

### XXX.—THE CARP-FISHERIES IN THE PEITZ LAKES.\*

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That "carp in beer" is a favorite dish in Berlin is sufficiently proved by the fact that about 500,000 pounds of this fish are annually consumed in this city. It will therefore not be out of place to give a brief account of the famous Peitz Lakes in Lower Lusatia, which mainly supply Berlin with carp, and which were well known even in the time of Frederick the Great.

The Ural-Baltic plateau, which includes a portion of Lusatia, contains a very large number of lakes and ponds. Of these the Peitz Lakes are the most important. These lakes, 76 in number, and forming a water area of almost 5,000 acres, are a royal domain, and are at present rented to Mr. Th. Berger. They produce a very large number of carps, and the annual fishing days in October, especially that of the Devil's Lake, having an area of about 900 acres, form important and interesting events, genuine popular holidays, not only for the inhabitants of Peitz and the surrounding country and the people of the neighboring city of Cottbus, but, because easy of access, likewise to many inhabitants of the capital. It must, however, be borne in mind that these great fisheries, and each one of the 60,000 or 70,000 carps caught during this season, have a previous history extending over a period of about four years; for those well-fed, golden-scaled government fish, resembling each other in size and shape as much as eggs, have not sprung into existence suddenly like the armed men who rose from the dragon-seed sowed by Cadmus, but it required great work and care and trouble to develop them so far; and in order to understand all this we shall have to become acquainted with the details of this industry, and gain some entirely new ideas with regard to the carp and its life. We here see not a fish rapidly parting the waves with its fins, and in undisturbed liberty now diving into the deep, now rising to the surface, always timid and flying from the terrible fish of prey, but a well-cared-for domestic animal, constantly guarded by and accustomed to human beings; a very peaceful, phlegmatic animal, with a predilection for muddy bottoms and slow-flowing water, growing more comfortable and gentle in its ways by its "education," which has been going on for generations, all this tending to make the fish fat and comfortable looking, and giving to its flesh a most delicious flavor.

The life of the carp, which really may be termed a "jolly sort of im-

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\*Die Karpfenfischerei in den Peitzer Teichen. From a Berlin daily paper. Translated by H. Jacobson.

prisonment," commences in the hatching-ponds, varying in size from one to ten acres, in which as many as 20 pair of well-developed milters and spawners are placed in spring, there to spawn under the genial rays of the sun. It is characteristic of the slow nature of the carp not to do this spawning business at once like other fish, and so far all attempts at artificial impregnation have failed. But if the water during the spawning season has been kept at an even height, and the frogs do not devour too many eggs, young carps are produced in great numbers, as they are very prolific, one pair alone producing several hundred thousand eggs, from which, even under the most unfavorable circumstances, about 25,000 young fish may be counted on. During their earliest infancy these fish live on infusoria, as their little mouths will not allow any other food to pass. The summer goes by, the new year comes in, and in spring the little one-year-old carps—which at this age are very suitable for the parlor aquarium—are placed in larger ponds (generally covering an area of 30 acres each) at the rate of 360 to 600 fish per acre. After they have stayed in these ponds a year, the fish (now two years old) are placed in still larger ponds (generally covering an area of 400 acres each) at the rate of 180 to 360 per acre. After another year has passed, the fish (now three years old) are placed in the large ponds (generally about 900 acres each), in which they stay another year, and reach an average weight of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, and thus attain their maturity.

Loneliness produces melancholy, and in order that the carp may not lead a too idyllic sort of dream-life after leaving those ponds where they spent their first two summers, and which are absolutely free from fish of prey, quite a large number of other considerably smaller fish, such as tench, crucians, pike, and even perch—which have been specially raised for this purpose in separate ponds—are during the third year placed in the same ponds with them. These fish give the carp some idea of life in the great world, and by their constant attacks, which, however, are generally harmless, bring a little life into the quiet society of philosophers, and, to some extent, act the part of shepherd dogs. But there are other enemies of the carp which tend to make the carp livelier, reminding us of those persons in "Gulliver's Travels" who had constantly to use rattles to rouse the Lilliputians from their day-dreams; and these are otters, herons, wild ducks and geese, fish-hawks, and human beings—poachers, who rob the ponds during the night.

Thus the day of harvest comes at last. Three weeks beforehand they begin to let the water flow off, and the carps gradually gather in the deep ruts or holes of the bottom. On the morning of the great fishing-day they are driven into a basin about the size of an acre and about one meter deep. This is done by the fishermen, who, armed with purse-nets, wade, often with half their bodies in the muddy water, and, shouting and yelling, drive the fish before them. Slowly the great mass of fish comes rolling on, making the water of a dark, muddy color, and

throwing great quantities of mud-like clouds in the air. No one could tell that these are carp, for the dark, round backs, which in innumerable places become visible among the seething mud and water, rather resemble eels or similar fish. The whole spectacle, which is quiet in the beginning, reminding one of the driving of a flock of geese or a drove of sheep, gradually becomes quite exciting, especially toward the end, where from 60,000 to 70,000 pounds of carps are crowded together in a narrow space scarcely 20 paces square. Two simple nets are nevertheless sufficient to close up the two channels leading into the basin, which now resembles a caldron full of boiling mud and water. In this turmoil the pikes fare worst, for some of the carps, which, like tame steers, seem in the last moment to remember that after all they possess considerable strength of muscle, are continually dealing powerful blows with their tails, which the sensitive and cowardly pikes cannot stand very well, so they endeavor as much as possible to crowd into a distant corner. Now the fishing itself commences, and a number of men with two drag-nets, each holding about 5,000 pounds of fish, slowly haul that quantity on shore. Here everything is activity and bustle. Under an open shed we see a large pair of scales with a 100-pound weight. The carps are uninterruptedly brought up from the pond in immense buckets, each carried by two stout men, and thrown on boards by the side of the scales. With lightning-like rapidity, one fish after another is seized by men standing there for the purpose, counting "one, two, three, four \* \* \*" until the scales are evenly balanced. Thirty-one to thirty-three fish generally make the hundred pounds. The full scale is then immediately seized by two men, while an empty one is being filled, and the fish are placed in large casks on one of the many wagons which hold at a short distance. As soon as the three casks, which every wagon holds, are filled, the wagon is rapidly driven along the turnpike, near which the whole transaction takes place, to the Hammer Canal, distant about one kilometer (3,280.709 feet), where the fish are immediately placed in the holds of boats, which contain water. Each of these boats carries 2,500 pounds of fish.

Thus the carps are within a few minutes transferred five times, without having suffered in the least. Near the scales stands, in his rubber overcoat, a note-book in his hand, Mr. Fritsche, from Frankfort-on-the-Oder, a well known fish-dealer, called the "carp-king," and, with Mr. Berger's agent, calmly notes down the number of fish to every hundred pounds, while Mr. Berger himself is busy arranging things, giving orders, and satisfying the many private buyers, male and female, young and old, farmers and town-people, who have come with bags, sacks, and baskets to buy single fish or small quantities up to 200 pounds. Mr. Berger also attends to the picking out of other fish, such as tench, pike, perch, &c., which have been caught in the net. A large quantity of still smaller fish, so-called "spoon-fish," because they have to be eaten with a spoon, are likewise brought up in these nets, many of them

almost mashed by the heavy weight of the carps, and dead a few minutes after they have left the water. These are thrown in large baskets and are viewed with eager and longing glances by the many poor people standing round, who here, for a few cents, might procure more than one good meal, and net Mr. Berger perhaps \$24 extra. But woe be unto him if he should dare to sell these fish; the inexorable police-officers would at once refer him to a paragraph of the fishery law, according to which these fish dare not be sold, as not having the required size.

Meanwhile the hour of noon comes, and the ardently longed-for lunch-time, doubly welcome on account of the pouring rain and the cold, is fast approaching, and Mr. Berger invites his guests to his house near by. Among them we see, besides some landed proprietors from the neighborhood, men of inexhaustible good humor and unlimited capacity of stomach, the well known Lusatian anthropologist and reporter of the *Gartenlaube*, Dr. Veckenstadt. In the hospitable mansion we are regaled with the products of the chase, snipes, reed-birds, ducks, partridges, &c., and one of the epicurians present makes the remark, which may be taken to heart by all good housewives, that the flesh of the pike becomes infinitely more delicious if it has lain in brine for twenty-four hours. The fishermen and drivers are meanwhile taking their lunch in the sheds near the ponds, and after a short pause the work begins anew until late at night, when about 60,000 pounds of carps have passed through the hands of the weighers. As regards the further transportation of the carps, which are the property of Mr. Fritsche the moment they leave the scales, they first go to the Schwieloch Lake, reaching it in five to fourteen days, going through the Hammer Canals, the Spree, and the Spreewald. The difficulties of their route are considerable, for the water is often so low that the boats have to be placed on rollers and conveyed for short distances in this manner. Arrived at the Schwieloch Lake, the fish are transferred to larger boats, each holding about 10,000 pounds, and, placed in the care of reliable persons, they go down the Spree to Berlin, which place they generally reach after eight days, or they go still further to Hamburg, where they get after a journey of four to five weeks, and other places. The total annual rent of the domain is \$12,870; the expenses for salaries, wages, wagons, &c., amount to about \$7,150; so that Mr. Berger must make at least \$20,000 just to meet his expenses. But it is said that he makes a little more!