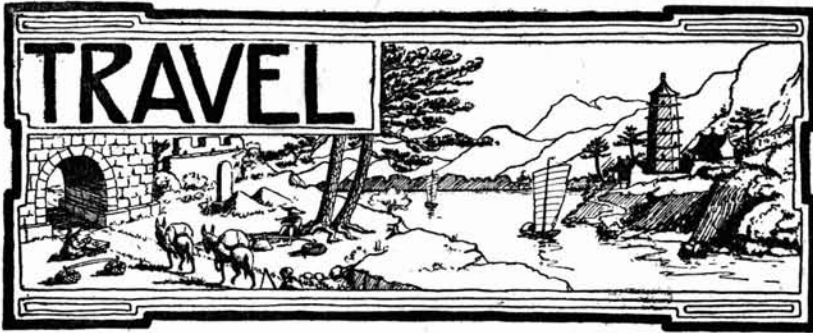




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THE HUNTING OF THE MAKO; A NEW ZEALAND INTERLUDE

BY

A. L. ANDERSON

“ Lord, suffer me to catch a fish
So great that even I,
In telling of it afterward,
Shall have no need to lie.”

The Angler's Prayer.

“ When thou hast caught a mako single-handed, my son, thou wilt
be a man.”

Maori Proverb (adapted.)

Auckland probably exceeds Rome in the number of her hills, for the streets afford as many ups and downs as a long adventurous lifetime. The two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants have built them a fine city out of what was but a village when I visited the place thirty years ago, have fronted it with modern concrete wharves and spread its suburbs of wooden villas along some seventeen miles of ocean shore. The main business thoroughfare, Queen Street, contains a number of fine shops and up-to-date office buildings; there are several small parks and a zoological-garden commendably well furnished. Schools are everywhere, to judge by the numerous signs on the motor roads—“ school, go slow;” a warning surely superfluous in the case of the average school-child, but it shows that Antipodean grown ups are more sympathetic than those of my school days; my admonition was ever “ Hurry up, and don't be late !”

But the glory of the city, as it might be of any city on Earth, is not of far-reaching streets nor sheltered harbour; it is Auckland's expression of gratitude to her Unselfish Head, woven from the white fabric of some

artist's dream of the Acropolis, and frozen into stone on the green slopes of the Domain above the town : the War Memorial Museum nears completion.

From Auckland to Bay of Islands is but a hundred and twenty-eight miles by sea, but it surely must be more miles than that by land, for during nine hours and ten minutes the quaint little two-by-twice Government Railway-train "Like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along." After forty minutes' travel the guard, punching all tickets, announces, "Next station ten minutes for refreshments," and thereafter at regular intervals we have our tickets punched and our digestions ruined with strong tea. The countryside, but for the prevalence of wire fences and the absence of flowers, is reminiscent of the Old Country. There are sweeps of green grassy up-land on which sheep nibble, head to morning-light, hill-tops holding up beacons of blazing yellow furze, and plains on which cattle and horses stand amid grass of a larger growth. The ravines and rougher hill-sides are spread with a close-knit carpet of fern, and long rows of the dark green *Cupressus macrocarpus* wave graceful arms in remonstrance with the too boisterous wind. On bottom lands are cabbage trees and the native flax raises its tall designs of geometrical exactitude in company with clumps of giant bullrushes resembling stands of mediaeval maces. Afar, with aristocratic aloofness, the dignified spires of the Norfolk Island pine shame man's competition in stone—he of the up-flung arms and she of the drooping hands—for, "male and female, created He them." New Zealand's graceful emblem, the sunworshipping tree-fern seeks the windlessness of ravines in which to extend its canopies of shade.

The train is of the order called Limited Express, the former word in allusion to the number of miles per hour and the latter to the meticulous care taken not to overrun even the most modest siding. Still even this is not without its compensations, for there is less teeth-chattering, and the Maori names of some of the stations, such as "Maunganui" are quite musical. Near to a place called Hikurangi, and in a gently-sloping wide green valley, stand the remains as of a cathedral erected in limestone by titanic forces in the prime ; here, lengths of wall of giant blocks truly squared ; there, delicate arches ; anon machiolated battlements, and, to challenge conjecture, the weathering of the stone not along vertical, but, despite the valley's gentle slope, horizontal lines, and from every air and of every height. But this is not fated long to please the eye, for a more deadly foe than Father Time is here at work, and the Spirit of Commercialism finds it cheaper to cart away the sculptured pinnacle for the furnishing of stucco villas than to hew the rugged cliff. "And so," in the language of the Cinematograph Hall, "the long day drags on," and as dark descends we come to the terminus at Opuā, where our little train teeters into its hutch, presumably to await the completion of Auckland's museum.*

* "*Litera scripta manet*," but since that writing it has been my fate to travel by an even slower railway-line—Mungar to Degilbo, in Central Queensland, fifty miles in four and a half hours—and, the irony of it, the axe that forty years before drove many of the pegs for its final survey was held in the hands of———The Author.



In the Bay of Islands, New Zealand.



The Harbour at Russell, Bay of Islands, New Zealand.



Cape Brett Lighthouse. This area is the Centre of the Deep Sea Fishing Coast.

THE HUNTING OF THE MAKO;

From Opua to Russell across the bay is a journey of half an hour in a motor launch. Russell, once the capital of New Zealand, now contains some thirty or forty small houses, the dwellings, mostly, of people content to stand aside and let the world go by. But for the comparatively new interest of "big game" fishing, everything is of the past. Upon the hill the flag staff, thrice cut down by the Maoris, in the church door the holes of Maori bullets, and near it the graves of some of those who drank and quarrelled on the beach in the good old days when some thirty tall ships swung to their anchors in the bay, refitting for yet another cruise after the whale.

On a nearby island stands old Government House, now a sheep-farmer's dwelling, and not many miles away are together the first wooden and the first stone house to be erected in New Zealand. Across the river is the spot where the treaty of peace was made with the Maoris, and, nearby, the site from which the country's first ship, the Missionary schooner *Herald* was launched. Further down the bay is Robinson Island, from the highest peak of which Robinson's wife and child were dashed by a party of marauding Maoris, and further still that island under whose lee Captain Cook first cast anchor, and that other on which his crew cut new spars for the *Endeavour*. On yet another of the hundred and odd islands still lie buried by an old time Admiral the log-books, which, could they be found, would establish, it is said, priority of discovery by the French.

The view from Russell across the bay is entrancing. The ocean may be rolling huge Pacific breakers in fifteen miles away at Cape Brett on the south or Cape Wiwiki to the north, but no more than a ripple visits Russell's shingle. Across the bay lines of rolling hills stand in ascending order one behind the other until the blue mist of distance defeats the vision; on its blue waters, some islands spread green expanses of sheep covered hill, others thrust upwards fantastic cliffs crowned with the sturdy *Pinus insignis*, recalling memories of the Inland Sea. Furze and fern, pine tree and secluded beach, dark green *tī* tree and the sometime scarlet Christmas tree, the *le hua* of the Hawaiians one feels, in the hush of dawn, as if gazing

"Thro' magic casements out on faery seas."

I imagine that for some eight months in the year the good people of Russell sit and think, or maybe, just sit; but during January, February and March, and a couple of weeks before and after, come the would-be fishers of "big game," and all is bustle. One can live in Russell and go down to the fishing grounds near Cape Brett each day in the launch, or make one of the three fishing camps one's head-quarters, so as to be within twenty minutes run of the fish. These camps are in sheltered bays, have jetties out to deep water, and consist of small wooden cottages with one main central building. I am told that one boasts electric light, hot and cold running water and a billiard room.

Good fortune sent me the use of the handsome launch *Avalon*, some thirty-six feet over all and fitted with a six cylinder Red Wing engine which could drive her at fifteen knots; but, more than this, the able offices of her master and owner Mr. "Peter" Williams, who has

already received complimentary mention in print at the hand of Mr. Zane Grey. The rod of split cane weighed fifteen ounces, and the reel, a multiplex winder, but not, to my regret, a distributor, was five inches in diameter and held five hundred yards of twenty-nine thread cotton line, to which was bent a thirty-foot trace of twisted wire.

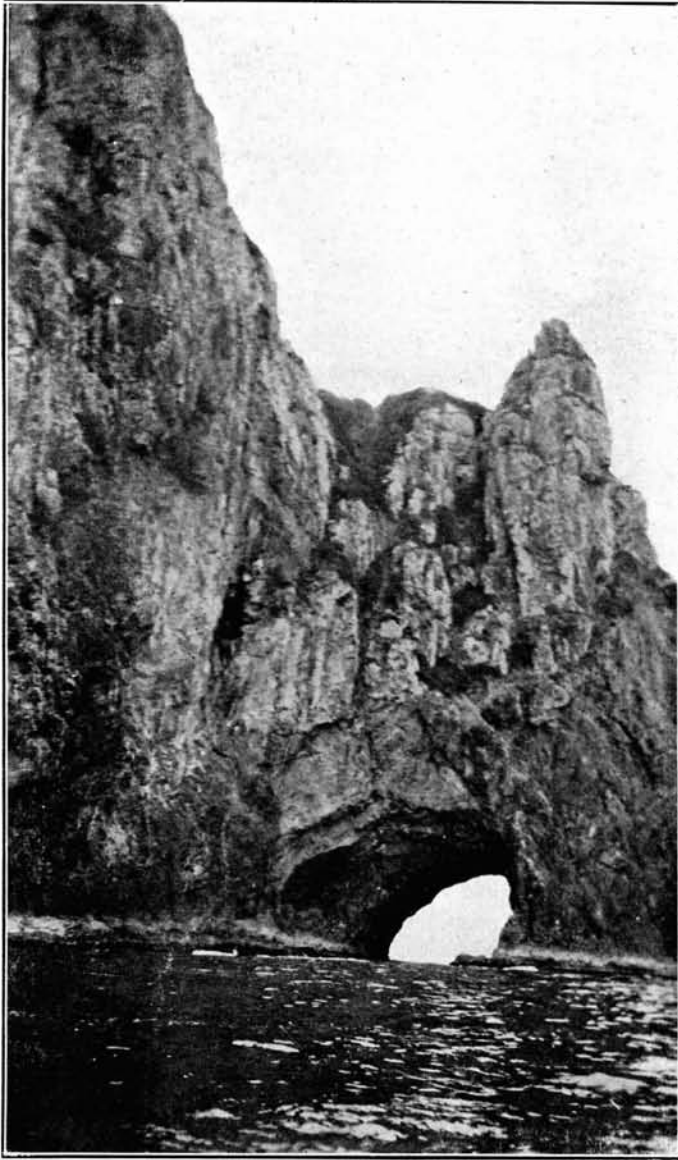
And so off down the bay, each promontory as we turned it and each succeeding island shore showing an increasing "break," until Bird Island, a barren rock one hundred feet high and covered with gulls, is reached. Here schools of *kahawhi* and *trevalli*, from one to a few acres in extent, are feeding in serried ranks, with their heads just awash, under canopies of gulls. Cruising at half speed at the edge of one of these, with a hook to which is lashed a wooden cigar or "dummy" trolling astern, provides us in a few seconds with the bait, a six pound *kahawhi*. This is a neatly shaped fish with dark grey back shading to pale green cloudings on the sides, running usually from five to eight pounds. With him and two or three of his fellows, we carried on to Piercey Island, two miles further and level with Cape Brett, where we allowed the launch to drift, with the bait on ninety feet of line. The easterly wind, bad fishing weather, was blowing into the bay, raising too much swell for good fishing. The season which had been a bad one, was too far advanced for much chance of a swordfish.

Of the swordfish there are three kinds; the swordfish proper, local record 450 lbs, Mr. Zane Grey, 1926; the broadbill, local record 442 lbs, Mr. Barnham, 1927; and the black marlin, World's record 976 lbs., Captain Mitchell, 1926. For the mako, the record of Mr. Lewis of Norfolk, 577 lbs., was beaten in January, 1928, by Lord Grimshaw whose fish scaled 630 lbs. Put the average weight of this fish is about 300 lbs. A swordfish and a black marlin leap often, and generally head to sea. They are fighters from the tip of their swords (on which they spear their food) through their sickle-shaped fins to the end of their tails. The broadbill stuns his prey and does not spear it, and he keeps his dorsal fin always erect, so that his surface appearance is that of one sickle following another. The mako, unlike the other member of his family, does not turn over to bite, but seizes his food directly; he is also unlike them in that he is a game fish, a fighter. Many of his cousins have I despatched, when rolling in the doldrums, with the quick command "Lay aft a couple of hands and hand aboard this sailor-eater;" a haul, as on a submerged log, the galley-chopper doing the rest. Not so the mako. He prizes his life and is prepared to fight for it, and of him it may also be said "*Cet animal est tres mechant; si l'on attaque, il se defend.*" The seven rows of his teeth are set in thick gristle which bends in the contres, as well as at the ends, of the jaws, so that at the moment of seizure the maw is diamond-shaped. At the same time the teeth of the upper jaw protrude and become horizontal, reverting in the action of closure.

The sea was fairly alive with birds. The little white gull with grey wings and rose coloured bill and feet was present in millions, and apparently is fearless of man. So much so that often while the launch man and I lunched, a gull would alight on the launch and inspect our stock of bait. On one occasion, while I was waiting for a strike, a gull perched



Bird Rock, white with millions of Sea Birds, with a School of Kahawhi being pursued by Gulls, Bay of Islands, New Zealand.



A natural Arch in the rocky Coast of Piercey Island,
Bay of Islands, New Zealand.

THE HUNTING OF THE MAKO;

on my rod between the first and second fairleads, and for some thirty seconds, head on one side, regarded me with enquiring eye, well within reach of my hand. We had left the shags behind us in smoother water, but there were gannets to sail overhead, and a number of dark brown shearwaters trying to see which could skim nearest to the wave crests without a wetting. These last are known locally as "mutton birds." They nest in shallow burrows on the island tops, and the young, taken by Maoris while still in the down, are smoked and sold as an article of commerce, at so much per thousand. Two or three petrels gave us warning of what to expect, and the smaller penguin in great numbers, after brief inspections of our launch, dived under with a showing of intense activity.

For about half an hour my bait signalled to me the approach of any larger fish by "registering fear" in sudden quick darts; then stillness, and anon a slow stealthy unwinding of my reel, braked to about one pound. "Feed it to him, Sir, feed it to him" from Williams, and this I did with arm long casts of line.* Then, "Strike!" and on the word, oh! the glory of the moment! A hundred and fifty yards away six feet of blue steel fish shot perpendicularly from the sea until three feet of daylight showed below the tail. "A mako," from Williams, and then the fight was on. Rushes and turnings, breaches, soundings and leaps; an occasional short sulk. With the engine running again, Williams was able to conserve my supply of line on a straight rush, but when the dodgings and turnings came, the swivel chair in which I sat oscillated like the balance-wheel of a watch. At one instant winding as for dear life, and the next braking the reel's scream as much as I dared. Bird Island, Dog Rock and Piercy Island revolved before me until all sense of direction was lost, and the reel became unpleasantly warm. Then a dark fin showing over a comber, and I cried "He's tiring;" but the wise Williams smiled an ironic smile. "One hour and five minutes," said he, and with that my reel suddenly sank to slimness in a scream and we were heading out to sea. To and fro, again, pump in, brake out. Now we were in the tide rip outside Piercy and the wall-sided seas made me wonder—when I had the time—how long I could remain on board. Sometimes, with the tip of the rod curved almost to the reel, my line entered the water nearly between my feet, anon I was looking up into the sky with the line disappearing over the launch's side above my head. Pump, reel in, pump, reel in. My fingers seemed all thumbs, my eyes were full of sweat, every joint in my body aching. "Quick, reel in, no slack or he'll bite your line!" Damn the man, does he think I'm a winding engine? Pump, pump, pump! Nearer and nearer, and I caught myself saying "You *must* distribute your line or you'll never get it all back, but for God's sake don't get your fingers fouled or you'll go overboard, rod and all, when he rushes." Now I could see him through six feet of water. Five, four, the gaff!

Whew-w-w from the reel, and the six feet became two hundred yards, then, pump, pump, pump. Five times in sight, five times the sight of the

* The bait, seized probably tail-first, must be reversed for comfortable swallowing, hence the concession lest the bait be discarded.

gaff renewed his courage, and if his strength was failing, mine was nearly gone. Then a succession of four leaps from him followed by frantic winding by me. A sudden yielding—pump, pump, pump! Williams standing over me like a stone task master, reverse lever in one hand, steering wheel in the other. Pump, pump, pump! Most of the time dead-weight—and what a weight!—but sometimes a worry. Pump. Gaining on him, pump. If he sounds once more, I'll never get him up again. Pump. Coming up, coming up! Pump, pump—one more pump, if it breaks your back Pump! The gaff—Ah! A bow-line under his flukes! "He's ours," said Williams; I said nothing.....two hours and twenty-five minutes.

After an hour's run we were under the lee of Red Head, and could boil the kettle. We shook hands.

From "The Auckland Star," April 13, 1928, the following account is taken.

BATTLE WITH A MAKO

Englishman From China

Easter Sport At Russell

(By *Telegraph, Own Correspondent.*)

Russell, April 12, 1928.

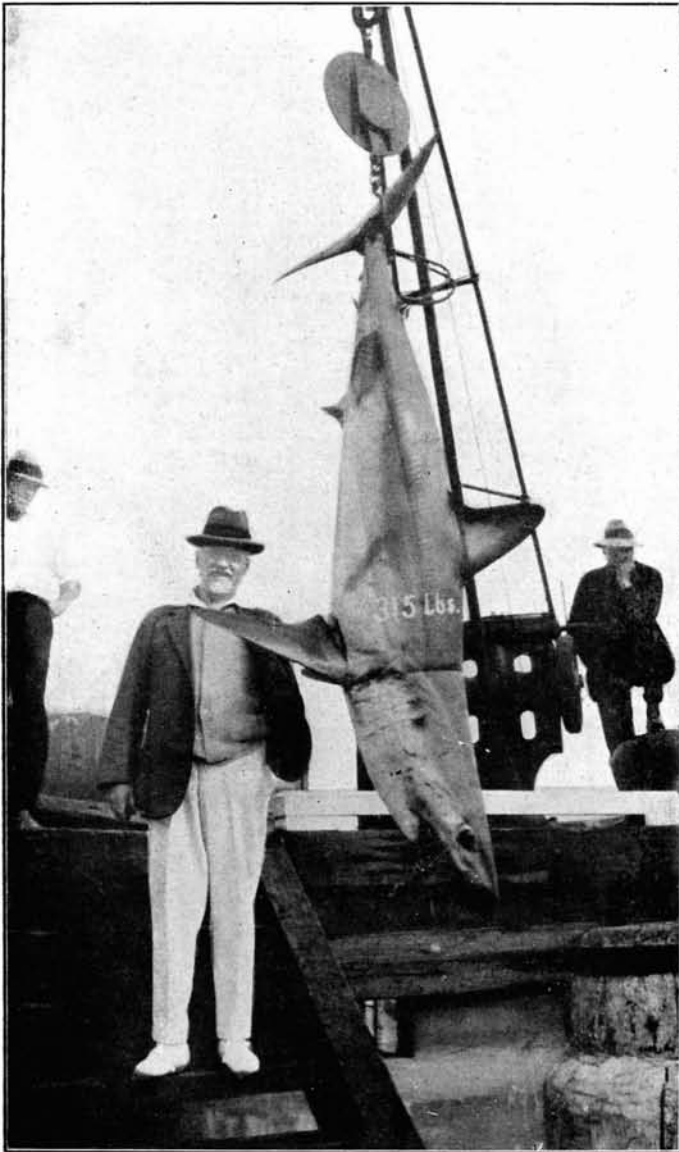
A mako shark of 315 lb. was caught by Mr. Anderson, of Shanghai, while fishing from the launch Avalon yesterday off Bird Rock. The launchman, Mr. Peter Williams, says it was the best fighting mako he has seen. It made frantic rushes of a hundred yards at a time, leapt on end four times, and even after an hour's play it came clean out of the water three times. The battle lasted two hours 25 minutes.

Other Easter catches include:—Mr. Geo. Hodgson (Auckland), mako of 235 lb; Mr. F. McKechnie (Auckland), swordfish of 262 lb; Mr. Hector Gray (Auckland), mako of 50 lb, kingfish of 86 lb; Mr. W. H. Ready (Auckland), swordfish of 258 lb, 270 lb and 224 lb, and mako of 40 lb; Mr. Duncan, mako of 150 lb.

Never since when alone in an African jungle I raised a bead on my first elephant have I experienced such delirious excitement. Good luck go with that mako's shade, and may an ever keen appetite be gratified with an unending supply of spectral *kahawhi* in the Piscine Hereafter. Verily, he was belicose all the days of his life, and in death he was not dishonoured!

Dusk in Russell, and an aching stroll down the unlit grassy path that is Russell's bund. Quoth a New Zealand empire's-hope, shaggy of hair, fragmentary of once-braced shorts, ragged of shirt, "Say, Mister, are you the man that caught the Mako?" "O-o-oh, Mates, this is him." This is fame! *Finis coronat opus.*

A word about New Zealand—last, loneliest, loveliest—and her people. In an unsurpassed climate, one may live in the winterless north of North Island, or settle, as he will, amid perpetual snow in the south. A few hours' travel, and Norwegian fiords, and sheer cliffs uprising from four hundred fathoms of sea give place to a smiling English country-side;



Mr. A. L. Anderson of Shanghai and his 315 lbs.
Mako Shark, taken in the Bay of Islands,
New Zealand.



A Day's Sport in New Zealand Waters. Two Swordfish and a Kingfish brought to Camp in the Bay of Islands.

THE HUNTING OF THE MAKO;

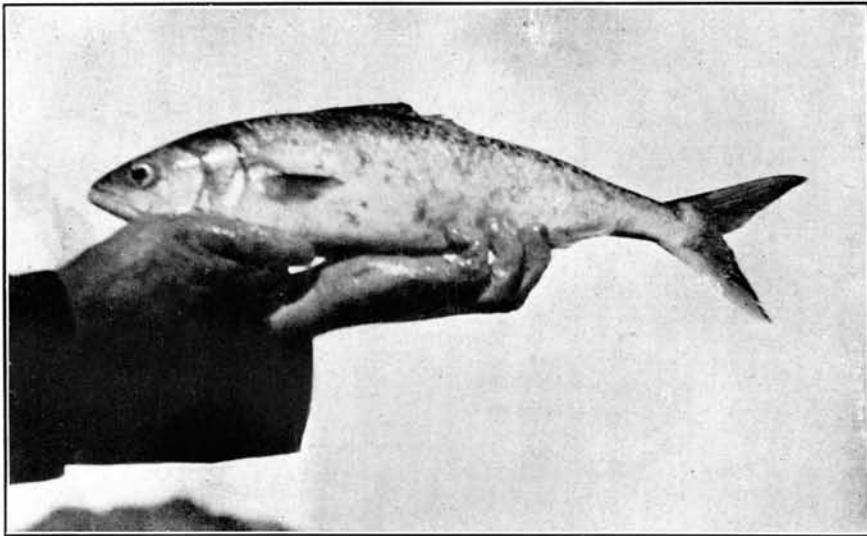
boiling pits and geysers to peaks clothed in eternal snow. "Winter" sports and sea bathing can be indulged in the year round. Wild flowers are few, but in gardens roses, chrysanthemums and begonias need take shame from none; fruits are plentiful and luscious as anywhere may be found. Roads and railways are poor, but two hundred miles a day is possible in a car. Rail-travel is cheap. The seas teem with fish from those of the smallest size to whales, for which there are two fishing stations. In many lakes, especially Tanpo Moana and Lake Roturua, brown and rainbow trout are plentiful, the record weight being 21 lbs. There is also the sea-run trout, and the Quinnet salmon, which averages 26 lbs., but has been taken up to 40 lbs. Red deer, with from fourteen to twenty four points (record twenty seven points), are increasing too fast; fallow deer, Virginian deer, axis and sambhur await the rifle. Chamois and thar should be open for shooting in one or two years at most. Besides moose, and wapiti, which have outgrown the size of their American ancestors, there are wild pigs, wild goats and "outlaw" cattle.

During my month's stay I was received everywhere with courtesy, nay, more, a quick ready desire to help. I neither saw rudeness nor heard bad language. Is it of the soil, of the air, this courtesy? The question is suggested by the recollection that in the Maori war when the main British force, foodless, with failing ammunition and communication line cut, was surrounded by the enemy, a Maori flag of truce said "The pakia's weapons are useless without ammunition and no man may fight well on an empty belly; if you will agree to an armistice we will send you what food you require, and wait until your ammunition bearers, unmolested by us, have joined you." It is surely not un-British to regret that in the eventual struggle these gentlemen were defeated. In his speech the New Zealander's soft burr suggests a 'way-back emanation from north of Tweed, and this is so general that the approach of a cousin from across the narrow sea, venting himself, amid a clatter of falling aspirates, of a cacophony calculated to mute the Bells alte-Bowe, attracts attention. Albeit the New Zealander is proud, as well he may be, of his country. Affectionate references to "Home" and "the old country" by even the native born are not uncommon, and in public gatherings, even in hotels, the first note of the National Anthem freezes even the most distant hearers to rigidity and proud silence. Let me just add that military training is compulsory and that the shirkers of duty during the Great War are still voteless.

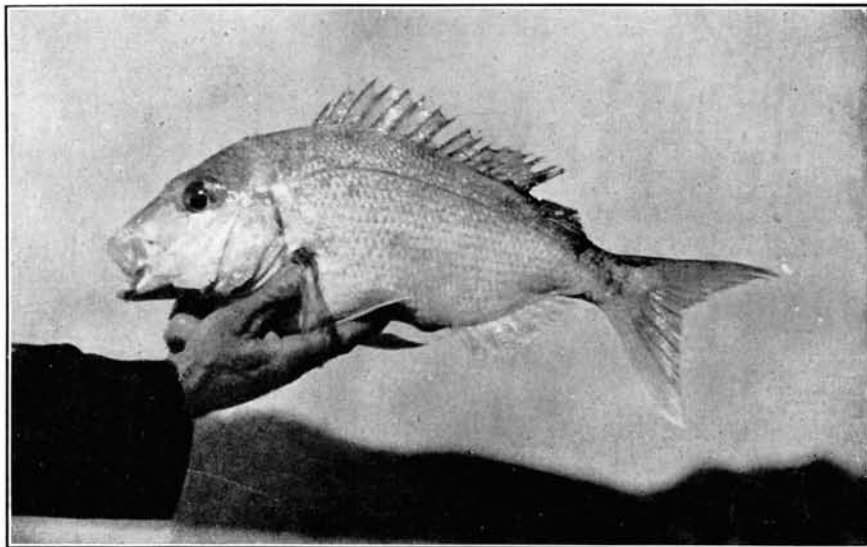
NEW ZEALAND

God girt her about with the surges
And winds of the masterless deep,
Whose tumult uprouses and urges
Quick billows to sparkle and leap:
He filled from the life of their motion,
Her nostrils with breath of the sea,
And gave her, a part in the ocean,
A citadel free.

KIPLING.



A 6 lbs. Kahawhi from New Zealand. This fish occurs in immense Shoals in these Waters. It is Grey in colour with pale Green Markings.



Photos by A. L. Anderson.

A 5 lbs. Schnapper. This is a beautiful sporting Fish. Its colour ranges from Red-brown, through Golden to White.

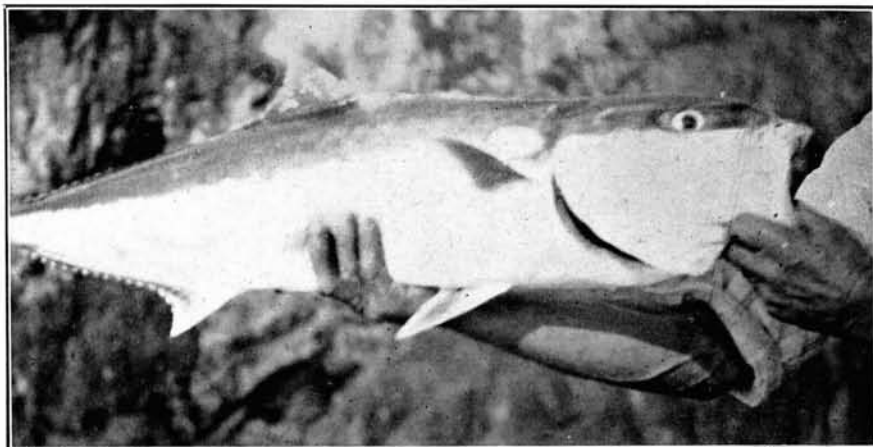


Photo by A. L. Anderson.

A 20 lbs. Kingfish from the Bay of Islands, New Zealand.



The Jaws of a Mako Shark, taken by Commander Billyard-Leake
in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand.