

FISHING ON LAKE HURON.

The average Ontario person knows very little about the fishing industry in his own province. He enjoys fish at meal-time, but does not care to bother himself enough to ask where it comes from. It is an industry that few take a great interest in, excepting those that earn their living by it, and the sportsman, who will travel far and wide to fish. Ontario has a great fishing industry, which employs thousands of men, and the fish are not only sold to the domestic market, but are sent across the line to the large cities of the Northern United States.

Lake Huron is the great seat of the fishing industry of Ontario. Many villages and hamlets are almost supported by fishing. These places lie chiefly around the Bruce Peninsula and the Manitoulin Island. The population is comprised largely of Highland-Scotch and French, who are among the best fishermen in the Old World.

At the foot of the Bruce Peninsula, on the Lake Huron side, lies the village of Southampton. Here the rocky Saugeen mingles its grey waters with the deep blue of Lake Huron. At first sight it would not strike the visitor as differing from the ordinary Ontario village. It has its tall chimneys and its main street, so characteristic of a new world village. A closer inspection of the old part of the town reveals the difference. At the mouth of the Saugeen the fishing population of Southampton live. Their dwelling-places are the same small houses of years ago, and if one should judge them from their homes, they do not seem to have fared so well as the English and German townspeople.

Here one finds some good Scotch and French-Canadian names. Malcolm, Murdoch, and Gabriel are on the lips of the people, and many of the older folk still speak nothing but the Gaelic. Fancy, here in the province of Ontario, far away from old Scotia, where the Highland race is fast dying out, the Scotch-man hearing the language spoken which he so dearly loves. Truly, Canada is a mixed-up affair, the people speaking a dozen different languages, and yet living in peace and harmony. To sit down of a summer evening, beside the Saugeen, and listen to the rippling of the water, and the conversation of the fishermen, would remind one of far Lochaber, except that the music of the bagpipes is silent, and no Grampians rise in the background.

There are no braver nor more experienced fishermen on our Great Lakes than those of Southampton. They have the weather-storms, which are often as fierce as those encountered on the Atlantic, and, considering the few that are drowned every year, they do marvelously well. The gales on Lake Huron often blow so fierce that even the largest steamers will not leave their docks and go out.

To fully appreciate the fishing industry, the work which the men undergo, and the number of fish caught, it is necessary to take a trip out on the lake and see the fishing actually going on. A great deal can be learned from conversation with the men, who are very obliging, and who will willingly enlighten you as much as they are able in regard to their calling.

The industry is fast getting into the hands of large companies, like the Buffalo Fish Company, which have a great capital to back them up. The day for the

fisherman who works for himself is fast drawing to a close, and every year sees large numbers quitting their former occupation. The smacks are also being fast done away with. They never go out more than ten or fifteen miles to set their nets, and the best fish beds are found in the centre of the lake. The tourist should take a tug belonging to one of the fish companies, as he can see more work done than in the smack, and will have more room to move about. It is a pity to see the old class of fishermen dying out. The tug does not take the same skill to handle it as the smack, and yet it may be far the best. Few accidents occur now, compared with the old days, and when men are working for a company, they are sure of their wages. If the tourist decides to go out for a trip in one of the tugs, he should be wrapped up warmly. It is often very cold in the centre of the lake, especially if the wind is blowing strongly. The men use oil-skins, which are, of course, the best. The tug leaves the harbor about one o'clock in the morning, and is quickly out in the lake. You can sleep down in the bunks, which are warm and stuffy, or on deck, which is preferable to most people. The boat pushes quickly ahead, and by about six in the morning you are at the reef, having run about sixty miles.

The great fishing-reef is in the centre of the lake, and it is here that the fish are to be found during the summer season. The water is not more than two hundred feet deep, and the nets are easily set. This reef resembles the far-famed banks of Newfoundland, on a smaller scale. Here are to be found abundance of white fish and lake trout, which are the fish most sought after in the great lakes.

To a great many the day would be a wearisome one. You see and smell nothing but fish, and everybody is working hard, except the tourist. It is on such an occasion that the knight of the weed enjoys himself, for he has still his friend, the pipe, to amuse and soothe him. To get a fresh fish cooked, soon after it is taken from the nets, is truly a luxury, and to have the pleasure of eating it in the middle of a vast expanse of fresh water is next thing to a dream.

Immediately after breakfast, the men generally attend to the lifting of the nets. They are set in gangs, often five miles long, at the end of which they are attached to buoys, which indicate where the nets lie. Lead sinkers and wooden floaters keep the nets in an upright position at the bottom of the lake. The fish generally travel in batches and rush together into the meshes of the net from which it is very hard for them to extricate themselves. The nets are pulled in over rollers, and the boat moves very slowly during this work, for the tug is liable to rock, especially in a rough sea. A thousand to fifteen hundred pounds is considered a good haul, but the catches in the Autumn are often much greater than this. The fish are generally cleaned on the boat, and are almost ready for export when the shore is reached. The afternoon is often spent in setting nets, and then the journey home commences. The tugs frequently race in from the reef, and this causes a little excitement in the monotonous life which the men lead. The harbor is generally reached between ten and eleven in the evening, and the tourist feels pleased to get on land again.

The life of the Canadian fisherman on the Great Lakes is not one of pleasure, but of very hard work. It is an occupation in which there is very little chance