

INDIAN FISH AND FISHING

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Indian Fish and Fishing by Francis Day

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FRANCIS DAY

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International Fisheries Exhibition

LONDON, 1883

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BY

FRANCIS DAY, F.L.S.

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ONE great purpose which many persons have anticipated from the International Fisheries Exhibition is a full investigation into the condition of fisheries in general ; the causes which have conduced to their prosperity or deterioration, with the suggestion of rules for their future administration. At present British fish economists are divided into two schools, which may be thus defined :—

I. That Government should permit our marine fisheries to be untrammelled by legislative restrictions, everyone should be permitted to help himself to fish as he pleases under the belief that the stock in the sea is inexhaustible.

II. That Government regulations in the working of sea fisheries is advisable in order to prevent undue destruction of the spawn and young fish, on the supposition that our inshore fisheries, as well as those of some trawled forms, are being unduly depleted.

12-15-97 The following pages on the "Fisheries of India," mainly relate to the condition they were in a few years since as ascertained by personal investigations. Some of the obstacles under which they laboured have been removed, while others, it is hoped, are shortly to be remedied ; but the result of the incidence of the salt-tax on marine fisheries, and the want of restrictions on fresh-water ones, are well demonstrated.

The length of the sea-board of India and Burmah has been

computed at about 4611 English miles, throughout the whole of which extent the waters are more abundantly stocked with fish than are those around the British Isles; either due to the greater reproductive powers of the species, or more probably to the less amount of depredation committed by man. While predaceous fish-consuming animals, as porpoises, sharks, rays, skates and sea perches, are far more numerous in the tropics than in these more northern climes. But it is a remarkable fact that due to some cause these fisheries which should afford a plentiful supply of food along the sea-coast are practically nearly unworked, except near large centres of population, or where cheap salt can be procured wherewith to cure the captures. This food harvest, up to within the last few years, has been comparatively untouched even while famines were devastating the contiguous shores.

Maritime fisheries, irrespective of affording food, ought likewise to be serviceable, as producing isinglass, fish oils and manures, as well as necessitating the purchase of materials for boat-building, the manufacture of nets, hooks and lines, the carriage of produce, &c. The principal modes made use of for utilising fish for food along the sea-coasts of India and Burmah may be considered under the following heads: (1) Fresh fish, how far it can be conveyed inland? (2) Dried fish and its varieties. (3) Cured or salted fish, and how prepared?

How far can fresh fish be conveyed inland? In examining this question, if the employment of ice or salt is omitted, the distance sea fish can be carried inland, while fresh, depends upon several circumstances. The season is one important factor, as during the hot months putrefaction commences very rapidly, while some forms, especially the immature, the herrings, and the siluroids or scaleless fishes,

decompose more quickly than others ; and the same result follows close packing, or want of protection from the full force of the sun's rays. Usually, fish are not landed until after sunrise, while those brought on shore of an evening are generally kept where they are until the next morning, coolies being averse to travelling after dark. On the other hand, facilities of carriage may exist, as railways, water communications passing inland, or arrangements made for this purpose. As a general rule, inland places having no special facilities for carriage do not receive uncured sea fish in a wholesome condition upwards of ten miles from the beach where they were landed. Should, however, the fish be first opened and cleaned, some salt rubbed in, and care taken in their conveyance (as warding off the sun's rays), they may be carried considerably further. But salt being very expensive is very seldom employed for this purpose, or else a very slight amount is used, and putrefaction has often set in prior to the fish being disposed of for human food. While ice is only prepared or stored at large centres of population, and at such localities a ready market exists for all the fisherman's captures.

What varieties of dried fish exist in India? In many places along the shores of British India, especially where the salt-tax is rigorously enforced, it is usual for the purpose of laying in a store for future supply or for inland trade, simply to dry fish in the sun. This can be done with smaller and thinner forms, as *Ambassis*, *Equula*, the Bombay duck (*Harpodon nehereus*), many of the herrings and small varieties or immature forms, but not so well with the larger fish ; however, even from these last, slices may be cut and sun-dried. In some localities small fish are first buried in the sea-sand, in order to obtain a little saline substance, and subsequently sun-dried. In damp weather such articles

rapidly decompose, while in the hot months they are attacked by innumerable insects.

Lastly, how are fish salted? The processes employed are chiefly divisible into the two following :—(1) Those cured with monopoly salt, or salt which has paid the Government tax; and (2) those prepared with salt-earth, or spontaneous and untaxed salt. I propose first referring to salt and its cost, for wherever the fisherman or fish-curer can obtain this condiment at a cheap rate, there marine fisheries flourish; where it is dear, his occupation is destroyed, except for the purpose of supplying daily wants, and a small surplus for salting or sun-drying. This will be most easily explained by referring to a few districts in detail.

The amount of salted and dried fish exported by sea from Indian ports was as follows (the value is given in £, computing one rupee at two shillings) :—

Five Years ending	From Sind. Value in £.	From South Canara. Value in £.	From Malabar. Value in £.	From Coromandel Coast. Value in £.
1857-58	8,472	No returns.	No returns.	No returns.
1862-63	13,064	"	26,272	"
1867-68	18,725	6,969	48,207	1,753
1872-73	22,944	14,921	90,849	4,513

The duty in Sind upon salt was 2s., or less, a maund of 82½ lb. avoirdupois, during the entire period comprised in the foregoing table.

The first great increase in salting fish in that province occurred in 1860-61, in which year the duty was raised in the contiguous Presidency of Bombay from 2s. to 2s. 6d. a maund. The next spurt of this trade, in Sind, was in 1864-65, when the salt-duty in Bombay was again raised from 2s. 6d. to 3s. a maund. Possibly the importations into

that Presidency from Sind would subsequently have been even more considerable, but Government decided, in 1867, to admit all salt-fish from foreign ports, where no salt-duty exists, into British India free of duty, to the immense advantage of the Portuguese settlements and the Meckran coast, but completing the ruin of Indo-British fishermen and fish-curers, unless they were advantageously located.

In olden times, salt was allowed duty-free in British territory, for salting fish; but this enactment was repealed (year not ascertained), because the excise officers found that it assisted smuggling, and so necessitated keeping up a larger preventive staff than would otherwise be required.

The annual sales of Government or monopoly salt in the various districts on the Malabar coast of Madras, along with the value of the salted and dried fish exported by sea, are shown in the following table. The figures demonstrate that but very little, if indeed any, taxed salt was employed by the fish-curers; while in the native state of Cochin, the sale of salt in ten years, ending 1872-73, owing to augmented duty, was reduced by two-thirds, and it is a significant fact that it was during this very period the great increase in the amount of exported salt-fish began. In the contiguous British district of Chowghaut, although in the year 1872 £1067 8s. worth of salt-fish were exported, only £46 worth of monopoly salt was disposed of among the entire population.

The reason why the sale of taxed salt is not in proportion to the amount of salt-fish exported, appears capable of the following explanation. Due to a legal decision the people had become entitled to collect salt-earth in order to cure fish for their own consumption; but, there being no law restricting their disposing of any surplus they possessed, a large trade in selling salt-fish sprang up. This induced

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Years.	South Canara.		Cannanore.		Tellicherry.		Travancore and Cochin.	
	Fish. Value in £.	Salt Sold. Maunds.	Fish. Value in £.	Salt Sold. Maunds.	Fish. Value in £.	Salt Sold. Maunds.	Fish. Value in £.	Salt Sold. Maunds.
1863-1864	1,057	191,002	96	11,653	1,459	72,505	5,416	728,268
1864-1865	3,036	168,279	219	7,932	1,504	57,516	6,052	643,897
1865-1866	875	184,174	11	9,856	194	62,135	7,061	672,370
1866-1867	1,124	151,113	12	9,728	1,825	57,381	7,337	497,988
1867-1868	875	174,629	303	8,721	2,011	56,502	7,803	558,766
1868-1869	114	176,465	520	9,045	4,319	63,340	7,130	573,639
1869-1870	2,053	147,173	4,340	8,807	5,839	72,616	6,096	574,119
1870-1871	3,927	136,967	1,470	7,932	5,309	57,624	5,833	593,389
1871-1872	2,845	177,482	695	12,008	5,340	88,674	6,987	577,268
1872-1873	5,980	135,839	951	6,985	8,429	77,332	?	?