

Festivals and Blessings of the Sea

THE fisherman, no matter to what Church or sect he belongs, is generally more inclined to interest himself in religion than the average landsman. This strain of piety manifests itself in various ways, one of the most usual in Catholic countries being the organization and assisting at pilgrimages to certain shrines; in Protestant countries it is evidenced by sudden and periodical 'revival movements' with their accompaniments of crowded prayer meetings and hymn-singing.

In Brittany there are many shrines specially frequented by fisherfolk—*e.g.*, Sainte Anne d'Auray, Sainte Anne de la Palud, Notre-Dame de Plogoff, etc. The Norman fishermen are no less pious. On certain days of the year you will still find them going in pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Grâce, Honfleur, Notre-Dame de la Délivrance, near Caen, or up to the little chapels above the harbours of Dieppe and Fécamp. Our Lady of Boulogne is still venerated by the fisherfolk of that busy port, Our Lady of the Dunes by the fishermen of Dunkerque and Gravelines, Our Lady of Tenos by the Greek fishermen of the Aegean Islands—but there is no room here to give a list of the vast number of shrines all round the coast of France, Italy, Spain, and other Catholic countries that are resorted to by seafarers.

It is strange how many traditions from Catholic times have lingered on even until recent years among the Scottish fisherfolk. For instance, the fishermen of

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Dunrossness when finding themselves in danger were accustomed to make a vow to St Ninian, or Ringan, which, if they were safely preserved, they never failed to perform. They made their way in secret by night to the old kirkyard, where, leaving their shoes and stockings at the gate, they would make their way three



NOTRE-DAME DE BOULOGNE

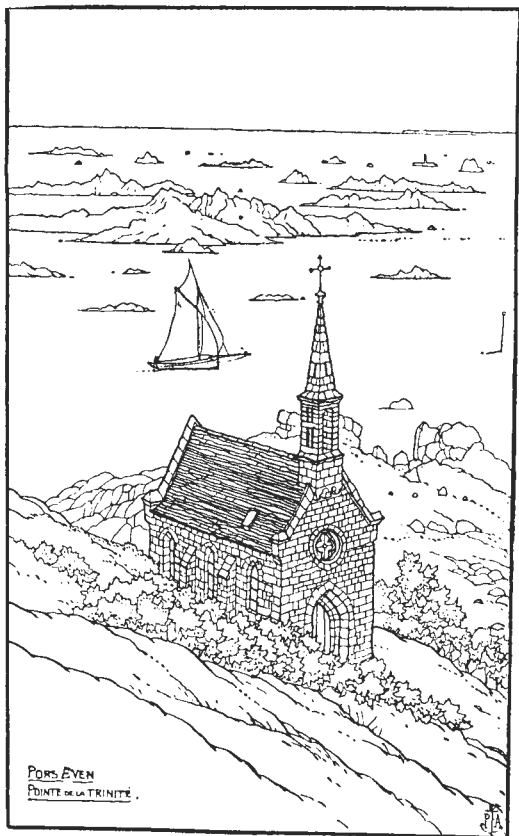
times round the ruins, following the direction of the sun. This being done, they would throw a piece of silver into the window of the chapel, taking care not to look back until they were outside the churchyard, for the skeleton of the saint was supposed to receive the offering by lifting up his hand, and sometimes raising his skull above the window-ledge! ¹

In many Breton villages those fishermen who had been preserved from shipwreck or any other danger at sea used to go barefooted in procession to some favourite shrine, wearing the same clothes as at sea. Among the fisherfolk of Asturias it was a custom when the fishing was bad to make a vow to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in terms that sound strangely familiar to our northern ears: "O Virgin, if you do not give us a fish

¹ L. Roubaudi, *Nice et ses environs*, p. 342.

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we will give you a barrel of vinegar" (*i.e.*, instead of the wine usually offered at the shrine).¹ In Catholic countries nearly every fishing village has its annual feast-day, an occasion for general merry-making and rejoicing for the inhabitants. At Mentone it was formerly the custom to set fire to an old boat on the 'festa,'² and at Nice fishermen used to process round the town with an old boat decorated with flags, which they eventually burned to the accompaniment of dancing and singing.³ St



THE FISHERMEN'S SHRINE NEAR PAIMPOL

Peter's Day, June 29, is always a great festival in Catholic fishing villages, since St Peter is the special patron of fishermen and seafarers in general. I have read that at one time it was the custom on the

¹ Vigon, *Folk-lore del Mar*, p. 17.

² *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. ix, p. 219.

³ Roubaudi, *Nice et ses environs*, p. 342.

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coast of Yorkshire for the fishermen to invite their friends to a feast on St Peter's Day. The boats were all decorated, and after the banquet their bows were sprinkled with wine.¹ At Trapani, in Sicily, after the *Te Deum* before the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, the fishermen always sprinkled themselves with holy water to preserve them from shipwreck.² At Villefranche the fishermen used to bring nets and baskets of fish into church at the Midnight Mass and lay them at the feet of the image of the Bambino.³ A Catholic tradition that lingered in the Orkney Islands for several centuries after the Reformation was for the fishermen to sprinkle their boats with water if they had not done well during the past season. They would also make a cross with tar on the side of the boat.⁴

The Catholic fishermen of the isle of Barra, in the Hebrides, always carry holy water with them on their boats and sprinkle the nets with it before fishing.⁵

In all Catholic parts of Europe it is the custom for the priests to bless the local fishing-fleets before the beginning of the season; typical examples of these picturesque functions may still be witnessed on the coast of Brittany and Normandy and Flanders. Perhaps the most famous of all these annual *Fêtes des Marins* are those of Saint-Malo, Fécamp, and Dunkerque.

BLESSING OF FRENCH FISHING-FLEETS AT SAINT-MALO AND FÉCAMP. Every year when the worst of the winter storms is past and the first signs of spring make their appearance in Brittany and Normandy the seafarers

¹ Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, vol. i, pp. 319 and 338.

² G. Pitre, *Usi e costumi*, vol. iii, p. 84.

³ *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. iii, p. 53.

⁴ W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 107.

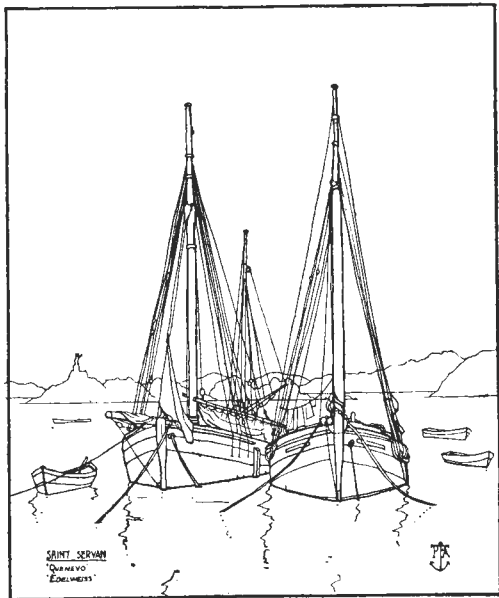
⁵ *Folk-love Journal*, vol. x, p. 260.

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of Saint-Malo, Saint-Servan, Cancale, and Paimpol and other smaller coast towns prepare to say good-bye to their families for a long nine months' separation. By the first week in March nearly all will have sailed away across the ocean in steam-trawler, barquentine, or schooner to take part in the cod fisheries of Newfoundland and Iceland. After their departure the quays of all these fishing centres will be abandoned; the *cafés* empty and silent, save for old men, women, and children, the maritime quarters of the ports almost deserted.

But the *Terre-neuvas* of Fécamp or Saint-Malo are never really happy during their short time ashore in the winter months. They are restless and listless; loafing about the quays in little groups when not working on their ships; drinking, smoking, and playing cards in the *cafés* and *débîts*; listening, perhaps unconsciously, to the call of their mother and mistress the sea; victims of an incurable 'sea-fever.'

The annual *Fête des Marins* at Fécamp and the *Pardon des Terre-neuvas* at Saint-Malo are still observed with great enthusiasm and devotion by the inhabitants of



FISHING-BOATS AT SAINT-SERVAN

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these two ports, and should certainly be witnessed by anyone who has the slightest interest in fishermen and fishing ways.

On the day of the festival the massive piers and columns of the cathedral of Saint-Malo and the church of St Étienne at Fécamp are hidden under decorations. In both churches flags and banners are strung from arch to arch, or arranged in festoons round capitals, the blue, white, and red tricolour of France being the chief note in the colour scheme. Crimson plush drapes the walls of the sanctuary; a forest of white lilies and green palms is banked up around and behind the High Altar, while cut-glass chandeliers blaze with electric light. Every seat seems to be occupied; in fact, long before the Mass begins you will find there is 'standing room' only.

At Fécamp the choir-stalls are filled with prosperous-looking shipowners and captains; in the middle of the nave rests a large model three-masted sailing-ship, to be carried in procession later on by those lively little *mousses* who are whispering among themselves, or making eyes at other boys less honoured than themselves. In front of the sanctuary fishermen's children who have made their First Communion the previous day are conspicuous: the girls in white muslin, with satin shoes peeping out coyly from beneath elaborately flounced petticoats, the boys dressed in blue sailor-suits, with carefully brushed and well-oiled hair. The sacristy door opens, the *suisse*, or beadle, magnificent in plumed cocked hat, sword, knee-breeches, and buckled shoes, leads the way, followed by the clergy in their best vestments and scarlet-cassocked *enfants de chœur*. The procession makes its way to the High Altar, and the *Messe des Marins* begins.

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I shall always remember the sound of the *Cantique des Marins* as it was sung at Fécamp on the first occasion I took part in one of these annual festivals some ten years ago : one could almost feel the rise and fall of the waves as the congregation joined in the well-known



A FÉCAMP FISHING-BOAT

refrain. They sung it at the offertory of the Mass itself, and afterward in procession, as we made our way down from the church to the Bassin Berigny, where every vessel was decked with flags and bunting—a gay scene on a bright sunny morning at the end of February. The excitement of the dense crowd increased as the *Archevêque* of Havre, representing the Archbishop of Rouen, prepared to bless the fishing-fleet. Suddenly the noise and chatter ceased. For a few moments the silence was broken only by the voice of the priest reciting the prescribed liturgical prayers. His right hand is raised aloft ; with holy water and incense he blesses the ocean in the

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name of its Creator, prays for those little ships that will soon depart for the banks of Newfoundland, four thousand miles across the Atlantic, and in a few moments the brief ceremony is over.

But the *Pardon des Terre-neuvas* at Saint-Malo is an even more impressive sight, for here you may still find fifty or more large three-masted barquentines berthed in the port. One seems to have stepped back at least a hundred years, to the days of sail and before the invention of steam; as one gazes at this forest of masts and yards and rigging. At Saint-Malo the actual blessing of the fishing-fleet is performed by the Archbishop of Rennes from a motor-launch, upon which he embarks after the High Mass in the cathedral. Accompanied by his clergy, he blesses each of these magnificent vessels in turn as the launch slowly moves round the great basin, whose quays are crowded with sightseers and visitors. Friends and relations of the crews are watching the scene from the decks of the ships, while the men themselves climb aloft into the rigging.

At Fécamp there is yet another function in the afternoon, when the fishermen, their wives and families, toil up the steep path that leads from the harbour to the chapel of Notre-Dame de Salut on the cliffs, whose walls are covered with paintings and models of ships, placed there by grateful seamen in thanksgiving for a safe return from a long voyage or preservation during some storm. The crowd is smaller but no less fervent than during the morning. It has come up to this chapel to pray and to ask a blessing on the fishing-fleet, to plead for the safe return of the steam-trawlers and barquentines now ready to start on their long voyage across the ocean to Newfoundland or Iceland or Greenland. Behind the cliffs to the westward, beyond Yport and

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Étretat, the sun is setting, a red ball of fire dipping into a fiery sea. In a fortnight or so the fleet of grey *chalutiers* and white-sailed *goélettes* down below in the harbour will have disappeared, and Fécamp will see them no more for several months.

OTHER BLESSINGS OF THE SEA. Blessings of the sea and the local fishing-fleet take place in many other Breton and Norman ports, one of the most picturesque that I know being that at Port-en-Bessin, on the coast of Calvados, near Bayeux, where you still find a number of smacks, in build not unlike those of Brixham, on the opposite side of the Channel. Then there are the famous blessing on June 24 of the channel between the mainland of Brittany and the Île de Groix before the annual sardine fisheries start, the *Pardon des Islandais* at Paimpol, the *Fête des Marins* at Notre-Dame de Grâce, Honfleur, and many another I have not the space to mention. Out in the Hebrides or on the west coast of Ireland you will still come across the priests blessing the fishing-boats and nets at the beginning of every season, and far away in the Pacific and Indian Oceans you will discover native fishermen propitiating the gods of the sea with strange sacrifices. At one time the Annamite fishermen around Cape Paradán used to sacrifice a man every year to the sea-gods to make sure of having a good fishing ; in some localities they would place the body of a dolphin in certain temples before setting out in their primitive craft.¹

SACRIFICIAL RITES. The custom of sacrificing fish to the gods of the sea goes back to remote antiquity. In many of the classical authors there are references to this practice among the fisherfolk of Egypt, Greece, Italy, Sicily, and other Mediterranean countries. Until

¹ Albert Bassett, *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. xii, p. 272.

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comparatively recent times, I understand, Cornish fishermen would leave some of their catch on the shore as an offering to a mysterious deity.¹ All the world over it is still the custom for fishermen to make an offering of the first fish caught in the season to some favourite shrine, or to the priest. The latter practice is still found in Protestant countries such as the east of Scotland.

In some of the Indian islands the natives believe that the souls of their ancestors bring luck to the fishing, hence they must be propitiated with offerings of rice, fish, sago, and tobacco, so that they may keep off evil spirits from the nets, lines, and hooks.² The natives of Burma construct little cabins near their fishing-stations where every morning they place bowls of fruit, rice, etc.³ In Malacca the fishermen offer turtles to the gods of the sea.⁴ On the Gold Coast, I am told, offerings are made to the sea at low tide in the months of August and September, when the fish are most plentiful.⁵ On Vancouver Island, British Columbia, and in Greenland it seems that the natives believe it is a sign that the god of the sea is angry when they catch no fish, and that the only way to appease him is to perform acts of penance and ceremonial ablutions.⁶ I have read that in New Caledonia while the men are at sea the women assemble on the shore and implore the help of the god of the sea while chanting hymns.⁷ The natives of the Banks Islands throw money between the crevices of coral reefs as offerings to the spirits of the departed,

¹ F. S. Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 387.

² De Backer, *L'Archipel indien*, p. 378.

³ W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 48.

⁴ Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 391.

⁵ Bosman, *Guinea*, p. 128.

⁶ Walckenaer, *Voyages en Afrique*, vol. ix, p. 526.

⁷ *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, vol. x, p. 277.

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and if a crab appears imagine that it has some connexion with their ancestors.¹ At one time, not so long ago, the fisherfolk of Hartlepool, men and women, used to steal each other's shoes on Easter Monday, the one having to pay a fine to the other before they were returned. On the first Monday after the Epiphany the fishermen of this same port used to march through the streets carrying a small anchor, singing and asking for presents.²

Before the beginning of the fishing season it is customary for the fishermen of Madagascar to remain several days shut up in their houses, speaking to nobody, fasting, and having no intercourse with their wives. They let their beards grow, and eat only certain kinds of food. Much the same practices are found among the natives of Samoa before they set out to catch turtles. The whole village keeps silence, and none of those who remain at home ventures outside the house until the fishermen have got well out to sea. On the Marquesas Isles it seems to be the custom for the rest of the population to refrain from ordinary work while the men are fishing. Amulets and charms are carried, for much depends on their influence. Such is the belief of all primitive races and some so-called civilized races too!³

For instance, in the north of Scotland it was once the custom when the herring-fishing was bad to dress up a cooper in flannel covered with burrs and take him in procession on a wheelbarrow round the village. We read of a still more curious rite being observed at Fraserburgh on a similar occasion. Two men on horse-back, both fantastically dressed, one with bagpipes,

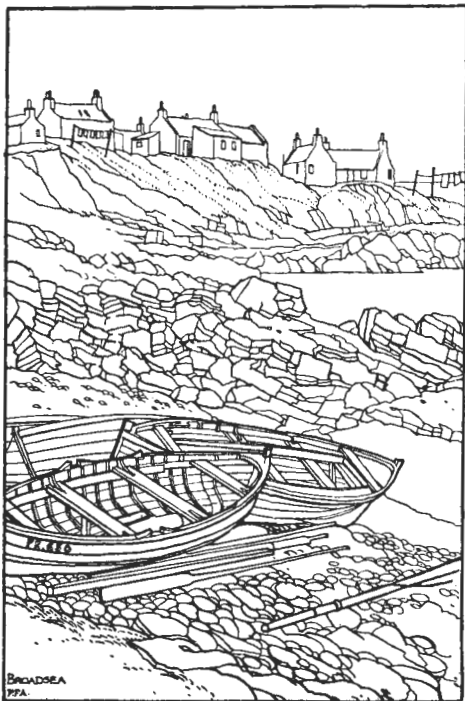
¹ *Revue d'Ethnographie*, vol. ii, p. 341.

² F. S. Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, pp. 387 and 414.

³ Cf. Gruvel, *La Pêche dans la préhistoire*.

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went round the town followed by a third man carrying a big flag and wearing a high hat on which were suspended herrings hanging by their tails! A huge crowd followed cheering and singing.



BROADSEA, FRASERBURGH

On the isle of Lewis, in the Hebrides, after a good fishing season an ox or a sheep was bought by the combined crews of the same village and taken to the spot where the fish were usually landed. The oldest fisherman present, constituting himself a sort of high-priest, led the animal to the water's edge, and, kneeling on his victim, in the presence of a reverent crowd of onlookers, cut the head open, so that blood flowed into the water. When the bleeding had ceased and some of the blood had been collected the fisherman walked into the sea and cast the blood over it as a sacrifice. Returning to the carcass, he divided it into as many parts as there were poor people in the district, for nobody else might eat of the animal. It is said that this rite was quite common a hundred years ago.¹

¹ John Abercromby, *Folk-lore*, vol. vi, p. 164.

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FAVOURABLE EPOCHS FOR FISHING. The Saxons believed that the seventh day of the month was good for ordinary fishing, but the eleventh day best for whales and walruses ; all other days were regarded as unlucky.¹ In most Christian countries we find a belief that it is unlucky to fish on a Sunday, although under modern industrial conditions this tradition is fast dying out. In certain parts of Scotland it is maintained that the reason why there is no herring-fishing in Dunbar and Stonehaven to-day, both of them once prosperous ports, is because the men used to fish on the Sabbath.² At Prestonpans, despite the constant protests of the Presbyterian ministers, the fishermen would not give up their firm belief that it was lucky to start fishing on Sunday. A story is told that one fisherman, fearing that some harm might come to him if he disobeyed the minister, took the precaution of making a rag dummy and burning it in his chimney,³ although it is difficult to understand the significance of the rite.

Spanish and Italian fishermen have a superstition that it is unlucky to fish on a Friday if it can be avoided.⁴ In all Catholic countries the feast of SS. Peter and Paul on June 29 is a great occasion for rejoicing, St Peter being the generally accepted patron saint of fishermen. There are few fishermen in Italy, Spain, or Portugal who would dare to work on that day, being convinced that they would have no luck for the rest of the year.⁵

¹ Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 442 ; W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 111.

² P. F. Anson, *Fishing-boats and Fisherfolk on the East Coast of Scotland*, p. 66.

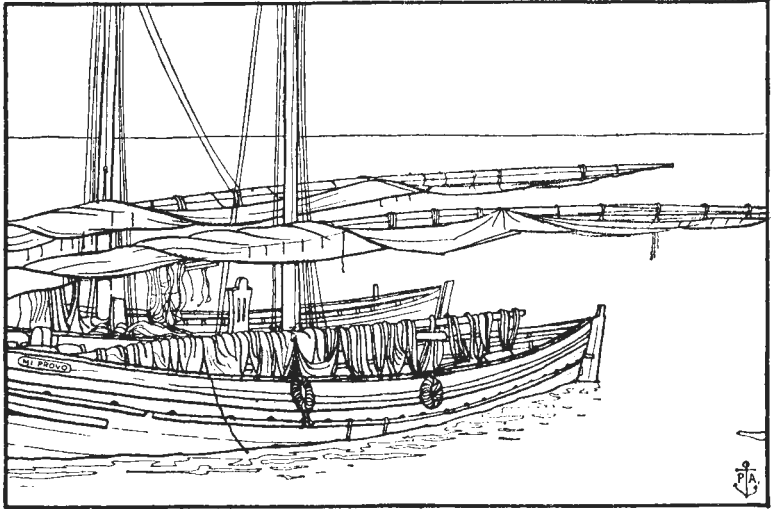
³ Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 442 ; W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 110.

⁴ Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 445.

⁵ W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 109 ; C. Pedrozo, *Tradições*, No. 84.

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The older generation of Dieppe fishermen would never go to sea or fish on All Souls' Day, November 2, believing that if they did they would 'see double'—*i.e.*, a second individual like to every member of the crew would be noticed on board. If they were so foolish



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as to shoot their nets only skeletons would be hauled up, the skulls with eyes flaming and mouths grimacing.¹

Among the Baltic fisherfolk there was a tradition that one should never fish between All Saints' and St Martin's Day, November 11. Irish fishermen are said to have the same superstition about fishing on St Martin's Day.² Owing to the great veneration paid to St James throughout Spain one is not surprised that Spanish fishermen maintain that it is unwise to desecrate his *fiesta* by fishing on that day.³ But a

¹ A. Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque*, p. 276.

² Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, vol. i, p. 394.

³ Bolclin, *Folklorico español*, p. 44.

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curious superstition is found among the Baltic fishermen that one never catches such good fish and in such large quantities as on the nights of Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension. In the Pacific islands certain fish are taboo at different seasons, and much the same superstitions as one finds in Europe are held regarding times which are lucky and unlucky.¹

CHARMS AND EXORCISMS. If an Iceland fisherman wishes to do harm to a neighbour's boat he sprinkles it with sulphur. If a Scottish fisherman from the coast of Buchan believed that his boat had been bewitched he used to burn a net as a sacrifice to the evil spirit.² Breton seamen maintain that to kindle a fire is an effectual way of driving out the devil from a fishing-craft.³ On the coast of Yorkshire an even more startling rite used to be observed to exorcize a boat having had bad luck at the fishing, but I doubt if this is still in practice to-day. The wives of the crew met at midnight, having first killed a pigeon, taken out its heart, and stuck needles into it. The heart was then slowly roasted on the embers of a fire, the idea being that the evil spirit who had bewitched the boat would thus be attracted. When it was supposed to have arrived presents were offered to it.⁴ On the Île de Sein, Finistère, it was formerly the custom to burn some nets in order to take away bad luck from lobster-pots, the ashes being put into the pots and rubbed over their wooden framework.⁵

Among the Scottish fisherfolk it was a common

¹ Clavel, *Archives de médecine navale*, vol. xii, p. 243; D'Urville, *L'Astrolabe*, vol. iii, p. 538.

² W. Gregor, *Folk-lore Journal*, vol. iii, p. 308.

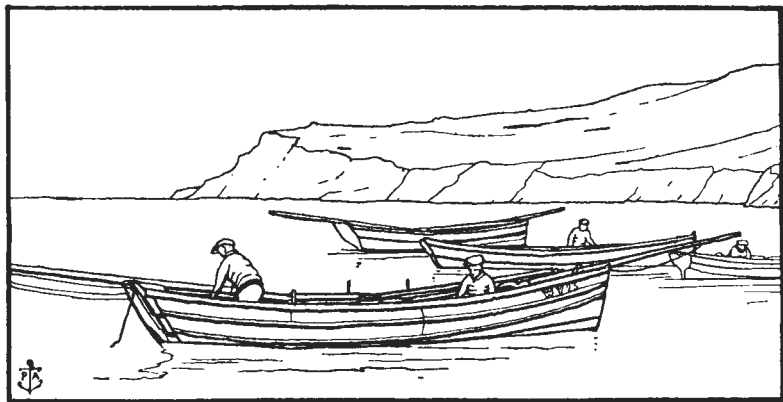
³ G. de la Lardelle, *Mœurs maritimes*; H. Le Carguet, *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. iv, p. 537.

⁴ *La Science pour tous*, January 23, 1886, from *The Times*.

⁵ *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. iv, p. 537.

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belief that if nets or lines got caught in a rock, or there was any difficulty in hauling them in, it was probably due to the influence of a fairy. To drive away the spell one of the men would take a piece of seaweed, or a shell from the bottom of the boat, spit on it, throw it overboard, and then spit again.¹



COBLES ON THE YORKSHIRE COAST

There seems to be an almost universal belief among seafaring races that there are devils which amuse themselves by destroying nets and lines, hence fishermen are accustomed to carry amulets and charms to ward off the evil. Those of the Isle of Man always used to carry salt in their pockets; Iceland sailors had a stone called the *oskastein*.² The natives of Madagascar put their faith in a magic bag filled with certain roots, oil, and stones, which they never fail to take with them when they are going whale-fishing.³ I have already mentioned that the Scottish fishermen believe that certain proper names are unlucky; on the other hand, they maintain that

¹ *Folk-lore Journal*, vol. iii, p. 181.

² Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 438.

³ *Mélusine*, vol. iii, c. 205.

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there are likewise other names which if repeated aloud have the power to attract fish.¹

ACTIONS AND WORDS FORBIDDEN AT SEA. When one is on board a fishing-boat one has to be very careful not only of one's behaviour but also of the very words one uses in ordinary conversation. I have more than once got into serious trouble on board a Scottish drifter for having thoughtlessly mentioned the fatal word 'salmon.' And there are other words which are looked upon with almost equal disfavour according to the particular village from which the boat belongs—minister, kirk, pork, trout, dog, and (as I have already explained) certain proper names are taboo. Should one be obliged to mention any one of these persons or things one does so indirectly—*i.e.*, the minister will be "the man in the black coat," a salmon "the big fish," the pig "the four-footed beastie," and so on. But should one have been so forgetful as to have used any of these fatal words when at sea on a Scottish fishing-vessel one can generally avert the spell or drive away the bad luck which would otherwise occur by spitting! It is strange that the fishermen of Malaya seem to have just the same superstitions regarding certain names and words that must not be repeated when fishing as the Presbyterian fishermen of the east coast of Scotland.² Fifty years ago the pious Scotsman would always cry out "Cauld iron!" and catch hold of the nearest piece of iron available should anyone mention the name of the Deity when at sea. Throughout the world whistling is always supposed to be unlucky, while Iceland fishermen, so I am told, look upon singing with equal disfavour.³

¹ *Folk-lore Journal*, vol. iv, p. 13.

² W. Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 193.

³ Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, p. 135.

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Dieppe fishermen will never refer to cats or rabbits when they are on their boats.¹ The same superstition exists in most parts of Brittany. On the Yorkshire coast all four-footed animals are regarded with equal disfavour ; many an old fisherman would return home and wait for the next tide should some one have mentioned any of them to him.²

It is said that there are some Scottish seamen who will not even eat chicken or duck on board a ship for the belief that harm will come to them.³

One of the most curious superstitions that I have come across among fisherfolk is the belief that certain persons can control the elements by making knots in a particular way on a piece of rope. It exists both on the east and west coasts of Scotland.⁴

Another strange idea is that luck will come to a fishing-boat if some object of no great value is secretly removed from the house of a neighbour at the beginning of the season and put on board a boat.⁵ In Germany it is said that a line which has been stolen brings luck to him who has taken it.⁶ The older generation of Aberdonian fishermen used to say that to lend any object to another boat took away the luck from the first boat. Swedish seamen hold that if they make use of anything lent them by a friend they get more luck than if they bought the article themselves.⁷

When fish have been caught a few are often thrown back into the water as an offering to the deities of

¹ A. Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque*, p. 308.

² Sébillot, *Folk-lore des pêcheurs*, p. 233.

³ W. Gregor, *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. iv, p. 660.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. xii, p. 381.

⁵ W. Gregor, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the North-east of Scotland*, p. 200.

⁶ Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, vol. ii, p. 111.

⁷ W. Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 116.

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the ocean.¹ In some parts of the world I am told that the first fish caught are burned as a sort of propitiatory sacrifice.

RETURN TO PORT. And, lastly, when the fishing-boat returns to port after being at sea there are certain acts which are forbidden just as when she set out. In Scotland the women are allowed to assemble on the quays to take away the fish and lines, but they must not step on board the boats.² In the Hebrides when a man went to sea for his first trip at the beginning of the season nobody was allowed to help him take his fish on shore upon his return to port, otherwise the fish would not come near the coast.³ In the olden days when there had been a good haul of sardines on the Breton coast the crews of the *sardiniers* used to decorate their boats with garlands and flowers,⁴ while the men of Le Pollet when they had done well at sea would sing a *Te Deum* as they sailed into the harbour of Dieppe.⁵

No book dealing with fisherfolk would be complete if it did not refer to the periodical 'revivals' that swept over them from time to time. Strangers often complain that the fisherfolk of the Moray Firth and Buchan coasts are dour and hard, yet this is scarcely true, for beneath a somewhat reserved exterior they are intensely



KNOTTING A ROPE

¹ R. Taylor, *New Zealand and its Inhabitants*, p. 198.

² W. Gregor, *Revue des traditions populaires*, vol. iv, p. 663.

³ Article by Miss A. Goodrich Freer in *Folk-lore*, vol. x.

⁴ E. Herpin, *La Côte d'Émeraude*, p. 80.

⁵ A. Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque*, p. 367.

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emotional. On the surface fisherfolk of most countries are usually more close and reserved than dwellers inland.



SARDINE BOATS AT AUDIERNE

A great change appears to have taken place in the character and habits of Scottish fisherfolk within the past fifty years. Earlier contemporary accounts picture

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them as a rough, uneducated, and immoral set of men, professional smugglers, and everywhere addicted to drink.

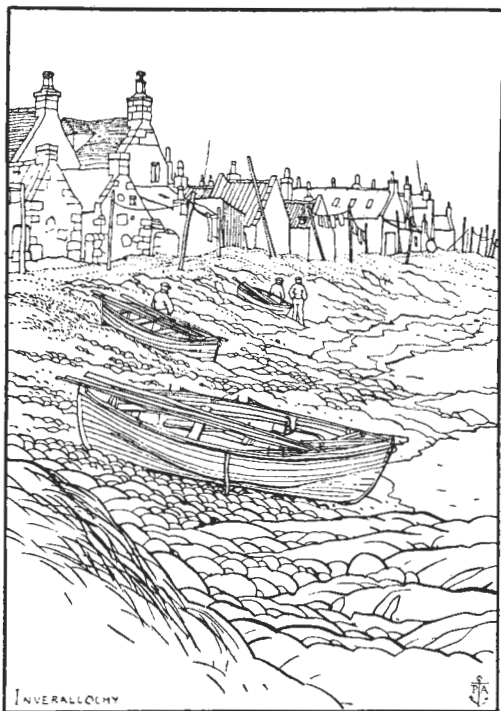
The beginning of this change dates from the 'Revival' of 1859, which, beginning in America, came to Great Britain *via* Ulster. It swept over Scotland until it reached the coast of Buchan. The leader of this movement so far as the east of Scotland was concerned was one James Turner, a Peterhead cooper and herring-curer, who in two years before his death was the means of 'converting' more than eight thousand persons along the coast. John McGibbon, in *The Fisherfolk of Buchan*, writes (p. 76) :

He started in his own curing-shed, holding small meetings there every night. It was only a low wooden building : on one side were the gutting troughs, and on the other the coopers' benches : the floor was of hard earth, and the light came from two or three oil-lamps that swung from the dusty rafters, and the whole place smelling strongly of salt fish and smoke. The meeting would begin as soon as the coopers left off their barrel-making for the day, and would last far into the night, and often the coopers would have to wait in the early mornings until the prayer meeting broke up and the fishermen went off to their homes. While they made barrels during the day, James made converts by the hundred during the night.

The revival began in the towns, but before long there was not a small fishing village along the Moray Firth and Aberdeenshire coasts where it had not penetrated. The whole life of the inhabitants was suddenly changed within less than a year. In more than one village it is still told how James Turner kept on preaching and praying, until every one of any age in the place had been 'forrit'—*i.e.*, gone up to the rail or

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penitents' form. The kirks and chapels were now all too small for the congregations who flocked to them. In isolated fishing villages, as Inverallochy and



INVERALLOCHY, ON THE BUCHAN COAST

Cairnbulg, for instance, there were no places of worship. Hitherto the people had been more interested in drinking and smuggling than in hymn-singing, prayer meetings, and sermons. But before long there was scarcely a fishing village along the coast which had not built at least a temporary structure where meetings could be held on 'the Sabbath.'

Scarcely had James Turner's revival had time to cool down when it was followed by another of an even more surprising character, for the normally staid and respectable Aberdonian Scot had not been accustomed to associate spiritual religion with flags and banners and crowds of lads and lassies, the former in peaked caps and scarlet jerseys, the latter in picturesque poke-bonnets, marching through the streets singing lively hymns and choruses to the accompaniment of a brass band and the waving

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of tambourines. Such was the way the Salvation Army launched its spiritual offensive on the dour nor'-east of Scotland. There was something about the great flaming posters with their startling wording, their mysterious references to "Blood and Fire," their announcements that the Devil might look to his defence, for every citadel held by him in Buchan was now going to be attacked, which appealed to the fisherfolk, although they were somewhat cautious of committing themselves at first. But it was not



SCOTTISH HERRING FISHERMEN ABOUT 1880

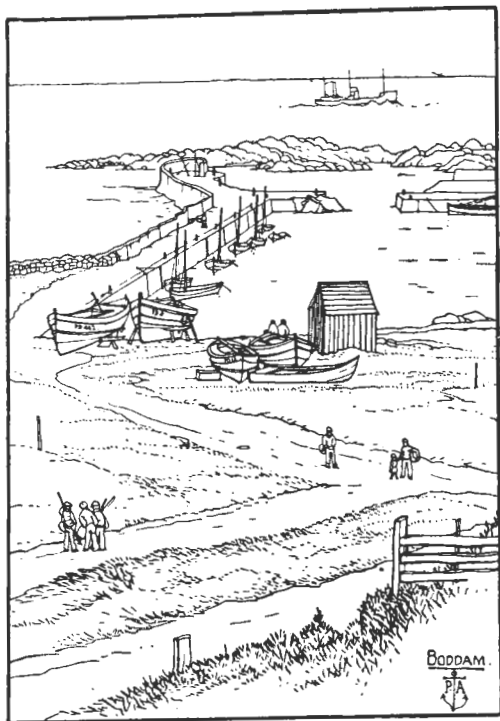
long before the Salvation Army had completed what James Turner had begun ; some of the very hardest 'cases' in the fishing villages who had withstood the 'fires' of other revivals were now kindled and roused to turn from their evil lives by the faith and the persistent preaching of the Salvation Army captains and officers.

It was upon this same race of Scottish fisherfolk that the 'spiritual offensive' begun in East Anglia in the spring of 1921 was to have its most marked effect : in other words, they were to be swept off their feet by yet another revival movement of much the same

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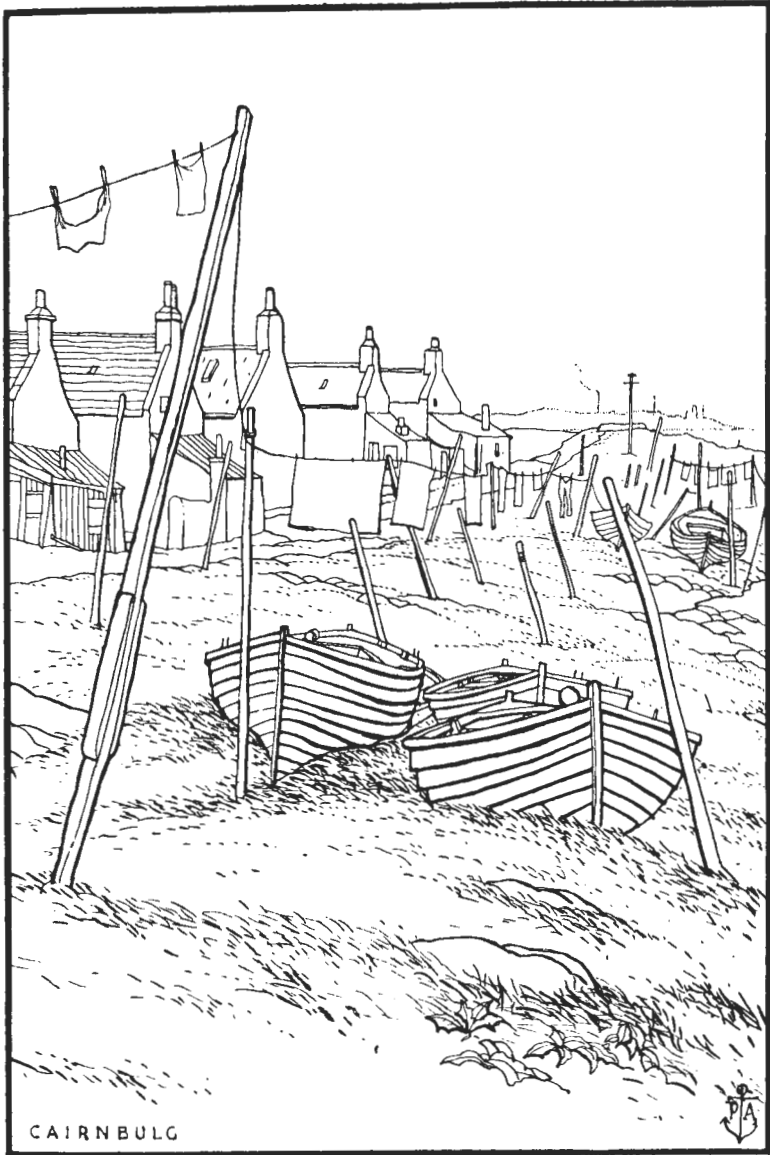
character as those which had preceded it some fifty years before.

The summer fishing of that year had been a failure. The autumn fishing from the first proved to be even worse. The outlook for the winter was gloomy. Skippers and crews knew that humanly speaking nothing could save them from financial ruin. They saw that they would be returning to Scotland even more deeply in debt than when they had started. And it was in such an atmosphere that the revival of 1921 began at Yarmouth and Lowestoft among the Scottish fishermen.



AT BODDAM, NEAR PETERHEAD

Wandering round the streets of Yarmouth during those autumn evenings, I often came across groups of fishermen gathered under a lamp-post, singing hymns with intense fervour or listening with hungry, eager faces to the fiery, passionate words of some young evangelist, whose preaching was interrupted by frequent ejaculations of "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" Within some of the Nonconformist chapels one found it difficult to



CAIRNBULG

CAIRNBULG

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obtain even standing-room, every corner being filled with fishermen and fisher-lassies. After much hymn-singing, endless prayers and petitions for those whose hearts were still hardened, recent converts would stand up and give their 'testimony.' From every part of the building you



LISTENING TO A REVIVAL
PREACHER

saw middle-aged, weather-beaten skippers, young deck-hands, and countless lassies making their way to the penitents' form. And when at last the meeting was over some of the more enthusiastic would carry on their offensive among the crowds that were still loafing round the market-place after the public-houses had been closed. Sudden 'conversions' took place, men would doff hats and caps, and, joining hands, sing together such stirring hymns as *Throw out the*

life-line or *Will your anchor hold?*

When the Scottish drifters had returned home at the end of the season their crews began to spread the news of their own conversion, and the 'spiritual offensive' was started in Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

Under the leadership of a certain young fisherman open-air meetings began in the streets early in December. There was something in the quality of the preaching of the evangelist that compelled attention. Whether the stories one heard that "he had thrown his cigarettes into the galley fire on hearing the Voice of God" are true or not such an act would have been quite characteristic of the man. On a winter morning one came across him dressed in the characteristic blue jersey and the

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duffle trousers of the Scots fisherman, mixing with his fellows round the harbour, talking to the unemployed at the Labour Exchange, and visiting the sick. All along the Moray Firth coast the revival movement spread; there was hardly a village that was not affected, and in many places whole crews were converted. Those who know the lie of the Moray Firth towns and villages, with their "up the brae" and "doon the brae" (where the fisherfolk live), will appreciate the quiet humour of the following remarks of one of the inhabitants quoted at the time:



A WEATHER-BEATEN SKIPPER

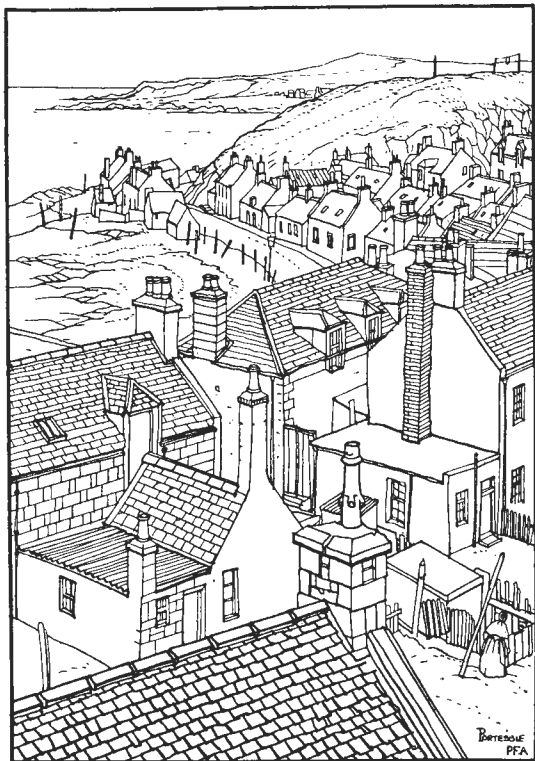
The folk up the brae have heard nae call to repentance and consecration for the Lord's service, an' they doot if we have. Aye, they're har' an' creetical up th' toon. They're expectin' that if the Lord wants them He'll come an' ring them up specially on their telephones. They dinna understan' that doon the brae the fisherman's aerals are aye oot, an' that he carries a receiver at his heart to catch the first whisper o' the Spirit.

But "the wind bloweth where it listeth,"¹ and it is not only among the Presbyterian fisherfolk of Scotland that these religious revivals take place. Here is the story of an even more curious conversion of an almost pagan fishing community that happened some two hundred years ago on the lonely Île de Sein, off the coast of Brittany. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the inhabitants of this almost inaccessible reef of rocks had an unenviable reputation among their

¹ John iii, 8.

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neighbours on the mainland as professional wreckers. Many a ship went to its destruction lured by lights exposed by these half-savage natives. A certain Jesuit priest, Michael le Nobletz, who had been moved to pity



PORTESSIE, BANFFSHIRE

by the condition of the inhabitants of the islands lying off Finistère, landed here one day, and preached with such earnestness that it was not long before he had won the hearts of these simple fisherfolk, just as James Turner was to win those of Buchan at a later period. He taught them the truths of Christianity, baptized

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them, and before leaving the island instructed an old sailor who knew how to read to gather them together on Sundays, so that they might take part in religious worship, even if they had no priest. Not content with this, Father le Nobletz sent his fisherman catechist a book of sermons, so that the old sailor could preach to his fellow-seafarers and their families. To-day there are no more devout and religious fisherfolk in the world than those of the Île de Sein. Missions, retreats, and special sermons here provide the intellectual and emotional outlet that in most other fishing villages on the mainland is now supplied by the cinema. Not content with this, both men and women are constantly undertaking pilgrimages to favourite shrines, such as Sainte Anne d'Auray, and many of them have even been to Lourdes and Rome.

On other remote islands off the west of Scotland and Ireland you will still find a similar simplicity of faith and intense love of everything connected with religion among the fisherfolk, no matter whether it is Barra, Benbecula, Eriskay, Inishbofin, Achill, or the Aran Islands, to mention but a few. Again, is it not the same in the Isles of the Aegean? What of the crowds of Greek fishermen who flock to the famous shrine of Our Lady of the Sea on the island of Tenos? But have not seafarers flocked here from time immemorial? For Poseidon and Amphitrite have been replaced by Christ and the 'Panaghia Thalassi' in the hearts of these Aegean mariners.

No matter where one goes, in any part of Europe, Sunday as spent in any fishing community does not seem to differ much.

Take, for instance, a typical fisherman's Sabbath in Scotland: on Saturday all the boats that are able to

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spend the week-end in their home port have returned to harbour. Their nets have been barked, and have been taken up to the fields, where they will be dry by Monday morning. During the evening the streets of any one of these east coast towns, from Wick to Eyemouth, will be crowded with blue-jerseyed fishermen, who, together with their wives, will be engaged in doing the necessary shopping to last them over Sunday, also in seeing that the grocer and the butcher have a list of articles required for the drifter on Monday morning before she goes to sea. The local cinema—for, as I have already mentioned, there are few fishing centres which do not now provide facilities for “going to the pictures”—will be crowded with fisher-lads and -lassies; the bars of hotels and public-houses will be doing a busy trade until their doors are closed at 10 P.M., when their patrons, who feel that Saturday night is a legitimate excuse for taking a “wee drappie mair” than on other occasions, reel out into the street, garrulous and often quarrelsome. But there are now certain towns on the east coast of Scotland which have “gone dry,” and in these it is the Italian ice-cream merchant, not the publican, who makes his fortune on Saturday nights.

Sunday morning dawns; a deathlike stillness broods over the town or village; not a sound anywhere, blinds drawn, doors fast bolted. There is seldom anyone astir in a respectable Scots town on the ‘Sabbath’ much before nine or ten o’clock, unless it is the milkman.

After a late breakfast many of the fishermen wander down to the harbour “juist to hae a look at th’ boatie,” clambering on board their own drifter over many others all moored together so that each touches its neighbour. Having seen that all is well, he returns home and gets ready for church.

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Before long the bells will have started to summon the worshippers to the various kirks that are so numerous in every Scots fishing centre. Although they are now officially united, there are still the Established and 'U.F.' varieties of the Presbyterians, not to mention the 'Wee Frees,' Episcopalians (commonly referred to as the "English Church"), Wesleyan, Congregational, several kinds of Baptists and Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Salvation Army, and many other strange sects, not forgetting the Roman Catholics, in those places where the "auld kirk" (as the fishermen call it) has managed to retain its hold since the Reformation.

In the Presbyterian and most of the other Protestant kirks the singing is lusty and hearty, especially if favourite psalms and hymns are chosen. During the long extempore prayers by the minister heads are bowed, and not a sound is heard, save for an occasional cough that refuses to be suppressed. Then comes the sermon, to which great attention is paid, for the fisherman will tell you, "If ye dinna gang tae kirk tae listen, dinna gang ava." Some of the older men will be looking up Scripture references in well-thumbed Bibles; others appear to be dozing. The service being over at last, the congregation disperses, and you will certainly hear the sermon being discussed by the fishermen as they go home to their dinner, for the Scots fisherman loves nothing better than to argue about theology or to display a knowledge of points of doctrine and the text of Scripture which is often astonishing.

A good and substantial Sunday dinner is conducive to a nap and, as there is nothing else to do but go for a walk, the afternoon is often spent in sleep. The more devout and fervent go off to Bible classes or prayer meetings, or sing hymns at home to the accompaniment

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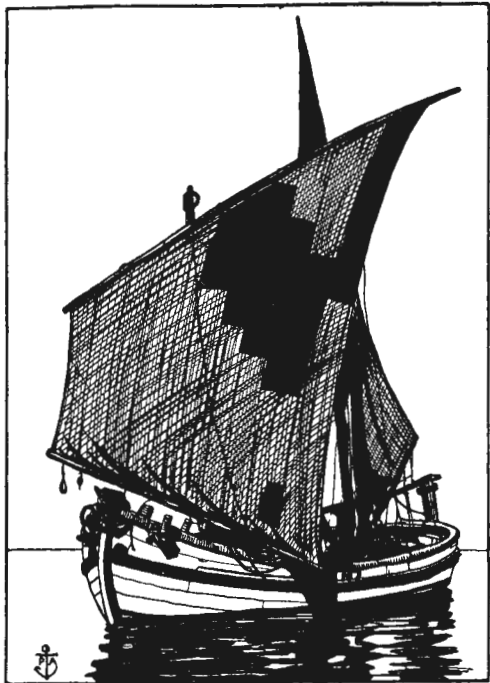
of the harmonium which is to be found in almost every fisherman's house, except where it has been replaced by the more fashionable piano.

After tea the bells once more start to remind worshippers that it is time to get ready for kirk, and soon the streets will be alive with fishermen, their wives and families, making their way in all directions to their own particular conventicle. The Salvation Army is mustering its forces at the harbour or in the square or market-place with brass bands and banners, the only sign of any liveliness in the average Scots fisher-town that is permitted on the Sabbath, and soon one will be cheered by such hymns as *Rescue the Perishing, care for the Dying*, or *Pull for the Shore, Sailor, pull for the Shore*. And after the hymns there will be 'testimonies' by fishermen and fisher-lassies, many of whom have discarded their normal attire for the scarlet jersey or poke-bonnet of the Army. Hymn-singing is also a favourite way of whiling away the rest of the Sunday evening by those who have already been to church, but soon after ten o'clock another 'Sabbath' is over. Down in the harbour the drifters are lying with their tall masts rising up above their short, squat funnels; some of them have already got steam up, for once Sunday is past—*i.e.*, after midnight—their crews will be on board and off to sea again for another spell of fishing.

Sunday as spent among the fisherfolk of Normandy or Brittany is more cheerful, less rigid, but nevertheless church-going still finds a place in the programme. Just as in Scotland, here too the fishing-fleet tries to get back to port on Saturday, yet in most of the fishing villages on the coast of France every one is as early astir on a Sunday morning as on any other day in the week, and a 'long lie in' does not seem to be looked upon as an

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essential part of Sunday observance. The women flock to church for the early Masses, while at the *grand'messe* at nine or ten you will find the benches or chairs set apart for men crowded with blue-jerseyed fishermen of all ages, except in certain districts where Communism and extreme Socialism have destroyed the simple faith of the people. On the Île de Sein, Finistère, you will find it difficult to secure a place if you come to church after the service has begun. All around you will be fishermen, young and old, who are following the Mass in large and much-used prayer books, and they join in the singing with voices

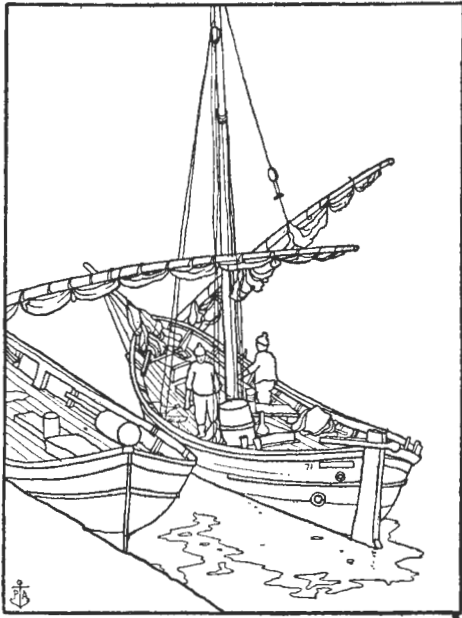


ADRIATIC FISHING-BOAT

that sound like the roar of the ocean. And at Port-en-Bessin and at Fécamp, in Normandy, to mention but two places, it is the same thing—the fishermen just let themselves go when it comes to singing the alternate verses of the familiar *Messe royale* which they have sung, Sunday after Sunday, for many generations. It is the same too at Vespers in the afternoon. Here the church is almost as crowded as in the morning, and the fishermen seem to know all the psalms by

Fishermen and Fishing Ways

heart, judging by the way they join in the singing. And what I have written about France is more or less true of fishing communities in Spain or Italy. At Chioggia, Molfetta, or Bari, on the Adriatic, you will



FISHING-BOATS AT SANTA MARGHERITA

find the churches crowded with fishermen on a Sunday: along the coast of Asturias it is much the same; also at Camogli or Santa Margherita.

French, Italian, and Spanish fishermen spend their Sundays more cheerfully than their Scottish cousins. In all these Catholic countries the *cafés* are more crowded on a Sunday afternoon than any other time; there is an atmo-

sphere of brightness and gaiety not to be found in the grim severity of the Calvinistic North.

Religion and superstition may be dying in this matter-of-fact twentieth-century world, yet as will be seen from what I have written there is still one section of the community in every country among whom both still thrive. I will conclude with the following quotation from *The Romance of the Yorkshire Coast*, by H. J. Gee:

The old days in which the fishermen believed in mermaids have long gone by, and yet the mystery of the sea is not wholly outworn, for we still hear of wonders and signs out

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upon the desolate waves—stories that are told of strange fish and unaccountable sounds and cries upon the wind. Spectral lights have been seen at midnight, and some can remember (or think they can remember) the time when they saw that fabulous monster, the sea-serpent, dragging its endless tail through a storm of waters. If you would laugh at these fancies go down to the sea by night, feel the cold, damp touch of the wind on your face, and you will understand. You will learn why the rough fisherman has a curious little fear sitting in his heart, why his nature is compounded of courage and suspicion, scepticism and poetry; and you will cease to wonder at the presence of ancient beliefs and customs which have overflowed into these latter days.