

THE FISHERIES OF IRELAND

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The Fisheries of Ireland by J. C. Bloomfield

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J. C. BLOOMFIELD

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IRELAND**

International Fisheries Exhibition

LONDON, 1883

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BY

J. C. BLOOMFIELD

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CONFERENCE ON 30TH JULY, 1883.

THE EARL OF MILLTOWN in the Chair.

IRISH FISHERIES AS AN ENGLISH SUPPLY.

THIS great gathering of fishermen and fish consumers of all nations will be more or less taken advantage of by every civilised community to gauge the opportunities and shortcomings in the development of God's greatest gift of sustenance to man—a harvest to be gathered without sowing, and, under infinitesimal restrictions, to be annually used to *the utmost capacity of natural appetite without fear of annihilation.*

To add my mite of information on the subject from Ireland's point of view is now my task.

The words of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh at the earliest meeting of the promoters, where he specially alluded to the results which he apprehended would flow from their labours in the stimulation of Irish fishing, are conclusive on the side of what he expected they would be able to do for the coast population in that country; but this is indeed only a small and local element in the consideration of the subject, the main expostulation including much more serious and Imperial interests.

I have had in preparing this paper to consider closely the Report of the Inspectors of Irish Fisheries, and I must say a more disheartening job I have never undertaken,

although they have made the most they could of a weak case, and put as good a colouring as possible to make the pale face bear the light before a national audience. It would take me long to do it justice, but I will give you an idea of what the country is losing.

In page 4—"Herring Fisheries," 1882—statistics have been taken from the following places *only*:—Howth, Arklow, Kinsale, Greenore, Ardglass, Omeath, and Warrenpoint, Kilkeel, Amalong, Courtown and Balbriggan, from which points were captured 70,457 mease, at a total value of £78,860.

Of course you will imagine that these are scattered denominations, representing the attacks upon the herring, *all round* the coast of Ireland. *No such thing*; look at the map behind me, where I have marked them *all*.

But, to make things worse, when I refer to the report of 1879, I find that *these same points* are *there* declared to be *then*, as *now*, the *ONLY* places from which regular and authentic returns *can* be procured! *Worse again*—I *there find* that the value taken in '79, from these *exceptionally favoured* places, which make up the Irish contribution to English supply is considerably over that of 1882. Well, but what proportion of our coast do these places represent to calculate this? We must turn to the divisions, and *there* I find that, giving the *whole possible area* in which these fishings could be defined, the mileage amounts on the east coast to 223 miles, and Kinsale to 110 miles, making altogether 333 miles, leaving besides four divisions—the length of which is not given in the report—2337 *miles of coast with no return*. With these Government statistics available must we not charitably imagine that the Treasury cannot have read them, when opposing Mr. Blake in a pitiful *grant of our own money* towards carrying out the recommendations of the

Inspectors, in developing such an accessory to employment and contentment in Ireland as well as additional national supply? Perhaps our good friend Professor Brown Goode will tell us what 2337 miles of coast teeming with fish would mean, in a value sense, to the people who breed shad and raise carp remuneratively in mud baths. I have no time even to hint at the aggregate amount of loss when we add mackerel, cod, and all the edible fish, besides herring, in the length of coast stated. I will but touch on the mackerel, as I have little time to emphasise what we have learned in the herring report. In the captures at all the stations, amounting to 199,779 boxes, £128,473 value, the *little* fishery pier of Baltimore springs into a prosperous station in a remarkable manner, rising *in two years* from 9845 boxes to 56,643, making, with the established fishing harbour of Kinsale, the amount of 177,000 out of an Irish total of 199,779, leaving but 22,779 boxes for all the rest of Ireland—close on 3000 miles! The fish were there when the 9000 boxes represented the whole take in 1880.

How is this? Simply a pier was built, costing £4000, by Government, and the people (who could not fish before, and so had no money to start) found a patron, who advanced the necessary funds, and see the result. The Report also shows that turbot, soles, mackerel, cod, haddock, herring, whiting, sprats, lobsters, crabs and divers coarse fish abound in every division; and it will be remembered that the old theory hitherto commonly obtaining, that the shoals of herring and mackerel passed along the whole coast, has been rudely shattered at these Conferences, *so* that the utilization of new fishing ground does not only give an extra catch to the human congener of the herring-loving cod, but, encountering a new supply, is like the discovery of an *original source of national wealth and sustenance*; and

however science may be required in England to overhaul the experience of the United States in propagating sea-fish—and I heartily hope science will insist upon its legitimate rights in this respect—neither science nor law founded upon it are wanting to give the country knowledge, *if* it feels that it wants fish, and as a natural sequence that it should be had *if possible*.

The means for carrying on the industry of course is confined in extent to a scale consistent with the demand which has hitherto been purely local on the coast-line in question, and the reason sufficiently explained in the above Reports, namely, an absence of means of transit, and in many places a want of safety piers and small refuge harbours for boats. Let me shortly quote again a passage or two from this important official document :—

“INSPECTORS OF IRISH FISHERIES.—The importance of securing facilities for transport to the great markets cannot be over-rated—they exercise the greatest influence upon the fisheries of any locality—as a rule securing to the fishermen more satisfactory prices for their fish, and bringing them in direct communication with the large buyers.

“The coastguard officer considers the fishing in the locality to be excellent, but thoroughly undeveloped. The drawback to the fishery is the great want of the means of transit or want of curing stations, but that energetic fishermen, not fishing spasmodically, would make a good profit. The shoals of fish off the coast, particularly herrings and mackerel, are sometimes enormous, from which local fishermen get little profit.

“The great drawback to any fishing being prosecuted on an extended scale in this or any other similar locality is the great distance between the place of capture and a line of railway ; at present, the nearest station is Tralee, situate

twenty-seven miles from Dingle, and about thirty-five from the fishing-ground.

"We cannot over-rate the importance of providing safe and convenient harbours wherever practicable, as without proper shelter for the boats it is not to be expected that there can be any great development of the fisheries."

Besides the above, in the Appendix to this paper will be found the denomination of 70 points on the coast where the Inspectors have unanimously recommended fishery piers to be constructed. To Lord Waterford's opinion, that "there was as great wealth in the seas of Ireland as in the seas that washed this country," I can add the testimony of the Minister, Mr. Shaw-Lefevre, who admitted this but hazarded the officially informed addenda, that the elements were against our securing the prize, though he did not explain how the law of storms, coeval with Cabinet sympathy, kept an eccentric puff in hand for my poor country, whilst refraining from interfering with the Norsemen of Shetland or the fishermen of Newfoundland.

I will not weary my audience by going over the ground so exhaustively trod in these Conferences by such men as Huxley, Brown Goode, and others, fully proving to the fair mind the inexhaustible supply the seas afford. It is enough for me that all authorities unite in proclaiming that the Irish coasts are not exceptional as resorts for the vast shoals we have heard so much about in recent interesting papers; but ere I leave the consideration of our coast fisheries, I would earnestly ask my audience to make a special inspection of the United States annex, with a view to appreciate thoroughly the question, and not to forget to pause before the jars which hold the produce of such refuse of the cod as its head and backbone turned into a valuable agricultural recuperative, while the edible