

"School Ho!" the Cry That Mackerel Fishermen Welcome

BOSTON, Mass., Saturday—"School ho, school ho!" The crews of two score of New England vessels now down in southern waters looking for the first signs of mackerel, go to sleep, hoping to be awakened by this welcome cry from the lookout on the masthead.

there for several days while the storm lasts, the men while eating their hearts out with their teeth to get out and with vain wishes for better weather.



PHOTO BY THOMPSON, N. Y.

LEAVING THE WAYS.

A replica of Fulton's steamboat, the Clearmont, launched July 10. It will take part in the Hudson-Fulton celebration to be held in New York during September.

and so has been up to T wharf, and if he talked of going south. When the vessels run into Gloucester anxious eyes are turned to where the seiners lie and searching glances tell them how far owners and captains have gone in their immediate preparation for seining.

The men can tell you the place where every seine is kept, where the seine boats are hauled out and stored, just how the schooner looked when she was laid up for the winter and what her condition was then. Any change, however small, is noted and commented upon.

GETTING READY TO SAIL.

At last March comes, and with it the immediate preparations for the departure of the seiners. The vessels that have become rusty and worn looking while lying idle are brightened up with fresh paint, rigging is overhauled and tarred, and caulkers and other artisans are set at work.

The day for sailing is set and the men who are to make up the crew and who are working on other vessels are notified. Everything is moving in the yards and on the docks a week before there was stillness and the appearance of desolation.

On board the schooner the work goes on. If they had been taken off while she lay idle, the rollers for the seine are again put at the sides, the "purser" is got ready, and put where it will be handy to reach. The dory is overhauled and set on deck, the seine boat is repainted, and, if necessary, repaired. Oars are looked over, and every inch of the big seine boat is examined. The big seine has been tarred, and its length, 500 to 520 fathoms (3,000 to 3,120 feet) has been gone over and every strand and mesh tested.

On this depends the fate of the first catch, and a weak spot in the seine might leave a chance for the mackerel to break through and get away, losing the vessel several thousands of dollars.

The big dip nets play an important part in getting the fish on the vessel quickly, and they also are examined

with a critical eye and tested with care.

FOOD A BIG ITEM.

The food is on board, the cook has his fire lighted, the men have been assigned their bunks and their working clothes, bedding and whatever else they wish to take with them are in proper place. The food of a fisherman is no small item. The men are healthy and blessed with good and hearty appetites. Their work is hard while it is on, and as full health and strength are necessary for the work the owners and captains make no question of the cost of the food so long as it is good and what the men want.

On the day set all is ready, and at the hour decided upon the newly bent sails are hoisted. Last farewells have been said to fathers and mothers. Sisters and sweethearts stand together on the dock trying to keep back the tears that well up to their eyes. It is no longer a question of a week or 10 days before the fisherman will be back. They may not be seen again for several months, for the time of the seiner in port is short and gives little time for

Each man knows his place and his particular duty, and there is no fussing or asking questions. The onramp jump into their places and get out the oars, and the seine heaver, bight passer and cork heaver take their places. The steersman is astern of them, with his long steering oar. All this is done in much less time than it takes to tell, and with only the captain, cook and spare hand and, if the seiner has gasoline power, the engineer, left on board, the seine boat moves rapidly away from the schooner.

Four men on that boat hold positions on which a great deal of the success of the venture will rest—the steersman, who is always a tried and experienced hand; the seine heaver, who is not only experienced but must have the ordinary strength and power of arm and staying qualities of the first class; the bight passer and the cork heaver, who must know their business thoroughly and keep time with the seine heaver, as a mistake in throwing would twist the seine and spoil everything.

The dory with two men rowing follows the seine boat, keeping close to it. The direction which the school is making is known, but the steersman keeps his eye set on the fish, following the movements of the large body and thus keeping track of the leaders, who are trailing out in front in advance of the body of the school.

Every eye is fixed on the steersman and every ear strained to hear his commands. Port or starboard, as he says, the men work until he orders the seine to throw of the seine. Over it goes without a moment of rest on the part of the rowers, who row harder and harder while the vigilant steersman directs the course of the dory. With his oar and commands the men on port or starboard to let up for a moment.

While the seine boat goes on the dory comes up and picks up the buoy, to which is attached the end of the seine and the bunting rope, and with one man at the bars to hold the dory in place the other seizes the buoy and hauls it into the dory. All the dory-men have to do now is to watch the seine boat sweep around the school of fish and wait for its return.

Steadily and swiftly the seine is being spread about the fish, and as the lead weights bring one side of it down toward the bottom the other side is buoyed up by the cork floats.

At last the school is surrounded and the seine boat has got back to the dory. The pursuing ropes and buoy are passed to the seiners on the schooner, and the bightpasser, who immediately begins to haul in quickly but carefully on the pursuing rope that runs along the bottom of the seine, and thus bag up the seine and prevent the fish, who are being crowded together as they haul in, from diving out.

As the line is hauled in it not only bags the seine but also closes it in and raises the net, so that the sides to swell out so that when the pursuing rope is all in the seine is like a big bag in which the fish swell out the body of the seine, which is open only at the top, the cork floats keep it on a level with the top of the water.

WHEN LEADERS ARE SCARED.

So far all has been well, but it is not always so. At times the leaders of the school take fright when they strike the seine, and dive down, and when the seine is pursued there are only a few or none left in it, as the whole school has had the fright communicated to it and has escaped.

But when the capture is made then comes another time of anxiety, and even fear. To tow thousands of fish that are snared by the seine safely to the side of the vessel is no easy task, and a weak spot in the meshes may let one or two escape the fish. The strain is tremendous, and to aid the men the captain, who has again taken the helm, brings his schooner as near as possible to the seine. The dory has got back to the schooner, and the two men who were in her are getting the dipnets ready and making things ready on the deck for the reception of the fish.

Let us say the seineboat gets its tow of fish back in safety. Once at the side of the schooner the work of the crew begins in earnest. The shinning, squirming mackerel, beauties of the fish kind, as they come wet and squirming from the seine, are dipped out on to the deck. Barrels with ice and water are ready there, and as rapidly as they can be handled and counted up, and then got down in the hold, already cold with tons of ice.

When the last of the fish has been led and there are no more in sight then comes a rest for the crew, and it is needless to say that they enjoy it, although some of the men begin at once to think over the price they have earned to pay he will make for the nearest port where mackerel are handled and buyers wait for them. Should he be the first in, and offer there is a hard race for this honor, he is the proudest man on the sea-coast, and every man of his crew joins with him in pride.

SURE OF A WELCOME.

But whether first or twentieth he is sure of a warm welcome. Once ashore he telegraphs Boston and his owners. Boston is the market, and the captain and members of the crew have friends among the dealers here to whom they wire at once their arrival and the number of fish they have taken.

It is not always peaceful out on the seining grounds, and often there is a clash between the crews of two or more schooners from each of which the same school has been sighted. The crews make desperate efforts to reach the school first and take advantage of every trick they know to out do the others and it is said by those who have been there that at times the crew that has been outwitted by another will even try to scare the fish by striking at them with their oars and even to break the seine by rowing through it, and even attack the men in the successful boat. But these are only incidents and when the men have gotten over the excitement and meet ashore they chum together as if nothing disagreeable had ever happened.

As the fish come up the coast with the warm weather the seiners follow them. Other seiners join the fleet, and the excitement increases, and the newer ones having been worked up by the reports of the catches made and the big prices received for the fish.

On and on they come until, instead of Norfolk and Newport News, Newport and New Bedford are the landing places for the mackerel. New York has then ceased to be the big market for mackerel and Boston assumes the lead. At this time the seiners have fitted out for what is known as the Cape shore, down on the coast of Nova Scotia. Seiners have run into Boston to deliver their fish at T wharf, and the excitement of the southern shore and those on the southern shore of Cape Cod has been transferred to the wholesale fish market.

It should be told that not all the mackerel are brought in fresh. Some are salted. This is done when the fish have become so cheap that it will

not pay to run in with a small catch, or the catch is so large that some of the fish must be salted to keep them.

DAYS OF EXCITEMENT.

Day in and day out, while the season lasts, the same anxiety, excitement and work are gone through with on board the schooners. Days and even weeks may pass without a mackerel being seen, or they may be sighted when the wind is so strong that the seineboat cannot be sent out, and the disappointment of such a time can only be told by those who have gone through it, or by the man who has seen a fortune at his hand and seen it disappear just as the seine is hauled the long seine, ready to be paid out.

Each man knows his place and his particular duty, and there is no fussing or asking questions. The onramp jump into their places and get out the oars, and the seine heaver, bight passer and cork heaver take their places. The steersman is astern of them, with his long steering oar. All this is done in much less time than it takes to tell, and with only the captain, cook and spare hand and, if the seiner has gasoline power, the engineer, left on board, the seine boat moves rapidly away from the schooner.

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Fishing for mackerel in the old way of hook and line is still done in some places, notably in spots on the coast of the Maritime provinces. It is done with profit also, and down at Cape Cod mackerel are taken in the traps and small netters run out, and some even fish with hook and line and make the work pay.

In this sort of fishing the men often have to resort to a ruse to get their fish where they will bite, and the knowing captain will spread ground bait on the surface of the water to entice the fish upward, and when they rise he and his crew will get busy with their hooks.

The habits of the mackerel are a

mystery, notwithstanding all the study that has been made of them. All that any one can tell so far is that at a certain season of the year they appear in southern waters, trail upward along the Atlantic coast to about Cape Cod, and then disappear. That is, the larger number of them disappear. But only for a time, as they later appear on the Cape shore, where they remain for some time and then disappear for good, and where they go or where they remain until they again appear in the south no man has yet found out.

The United States government has recently become interested in the study of the habits of mackerel, and it is hoped by the fishermen that its experts

will be able to trace them to their winter quarters, in which case, the tropical fruits that were once only to be had for a season, the luscious mackerel may be on the breakfast table, fresh and juicy, every day in the year.—New York Herald.

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JAMES T. MCCLEARY. Former assistant postmaster general, who will probably be appointed director of the mint.