

82.—ITALIAN FISHERMEN IN SAN FRANCISCO.

[From the San Francisco Chronicle, July 20, 1885.]

The branch of the fishing industry of this city represented by the picturesque Italian fishermen's market on the sea-wall employs over 1,000 men. They are the Italians who supply the city markets with deep-water fish, but of course they do not supply all the fish used in the city, as the Italian fishermen of Monterey Bay, the Chinese fishermen of San Francisco Bay, the Italian fishermen of the Sacramento River, and the American fishermen of the mountain lakes and streams all add their product to make up the tons of fish daily consumed or packed in San Francisco. But the Italians do most of the fishing for the city, doing a deal of hard and dangerous work, and earning the short leisure they so much enjoy. Much has been written about the picturesqueness of the Italians and their lateen-rigged boats occupying the fishermen's wharf and the sea-wall market, but little has ever been said about the practical side of their business. They are not always engaged in lounging on the decks of their pretty boats, smoking cigarettes, and gossiping volubly, or mending their nets on the sunny side of the wharf. There are so many of their boats—265 make use of the new wharf—that there are always enough of them in the slip to give the casual observer the common impression that their chief end and aim is to make that part of the water-front look as much as possible like the Bay of Naples.

Each of the 265 fishing-boats above-mentioned is owned in partnership by the crew that works it. These crews range from three to six men in number, and altogether they have about \$35,000 invested in their boats and fishing-tackle. The largest crews are not always carried by the largest boats, as the character of the fishing a boat is used for, rather than its size, determines the number of its crew. The boats on which line-fishing is done carry six men, while the net fishing boats carry three or four. The amateur fisherman, who finds one rod and line quite as much as he has the skill to attend to properly, will agree that six men are none too many for a boat from which 7,000 hooks and lines are thrown. This is the number of hooks one of the large-sized boats casts when it is out for rock-cod and kindred fish.

The net-boats, which cast for tomcod, flounders, soles, and anything else their meshes will hold, go outside from fifty to a hundred miles. In summer they run down as far as Monterey Bay, and in winter they go farther north than Tomales Bay. The little craft are carefully prepared for each journey out to sea. Nets are overhauled, mended, and carefully laid; hooks are baited, and lines coiled; the false bottoms are taken out and scrubbed; everything pertaining to the work in hand is made snug and ship-shape; and then the provisions for a three or four

days' trip are laid in. This last is to the Italian a labor of love. Big, round loaves of bread, numerous demijohns of red wine, coffee, fresh meat, and salt fish—salt fish, when tons of fresh fish are to be caught!—are stowed in the larder, and charcoal for the little cooking furnace is always taken. But this fare is not all. If the weather permits, the boats during the trip are run in near shore, and a landing is made by the small boat at some convenient ranch where eggs, butter, milk, and chickens can be bought or exchanged for fresh fish. These fishermen live well and drink enormous quantities of red wine. Their duties generally keep them wet through whenever they are on deck, and they feel the need of something warming when they go below to the snug little forecandle, where dry clothing and the little furnace are not always enough to counteract the effect of the cold and wet on deck. The trips outside cannot be prolonged over three or four days, for the goods they drag from the depths are perishable, and a run in to the market must be made whether the forward hold is filled or only half filled with fish.

When the wharf is reached the fish are assorted, placed in the small open boxes such as are commonly seen in the fish-market stalls, weighed, marked, and piled up in the market on the wharf, ready for the next morning's sales. The wharf fish-market is the earliest-opened place of business in the city. Every week-day it is opened between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, except on Friday, when the sale begins at 1 o'clock in the morning. The market men and peddlers are the only purchasers. Caterers for hotels and big restaurants are commonly supposed to buy at the wharf market, but this is a mistake, as that market sells only to middlemen. Each boat has a representative in the market, and every Saturday night he divides the proceeds of the week's sales among his partners. The sales of fish at this market amount to 50,000 pounds per day, and sometimes more on Friday morning and somewhat less upon other mornings.

The Italian Fishermen's Association rents the wharf from the State, and each boat is assessed a dollar a month to pay the rent and other expenses incident to the place. Besides the market the association maintains a "boiler-house," where the nets and lines of the fishermen are boiled with oak bark, and has means for hauling the boats out of the slip and on the wharf up a broad gangway leading down into the water. Although the new slip and wharf are more commodious than the old, the Italians do not like the place well, and for a characteristic reason: it is more exposed, and therefore more windy and cold. They do not growl at the wind and water and cold while outside in their boats, but in port they want calm and warmth, where cigarette smoking and gossiping may be indulged in under the most favorable circumstances. But this objection will be obviated in time, as the new land made by the filling in of the sea-wall and back of it will soon be built up with warehouses, and the present quarters will be well sheltered.