

Now Comes the Salmon

Last Sunday the sails of the fishing fleet again began to dot the broad mouth of the Columbia, and from now until August 12 one of the prettiest spectacles on the lower reaches of the great river will be the trim little boats, each with its flat spritsail, its two or three men and its canvas-covered nets, slashing the water on its way to or from the fishing grounds. Although the Spring run of salmon has begun, the fish that are coming now form only the advance guard—the outposts of the army that will follow by and by, and if the season is anything like a successful one, the number of boats engaged in fishing will double, treble and quadruple, as each fortnight goes by. The fisherman who succeeds this season in making a good catch will be on the royal road to fortune, for salmon that, in early days, brought 15 to 20 cents a fish, now bring 5 and 6 cents a pound, and it takes only a 20-pound salmon to put his captor \$1 ahead of the game.

Most of the fishermen who are engaged in drifting for salmon work for themselves. They are supplied by the canneries with the gear that they require and pay for it out of the fish they bring in. The gear once paid for, the profits are their own.

They are a peculiar and a distinctly individual race, these fishermen. Their mode of life is one which inures them to hard work, gives them a contempt for hardship and peril and a rough exterior which only their fellows or their chums on shore can penetrate. From the time the season begins, their home is their boat, racing through the water at dusk, drifting for fish far into the night and resting quietly at anchor in the morning hours, with the sail drawn snugly over the cockpit at the stern to form a perfect shelter tent.

Have Clubbed Together.

This season a number of them have clubbed together at Astoria and rented a scow where their meals are cooked. They are a jolly, sociable lot among themselves, spending their money like sailors at the end of the season, quick to resent an injury and always ready to unite when their interests clash with those of the packers. As a rule, however, they are peaceable and, only once or twice, has trouble threatened, as a result of a difference between the men who catch the fish and the men who pack them.

Few more beautiful scenes are presented than the outward voyage of the little fleet, as it leaves Astoria for the fishing grounds, on a clear Spring or Summer evening. About half-past four, a boat or two leaves the wharf, hoisting their sails as they swing out into the stream, and when the fresh ocean breeze catches them, sending their sprits home and bounding forward like frightened deer. Soon another and another are in the stream and, in half an hour, they are flocking from the water front like gulls, racing with each other as they go, till the whole bay is speckled with them as far as the eye can see. The evening glow lights the Western horizon with a deep red, against which the brown sails stand out in sharp outline, and as the shadows begin to fall, the craft grow smaller and smaller till darkness shuts in, when only the swish of water under the bows of a few belated ones is heard to tell that the fleet is voyaging for the bar.

Nearly all night they drift slowly and leisurely, and the passengers on passing steamers, should any be bound out then, see the twinkling of their lanterns like a thousand fireflies on the water. In the morning the fleet comes back, perhaps many of the boats laden with a fine catch and others empty, but every fisherman puffing his pipe philosophically and putting his boat through its best paces in the race home again.

Boats in Use.

The boats used by the Columbia River fishermen are, like the fishing craft of every country, the result of an evolution which has gradually fitted them exactly for the service in which they are engaged. They are all of the same general plan, sharp at both ends, hollow-homed, built to ride waves like seagulls, and to increase in buoyancy as their cargo weighs them down into the water. They carry a spritsail which can be shortened merely by unshipping the net and taken in entirely at a moment's notice. This is necessary, for the winds that blow at the mouth of the Columbia are subject to violent increases on short notice, and the fisherman must be able to get his craft under bare poles in the nick of time or capsize and struggle in a water-logged boat until help arrives.

As long as the weather is pleasant the life of the salmon-seeker is tolerably enjoyable, as such lives go. He is in the open air; he never knows what ill-health means, and the constant excitement of his quest and friendly rivalry of daily races with other fishermen keep up his interest in things. But when drizzling rains pour down, week in and week out; when a driving gale sets in from the ocean and the swell grows heavier and heavier, till the little boat is tossed about like an eggshell, it is by no means an easy nor a safe pursuit. More than once a boat has been found drifting out to sea, bottom side up and with no one to tell how the accident happened, and many are the fishermen who have spent the night on an overturned boat, exhausted by endeavors to right it and shout for assistance, and al-

most lifeless when help has finally come. But men must work and woman must weep, which is as true today as when the rhyme of the three fishers was written, and the men who go down to the sea in boats from Astoria take their chances and are as content as any other class of wage earners.

Importance of Industry.

So much has been printed of the importance of the salmon industry; its possible decline because of the threatened extermination of the fish, and of the legislation to protect the salmon, that it cannot be dealt with here. It may be remarked, in passing, however, that last year the Columbia River salmon pack was 240,000 cases, valued at \$1,500,000, and that nearly 10,000 men are employed in the various branches of the work. The present law which, while not considered wholly satisfactory, is the best that has yet been on the statute books, was passed largely through the efforts of the late Hollister D. McGuire, who did more for the industry than any one else. Mr. McGuire was State Fish and Game Protector for six years, and he gave himself up to the study of artificial propagation, the enforcement of the law, in season and out of season, and the fostering of the industry in all its branches, with an enthusiasm and an energy that accomplished wonders. He was seeking the site of a salmon hatchery on the Umpqua River when the boat in which he was rowing was overturned, and he was drowned. Mr. McGuire's work has been taken up and energetically prosecuted by his successor, F. C. Reed, and both packers and fishermen are pleased with what is being done for the perpetuation of the salmon.

Passengers on the Astoria boats, on awakening in the morning, find their attention drawn to teams of horses, wading apparently in mid river, and attached to some invisible burden. To the uninitiated this spectacle causes no small amount of wonder, and the rail of a steamer is usually lined with theorizing passengers until an obliging officer explains that these are setting grounds—shallow tracts of water where large seines are taken out into the river in boats and their tow lines hitched to horses, which then pull them ashore, with, not infrequently, a big haul of bright, silvery "chinnooks." The setting-grounds worked or leased by their owners are among the most profitable and easy means of fishing, none of the dangers of the men who fish out toward the sea being risked by the seiner.

Trap Fishing.

Needing under the rocky point that mariners look for when they want to locate the mouth of the Columbia is Baker's Bay, and Baker's Bay, as all who have journeyed to the popular Summer resorts along North Beach, Wash., know, bristles with piles, like quills upon the fretful porcupine. There are thousands of them, stretching in every direction as far as, and farther than, they can be counted, and obstructing, so navigators allege, the channel, by forming innumerable bars on the bottom of the river. These piles are the skeletons or frames of fish traps, with which Baker's Bay fairly teems.

The traps are ingenious affairs, being simply long guiding nets, stretched on the piles, and intended to deflect the salmon from his cruise to the spawning grounds and steer him into a maze made of more nets, from which he can no more extricate himself than he can walk on a pair of crutches. He must keep on swimming right along, if he expects to get anywhere, and his destination is an open space, in the midst of a group of piles, driven in a circle, at the bottom of which is a strong net, attached to gear by which it may be pulled clear from the water, salmon and all. Every morning the owners of the traps, in their boats, haul up the nets, and, in a good season, find them alive with the floundering and astonished salmon, who have been butting their heads into the piles and nets all night, in a vain struggle to escape. Sometimes a big, powerful fellow actually rends a net and escapes, but he usually finds himself in another trap in a few minutes, and then give himself up for lost.

The traps are among the heaviest feeders of the canneries; they take an enormous number of fish, and require but little attention. They have, moreover, been a fruitful source of trouble for many years, for the gill-net fishermen regard them as a menace to the salmon industry, and assert that if traps are allowed to remain in the river very many years longer, there will then be no more salmon for them (the gill-netters) to catch. Several times "misunderstandings" between the trap-owners and the gill-netters have threatened disturbances of very considerable dimensions, and once the General Government deemed it advisable to send a company of soldiers to Baker's Bay and keep it there two or three weeks, pending the adjustment of a difficulty. The traps are usually operated by the packers themselves.

More Trouble for Trap-Owners.

Another difficulty which the trap-owner finds constantly bobbing up is the tendency of the United States Engineers to regard his fish-catching contrivance as an obstruction to navigation, and a nuisance which might properly be abated. If the engineers say that the traps must go, they must, at least from all channels, or from places where they are likely to form bars in the channels. This edict has not yet gone forth, and it may never be pro-

mulgated, but the eagle eyes of the engineers are constantly on the watch for encroachments, and many is the trap which has been pulled up, in compliance with a peremptory order, written on Uncle Sam's letter paper.

The amount of money which is invested in traps in Baker's Bay is something enormous, as each trap is an expensive affair, requiring many feet of net, and the driving of a large number of piles. Most of the traps in the river are in Baker's Bay, whose waters are within the limits of the State of Washington, and the amount that is paid into the state every year for licenses is very large. Here and there along the Oregon shore of the Columbia, almost as far up as the Cascade Locks, are to be found a few traps, but their number is nothing like as great as that of the traps on the Washington side.

The most deadly of all the foes of the salmon, however, awaits him farther along on his journey up the river. That is the fish wheel, an ingenious contrivance which was invented on the Columbia river, and which gives the salmon who enters its

long "lead" absolutely no chance for his life. Up the Columbia, from Rooster Rock to the Cascade Locks, and again in the vicinity of The Dalles, these wheels—scores of them—may be seen working any day during the fishing season. Sometimes, when the run is large, they are plying salmon out of the river faster almost than the attendants can take care of them; again the big net scoops rise, one after the other, dripping and empty, and continue to do so for days at a time.

Deadly Contrivance.

The wheels consist of large, shallow nets, arranged about central axes, like the fans of a windmill, and dipping into the river like an undershot wheel, the current turning them slowly around. Long "leadways" are built out into the river, to deflect the fish into the channel under the wheels, and, as they swim up stream, they suddenly find themselves lifted into the air, shot down into a trough, and thence to the slippery deck of a scow or platform, where a pile of their fellows are breathing their last. The wheels are

one of these fellows in his net usually knows that he has caught something before he gets him out. He is worth the trouble it takes to get him, however, for at 6 cents a pound he is worth \$3.00 at the canneries, and will bring a great deal more than that in the Portland market, where big fish are highly prized.

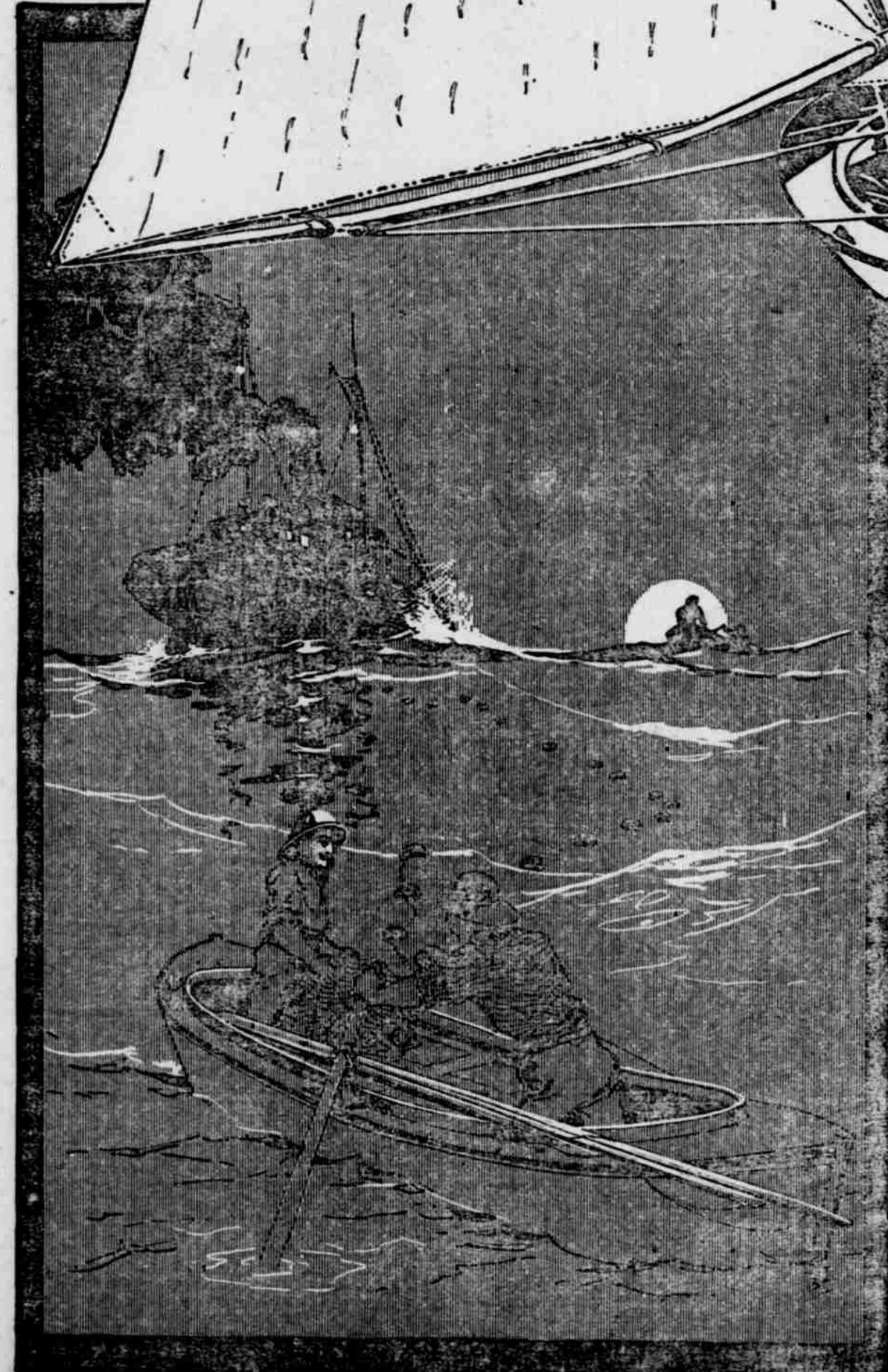
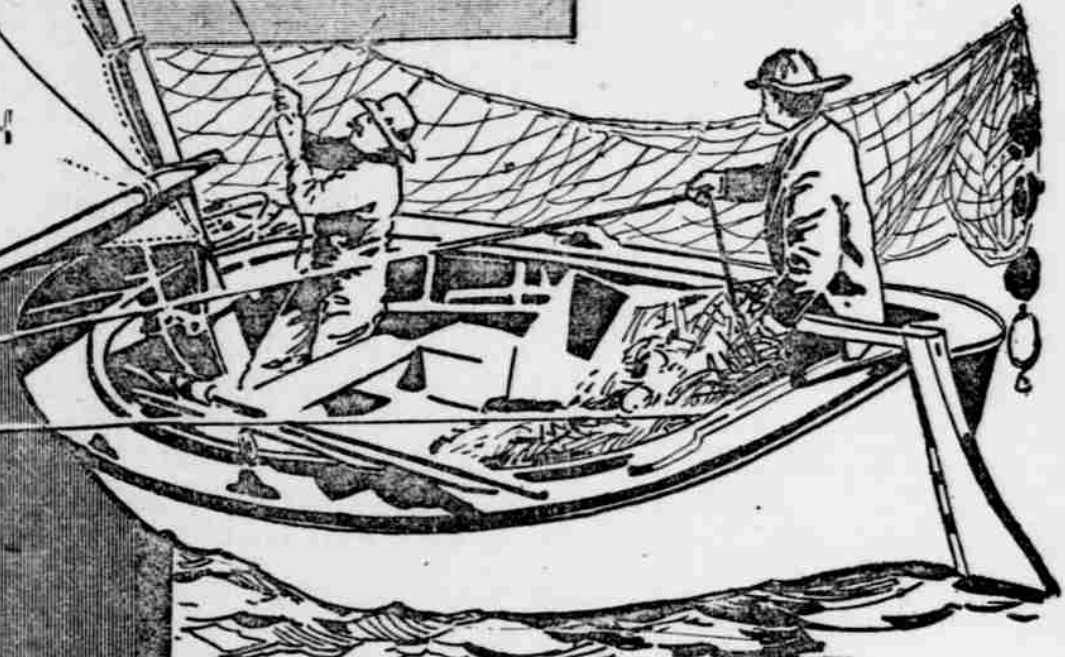
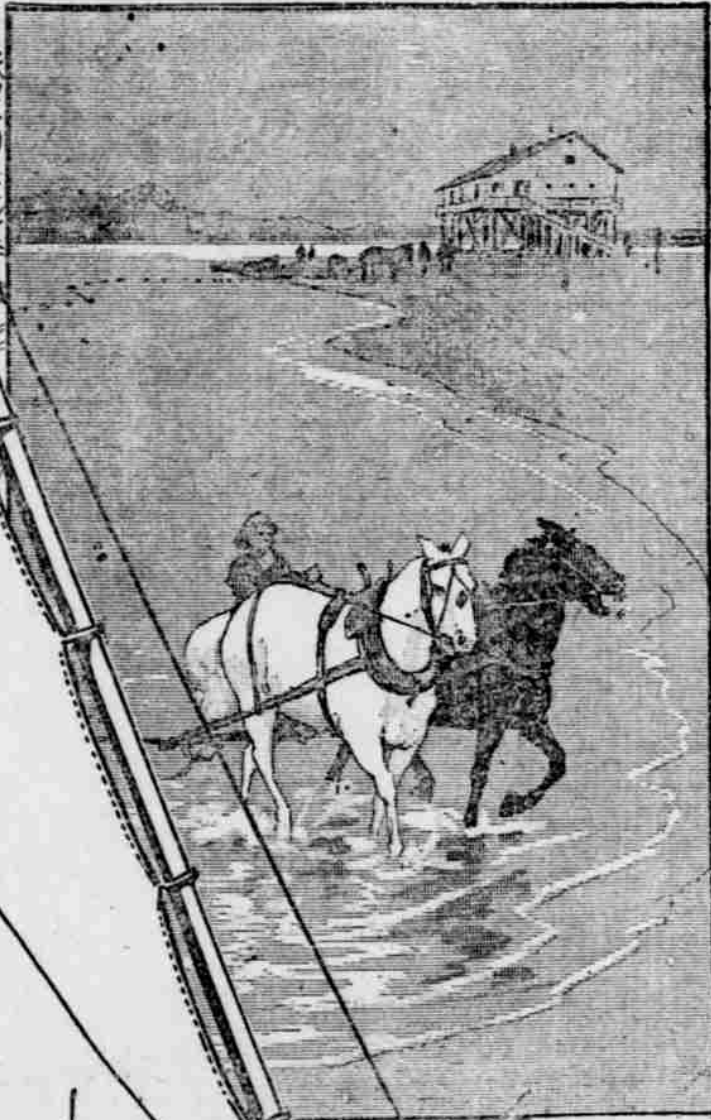
The Spring run of fish is the mainstay of the canneries, although the run of "silverides," which comes in the fall, always goes to help out the pack. "Steelhead," the finest fish of all freezing and smoking, runs in the winter, and a sprinkling of them comes with the run of Chinooks. These are the fish that rise to a spoon at Oregon City, and for which Rudyard Kipling angled at the Clackamas hatchery. The "bluebacks," a small but delicious fish, come with the last of the Chinooks. They are not sufficient in size to be of much commercial importance, but they are a fine fish for the table.

The business of packing salmon has lately been undertaken by a trust, which has absorbed a number of the biggest canneries along the river and has entered the business with a determination to do it all. Its success, however, has not been marked. The opposition of the packers who did not sell their plants to it has been determined; the run of salmon has been small, and, of late, "cold-storage" men are paying so much for fish that it is hardly worth while to buy them for canning at all. There is always a fine market for Columbia River salmon in Europe, and recent improvements in freezing machinery made it possible to transport them and sell them in the European market as fresh and sweet as they can be sold in Portland. Such is the demand for fish for freezing that the price has been climbing steadily for the last few years, till it is now almost beyond the reach of the packers, although they are still in business.

Scarcity of Chinese.

Another trouble which is harassing the packers is the scarcity of Chinese help, which is considered the most useful in packing salmon. The enforcement of the immigration law has excluded many Chinese, who would naturally take the place of those who return to China, and many of the old gangs, which, year after year, worked in the same canneries, have been scattered, some of them going back to China, others seeking the Celestial paradise, and still others growing too old and infirm to work.

In the early days of the settlement of the country along the banks of the Columbia and its tributaries, salmon, in the Spring season, were actually so thick at the head waters of the streams, as almost to justify the statement that a man could cross the water upon their backs and hardly wet his feet. So great was the rush to get up stream, that in shallow places many fish in the great schools were forced clear out of the water by their fellows and died along the banks. But, year after year, the



as unpopular with the gill-net fishermen as the traps, but repeated attempts to abolish them have proved vain; they are still the largest feeders of the up-river canneries.

The method of transporting the salmon from the wheels to the canneries, several miles down stream is both novel and ingenious. The current through the Cascades is very rapid, and does not settle down to a sober, steady gait until some miles below the last cannery supplied by the wheels, which are placed all the way up to the Cascades. At a certain hour every day the salmon caught by the wheels are strung together and made fast to empty barrels, which are painted some bright color, so as to attract attention, and turned adrift in the stream, which is soon hurrying them down the river at several miles an hour.

Tenders from the canneries—little steam launches—are on the lookout for the barrels when they come down, and soon overhaul them, take them on board, and set them ashore. The barrels of the several canneries are painted different colors, so that there is no danger of getting the fish mixed up in the shuffle. Fish from the wheels below the canneries are taken charge of by the launches, which steam with them up stream, and make the round of the wheels daily for collection.

In every little inlet along both the upper and lower river may be seen the scows of the gill-netters, who fish everywhere, and, not infrequently, out of season. Most of them sell their product to the canneries, although some few fish only for the market. So thickly are gill-nets spread in the river during some seasons that steamboats are constantly running them down and destroying them. If the nets are in the channel, the fishermen have nothing to say; if they are out of it, the destruction usually results in a suit against the steamboat company.

Killing of Salmon.

The Spring Chinook salmon, which comes only into the Columbia River, is admitted to be the finest fish of his kind that swims in Pacific waters. Although his average weight is between 10 and 20 pounds, the Chinook sometimes run as high as 60 pounds, and the man who gets

fisherman has been reaping where he never sowed, and gradually the run of fish has decreased, till it has threatened to cease altogether. This has been prevented by the inauguration of methods of artificial propagation, which it is now admitted has greatly increased the runs of late years.

Artificial fish culture is only in its infancy in Oregon, and yet its benefits are already beginning to be felt in the waters of the Columbia. There are now three hatcheries on the tributaries of the river, two on the Clackamas and one on the White Salmon, and others are in course of construction. Millions of fry have been turned into the water from these hatcheries every year, and by carefully marking the fish, it has been established beyond a reasonable doubt that the salmon thus started on their career have returned to the river again and are returning, in increasing numbers, year by year. The advantages of taking the spawn from the salmon, hatching it where it will be free from interference by the numerous enemies of the fry that swim and crawl in the rivers, and in keeping the young fish protected till they are old enough, in a measure, to look out for themselves, are obvious.

Twelve Million Eggs.

Nearly 12,000,000 eggs were taken from Chinook salmon in 1898, and a much larger number last year. The percentage of fry hatched out and liberated is very large, and every year the "runs" show the effect of the work of the hatcheries.

What becomes of the young fish after they leave the river is something no one knows. Whether they voyage around the world, or spend their time coasting along the shores, it is impossible for any human being to say, but certain it is that they return in a few years to the stream from which they came, to spawn and die. For, after they have swam hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles inland, battled with rapids, leaped falls, evaded the thousand lures that are spread for them along their way and deposited their eggs, they pass into a swift decline. Their snouts contract into long, hooked beaks; their fat, round sides shrink, and their once strong fins wag feebly and listlessly. They have fulfilled their mission in life, and all that is left to them is to die, which they do, to the number of thousands.