pound or a pound is fine, and one of two or three pounds may be considered as extremely large, yet there are instances on record of perch being captured weighing six, eight, and even nine pounds; the ponds at Richmond Park have yielded perch of four pounds.

Several species of fish, called wrasse, or rock-fish (*Fam. labridæ*), are common on our coast, and those of the adjacent continent. They are remarkable for the beauty of their colours, their thin large scales, their great thick lips, and their numerous and conspicuous teeth. They generally haunt rocky shores, dwelling in deep gullies between masses

same spot a few days afterwards, they catch a greater number, and those smaller, whence they conclude that the large fish assume the dominion of a district, and keep the younger at a distance. They breed in April, and the young are seen swimming about the rocks in clear shallow water during the summer.

The flesh of the ballan wrasse is soft



PERCH AND GRAYLING.

of rock, and under the covert of the long fronds of sea-weed.

The ballan wrasse has been taken on the coast of Ireland. It feeds on various kinds of crustacea, and, according to Mr. Couch, takes a bait freely; the fishermen, he says, remark that when they first fish in a place they take but few, and those few of large size, but on trying the

and worthless; in beauty of colouring, however, it is exceeded by few. The head and cheeks are of a rich deep bluish-green, reticulated with lines of fine orange-red. The back and sides are of a deep bluish-green, becoming paler on the belly; and every scale is margined with orange-red. The fins are spotted with verditer, the fin-rays being

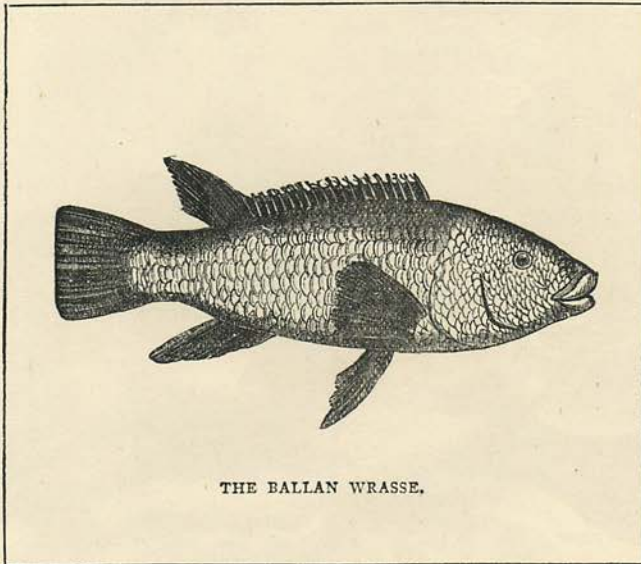
reddish - orange. Lips flesh colour. Length from sixteen to twenty inches.

A fine specimen of this beautiful fish, some years ago, came under our immediate notice. When put into spirits, for the sake of preservation, its fine blue tints began rapidly to fade; and the colouring matter being dissolved by the spirits, rendered the liquor blue. In a few days the fish had lost its splendour, so that no idea could have been formed from its appearance of its original colours.

To the family of hard-cheeked fishes

tailed stickleback (*G. trachurus*). It seldom exceeds two inches, or two inches and a-half in length, and abounds in all our ponds and brooks. A writer in the "Magazine of Natural History" gives the following description of its manners in captivity, in a tub or wooden vessel:—

"When a few are first turned in, they swim about in a shoal, apparently exploring their new habitation. Suddenly one will take possession of a particular corner of the tub, or, as will sometimes happen, of the bottom, and will instantly commence an attack on his companions.



THE BALLAN WRASSE.

belong the sticklebacks (*Gasterosteus*), of which seven species are British, inhabiting lakes, brooks, ditches, and the sea, around our shores. One species, however, the fifteen-spined stickleback (*G. spinachia*), rarely ascends rivers, and may be regarded exclusively as a salt-water fish.

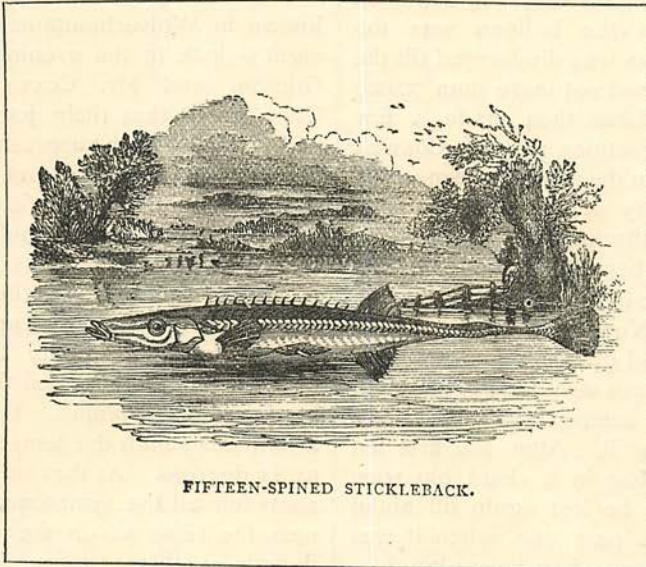
The sticklebacks are remarkably rapid and prompt in their movements, and dart along with great celerity. They feed upon insects, small worms, and the eggs of fishes. One of the most common, and the smallest, is the rough-

If any one of them ventures to oppose his sway, a regular and most furious battle ensues; the two combatants swim round and round each other with the greatest rapidity, biting and endeavouring to pierce each other with their spines, which on these occasions are projected. I have witnessed a battle of this sort which lasted several minutes, before either would give way; and when one does submit, imagination can hardly conceive the vindictive fury of the conqueror, who, in the most persevering and unrelenting way, chases his rival

from one part of the tub to another, until fairly exhausted with fatigue. They also use their spines with such fatal effect, that incredible as it may appear, I have seen one, during a battle, absolutely rip his opponent quite open, so that he sunk to the bottom and died. I have occasionally known three or four parts of the tub taken possession of by as many other little tyrants, who guard their territories with the strictest vigilance, and the slightest invasion invariably brings on a battle. These are the habits of the male fish alone;

The stickleback is one of the very few fish who build houses for their young, as a defence against the many foes which are ever lying in wait for the destruction of the eggs or the newly-hatched young.

An observer thus describes the operation:—"The nest is somewhat larger than a shilling, and has a top or cover, with a hole in the centre, about the size of a very small nut, in which are deposited the eggs or spawn. This opening is frequently concealed by drawing small fragments over it, but this is not always the case.



FIFTEEN-SPINED STICKLEBACK.

the females are quite pacific, appear fat as if full of roe, and never assume the brilliant colours of the male, by whom, as far as I have observed, they are unmolested." This species, and two others, have three sharp dorsal spines, but the present has the sides throughout their whole length defended by a series of vertical bony plates, forming a coat of mail; in the two others, the sides are only more or less partially defended.

In making the nest, I observed that the fish used an unusual degree of force when conveying the material to its destination. When the fish was about an inch from the nest, it suddenly darted at the spot, and left the tiny fragment in its place, after which it would be engaged for half a minute in adjusting it. The nest, when it was taken up, did not separate, but hung together like a piece of wool."