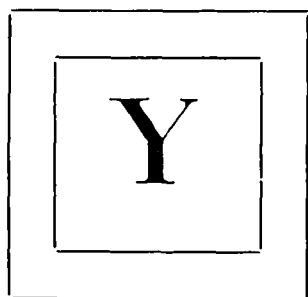




“Chink” Finger-Prints and the Salmon Industry

By J. H. Grant



YOU have read something of British Columbia's fishing industry. You know that last year it gave employment to about 12,000 men, and Premier McBride says it is still in its infancy. You have heard that moguls of finance built boats and canneries and towns, and put acid in the tins to soften the salmon's bones. Did you ever wonder how came the finger-prints in the brown paint of the salmon cans? Sometimes these marks are covered by the label, but they are always there. The making of them is a mere accident in the commercial drama of the salmon.

If you have ever had a sufficiently strong desire to see this great play for yourself it will have landed you in some little town of the Pacific Coast where there are huge buildings equipped with smoke stacks and small windows like elephant's eyes. Somewhere beneath those acres of roof you may have seen smoky “Chinks” (Chinamen) kneeling before a vat of lacquer. They were snatching shining tins from a mammoth

stack and thrusting each together with a clawlike hand and several inches of ropy arm into the brown fluid. Beside them grew a pile of stained and dripping cans, and in each, for the same reason that there was a vulnerable spot on the heel of Achilles, were the—but we begin with the last act.

The cannery of your choice may be on the Fraser, or the Naas, or at Rivers Inlet, or on the Skeena. There are twelve about the mouth of the last mentioned river, and each owns from fifty to one hundred boats, with an average of twenty five miles of net to the cannery. These nets are over twenty feet in depth. Calculate, if you can, the chances of a madly rushing salmon to reach the spawning beds of the upper Skeena.

Long, low structures butt the river's rocky shore amid clusters of whitewashed cabins and stalk upon centipedic stilts far out over the smooth waters of the inlet. Here beavies of boats flit to and fro, or nose the huge piles in idle rows. Stretches of sandy beach exhibit large, black canoes reposing in grotesque decay, relics of a time when war was paramount and commerce incidental. This is the cannery town of Spokeshoot. It is called Port Essington on