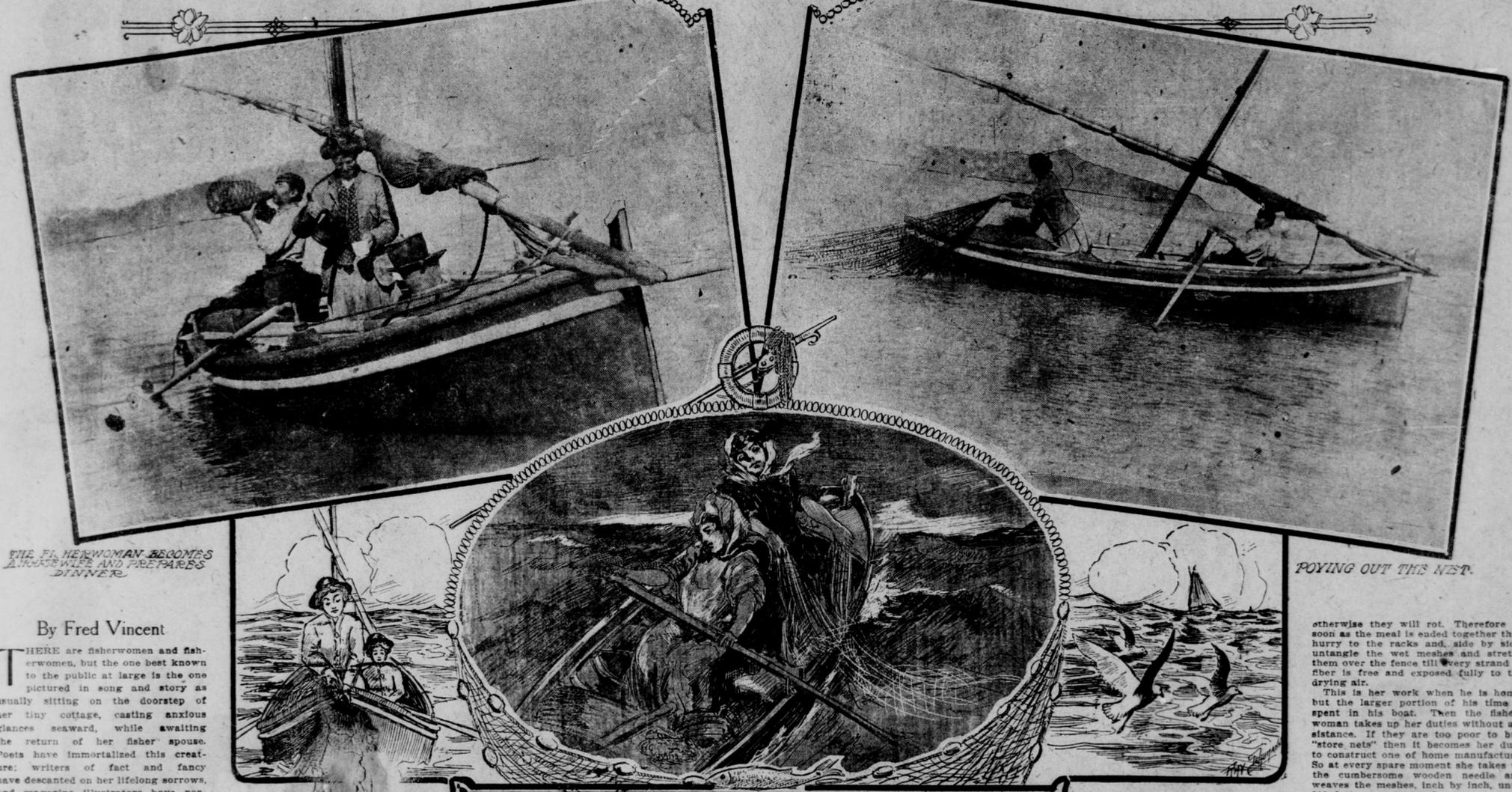


# Fisherwomen of San Francisco Bay

## THEY ARE NOT A MYTH



THE FISHERWOMAN BECOMES A HOUSEWIFE AND PREPARES DINNER.

By Fred Vincent

There are fisherwomen and fisherwomen, but the one best known to the public at large is the one pictured in song and story as usually sitting on the doorstep of her tiny cottage, casting anxious glances seaward, while awaiting the return of her fisher spouse. Poets have immortalized this creature; writers of fact and fancy have descanted on her lifelong sorrows, and magazine illustrators have portrayed her in a fashion peculiarly their own. Nevertheless, it is true that in spite of poetry, tradition or fancy, the fisherwoman of fact is a very different being from the ideal one who has stirred the pity and sympathy of thousands, though she loses none of her admirable qualities in the transformation.

In any of the fishing settlements about San Francisco bay the real fisherwoman of the present day may be found. Her duties are manifold; her life hard. She is often fisherman, housewife and mother combined; the "better half" of the family sometimes, for in many cases she does the better half of the labor in the struggle for a livelihood.

Often the fisherwoman's home is a 40 foot smack owned perhaps by her sister's husband, or her own, and in this solid little sailing craft she works, accomplishes, waits and endures with all the good humor and pertinacity of a man. She is strong, healthy, used to the broad, open spaces of sea and sky, and the free, fresh life in the boat is all that she knows. When her husband tells she is, if possible, at his side. Should she be on land, and he out in the boat alone, she is not particularly anxious about her spouse out on the bounding main. If a storm arises the weather bureau has sent out notice of its approach and the fisher folk have had ample time to steer for a sheltered cove where the still waters lie. Seldom do the fishing boats venture far out to sea, and sudden indeed must be the blow that can catch these hardy folk napping.

So idle moments are few and far between for the fisherman's wife. In the boat there is much to be looked after—the nets, the fish, the bait—with the eye constantly on the lookout for signs of weather change. On land the children must be looked after; there are nets, heavy awkward things often over 200 feet long to be repaired; the new net to make, the house to be kept clean and her own stout scanty wardrobe to be kept likewise.

The fortunes of a fisherman depend on the size of his catch. Arrayed against his efforts are the fickle forces of nature. Predatory sealife preys on the fish, on which he himself preys; his success is affected by the winds, the waves, the tides; lastly, he has to face a sharp competition in the form of his fellow fishermen, who strive lustily to be the first to haul the catch into the boat that they may set sail the sooner for the shore and sell.

And in this battle for supremacy the woman aids her mate. It is no uncommon sight to see one of these fisherwomen, broad of back and ample of girth, hauling in a 300 pound net, or rowing stroke for stroke with her husband or brother after they have fished the entire day near the heads, or cast their gill nets in the channel to estrap the silver herring or the fat smelt. She has grown strong, self-reliant and brave. Should a sudden storm come upon them she evinces no fear. Hysteria is out of place on a 40 foot smack.

The majority of the fishermen who supply the fish marts of the bay cities are Portuguese and Italians. Usually they work two men to the boat, except in winter, when the weather is uncertain. A few of these workers of the deep own gasoline power boats, while the ocean fishermen have smacks, but by far the larger part of the fishers cling to the 18 and 20 foot fishboats, modeled after those used in the Medi-

terranean. Wide of beam, of rounding bottom, with ample keel and braced by sturdy ribs, they are serviceable and seaworthy, and will ride out any ordinary gale. The mast, with forward hilt, is stepped amidships, and one broad stretch of canvas—the lateen sail—propels the craft to and from the fishing banks on windy days.

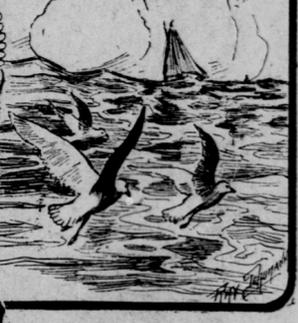
And many, many times the fisher wife is there, her husband and she working like the mates they are together. Sometimes she makes only a third in the party, but always can she be relied on to do a man's part, and she does it with alacrity and skill.

When angling with the drop lines for garropa (rock cod), beregata (rock trout), cabrilla (kelp salmon), or the red fish, or gagnard, which in plain English is known as little bass, the woman in the boat is as much of an adept as the dark complexioned man seated in the stern. Nor does she feel the least bit squeamish when she baits her hooks with a squirming earthworm, or one of the water variety that was found clinging to the piles supporting the wharves at San Francisco. She can pick up an animated spiral with the utmost indifference, and in spite of its frantic endeavors to escape pierce its body with a hook and drop it calmly overboard to lure the hungry fishes to their doom that hungry man may eat. What would you? It is necessary for both. To satisfy the inner man she counts on the desire of the fish to satisfy the inner fish. And the unfortunate worm whose highest ambition it is to gorge itself on the tidbits of earth is the innocent sufferer thereby. He is the victim of both fish and fisher.

But the fisherwoman thinks little of the worm. It is to her but a means to an end, and when she sees the float attached to her line go suddenly under water forthwith she hauls in the wet strands, yanks out the fish and, taking him off the hook, drops him slopping into the box near by. All this does not, however, prevent her from keeping an eye on the boat's bow. There, protected from the wind, is a panful of hot, glowing charcoal. Raised a little above the embers is a wire screen, and on it a bit of meat is broiling, and a savory kettle of culpebre, a composition of greens, onions, oils and fish highly seasoned, is steaming merrily away. Fishing is the mainstay of life, but the cooking must be attended to also. When meal-time approaches she leaves "her man" to handle the dozen lines that radiate from the gunwales on both sides, while she prepares huge sandwiches and dishes out the ever present macaroni or spaghetti. Then the party settles itself to drink its "vino" from the black demijohn, and eat and watch the "bobs" that no unwary fish may escape during the progress of the feast.

Though the women do not accompany the men when they net beyond the Heads, there are a number who "lend a hand" when the fishing is carried on in the bay; and when there are no children needing attention many of them live in the boats with their husbands, gill-netting or seining by day, and at night sleeping under a tarpaulin fastened to the gunwale and stretched triangularly upward.

And here again she proves a worthy partner. Attired in a short, heavy woolen dress to keep out the cold on foggy mornings, her hair securely knotted and tucked away under a tam o' shanter, booted and prepared for all exigencies of weather, she does all that she is called upon to do, which is far from little. Sometimes it is merely to assist in emptying the net after the "drag." If she is needed to pull an oar, however, the fisherman's wife is able with ease to keep stroke with the masculine oarsmen in the boat attached to the other end of the



POYING OUT THE NET.

otherwise they will rot. Therefore as soon as the meal is ended together they hurry to the racks and, side by side, untangle the wet meshes and stretch them over the fence till every strand of fiber is free and exposed fully to the drying air.

This is her work when he is home, but the larger portion of her time is spent in his boat. Then the fisherwoman takes up her duties without assistance. If they are too poor to buy "store nets" then it becomes her duty to construct one of home manufacture. So at every spare moment she takes up the cumbersome wooden needle and weaves the meshes, inch by inch, until 200 feet or more are done.

It is not the labor of a day or a week, but of months. Nets are not easy to make, and so it is the woman who usually completes the task. Also it is she who "cures" the net so that it will withstand the effect of the ocean salts and not rot.

First, she gets out a big iron cauldron and surrounds it with wood. The monster kettle is then filled with a mixture of tannin and hemlock bark, and water is added. Fire is then started, and when the water comes to a boil, the new net is dropped into the steaming fluid and left there until every knot is saturated with the composition and thoroughly "cured." The net, which before its bath was white, is now brown colored. It is then placed on the racks to dry, after which the wooden floats to keep it above the surface, and the lead weights to hold the meshes in a perpendicular position when in use are attached to opposite sides and the net is ready for work. Handling a net 200 feet long is not play, but this fisherwoman, housewife and mother tackles the job as cheerfully as she does any other of her many duties. It has to be done, and that settles the matter.

But, withal, her life is not all work. There are periods of relaxation, and they are appreciated all the more after this arduous labor. In the winter, when it is too stormy to venture forth, family and friends gather about a blazing fire and the folklore of the home country is repeated to the youngsters, while the grownups quaff the red wine and the man smokes strong, black pipes in front of the fireplace full of crackling beach wood.

But summer is the best time in the fishing settlements. In the evenings the fisher folk rest content. Their work is done for the day, and when the big passenger boats plow rapidly by, many a worried businessman listens to the faint tinkling of the fisherman's mandolin as the strains of the plaintive Italian love songs melt into the natural music of lapping waves and sea-breezes. After a while the fisherman puts away his instrument and he and his happy, sturdy wife enter their cottage hand in hand.

Tomorrow he will have his work to do and she will have hers and maybe her share will be part of his.



OFF TO THE DAY'S WORK BESIDE HER HUSBAND.

THE MATE PARTNER

big net, which is dragged through the water until it sags from the weight of entangled fish.

Nor does this Amazon draw back or hesitate when it comes to sorting the catch. Her life centers around fish, and she has practical knowledge of the whole category from sole, halibut and flounder to "sparada," as the Italians call the "shiner."

She can tell the exact time when the schools of herring, sardines, smelt or kingfish are due to arrive at the fishing banks, and as for the water, she knows precisely the kind of bait that will tempt each species and where to find it.

She knows, for instance, that "sprat" is best for food in the perch family and will bring the top price when perch happen to be the victims of the net.

Consequently she can be depended on to do such a simple thing as to separate the different species and to pick the choice ones for the cafes for the pleasure of other women of a far different type who will congregate in their brilliantly lighted rooms later.

Thus she passes the summer, living out of doors, her home a 20 foot boat, her roof a bit of tarred canvas. Simple, indeed, is her life when passed on the water, and her life on land is simple, too, the only difference being that on land she has a chance to visit her friends, go to church, attend a dance, to feast the whole night through, or, perhaps, merely alter the routine of existence by another kind of work; for wherever she shows her smiling face the fisherwoman is hailed as a willing and efficient helper.

When the fisherman comes home at night after seining from dawn she has his dinner prepared. In her role of housewife she watches the tides, knowing that his coming is regulated more by them than by the sun. So when she hears his crescendoing cry, "O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o" as he approaches the landing she is there to greet him and assist in furling the canvas, making fast the lines and carrying in the oars, bait buckets and other articles, while he struggles with the water weighted net.

Nor does she rest there. The nets must be spruced on the racks to dry.

### Wisdom for Smokers

Don't wet the end of your cigarette before you put it into your mouth; you spoil the flavor of the smoke. To prevent the cigarette from sticking to your lips, keep the cigarette dry and your lips dry.

Don't wonder why a home made cigarette burns the tongue more than a ready made one. The end of the home made cigarette gets screwed up to a point, and thus you get a "pin prick" of smoke on your tongue. In the same way, a pipe with a small bore will burn the tongue more easily than will a pipe with a large bore.

Don't fill a new pipe full of tobacco the first time you are going to smoke it. Let the bowl be half full; but smoke it right out, charring the bottom of the bowl. This is the shortest way of breaking in a new pipe.

Don't smoke the same kind of tobacco always if you want to get the utmost enjoyment out of the smoke.

Don't believe all you hear about fine cut tobacco smoking hotter than flake tobacco in a pipe. If the fine cut tobacco is packed fairly tight in the bowl, the smoke will be just as cool as that of a coarse cut tobacco.

Don't put a piece of raw potato in your pouch in order to keep the tobacco moist. Your aim should be to get out some of the moisture which is put into the tobacco when it is manufactured. The simplest way of doing this is to spread it on the table all night.

Don't imagine that you are keeping your cigars in good condition by stacking up the boxes in the cupboard over the kitchen fire. You are only drying them up. An amateur can not keep a cigar in perfect condition, because the room in which cigars are kept should be at the same temperature night and day.

Don't buy an expensive cigar at the

seaside; the sea air spoils all cigars—to a certain extent—and you will be unable to detect much difference between the flavor of a good one and a cheap one.

Don't smoke in a high wind, and if you are not a very hardened smoker don't smoke a cigar with the wind blowing in your face. It will upset you.

Don't refer to any tobacco you don't like as cabbage. The government inspectors would not allow anything of the kind. Besides, it seems to imply that you are ignorant of the fact that the cost of making a substitute for tobacco would be very much higher than the value of tobacco itself.

Don't talk airily about your tobacco being perfectly pure—unless it is very good Turkish. You would not like a pipe tobacco that was "perfectly pure"—that is to say, before it had been "manufactured" for your use. You don't much care for a chop till it has been cooked, do you?

Don't believe all you hear about certain forms of smoking being injurious. A doctor who likes his pipe will tell you that all other forms of smoking are bad; the doctor who prefers cigars will swear by cigars; and the doctor who likes cigarettes will tell you that if you do not inhale the smoke cigarette smoking is no worse than any other kind of smoking.

Don't light pipe, cigar or cigarette at a gas jet; a wax match is not so good as a wooden one for smokers.

Don't smoke morning, noon and night. The man who smokes in this way is merely a victim to the habit of having something stuck in his mouth, and he scarcely knows when his pipe, cigar or cigarette is a light and when it isn't, because he has as a matter of fact totally destroyed his palate.

Use tobacco as you do your food—in moderation.