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No. 84.

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No. 911

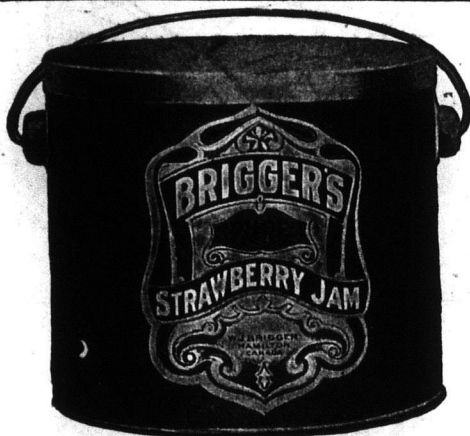
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"The Trawler"

By James B. Connolly

THERE he goes in his little dory, his highest hope being only to win from an uncertain sea the fish which is to furnish his family with the necessities, and rarely is it more than the necessities, of life.

Heavy enough labor, this trawling, though never, on a fine day, beyond the power of the moderately muscular and enduring man who is broken to it, who has learned to time the swing of back and shoulders to the swell of an ocean that never, except in phenomenally calm weather, ceases to heave beneath his feet. Under the best of conditions it might be compared ashore to the work of the man who has, after toiling the long day through in the field, to carry when eventide comes his heavy load back to where far away the home-light burns dimly, except that your light ashore can be reckoned with, whereas your vessel's light is ever shifting, up the wind, down the wind, sometimes as near as a cable's length, again miles away; with that difference and, of course, for firm earth under your feet, the substitution of a dory's bottom which is never for two consecutive seconds in the same place; and bearing in mind always that a casual stumble, which ashore will only throw you at body's length, may here throw you to your grave; and not forgetting after you reach the vessel the little added labor

lose life, whirled the dory bow or stern to that sea. If he does it skilfully, the dory rides the crest in safety; if not, their shipmates that night will be saying a prayer or two for the repose of their souls.

The man hauling the trawl wears what are called nippers, grooved rings of cloth, that the fingers may not be cut through by the hard wet line; but should the trawl become tangled on bottom he discards the nippers and hauls in bare-handed. Quite often he has to haul in hundreds of fathoms of line in that manner. Imagine that cutting into his flesh, while all the time the winter wind is whistling, biting, and the spray dashing over the gunnels, thwarts and into the dory, freezing where it strikes, frequently to such a thickness that if they did not often stop to pound it off, the little boat would sink under the weight of it.

The long chances of fishing are taken by these men who fish from dories; by being capsized, and by becoming separated from their vessels in thick weather. And this ever-present danger of going astray is never minimized by careful measures of safety. Of course, there would be many less lives lost if the men were careful, more prudent; surely, but your careful, prudent men don't take to deep-sea fishing, nor would they break any records if they did. A man could



Salmon Fishing Industry, Fraser River. Floor of A.B.C. Cannery

of three or four hours at racing speed of dressing, icing and stowing your fish before you may turn in if so be you do not have to go on watch the same night.

That is for smooth weather, but of course come the days when it is rough. Then you may see them in battle, tossing their dories over the side, themselves standing by to leap, and carrying such a weight of clothing, boots and oilskins that a misstep would mean a quick finish. There goes the dory, down in the valley one moment, high above the rail the next, while whosoever's turn it is to go watches calmly for his chance. Few of us would care for just once to try that dive; not for the whole vessel's value would we, even were we good swimmers and unweighted by clothing, but these—they do it several times every rough day, and many of them cannot swim a stroke.

And also comes the winter weather. Imagine it then, one of those days when ashore your ulster collar is up to your ears, your hands in thick gloves, your breath coming from you, in thick wreaths of vapor. Somewhere upon the ocean at that same hour are thousands of fishermen in their little dories, the same swinging easily or it may be tossing from here to as high as the ceiling of your room and back again. In the bow of each little boat is standing the man who happens to be hauling the trawl; in the waist is the other, coiling it into a tub as fast as it comes in. The man in the waist has to keep an eye out for the bad seas. To circumvent them there is always a ready oar in the bucket astern. In the event of a mortally high comber bearing down, the man in the waist turns, and with a quick and clever flirt of the oar, never too soon to waste time, never too late to

cut his gear and run for the vessel, but your real fisherman doesn't do that in a hurry. Pride of calling alone forces him to hang on as long as the next man, and there is besides the expense to shipmates if the trawls are abandoned, for the cost of replacing the lost gear comes out of the men, not the owners; and also, too, the dory's crew which earned the reputation for abandoning gear would soon have to hunt another vessel.

And not alone is the danger of a fog finding them away from the vessel. There is, for instance, that practice in the big "channel fleet," which trawls the deep water to the westward of George's Shoals. These fellows—the "haddockers"—aiming to make the market once a week, fish night and day till they "fill her up." These are the men who sometimes put off at night in vapor so thick that they have to take along flambeaux to mark their line of dories. Sometimes they put off in fog too thick for even their great torches, and then you may hear them hallooing all the night through, from one to another, so they may not go astray. That may be flirting with death, but such is the pace of one body of our cosmopolitan trawlers these days—the fastest sea toilers whatever.

And so men go astray; and the ocean is so vast a place, and vessels and dories such small specks upon it! In clear weather, with tide and wind and sea to baffle, it is bad enough to lose sight of your vessel, but when fog settles down! When it comes so thick that standing to the wheel at midday you are unable to distinguish your watch-mate leaning against the fore rigging, it surely is a bad outlook for a straying dory. But when you have to stare hard to make out your mate