



THE STURGEON FISHERIES.

THE cartilaginous fishes (*Chondropterygii*) are those in which the skeleton is never thoroughly ossified, but remains permanently as tough cartilage.

In the fishmongers' shops of our metropolis, huge examples of the sturgeon (*Accipenser sturio*), a fish regarded as royal, is often to be seen. It is, however, only a royal fish when caught in the Thames, within the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor, it being by ancient custom reserved for the royal tables. The sturgeon has a long, pointed, conical snout; the mouth opens underneath in the throat; the body is elongated, and defended by indurated plates and spines, arranged in longitudinal rows. This fish is often taken on various parts of our coast, and in the estuaries of rivers, where it is frequently entangled in salmon nets. Its struggles are very desperate, and it sometimes occasions much trouble. The flesh of this fish, which is sold in slices, is much esteemed by many; it is firm and white, like veal, and generally prepared as a stew, with a rich gravy; it is also preserved by salting. The roe of the sturgeon on the continent is made into a condiment, called *caviare*, and the best isinglass is prepared from the membrane of the air-bladder.

In the Caspian Sea, and in the northern districts of Europe, extensive sturgeon fisheries are established, the roe and air-bladder being the great desiderata. The Russian fisheries on the Caspian Sea are extremely valuable. In this great inland sea, besides the common sturgeon, two different species exist: one is the great sturgeon *Beluga* (*Accipenser Haso*), which is from twelve to fifteen, and sometimes twenty feet long, and

weighing upwards of two thousand pounds, with a roe of five or six hundred pounds. The other is a smaller species, usually from four to six feet long.

The first fishery of the great sturgeon begins in April, at the various stations along the coast. The lines laid down are on the same principle as the bulwers and snoods sometimes made use of in cod-fishing, but of course the tackle is of far greater strength. These lines are examined twice a day, and the fish which are caught are disengaged, and when a rope from shore is passed through their gills, they are put into the water, to be kept alive till the time for cutting them up arrives. A single vessel will sometimes capture fifty of these fish in twenty-four hours. The work of cutting up these fish is managed on planks, along the shore. The sounds are obtained by the isinglass makers; the roes are put into tubs, of which the preparers of caviare take the charge; the fish is then cleared of refuse, cut up, and put in layers into brine vats in underground cellars, for the sake of coolness; after this, the fish are taken out, again sprinkled with salt, and placed on layers in store cellars, lined with ice. One or more large vessels are continually passing to Astracan from the fisheries, and back again, bringing salt and needful implements, and returning with salt-fish, caviare, isinglass, and fish-skins, which latter, in some parts of Russia and Turkey, are made into a sort of leather, or used instead of window-glass.

After the spring fishery of the great sturgeon is over, that of the *sevruga*, the smaller species, commences, and lasts about a fortnight. This fish is very abundant, and a single fishing-vessel sometimes takes from fifteen to twenty thousand. The total number taken in one

season has been calculated at 1,300,000, affording the value of £16,000 in isinglass, and £40,000 in caviare. Of the common sturgeon, the number captured amounts to 300,000, yielding in isinglass £6,500, and in caviare £10,000.

Late in the autumn, and during the winter, a second fishery of the great sturgeon is carried on. Large holes are cut in the ice, for the introduction of the apparatus of lines and hooks, and the fish, when caught, are sent off direct, in a frozen state, to Astracan, by means of sledges.

Some years ago it was calculated that the spring and winter fisheries of the great

sturgeon produced annually 103,500 fish, which afford 30,000 pounds of isinglass, and 414,000 pounds of caviare.

The common sturgeon of our seas sometimes attains to an enormous size; one recorded by Pennant, which was caught in the Esk, weighed 460 pounds; and in 1802, a specimen, eight feet long, was caught in a weir below the castle of Shrewsbury, and weighed 190 pounds. The mouth of the sturgeon is destitute of teeth, and it is said to feed principally on mollusks, and various soft substances it may find at the bottom of the water. The under side of the snout is garnished with four barbules or feelers.

MY FIRST LION HUNT.



HERE were five Dutchmen and ourselves, seven in all. We started at daybreak, and made for the spot where the two horses had been killed. It was one of those mornings in South Africa when a thick fog precedes

a very hot day. We reached the dead horses—or rather what was left of them, for there was nothing remaining but the backbones and heads—just as the sun had risen. The mist was so thick that the rays of the sun made a complete halo round you for about twenty yards distant, and beyond that distance you could see nothing. This made it the more critical, as the lions had only left the carcasses just as we got to the spot. We could tell this by the sparkling dew having just been knocked off the grass and not replaced by the heavy mist. We counted the spoor or trace of seven lions, and could not tell at what moment we might come up with them, for we could ride at a fast walk on their track. All at once we came to a deep gully, about eight feet deep and twenty or thirty feet wide; into this gully the lions

had jumped, and we had to follow the spoor by riding on the bank above. These gullies are numerous in that part of the country, and are formed by the heavy rain or thunderstorms; they continue for some miles on the flat grounds, starting from the foot of hills or mountains. We knew that this gully must soon terminate, as we were then approaching Tea-bus, or Tea-canister Mountain, so called from its likeness to that article of furniture of the Dutch shape.

When we had got to within about 200 yards of the termination of the gully, and close to the mountain, out jumped the seven lions—two males, two lionesses, and three cubs. They walked majestically away from us, rather to the right, so that we had to continue to the head of the gully before we could get at them, and the lions were then about 150 yards from us, and a little scattered, a great black-maned lion being on the left. Old Dederick Putter, who had been appointed captain of the hunt, told us to dismount hastily, which we did; the horses were then turned with their tails to the lions, and were held by the bushmen after-riders, while we formed up between the