

FRANCE'S SEA-FISHING.

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SEA-FISHING is sea-fishing all the world over, and whether the baits dangle beneath the shadow of fir-trees mirrored in the Baltic, or amid encrusted galleys in Mediterranean deeps, or in the

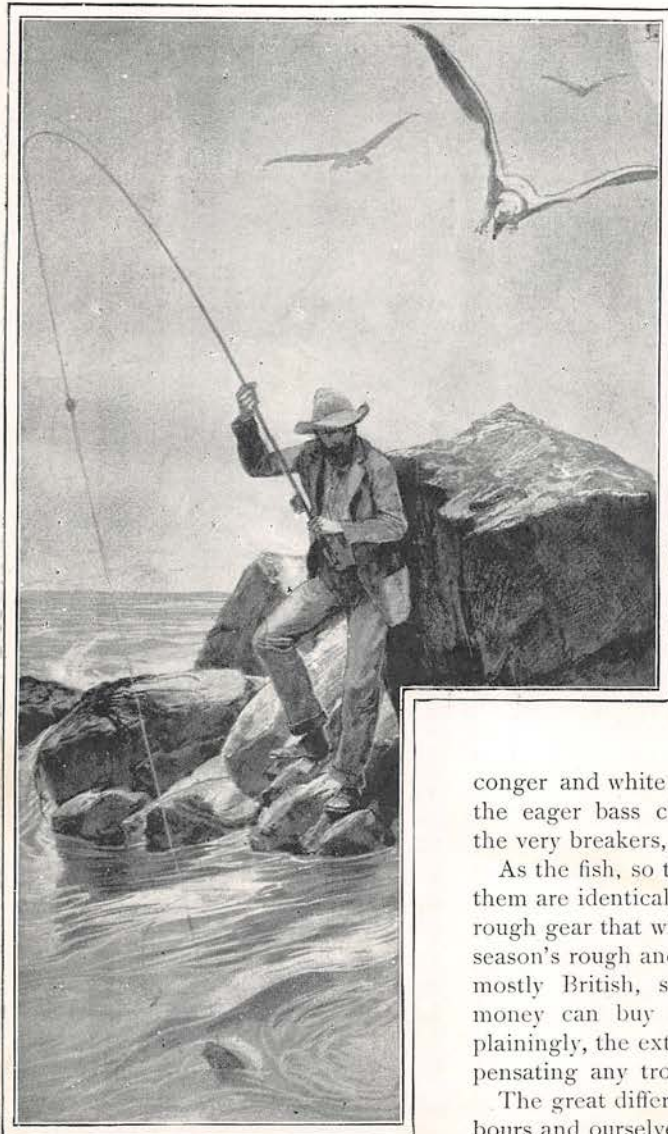
swirling rock-pools off Hobart, the sea-fisherman exercises the same patience, enjoys the same isolation, owns to the same absorption in the business of the moment, as any day-tripper catching flat-fish from Southend pier.

The wondrous coast of Brittany bears, like the sister peninsula of Cornwall, the impress of legend and tradition. The sea-fowl that cackle on the rocky islets off Ploumanach speak the same language as those that shriek o'er Cornish wrecks. The sardines of Douarnez and Cancale will be the next year's pilchards of St. Ives and Mevagissey, or such of them, at least, as escape the meshes of seine and drift-net. And in the rocks there lurk the same black

conger and white conger and bream, and the eager bass chases its living food to the very breakers, just as in Cornwall.

As the fish, so the methods of capturing them are identical. The professional uses rough gear that will bear the strain of the season's rough and smooth; the amateur, mostly British, selects the finest tackle money can buy and renews it uncomplainingly, the extra sport more than compensating any trouble and outlay.

The great difference between our neighbours and ourselves—and if I lay stress on so apparently trifling a distinction, it is



"TO BE OR NOT TO BE."

because we do well to take note of these national traits—is that we merely waste, whereas they waste and replenish. The great work of stocking depleted waters, which in this country is done only in a playful way by sportsmen and for sportsmen, is, all along the coast of Brittany and farther south, taken quite seriously as a public duty.

Scientific men of experience and enthusiasm pass months on isolated parts of that rocky coast, studying the best

terrible, and, knowing the Cornish coast in all its moods, I can believe it.

In calm weather, however, it is possible to get admirable fishing a mile or two from the coast, and perhaps the conger-fishing stands out in one's memory as the most famous. The sea-bed must be uniformly rocky—I speak without access to the charts—on that coast, for wherever we anchored I could be certain of several conger, and conger mean rocks. Not every sportsman, it is true, fancies conger-

fishing, or, for that matter, any kind of sea-fishing. It is coarse, say the sapient; it is clumsy; it is devoid of art. And the sapient are utterly wrong. Comparatively, perhaps, there is a boisterous roughness about this pastime, but as for the absence of art, I will



FISHING FOR CONGER: A CATCH.

methods of propagating the precious fish in strict accordance with natural conditions. If we all jog along as we go now, France and America should be in a fair way of supplying London with fish in another fifty years.

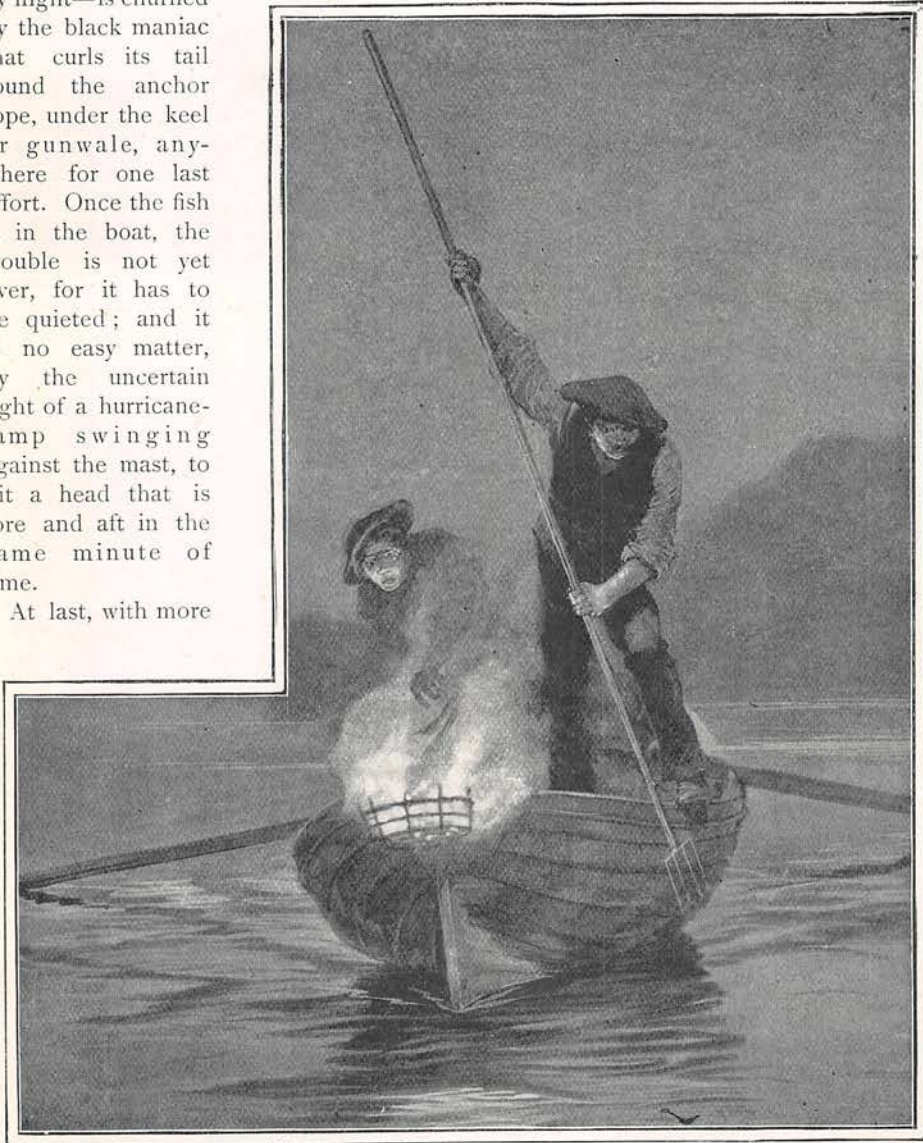
The amateur may, so far as a retrospect of four years serves me, find off that coast much the same fish as he would expect in South Cornwall. Only, the wind and weather being exceedingly subject to caprice, and the havens of refuge being somewhat far apart, it behoves the angler-yachtsman to keep an eye on the elements. I never actually saw a storm on that coast, for my visit was made from the sea side, and yachting visitors take pains to be elsewhere in doubtful weather. But I understand that the fury of the waves is

warrant that a conger—note that the corresponding capture of eels in fresh water is barely classed as sport—is as wary and as easily alarmed as most fish, as quick to resent a taint in the bait, or to vanish at the touch of an unaccustomed hand twenty fathoms up the line. The freshest of bait, be it sardine or squid, must cover the hook, and the latter must be left motionless on the rough bottom. Several lines are used from one boat, and every few minutes the skilful fisherman tries each, letting his thumb and forefinger raise it imperceptibly not more than half an inch. Should there come a faint responding shiver, the hand tightens firmly on the line, without, however, moving it until the strain comes from the farther end.

Then, and not till then, the fisherman strikes well home; there is a terrific hauling, and presently the moonlit water—needless to say all conger-fishing worth the name is enjoyed by night—is churned by the black maniac that curls its tail round the anchor rope, under the keel or gunwale, anywhere for one last effort. Once the fish is in the boat, the trouble is not yet over, for it has to be quieted; and it is no easy matter, by the uncertain light of a hurricane-lamp swinging against the mast, to hit a head that is fore and aft in the same minute of time.

At last, with more

the hardy natives know nothing; and the summer visitors from the capital would rather dally with chimeric gudgeon on the banks of Seine. The majority of English



SPEARING BY NIGHT.

or less trouble, the end is at hand, the line is once more over the side, and fresh spoils come to the fisherman's basket.

Of this fishing for pastime, however,

visitors, too, prefer sketching the fisher-folk to catching the fish. So the latter, barring the sardines, lead a fairly free existence, undisturbed by man and his infernal machines.