



beyond dispute. However, they have not fully adapted to the saline environment, for the eggs which the female salmon and sea trout might annually shed would merely float in salt water.

Nature, therefore, insists that all the sea-going family *salmo* return to the rivers of their birth—if for no other reason than the successful procreation of the species.

It is during the migration period that the *salmonids* are subjected to their greatest dangers. The young *fry* slowly develop into *parr*. At the end of a two-year sojourn in freshwater these *parr* develop the urge to migrate; they don a silvery coat, become known as *smolts* and quickly drop back to the estuaries and the open sea. It is not for them to know or to be able to predict, what levels of effluent there may be in the lower reaches of their river system.

Nature has merely told them to go downstream and go they must!

It is, therefore, at this stage in their life-cycle that migratory fish are most vulnerable. Millions of smolts may be struck down in a short time. Many will not make it to purer saline waters and, but for the grace of God, this could well mean the end of the cycle. Mercifully, some fish do survive this traumatic downstream movement; do endure the filth and effluent; do make it to the comparative sanctuary of salt water and do find a bountiful larder upon which to wax fat. The mature salmon returning to the river also have the advantage of sensing the levels of pollution and of knowing when it is prudent to try to run the river or to stay, temporarily, at sea until things get better.

The only Yorkshire salmon river of consequence today is the

little Whitby Esk, but in river systems like the Humber the fish are continually at risk. For a few years immediately after the war they were in grave danger of extinction. Before that time, runs of salmon up the Humber, into the Ouse and thence up the Ure were quite common. Age-old netting rights were exercised at Naburn. In a newspaper article dated June 16, 1944, Mr. James Leaf of Front Street, Naburn, claimed that his family had held these rights for over two-and-a-half centuries. He, however, was the last of a long line, for the salmon had virtually disappeared from the river by the end of the last war.

By a stroke of fortune I was recently privileged to have a sight of Mr. Leaf's original catch records. He started operations on February 2nd, 1907, but that year did not produce any notable catches. In 1908, however, in partnership with a Mr. A. Smith, he took 115 salmon averaging over 17 lb.

The records contain mysterious, but interesting, asides. For instance, "Salmon jumped into boat June 19 1912." "Drowned Blanche March 25 1912." "Had Jack shot. October 16 1917." The most prolific salmon year seems to have been 1936. In that year Mr. Leaf records no fewer than 1,006 salmon taken in his net, but the average weight had dropped to 8.9 lb. His best recorded day's catch was on August 1, 1932, with 103 fish weighing 781 lb. Four years earlier, in 1928, Mr. Leaf had already reported a bumper season. A fish of 42 lb. was his best-ever and there were always plenty in the 20 lb. bracket. The Yorkshire Water Authority records also show 1936 to be the best year since 1883. Their figures, of course, show only total catches for the Ouse and Humber system. And although there is a good four-year cycle from 1928 through 1932 to 1936, there is nothing to sustain it before or since. Salmon in quantity could be netted from February until the end of August.

Higher upstream on the Ure at Wensley in 1928, the late Lord Bolton claimed to have caught over fifty salmon to his own rod. The mill at Hammerton on the river Nidd frequently had fish waiting to ascend and Mr. Shillitoe, of Hammerton, recalls the many occasions when it was possible to extract fish without too much effort. Mr. Tom Wright, of Wheldrake, also recalls the time when fish could be seen stranded in flooded fields near the river Derwent at Sutton. Salmon were there in abundance and the odd fish slyly poached did not matter much.

In 1908 it was reported that white whales could be seen in the Ouse. (One wonders today, if they are not the self-same species reputed to inhabit the dark waters of Loch Ness.)

Salmon were also known to run the Swale and Wharfe; but it was, traditionally, to the Ure that the most noted runs occurred. The weir at Boroughbridge was a well-known spot from which to witness the miracle leap, but there are only a few who are privileged to see salmon jumping there today. They have to be diligent and observant, but the miracle does occasionally happen! As recently as the mid-'seventies a good run of salmon got into the river Derwent as far upstream as Kirkham Abbey. One inhabitant of Stamford Bridge told me, confidentially, that he had managed to hand-tail one that was laid near the bank. Several were also caught by anglers spinning for pike, but it was kept very quiet as far as press reports were concerned.

In the 'sixties there were earnest endeavours on the part of the then Yorkshire Ouse and Hull River Authority to implement a re-stocking scheme. Salmon *ova* were obtained from Scottish fisheries. These were hatched at the Pickering hatcheries and released as tiny *parr* into Ure feeder streams upstream of Ripon. At the tender age of two years they developed the urge to migrate to saltwater; they donned a silvery coat and made downstream on the spring floods. To assist their safe passage to salt water a fish trap was installed at Mickley. Here the *smolts* were intercepted and then transported, overland, to brackish water below the point where they might succumb to excessive pollution levels and high biochemical oxygen demand. By a quirk of fortune the experiment was modestly successful, with the result that today there are just a few salmon back in most rivers of the Humber system.

Whether the salmon will return to Yorkshire is entirely dependent on the levels of filth and effluent discharged into the Humber. Clean that up and there is little doubt that nature would recharge the batteries and bring silvery salmon from an equally silvery sea. Sadly, there are many anglers who do not want to see their return. They feel that rents might rise as a consequence and that their coarse fishing would be taken over by more affluent syndicates. There are, however, many river systems where the coarse fisherman and the salmon man can live together. The Herefordshire Wye is the classic example!

The upstream environment of all Yorkshire rivers is just as capable of supporting *salmonid* life as it ever was. Although one might now deplore more commercial netting at Naburn and further poaching at mills and weirs, it would be pleasant to think that, one day, it might all again be possible!