

25.—FISH-CULTURE IN BELGIUM.

By Hon. E. WILLEQUET.

[Extract from a speech on the subject of the fisheries delivered before the Belgian Chamber of Representatives.*]

There is another point which relates to the fisheries, and which is too important to be treated laterally, and, so to speak, in an incidental manner—I mean the pollution of the water. This is a very serious thing, and should be the object of the immediate attention of the Government and of the Chamber. There take place incredible things, unworthy of a civilized country. The drinkable waters which are used in the manufacture of beer are continually corrupted by chemical and other substances without any of the authorities seeming to notice it. It is a veritable poisoning, and, because it is only spoken of in connection with fish, no attention is paid to a mischief which is in reality very great. This emptying of poison into the water of our rivers certainly exerts a most sad and cruel influence on the public health. Many maladies of which the origin is not known have their source in this pollution which is carelessly, shamelessly, and with impunity practiced in our country.

Yesterday, in considering the subject of agriculture, an honorable member spoke of the necessity of pointing out to our agriculturists new fields upon which they may enter, in view of the revolution produced by the introduction of cheap foreign cereals. It is undeniable at present that the production of cereals should be abandoned in a great measure by our country people, and that there is urgency for them to find another outlet for their activity.

And in this connection let it be permitted to me to point out to the farmers who have lands suitable for being submerged the very general use in Germany of alternating ponds. It is perfectly possible to combine with other rural labors the cultivation of a pond which, every second or third year, can be restored to cultivation, after having served for the multiplication and fattening of fish. This method is excellent for the fields, as by its means the land is without expense furnished with a most excellent manure.

I pass to another field of activity for those who interest themselves with fishery questions. I particularly desire to say something in respect to the mixed fishery—that in the tide-water of our rivers. Heretofore there has been no thought except regarding the fluvial fishery, properly so called—that is to say, the fishery in our rivers and in the streams tributary to our rivers. There is another fishery which occupies the middle ground between the maritime fishery and the fluvial fishery, that which is carried on in the lowest parts of our rivers, in the Escaut and

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in the Meuse. Now, this is a source of wealth which is most completely slighted, and yet is exceedingly valuable. I could attest by statements emanating from the highest authorities on the subject that, with a slight expense, these water-courses could be peopled at will with excellent fishes. In America this is done every day. The great Commission of Fisheries established by the United States Government has led to positive results, which can be verified at any time, and which, if attained in our country, would permit the stocking of the tide-waters of the Escaut and the Meuse with river herring, shad, and still other fishes.

I mention the shad: we have in our country only an insipid shad, generally disdained—I mean the common shad. But there are others which are superior to it; there is one especially, the mere name of which makes one's mouth water—the *Alosa sapidissima*. It is cultivated abundantly in America, and could easily be so in our rivers.

There already exists a treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands in regard to the fisheries of the Escaut. It would therefore be very easy for our Government to act in concert with the Dutch Government. I do not ask, however, that negotiations be engaged in which will absorb very valuable time, I ask that our Government, after the example of what has been done elsewhere, shall take the initiative in this measure, without regard to what is done by her neighbors. Let her engage in a work which will profit her; and should she sow benefits around without deriving any profit herself, she would in that only follow great examples and make an important beginning.

On the subject of this special question of the fisheries, new relations have recently sprung into being between different governments. One notices a reciprocal kindness and disinterestedness and eagerness to oblige which hitherto have not been the characteristic feature of their reciprocal relations. So we may observe to-day between the United States, France, Switzerland, Italy, and England exchanges of fish-eggs and of fry which attest a cordiality most remarkable and most profitable. Not a year passes that the North Americans do not make important shipments of fish in every direction; and they not only make presents of them to other countries, but [sometimes] send persons to accompany each lot to give them all necessary attention, in order that they may arrive at their destination in the best condition. Two recent facts are of a nature to show you how much these new customs are developing.

It is from Switzerland that I draw my first example. There are in this country four piscicultural establishments, carried on under the exclusive dominion of the ideas of which I have just been speaking. A little below the falls of the Rhine, at Schaffouse, is situated the establishment of Neuhausen, in which a very large number of salmon are raised, purely and simply to be put into the Rhine without regard to who will take the fish and profit by them. Not far from it, on the other side of the river, in the canton of Zurich, there are three establishments of the same nature: one at Dachsen, opposite Neuhausen; the second,

a little lower, at Glattfelden; the third at Meilen, on the Lake of Zurich. There, as at Schaffouse, the products are placed in the Rhine and in the lake without any anxiety to know who will be profited by this benefaction. Notice that all these establishments were founded and are carried on at the expense of the cantons. These are examples which I would desire to see followed. I would be charmed to have this happy rivalry establish itself between us and our neighbors, and I hope that no prejudice will arise on account of the sacrifice, really insignificant, which we would have to make. I will add that a good deed never goes unrewarded, even on the earth. There is a natural law by virtue of which the fish return, however long the journeys which they make, to the place of their birth. The fact is everywhere verified to such an extent that it can be regarded as unquestionable. It results thence that the fish will be found again at the place where they were put into the water, unless untimely dams happen to impede their progress. It follows thence that the sacrifices which I recommend would not be made in vain—they would lead to direct results.

A fact of the same kind presents itself in my district. Since the enactment of the new fishery law the founding at Gand of a piscicultural association has been vaguely contemplated. Well, would you think it? The United States of America, who have agents everywhere, it is true, learning of this, have offered, through the great Commission of Fisheries of that country, to send us a fish that we have not and which is distinguished by peculiar merits. This fish has been selected for us* by the learned men of America, with special solicitude, because it is particularly suitable to the muddy waters of the Escaut. It would be of no use to us to receive trout or salmon; they would make a sorry figure in our rivers. Animated with broad and generous intentions, these men on the other side of the ocean, devoted to science and to humanity, have chosen what answers to our wants, and thus show us that for them there is no obstacle which can prevent the propagating of a good idea or the doing of a good action. You will read, one of these days, in the papers, gentlemen, that there have come to us from North America fishes for the basin of the Escaut.

These principles of solidarity, by enlarging the ideas, will bear important fruits, far beyond the limited point of which I am speaking.

* It is proposed by the United States Fish Commissioner to send some catfish to Belgium this fall, as being well adapted to its muddy and sluggish waters. See correspondence in Bulletin for 1882, vol. 2, p. 153.—C. W. S.