

Legislative Proceedings.

COUNCIL CHAMBER.

MONDAY, Feb. 27.  
The house met at half-past 4.

(Continued.)  
And now we hear no note reminding us that such a consideration had ever exercised the ministerial thoughts. Not long ago one of the local papers contained a series of articles respecting the revival of our fisheries, but nothing of importance has grown therefrom. It was all very well to preach up the necessity of improved cure of the fish; of course the propriety of such a contention was indisputable, but the prime cause of loss of markets for the fish of this country lies in the powerful competition of industrious rivals in other lands. This fact was amply demonstrated during the past year, and for the first time in many seasons the catch of our competitors fell off, and at once the price of Newfoundland fish leaped upwards attained a figure, it had not reached for many years previously. This cause added to the value of our staple about one-third over and above what it would have yielded with the price of preceding years, but we have no guarantee that such a fortunate condition of trade is to continue. So far as it has existed, the result was a cause of profound gratification to the fishermen throughout the colony. The benefit was not so fully realized by the exporter as by the producer, still it was satisfactory to all that the voyage was attended with such successful consequences. One cheering feature of last year's codfishery was the success that in many places crowned the small boat and punt fishers, who with little expense caught larger fares than they had done for many years past. Respecting the seal fishery, no doubt the average catch of seals was considerable, but as has been said, very partially distributed, yet his opposition to the Government was not so strong as to urge that it was their duty to pass an Act to prevent partial distribution in the future. The codfishery was very short last season, but the enhanced price helped largely to bring up the lee-way, and thus averted what might otherwise have been felt as a very unprosperous voyage. He hoped more attention will be devoted in future to those matters which from the basis of all our institutions and the maintenance of the whole population, whether commercial or laboring men, and upon which depends the financial stability of the colony. No matter how ardently any member of the Council may be enamored of the railway or how strong their faith in its future achievements, it cannot be forgotten that the very railway itself is founded upon no substratum save and except such as the fisheries of the colony are expected to furnish. If the fisheries fail, there is then no prospective means of meeting the liability undertaken by the colony in promotion of that policy, except by increased taxation in some direction; the railway subsidy for many years must come out of the produce of the fisheries, for no other resource will be available. It is true, it is a self-evident fact that the fisheries are, and will long be the most valuable resources of the colony, and hence the greater is the reproach for our lack of effort to foster and develop them. Even one single branch—the herring fishery, if fully prosecuted, would yield a astonishing amount of wealth, as we see in other countries, while in this colony it is hardly taken any notice of whatever. Last year the herring fishery on Labrador was almost a total failure, and the fish were so unusually small as to be scarcely marketable. He certainly felt assured that hon. members of the Council and most outside it believe that we must still look to the fisheries for many years to come, to furnish the sinews of trade and business of all kinds in Newfoundland.  
Hon. Colonial Secretary could not see the applicability of the criticisms of hon. members of the speech of his honor the Administrator. In looking over the reference made in that document to the fisheries it appeared to him (C. S.) that the paragraph in question fairly enough describes the condition of last year's operations taken as a whole. Hon. members must know that it is not usual in framing opening speeches, to dilate at unnecessary length upon the several topics to which they refer; and he need not point to the practice of the Imperial Parliament, and of the neighboring colonies to show that subjects of equal moment to those

as are the fisheries to Newfoundland, are almost invariably disposed of in very brief terms. As a rule the practice that governs, with regard to speeches of this nature, is to condense the matter embraced in them into the smallest compass consistent with their importance, therefore in our local procedure we cannot err very widely in following the example of countries having much larger political experience. On some former occasions of convening the legislative bodies, it had been complained that the speech contained an unnecessary amount of minor detail which by yearly repetition had become stereotyped upon our records without any derivable benefit, hence, it was considered, and very properly, as he thought, a brief general reference touching upon all that was material, was more in keeping with the ordinary fitness of things. The hon. Mr. W. has alluded to the seal fishery of last year as not being accurately represented by the terms of the speech. Now, he (C. S.) thought he was correct in saying, that the general estimate of that industry declared it to be successful, though attended, as the speech says, with the drawback of partial distribution. It is not pretended it was successful in every case, but it is described in general terms; the returns showed a good average, but the importance of several cases of deficiency had not been underrated. Then the summer shore cod fishery was, he believed, upon the whole a prosperous one though that industry also was attended with failure in some localities at the westward and on northern Labrador.  
Taking those exceptions into account, the general character of last year's fisheries is not inaptly described, and there was no just ground for the charge of want of appreciation by the government of the importance of the fisheries furnished by the ministerial speech. That speech did not present the fitting occasion to discuss such matters *in extenso*, as hon. gentlemen ought to know without being reminded of the fact. The present government who are so recklessly changed with indifference to the fishing interests of the colony, may fairly challenge the record upon that point. He knew his hon. friend, Mr Harvey, entertains strong views upon the subject, and therefore was not surprised at the fulfilment of his promise to urge in season and out of season the necessity of establishing a fishery bureau to take charge of our fishing interests. He could accord full credit to that hon. gentleman for sincerity of opinion upon this question, being sensible that he was forcibly impressed that such an institution was indispensable in this colony; and his arguments in support of his position possess considerable weight. But the hon. gentleman himself knows that however firm his own conviction upon the point, there is a wide difference of opinion upon the propriety of interfering with the fisheries; a difference shared in by members of the Government and Legislature, and also existing amongst the commercial community of which the hon. gentleman is a member. He thought he was correct in saying that the divergence of view upon the matter was even greater at the present time, than when the propriety of regulating the fisheries was first mooted some years ago. They had no doubt all seen the report of the British fishery commissioners in which the whole subject of legislating for the fisheries was minutely and lucidly dealt with. Those were the highest authorities to whose opinions we can appeal upon a subject

of this kind, and we find that the result of their investigations obliged them to declare that the less the deep sea fisheries are interfered with by legislation the better for their interests. Such was the decision of the most eminent scientific authorities upon the question, and should we not then, in view of their verdict, be wise in hesitating to move in the direction in which the hon. gentleman points? Of course no one could contend that the judgment of those commissioners is infallible, nor is it improbable that certain fisheries with which we are better acquainted than they, might not be benefitted by regulations of some description, but the general opinion of scientific authorities appeared to run in the opposite course. He C. S., had been pretty much of the same way of thinking upon the matter as the hon. gentleman, Mr. Harvey; he was very much impressed by his reasoning upon it, and by the forcible way in which he put his opinions before the council but having perused the reports of the authorities referred to, he must say he was not surprised for the reasons they gave, at the decision they had arrived at; nor that this decision had been so largely concurred in amongst ourselves. Things being in this position, it would be no fair reproach of the government that they had abstained up to this time from establishing a fishery bureau. They had acted prudently in waiting at least until the wide diversity of sentiment becomes more modified and harmonized than it exists at the present time. The expense of such an undertaking would no doubt be considerable, but that would not of course, and should not, be permitted to stand in the way if the work were shown or believed to be worth doing; then the question of cost would form but a minor consideration and would interpose no difficulty. But he should like to ask hon. gentlemen, how have the government shown themselves indifferent to the fishing interests of the country? Have they not revived and restored the bank fishery by applying a bounty to that industry?  
(To be continued.)

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