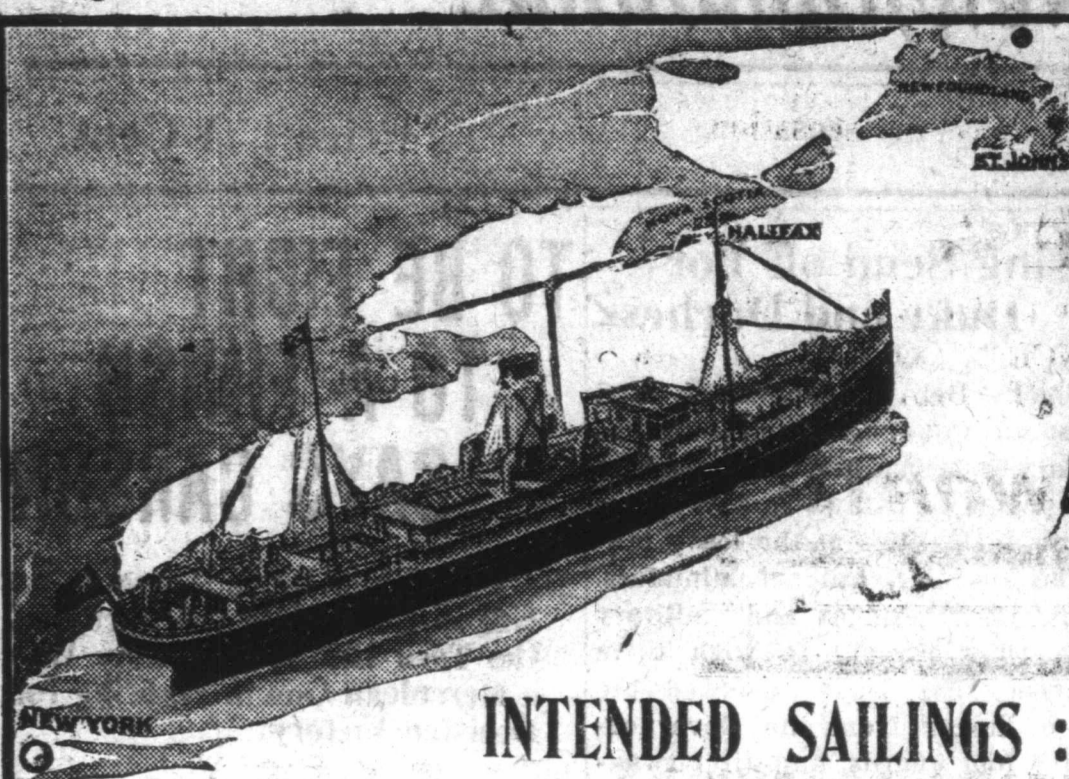


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## The Shortage of Fish in the United Kingdom and the Practicability of Obtaining a Supply from Nfld.

By Mr. H. C. Thomson, in a Lecture delivered in Grenfell Hall, Oct. 11.

The War has brought about a radical change in the British fisheries and a great scarcity of fish. This has been intensified by the adoption of compulsory service, there being fewer fishermen to catch fish, which will soon be too dear for any but the well-to-do.

That is a serious state of affairs, and every effort is being made to remedy it, consistently with naval defence. But fish cannot be got without men, and without boats, and both are wanted for sterner work. The only way to get fish now is to bring it in from outside sources, and efforts have been made for the last two years to show that it can be got from Newfoundland and to devise some means for getting it.

I have been asked to explain to you to-night with what measure of success; and to place before you such information as I have been able to gather regarding the present position of the fish trade in the United Kingdom, what the outlook for it is, and what prospect there is for Newfoundland fish to secure a place in the British markets.

And by fish I mean, of course, fresh fish, and fish of every kind—not merely cod.

During the Napoleonic wars, when food was very dear, people had to live largely upon fish, the thriftest, and cheapest food there is, and for other reasons besides those of economy, the statesmen of that day did all they could to bring it into general use.

A story is told of how Admiral Rodney was dining one day with the Prince Regent, and a dish of herrings was on the table. "Ah, Your Royal Highness," said he "I would that herrings could be on every table in the Kingdom. It would double the number of men for His Majesty's Navy."

"We must see what can be done," said the Prince, "and we will call them Rodneys," and so for some time herrings were known as "Rodneys."

During the present war the navy is just as important, and the price of food just as high as it was then, and the altered methods of naval war have prevented the same use being made of fish; indeed, in great measure they have stopped the use of it altogether.

The fisheries were crippled from the very start, the greater number of the fishermen and of the fishing boats being taken for mine sweeping, and other naval uses, and fishing being prohibited except in certain restricted areas.

The average quantity of fish sent daily to Billingsgate market soon fell from over 1,000 to about three hundred tons, and on some days it was less than that. This gives some idea of the diminution of the catch, for if there is a shortage at Billingsgate there is sure to be a greater shortage elsewhere.

The rich can still buy fish, though at enhanced prices, but it has passed quite out of the reach of the poor, who are suffering much distress from the loss of this cheap form of food, upon which in normal times they so greatly rely.

No organized attempt, however, has yet been made to obtain it from sources other than those usually drawn upon. No such sources, at first sight, seemed available; moreover, it seemed hardly fair to take advantage of the predicament in which the British fishing interests were placed—through no fault of their own—and to bring into existence an outside competition which, after the war, might conceivably operate to the detriment of a great national industry, and of the fishermen who have been doing such magnificent work in guarding the narrow seas.

But as the war has dragged on, month after month, and more men and more boats have been taken for the navy, the supply of fish has dwindled so much and has become so uncertain that these considerations have lost their weight.

In every branch of industry vested interests have been swept aside, have had to give way to the greater interests of the nation as a whole, and in no industries are national interests so paramount as in those, which have to do with the production and supply of food. Hunger is the greatest of all overruling forces.

The London Evening News of August 3rd last outlines in a few words the present conditions of the fish trade:—"Scarcity of supply, shortage of labour and difficulties of transport mainly contribute towards the record price at present paid for fish of all descriptions."

In Germany the value of fish has been recognized from the first. The British fisheries were early placed under

Government supervision, and potatoes are only sold with so many potatoes are taken with so many herrings.

So too, in Austria, the fisheries of the Adriatic have been taken charge of by the Government, and fish is being sent all over Austria-Hungary to relieve the pressure upon meat.

Similar steps may yet have to be taken in England should food stuffs continue to rise in price in the way they have been doing lately. It was Von Moltke, I think, who said that an army depends upon its stomach—a nation certainly does; and effective organization of food is as essential to success as organization of munitions. Indeed food may almost be said to be a branch of munitions.

Last year I was shown over some works where meat was being canned for the troops. The men had been working long hours of overtime and Lord Kitchener wrote personally and asked that they should be thanked for what they had done, and told that they were helping as materially to win the war by feeding the men at the battle front as if they were fighting alongside them—we can't all be in the trenches but we can all lend a hand in the organization of supplies.

Now as regards fish. The British Government have acquired control of meat, of flour, of sugar, and of various other commodities. They may have to do the same with fish. They have bought the Norwegian catch to keep it from feeding the enemy; might it not be possible to organize our own fishery resources, home and overseas, to feed ourselves?

Fish, it must be acknowledged, is in a totally different position to meat. Long before the war the importation of

immense and regular supplies of chilled and frozen meat had become an established, and indeed a dominating factor in the British meat market.

There is no existing trade of that kind in fish, and to arrange as an untried experiment, for the acquisition and distribution of immense quantities of fresh fish in the midst of the overwhelming difficulties and uncertainties of the war, is a problem of a very different kind, and one which is naturally faced with considerable hesitation.

But as the war goes on the food question is becoming increasingly urgent and the opinion is steadily growing that every available source of food supply should be drawn upon—that mere difficulties should not be allowed to stand in the way—that if the food is there, the difficulties should and must be overcome.

If Germany had access to such a source of supply as is contained in the Newfoundland waters, would she leave it unorganized?

Fish, it must be borne in mind, ranks very high in food value. In the Times resume of our food resources, published immediately before the war, in June, 1914, it was stated that fish affords more nutriment for a given sum than any other kind of food. It is cheap as well as nutritious and its present high price is causing more suffering amongst the poor than the high price of meat. There are hundreds of families in Wales, and in Manchester, Bradford and the other great manufacturing cities of the North of England where a meal of fish and chipped potatoes used to be their principal stand-by. Now they have to go without it.

It was pointed out, at a meeting held last year of the representatives of the various fishery interests, that one great danger is, that if the supply of fish ceases the system of distribution will cease with it, owing to the ruin of the small fish dealers, and that when the war is over it will be impossible to resume the fishing in the old way for some time afterwards owing to the disappearance of the means of distribution which it will take years to reorganize. It was stated at the same meeting that 50 per cent. of the small fish shops had been already closed and that 90 per cent. would be closed in another six months. It is to be hoped that that prediction has not quite come true, but things are certainly bad enough. That is why those interested in the fish trade are now anxious that fish should be brought in from wherever it can be obtained—to keep the small fish dealers going—that is far more important than any question of the effect which outside competition may possibly have upon the industry after the war.

The Manager of Messrs Isaacs, the firm which owns so many fish shops all over London in an interview published in the Evening News on Aug. 3rd, last said that if the poor could be supplied as they used to be by fish taken away in small quantities by the costermongers it would help them a great deal, but the costermongers, he said, had disappeared.

He gave a comparison of prices before and after the war which shows how immense the rise has been, more, a great deal in proportion than that of any other kind of food.

Haddock, for instance, has risen from 2s. a stone to 4s. and 4s. 6d. Skate from 3s. to 7s. a stone. Salmon from 1s. 8d. per pound to 2s. 8d.

How great an effect such a rise in price must have upon the general cost of living may be estimated from the huge quantity of fish consumed in normal times.

In 1913 it reached a total of nearly 25 million quintals with a value of £14,000,000. The number of men employed being over 100,000 whilst a great many more were employed in the subsidiary trades, as salesmen, fishmongers, fish porters, ice manufacturers, etc. The total annual value of the British fisheries, including these trades, being close upon £30,000,000.

The annual amount landed at Grimsby alone, before the war, was 3,800,000 quintals. On normal days between 700 and 800 tons were landed and the ice manufacturers turned out yearly as much as 200,000 tons of ice.

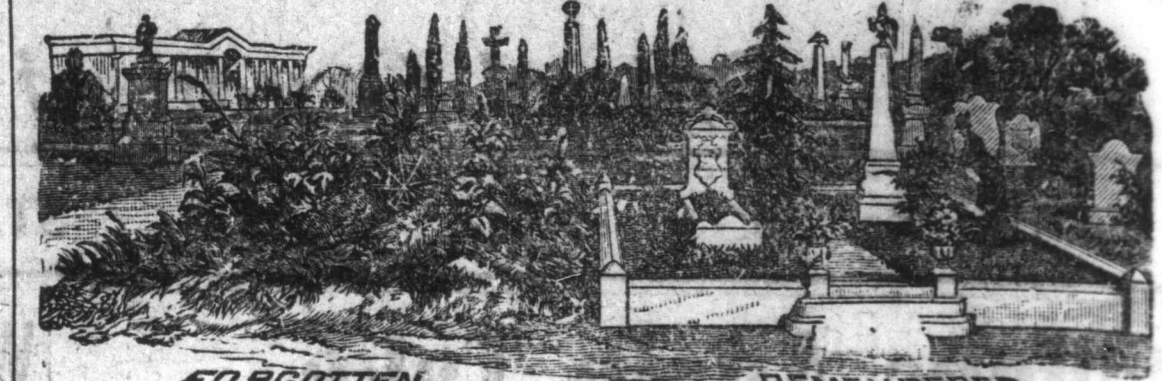
Messrs. Isaac mentioned incidentally the great inconvenience caused by the shortage of ice. Here, of course, there would be no difficulty about ice any more than there is in Norway.

What is needed to give work to all these people are frequent supplies of the cheaper kinds of fish.

(To be continued.)

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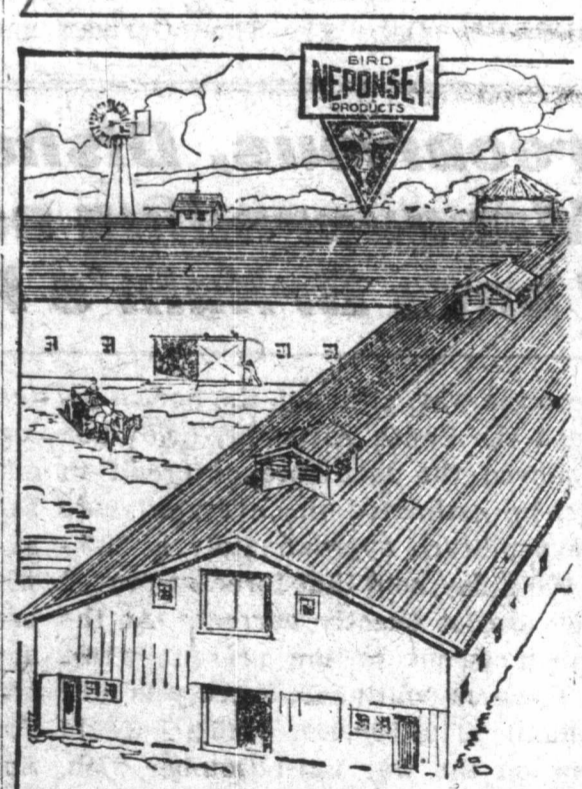


## NOTICE

All Persons holding Receipts for Fish shipped to me on the Labrador Coast must present them to my office at Catalina for payment. On no account whatever will they be paid at St. John's.

Philip Templeman

Oct 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14



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