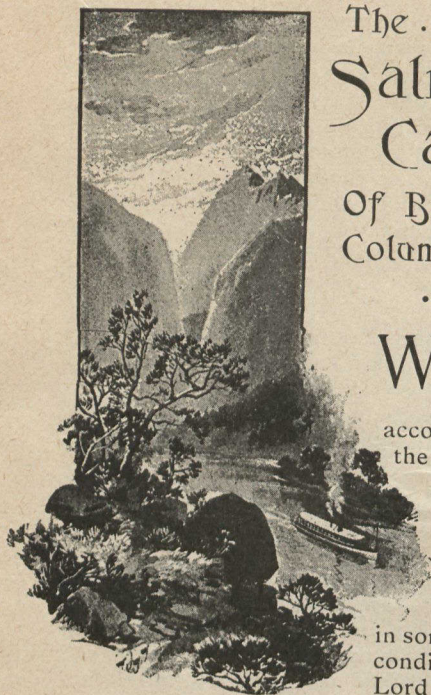




The ... Salmon Canneries Of British Columbia.

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WHEN invited by a small party of friends to accompany them to the salmon canneries at Steveston—a town on the Fraser River about fourteen miles from Vancouver,—I was in somewhat the same condition of mind as Lord Dufferin, who, when asked, during a

visit to Chicago, to inspect a sausage manufactory, replied "No, thank you; I am fond of sausage."

However, my love for the novel and curious conquered every other consideration, and so, one hazy morning in August, I sailed down the Fraser in pursuit of knowledge, and peradventure amusement as well.

The smoke and mist hung over the mountains like a bridal veil, and caused the shore on either side to appear dim and shadowy. But as the day grew older, I could discern in the distance the fishing boats—some four thousand in number—wending their homeward way. For it was Saturday, and no one is allowed to fish for salmon from noon upon that day until six p.m. on Sunday.

One of the prettiest sights in this land of beautiful pictures, is to be seen when the boats start forth at sunset hour, and, spreading their terra cotta nets over the green waters of the Fraser, entered upon their week of toil.

The sounds are deafening; eight thousand men all speaking at once, and in different tongues. But the setting sun, dancing waves, bright blankets, and white sails, illumine and beautify all.

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After a sail of about three hours, Steveston was reached, and, as I stepped from the wharf to the main street, I felt as though I had walked right into the heart of some quaint, curious, old dream. What was there about the pine-board buildings—one-storeyed, unplastered and unpainted—so strangely familiar? Then I remembered.

Once, when a child, I was taken to an old-fashioned Methodist camp meeting, held in a large grove, and the houses confronting me were the fac-simile of those I had seen in the long ago. But, there alas, the resemblance ceased, for anything more utterly unmethodistical than Steveston it would be hard to find. A gentleman, who has lived in some of the worst European cities, told me he believed it to be 'the toughest place on earth.'

The town is fairly orderly during the day, but when the shades of evening fall, then pandemonium is ushered in, and drunkenness and licentiousness reign supreme until the day breaks again.

And yet, Steveston is, supposedly, a prohibition town; doubtless, owing to the large number of Indians engaged in the fishing and canning industries, and who are perfectly wild when under the influence of liquor.

Everywhere one's gaze is met by the sign,

"Temperance drinks for sale here," and some of the merchants engaged in the sale of these 'cooling' beverages do such a rushing business that they are obliged to keep open night and day, and instead of eking out a precarious existence, as is generally the fate of those similarly engaged, they flourish like the green bay tree

The town is very cosmopolitan, but the canning is done chiefly by Kloodchmen (Indian women) and Chinamen.

The yellow rain-coats, green and red silk handkerchiefs and shawls, with which the exterior of the stores are profusely decorated, make brilliant patches of color all along the streets, whilst the Indian encampments scattered throughout the town, and the Indians themselves sauntering along in garments of every hue, give the place quite a kaleidoscopic appearance.

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There seemed to be a goodly number of bibulous souls abroad, and one man who had reached the amorous stage, opened his arms playfully as I passed him, with a view to embracing me, but, fortunately for himself—my escort being of a somewhat bucolic temperament—exerted a British subject's privilege, and changed his mind.

After dining I sallied forth in the direction of the canneries—ten in all. And it was whilst wending my way thither that I came in contact with one of those touches of nature which makes all the world kin.

She was an Indian maiden, and he was of the same dusky race, and as they sat in close proximity, upon the seat bordering the dyke-path, which led to the canneries, they were unmistakably lovers.

What cared they for the noisy crowd, which surged to and fro about them with curious glances and scornful smiles? They lived but for each other. Just as I reached them, I noticed that his brawny hand was tightly closed, and that the beloved one was playfully, but ineffectually, seeking to solve the mystery of that hidden palm. Moved by a woman's curiosity, I paused in front of them, when suddenly the hand flew open, and lo, and behold, buried in its capacious depths, was a silver ring.

At that moment a wretchedly unromantic man in my rear, jostled me onward, but as I cast one last, lingering look behind me, I saw her head pillowed lovingly upon his shoulder, and her form clasped closely to his manly breast.

It is not often in this conventional age, that one is privileged to be an onlooker, during the supreme moment in the hour of courtship,—and if ever I longed for a camera, 'twas then.

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Upon entering the cannery, I was conducted first of all, to a large wooden platform overlooking the river, where the salmon were being thrown up by men with spears, from the fishing boats below. There are two kinds of salmon, the spring and the sock-eye. The former are larger, but not nearly as plentiful as the latter.

After being pitched into the cannery, the fish are tossed on a wooden table, where, in the twinkling of an eye, they are shorn by Chinamen of heads, tails, fins and internal economy. They then pass into the hands of a row of Kloodchmen and are thoroughly cleansed with a brush. The Chinese are never allowed to perform this part of the work, as, although more skilful, they are not as cleanly as the women, who as they stand there in their bright garments, hair hanging in two long braids, and silver ornaments, make an extremely quaint, and never-to-be-forgotten picture. The fish are then placed in a curious-shaped wooden receptacle, in charge of a Chinaman, who, by turning a crank, cuts them into five or six

pieces; after which they are thrown into a large keg of brine, from which they are taken with a net, very similar to that used in catching butterflies.

Then comes the part most trying to the onlooker, provided he or she be a fastidious soul and partial to canned salmon. The salmon, fresh from the brine, is passed to a row of Chinamen, who take it in their hands, and press it into the cans, each piece of fish being supposed to fill a can. I might say just here, for the instruction of all, and the consolation of a few, that this is the only time the fish is touched with the hands, after having been cleaned by the women; and those who assist at this stage of the work, are made to observe the utmost cleanliness.

The cans are then placed on trays and sent along to be covered, soldered and tested, before being cast into a boiling cauldron, where they remain for one hour. Upon being removed from the boiler, they are again tested by rapping the lids with a small hammer, and so wonderfully acute is the hearing of the testers that they can detect the most infinitesimal opening, just by the sound. After the needed repairs are attended to, the cans are put in a retort, where they are steamed for another hour, then tested and put away to be cooled and lacquered.

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From the time the cans are closed until they are shipped they are tested no less than ten times, and one cannot but admire the thoroughness with which every part of the work is conducted. The rows of cans, piled ten and fifteen feet high, enable one to realize, as no word-picture could, the magnitude of this industry.

Although this an 'off year,'—they only look for a heavy catch every fourth year,—the season's pack is a large one, and for ten days the run was enormous.

Two fishermen made with one boat eight hundred in three weeks, and the gross sum realized will be over eight million dollars.

One vessel alone is taking to England a cargo valued at seventy-five thousand dollars.

This speaks well for the hatcheries established by the Government, and which are regarded by some ignorant and prejudiced people as an unnecessary drain upon the public purse, and an impious interference with the province of the Creator.

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The canning season is over, and the Indians, many of whom have come from distant parts of the province, accompanied by their families, are sailing merrily homeward, with the fruits of their labor. This being carnival week in Vancouver, a number of them have moved their canoes to the various wharves of the city, and are enjoying the festivities.

As they stroll leisurely along—an Indian never walks hurriedly—they are the most complacent, self-satisfied-looking people in Vancouver. And well they may be, for there is probably no class at the present time who have so much ready money at their disposal, or who spend it as freely. When they return next week to their winter homes, they will carry with them but little cash, but will be well supplied with clothing, blankets and provisions.

One feels sorry for the Kloodchmen sometimes, for whilst the husband carries the 'bag,' the poor wife is generally expected to carry the bundles and babies. And it is no uncommon sight to see a Kloodchman dragging herself wearily along, with a baby on her back, a stovepipe under one arm, and a bag of flour under the other; her liege lord, meanwhile, strolling serenely on before, with his hands in his pockets.

BETSY GADABOUT.