

133.—FALLING OFF IN THE FISHERIES OF MALTA.

By JOHN WORTHINGTON.

[Dispatch No. 97 to the State Department.]

The fish question has come to be a very serious one for the inhabitants of these islands. Year by year the supply of fish has been gradually falling off in Maltese waters, until less than one-half the number of fishermen are engaged in the industry now that were engaged in it twenty-five years ago. Fish having become comparatively scarce, the prices have advanced proportionately, and not a few of the poorer class of the population are unable to afford themselves fish at all. The fish that are caught in the deep water off the shores are of excellent quality, but of migratory habits. When, however, the seasons arrive for the taking of the better grades of fish, it is found that the yearly catch continues to decrease, and at such a rate that considerable anxiety has arisen lest the supply will ultimately fail entirely unless measures are taken not only to prevent further depopulation, but also to preserve, cultivate, and increase the yield. I believe the bays and coasts of Malta are well adapted for the propagation of fish, but proper and intelligent measures need adoption and accomplishment before they can be made to supply the demand. With the end in view of increasing and fostering the fisheries of the island, a fish commission has been formed in Malta.

I have received an official communication, dated Valetta, Malta, January 7, 1885, from Walter Hely-Hutchinson, lieutenant-governor and chief secretary of the Government of Malta, which is as follows:

"A commission is at present sitting in Malta with a view of inquiring into the fishery regulations.

"The committee has to be supplied with any information that can be obtained on the subject of the preservation and culture of marine fish which may be available.

"I am given to understand that instructive and interesting information on this subject can be obtained from America.

"I am directed by his excellency the governor to ask whether you would be in a position to furnish me with any such information.

"I assure your Department that any information it may furnish the Malta Government on this important subject will be gratefully received and highly appreciated by the governor and the Maltese people."

If it is within the province of the Department to obtain from the United States Fish Commission, or from other sources, any information which may meet this request, I shall be happy to receive and impart it to the Government of Malta.

UNITED STATES CONSULATE,

Malta, January 10, 1885.