



The UPS and DOWNS OF A DAYS FISHING

A KORERO Report

SEVERAL MONTHS ago several fishermen from the fleet at Island Bay,

Wellington, put on their best suits, packed cases, and caught the express for Auckland. For weeks they were away from their homes. In Auckland they were paid £9 a week, provided with meals and accommodation, and to the local fishermen they gave lessons in fishing. It wasn't that the Auckland fishermen hadn't been landing good catches, it wasn't that they didn't know their job; but for certain types of fish, groper in particular, it was thought that if a change was made to methods used off Wellington results might be more successful and the market provided with a more plentiful supply. It is agreed the experiment was a success.

Except for butterfish and crayfish, all the fishing on the Cook Strait banks is with lines; with such deep water and a constant rip of current and tide the use of nets is not practicable. And that line fishing has become a highly developed art that can be employed only after sound training and years of practice. To those who weren't qualified there would be risk to boat and to person, but no fish. The "Wild Duck," a forty-footer, and her crew of three men and a boy know all about the game. We spent a day with that boat and its crew. It wasn't an enjoyable day—but it was instructive. Sometimes the fishermen earn big money; the day we spent in Cook Strait shows they

do not earn it either easily or pleasantly. Nor is their work without risk.

The boy of the crew had a broken wrist. So the "Wild Duck" was short-handed. Crates of mackerel and a few precious boxes of sardines were on the deck for use as bait. Sharp meat-choppers sliced those fish into 2 in. chunks, the baiting of the lines began as soon as we left our moorings. On each line there are about ninety hooks, and that day we were using nine lines. The skipper, once we were past the breakwater and the threat of rocks, steadied the wheel with his back and helped his two mates with the work. We watched the baiting. And we wondered if that Cook Strait sea was going to be rough.

The crew talked as they baited. In the paper that morning there was a report of a fishing-boat which had been thrown 20 ft. into the air when a whale came up for air beneath it. There had been a flip of a giant tail, a dinghy had been smashed, and the crew were lucky their boat hadn't been wrecked. The men on the "Wild Duck" were sceptical. To them it didn't seem possible that a launch could hit the water after a rise of 20 ft. without breaking its back. There were witnesses, the report continued, but it was too good to believe.

Once off Island Bay two launches had been busily fishing when suddenly one of them lurched violently. A whale was gently rubbing its back against the side. It disappeared. The men sat down to have