

## 5.—THE SEA AND COAST FISHERIES.

BY DANIEL T. CHURCH.

Personally I am a commercial fisherman and have been connected with the fisheries from my youth to the present time. It is my belief that fish that live and spawn in tide water are inexhaustible and that no mode of capture yet invented in the form of seines and traps is able to make any appreciable difference in the supply. Floods and droughts of all tide-water fish are the rule and the fluctuations would be just as marked if man never took a fish from the water.

Thirty years ago it was claimed in England, as it is in the United States to-day, that improved methods of taking fish with nets, seines, and other contrivances were diminishing the supply of fish, and the Queen appointed James Caird, Thomas Henry Huxley, and George Shaw Lefevre to inquire into the condition of the sea fisheries of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Their conclusion, after three years' exhaustive inquiry, was expressed as follows:

We find the laws relating to sea fisheries to be complicated, confused, and unsatisfactory; many restrictions, even of late date, are never enforced; many would be extremely injurious to the interests of the fishermen and of the community if they were enforced, and, with respect to these and others, the highest legal authorities are unable to decide where and in what precise sense they are operative.

We advise that all acts of Parliament which profess to regulate or restrict the modes of fishing pursued in the open sea be repealed, and that unrestricted freedom of fishing be permitted hereafter.

For the present we advise that all acts of Parliament which profess to regulate or restrict the modes of fishing pursued inshore be repealed, with the exceptions, purely on grounds of police, of the local act regulating pilchard fishing at St. Ives, and, for that part of Loch Fyne which lies above Otter Spit, of the act prohibiting trawling for herring in Scotland.

It may be instructive to consider the action of the Dutch government, the sea fisheries having been for three centuries a matter of care and prominent interest in Holland. Their present position is referred to in the following words of the King's speech at the opening of the legislative session of 1865-66: "The produce of the fisheries, both in sea and river, is most satisfactory."

Referring to the Dutch fisheries the English commissioners state:

Up to 1857 the Dutch fisheries were burdened with many restrictions intended for their protection and encouragement. The period within which herrings could be fished was limited. The places of fishing, the times, the nets, and the tackle were all under regulations. But the fishery languished and declined, and it was determined by the legislature to try the effect of another system. A law was passed in 1857 abolishing all restrictions, regulations, and enactments as to close time, trawls, nets, and lines. Every one was left free to fish the sea in any mode and at any time he deemed most advantageous, while a fishery commission was established to collect the statistics of the various fisheries and report annually to the legislature upon all matters affecting the interests of the fisheries.

The result has been a steady and continuous improvement. The last report of the commission shows greater anxiety to find new markets in foreign countries for the fish than about the prospects of an abundant catch. The commissioners conceive that the future prosperity of the Dutch fisheries will depend on a profitable outlet for the fish being found by a freer intercourse with neighboring countries. A return is given of the number of vessels employed in the herring fishery at Scheveningen and their annual catch, which rises from 24,969,000 in 1858 to 33,535,000 in 1864. The export of cured herring from all parts of the country had risen from 30,919,271 "stuks" in 1858 to 42,698,000 in 1864.

In 1870 it was claimed that fish on the New England coast were being depleted by the use of traps and seines, and a determined effort was made by the legislatures of Massachusetts and Rhode Island to pass laws to suppress them, but it failed, and in spite of their use the floods and droughts of fish have happened with their usual regularity.

During the year 1890 scup were as plenty as ever known since their appearance in 1800, and the following figures are instructive, showing conclusively that for the last ten years they have more than held their own with unrestricted trap fishing:

The number of barrels shipped from Newport were:

Year.	Barrels.	Year.	Barrels.
1882.....	8,389	1888.....	13,337
1883.....	8,865	1889.....	17,597
1884.....	16,062	1890.....	7,696
1885.....	15,263	1891.....	17,562
1886.....	14,586	1892.....	25,253
1887.....	14,400		

In 1892 tautog were exceptionally plenty, and in 1893 squeteague were plentier than ever before known.

Sam B. Miller, who has had over fifty years' experience in Fulton fish market, has sent me the following letter, which is instructive in this connection:

D. T. CHURCH:

DEAR SIR: Your letter at hand asking for information about blackfish. Well, I will say that they are very plenty and very cheap. I have no recollection of seeing them more plentiful in the last fifty years and at the end of the season, for shipping them in barrels. The smaacks began to arrive with live ones, until at one time it was estimated there were alive in the dock more than 100,000 pounds. But they are out at a much less price than any year for the last ten years. Bluefish and weakfish have been through the season very plenty. I never knew weakfish as plenty and as cheap in my time; 1 cent per pound was considered a good price for many days, and many tons were sold for less.

S. B. MILLER.

From 1870 to 1893 similar floods and droughts have happened to every fish known to our coast fisheries.

The menhaden fishery, one of the most important in the country, is being ruined by the stringent laws enforced against it by several of the seaboard States. Millions of barrels of menhaden have been in Buzzards Bay this season with fishermen and factories idle, because Massachusetts will not allow them to be taken with nets in that bay, resulting in disaster to invested capital and labor and fishermen depending on that fishery for their daily bread; also in a short crop of oil, causing our oil merchants to send to Japan for fish oil of an inferior quality at a higher price. The Maine menhaden fishermen had a similar experience in Maine in 1891, causing a heavy loss of money, which badly crippled those engaged in that fishery in that State. Last year the State of Delaware arrested and made trouble for the menhaden fishermen in Delaware Bay and so did the State of New York in the head of Long Island Sound.

In the light of the above facts I would suggest that this Fishery Congress recommend to the Congress of the United States the appointment of the head of the U. S. Fish Commission, Eugene G. Blackford, and Tarleton H. Bean, to inquire into the condition of the sea and shore fisheries of the United States, with powers similar to those given to the English commission, and have them report their conclusions and recommendations the same as the English commission did at the end of theirs.