

### Trawling At Tignish Run

Wilson Shea, '40

If one unfamiliar with trawling were to visit Tignish Run a few days before the opening of the season in the third week of July, he would be puzzled by an unusual commotion about the wharves. He would see more than one hundred and fifty men hurrying about, preparing trawls, hanging new nets or repairing old ones, procuring sinkers and floats, all in preparation for what they hope will be a successful fishing season. If he were to return on the day the first fish is landed, he would witness a very different sight. Then he would find an explanation for the commotion observed on his previous visit. The gear which he saw a few days before, scattered about the wharves, would be stowed snugly in fifty or sixty boats. The trawlers are ready to make a start. All boats leave the shore together, but within two hours they have become separated by miles of ocean. Each fisherman has found his proper berth and already is loosing his fishing gear. The following morning will see the first catch of the season.

The appearance of light in the east is enough to awaken the eager fisherman. In less than half an hour, he is sitting in the stern of his boat with the steering ropes in hand waiting for his companion to start the motor. They set out for the fishing grounds. At the end of the first hour's sail, it is bright enough to see land. The captain takes his last glance shore-ward to make sure of his course. As a rule, the young fisherman must take this precaution; but the experienced sea dog can go to his gear almost by instinct. In a short time the last sight of land disappears below the horizon. They overhaul their mackerel nets and are now ready to pick up their trawl. Another short sail brings them to it.

The trawl consists of a single line of twelve thread rope, usually about three-quarters of a mile in length, and is anchored and buoyed at both ends. At intervals of a fathom hooks are attached to the line by means of thirty inch snoods. The hooks are thus allowed to swing freely in the water. At intervals of twenty fathoms light sinkers are attached; these sink the line. Midway between each pair of sinkers is attached a glass float that is just buoyant enough to keep the hooks in the depth of water in which cod are found. The line is hauled across the bow



of the boat by one man, and as each hook comes up, the fish is removed and the hook rebaited by the other with a small piece of mackerel. The hook is then cast out on the opposite side, and the boat is pulled along to the next one. The fisherman hauls his boat in this manner about three-quarters of a mile for every five hundred hooks—many of our fishermen overhaul more than fifteen hundred hooks a day.

A fish to every six or seven hooks is considered good fishing. Occasionally, a fifty or sixty pounder is caught. A cod of this size is easier to bring aboard than one weighing twenty pounds, because the larger one lies gently on the surface and seems too lazy to move. A strong gaff is used to bring him aboard. Then starts the wrestle to bleed him—and every fish must be bled as soon as he is taken from the water. In order to hold his slippery captive, the experienced fisherman thrusts a finger into each eye of the fish. Even this hold will be broken several times before the large cod will be completely subdued.

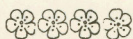
In good weather, two average fishermen can overhaul fifteen hundred hooks in about five hours. But it often happens within this short space of time that the ocean's glassy smoothness of early morning suddenly changes to the hilly surface of a turbulent sea. Trawling in calm weather is enjoyable work, but in a stormy sea it becomes a perilous task. When a stiff breeze suddenly springs up from a dangerous quarter and catches the fisherman ten miles from shore and with twenty-five fathoms of excited water under his boat, then it is that the fisherman is beset with treacherous hazards of the sea. Indeed he seems "alone on the ocean." But long experience has taught the hardy son of the sea how to cope with such a situation. To him it means only another struggle with the fury of the ocean. The difficulty of guiding a sixty-foot boat over ten miles of jumping water is not a new event in his life. From boyhood he has watched his dad do so, and from him has learned to take his place at the tiller.

About noon the wharves at Tignish Run are always crowded with fishermen, each boning, cleaning, and washing his own catch. As all fish must be prepared for market as soon as they are landed operations begin at once. The fish are thrown upon the wharves where one man removes the head and inner organs while the other removes the large bone. This process is not as simple as it appears. An inexperienced man might succeed in removing the



bone after a ten-minute tussle, but not before the fish has been badly disfigured. A good boner can remove the bone from any cod by two quick slashes of the knife. In order to comply with the demands of buyers the fish must be washed four times and as much of the blood as possible must be removed. A government official must inspect all fish before they are marketed.

There is little change of routine throughout the trawling season. As a rule weather is good; but sometimes it is such as to make fishing impossible. The cod usually remain off the coast until the first week of September when the dog-fish swarm in and put them to flight. At this juncture gear is landed. Another year of Trawling at Tignish Run has been completed.



Good books add to the happiness of a home. The true university of these days is a collection of books.  
—*Carlyle.*

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Our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught;  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

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I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act: but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.—*G. H. Chesterton.*

