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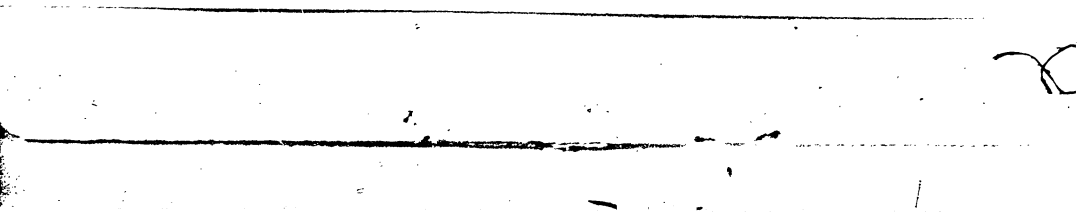
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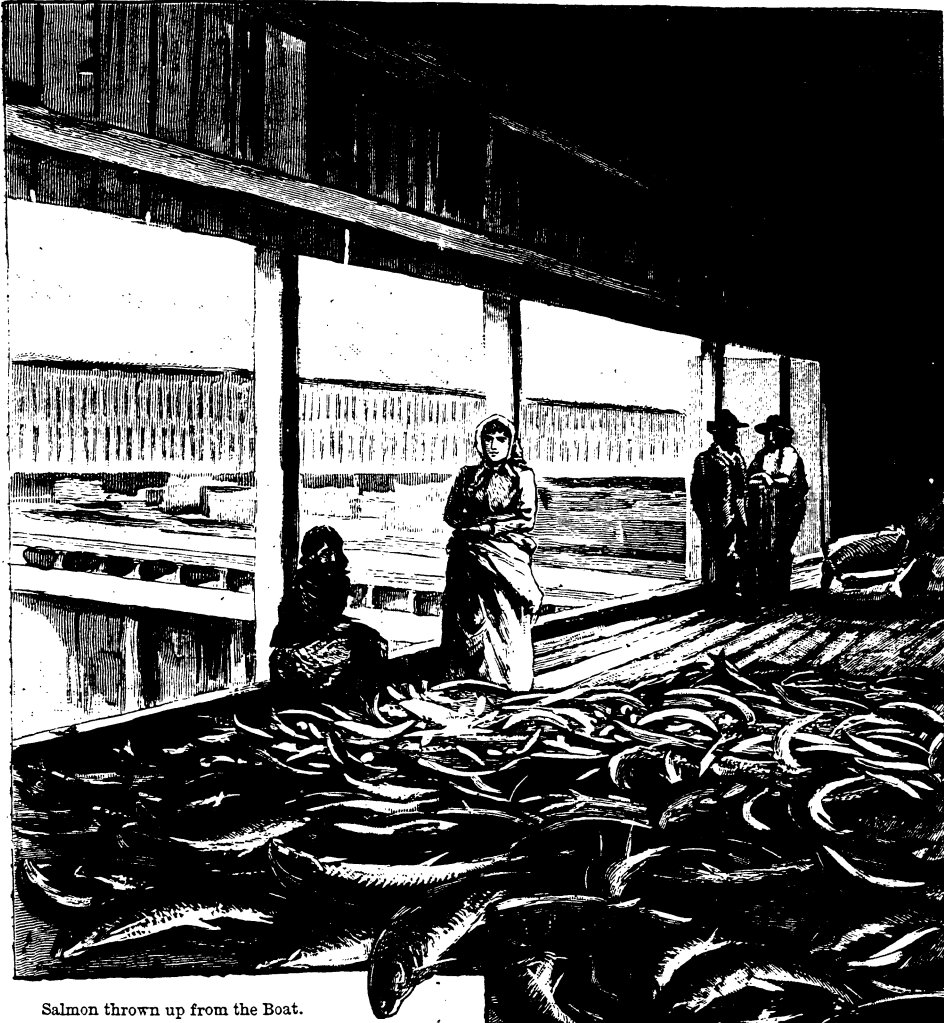
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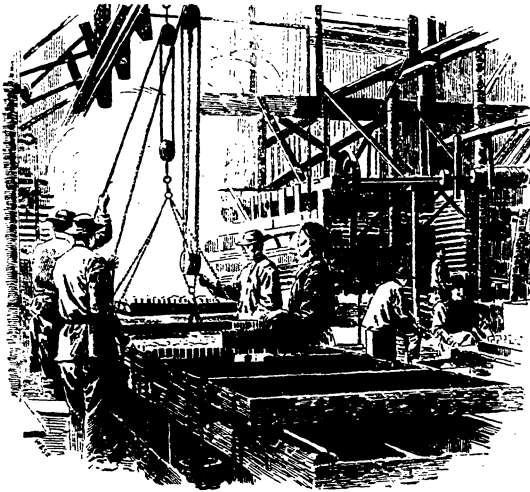
Salmon thrown up from the Boat.

SALMON-CANNING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

By CATHARINE KIRBY PEACOCK.

JUST a round tin of salmon, measuring some six inches in height, an insignificant little object, perhaps, when viewed by itself, and yet the representative of a large, lucrative, and ever-increasing industry in one of our British colonies. What a multitude of hopes and fears, what strange minglings of races and types have all been bound up in the gaily-coloured little cylinder since the days early in the spring of the year, when the tin or can

was originally made on the banks of the Fraser, in the same cannery which later on



Chinamen lifting trays or coolers.

was destined to show industry of a very different nature.

The city of New Westminster, situated on the north bank of the river at a distance of about fifteen miles from the Gulf of Georgia, is perhaps seen to best advantage when on approaching by steamer it unfolds itself before you, trim, yet picturesque, with an air of individuality quite its own, as street after street of brightly-painted wooden houses and leafy orchard trees rises steeply one behind the other, until the summit of the high hill is reached. Eastward to Sapperton, so called by the Royal Engineers, the original pioneers of the district, in 1859, under Colonel Moody, and westward through the large yards of the Royal City Planing Mill, the town stretches over a distance of nearly four miles.

Like almost every other colonial town in all parts of the world, this city of New Westminster is subject to periods of "ups and downs"; and after being, perhaps, unduly elated during a small boom three years ago, the inevitable depression has followed, and has been felt the more severely because of the recent good times, when money was plentiful and wages at an abnormal figure—£1 per day, for instance, being the usual pay for plasterers, while other artisans and labourers were remunerated in proportion.

But the "Royal City," as she is proud to call herself, in recognition of the fact that her name was originally chosen by Queen Victoria, possesses what should be the high road to wealth in the beautiful Fraser River, which, in places nearly a mile broad, traverses the finest agricultural land of the dis-

trict, putting a means of transit into the hands of all in places where railroads are but a dream of the distant future, and communication by waggon is well-nigh impossible over the newly-made, rough roads of the forest. So it is to the Fraser, with its marvellous supply of salmon in the summer, and its practically unlimited stores of ice in winter, that New Westminster largely owes her ability to weather temporary storms and fogs, and hopes finally to settle again to steady-going ways on a firmer basis than is ever afforded by speculations in land, however tempting they may appear at the time.

Never perhaps, however, in the memory of any settler has the salmon-run at all equalled that of the season of 1893, though it is a well-known and oft-proved saying among the Indians that only on every fourth year do the fish come in their full numbers. Yet there can be but little doubt that much of the excessive quantity this year is due to the co-operation of the Government Hatchery, which annually preserves and deposits some millions of fry, or small fish into the waters, the number last year being 5,764,000. As a rule, the size of the pack for the next season is decided as early as the preceding autumn, and all arrangements are made accordingly. The boxes containing sheets of tin are ordered at once from England, and take their long journey round by the Horn, when, upon their arrival, they are taken in hand by the much-execrated, but ever useful Chinamen, who, as a rule, contract to make the tins at so much the case, containing forty-eight of them, often turning out as many as from four to five thousand cans in one day. But it is not so much with the making of the receptacle as the actual method of canning itself that we are concerned, a process involving more care, skill, and expedition than would be credited from any mere casual consideration of the work.

Of the five different kinds of salmon which abound in the river, the sockeye is the one universally used for the purpose of canning, and it was towards the end of July the good news came that the great run of fish had begun. From that time onward for three weeks the one word in everybody's mouth, the one thought in each mind, and the principal prevailing odour along the wharves was—salmon. The morning papers were seized upon eagerly, and "last night's catch" formed the topic for the day's conversation. Lucky, indeed, were those fishermen who, having

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paid the \$20 (£4) necessary to obtain a licence, found that as the result of one night's sport as many as eight hundred fish at ten cents each (value £16) had fallen to their nets. In more than one instance the load was heavier than the boats could hold, with the consequence that men and booty were all swamped, and owed their escape from a watery grave to the assistance given by those around them.

It was, therefore, with no small pleasure, when the season was at its height, that we accepted an invitation kindly given by Mr. MacNab, Government Inspector of Fisheries, to take a trip in the little steam-launch and see for ourselves the working of this great industry.

A brilliant August sun shining down with fierce intensity made the fifteen-mile run down the river a perfect luxury in its contrast to the white and dusty town, for, no matter how hot it may be elsewhere, a fresh breeze is always blowing off the Gulf, and it was not long before we were glad to make use of some of the extra coats and wraps we had brought in readiness for the return journey.

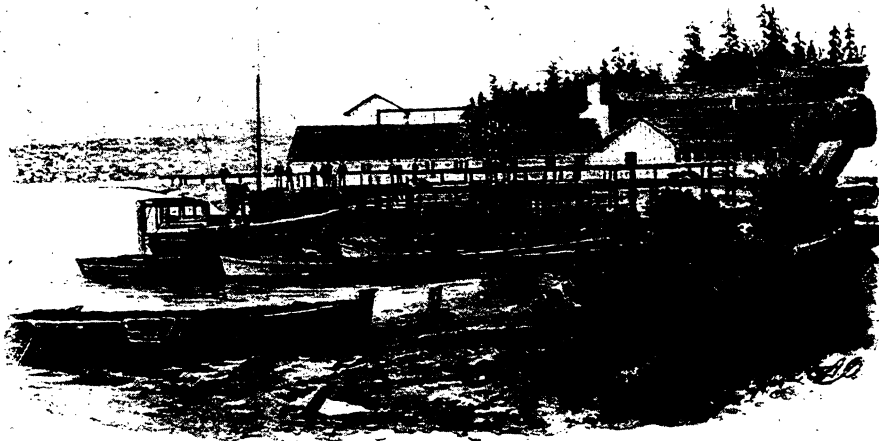
On we went steadily, but surely, leaving by degrees the familiar hills covered with their bare and blackened fir-tree stumps, standing some of them three hundred feet in height (relics of a forest fire which ravaged this part of the country some years ago), past the rich alluvial land of Lulu Island, with its prosperous farmsteads and smiling orchards, till coming under the bridge which connects this island with the City of Vancouver, a most unmistakable odour, and the presence of several large white wooden buildings looming in front of us, announced that the goal of our ambition was almost attained. Five minutes more and the little boat was brought alongside at the landing-stage, and we stepped out on to the wooden platform, and by the edgy bank of the river, where little Indian children coolly had in the scantiest of frocks were amusing themselves by tumbling about on the grass, their big round faces, black eyes, and straight, dark hair, carrying one back in imagination to the days not so long

distant, when their immediate progenitors were practically the monarchs of all they surveyed, and before the time when the white man with his trains, his steam-boats, and electric cars had come to teach them the doubtful advantages of European and other forms of civilisation, in return for the possession of whatever land they might require or desire to obtain.

A branch of the Flatheads, those Indians are yet a most peaceable and, when taught, a fairly moral people, squarely built and stunted in growth; a race who for many generations have depended for their livelihood upon the water, and are, therefore, accustomed to long and continuous paddling of their heavy wooden canoes or "dug-outs," hollowed by themselves from the trunk of some giant of the forest. To this day whole large families of relations will travel along the coast, or down from the mountains, to the town in these primitive, yet capacious boats, bringing with them their various household goods, and, after sojourning for a few months in diminutive shanties or tents, according to circumstances, will return later in the year laden with their recent purchases, the result of their summer labours. No small amusement was it during the first weeks in September of last year to stroll down to the wharves and watch the packing in of their stores, for, owing to the aforesaid wonderful drift, the Indians were in a posi-



A New Westminster Group.



Salmon Cannery, New Westminster.

tion to gratify whatever fancy occurred to them. Some idea of their lavish expenditure may be gained from the fact that *one* among the five drapery stores in the town took £180 in three days from these dusky purchasers. The Chinamen, of whom we saw several at the cannery, are deservedly less popular among their neighbours; few, indeed, and far between are the cents which "Honest John" expends in this country, and the constant drain to China is undoubtedly felt at such times of depression as these.

But to proceed with the matter in hand. On entering the building we were taken at once to the fish-house, where the salmon were lying in great heaps of some thousands, awaiting the hand of the Chinamen splitters, who, seizing them rapidly one after another, first decapitating and cutting off the fins, then taking off the tail, throw them into troughs of water. From these they are lifted and further entrailed by kloochmen (Indian women); and very unprepossessing did some of these rather elderly ladies look, with the wiry hair straggling out from under their soiled handkerchiefs, which took the place of other head-gear; but the unusual sight of a small black note-book raised a hum of comments in the Chinook jargon, and the greeting, "Kla-ha-ya?"—"How do you do?"—met with a hearty laughing response.

This row, having finished their most unsavoury part of the work, pass the fish again to another row, who brush them and clean

them yet more thoroughly, and in their turn hand them over to the Divider—a most ingenious arrangement of curved knives worked by a lever, so that the whole fish is at one stroke cut into sections the exact length of the can. This accomplished, it next falls to the lot of the choppers, who are generally Chinamen, to subdivide these pieces, so that they can be the more readily fitted into place, after which they are all immersed in weak brine, where they are allowed to remain for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Thence they are fished out with nets and thrown on drainers to dry them, before being again taken in hand by other Chinamen, who proceed to fill the cans with a marvellous rapidity and neatness, allowing an equal proportion of belly and back to each up to the amount of one pound, which must be regularly tested upon the scales.

Next comes a washing and cleaning of the cans, by either water or steam, before sending them to receive the small square piece of tin always found on the top of the fish, in order that no solder may penetrate through the hole at the end, which is of necessity left unclosed until the lid is secured. The lids are then put on loosely, and the can placed in what is called the Crimping machine, the pressure of a revolving wheel fixing them on firmly before passing along the gully or trough holding the melted solder. Taken from this machine they are next put in huge iron frames called Coolers, holding

one hundred and seventy-five tins, and moved by chain and pulley for convenience in transit, and the hole in the top being filled up with solder the cans are tested by immersion into tanks of boiling water. Should any air-bubbles appear, to show the presence of leakage, they are at once swung out and repaired before being boiled in the large kettles, which hold six coolers at a time. Indicators affixed to each kettle mark the time allowed—in

this case fifty minutes — and at its conclusion every individual can is again pierced to create a vacuum, the instrument used being a small wooden hammer with a sharp spike inserted beneath it. This is wielded with the unerring precision and dexterity for which a Chinaman is famous, and which, combined with his stolid pertinacity and powers of endurance, make him so valuable a servant. The holes are again soldered, the tins are loaded on to waggons holding some seven coolers or trays, and taken to the retorts or steam-boilers, where as many as three waggons can be placed at a time. Here they are kept for one hour, at a temperature of 240° Fahr., at the end of which time they are thoroughly cooked and ready for use. After so many vicissitudes a bath of alkali is administered to clean the cans of all grease, and they are sprayed with fresh water.

At a lapse of twenty-four hours a further testing is given by experts, who tap tin after tin rapidly with an iron tool, the practised ear rapidly detecting any fault heretofore unobserved, and even, after an interval of three weeks or more, this testing operation is again repeated, thereby considerably mini-

mining all danger of faulty goods being put upon the market.

The final process of lacquering, labelling, wrapping in paper, and packing in wooden boxes of four dozen tins it did not fall to our lot to see, for as late in the year as October eighty Chinamen were employed in one of the largest establishments attending to this last epoch in "the strange eventful pilgrimage" of the tin of salmon, so far, at

any rate, as the cannery on the River Fraser is concerned.

Statistics recently published give the output from the twenty-six canneries on this river at 22,600,000, several thousands of cases being shipped to Australia, but by far the greater proportion taken by the British Columbian salmon fleet direct to Liverpool and London, in addition to the large quantities which were shipped to the British Isles from ports in Eastern Canada.

"Hyu skookum salmon,"

said one of our number, airing his Chinook for the benefit of a good-looking Indian lad, who was sunning himself on the little quay. "You bet," replied the Siwash complacently; and with a hearty laugh at the rapid development of the race, we stepped into the boat and were soon steaming away homeward-bound, the Cannery, with its picturesque figures of Indian and Chinaman, growing ever more weird and indistinct in the glorious haze of the setting sun, till, little by little, they all faded away, and nothing more could be seen but the beautiful river with its pathway of trembling molten gold.

[The photographs were taken by Mr. Thompson, Artist, New Westminster, B.C.]



Fisherman delivering his Catch.