

THE NATIVE OYSTER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. (*OSTREA LURIDA*, CARPENTER.)

BY JOSEPH STAFFORD, M.A., PH.D., MONTREAL.

METHODS OF CULTURE.

The oyster is one of our natural resources, and as such has been brought into existence by natural causes and perpetuated under natural conditions. It has likewise been limited by natural forces to circumscribed areas and restricted numbers, and its struggle for existence has settled down into a reciprocal give and take between itself and the other members of its limited world. Against these it is fitted by nature to defend itself, since the mortality brought about by adverse climatic, physical, chemical, or biological elements is offset by successful defence and fertility of reproduction.

When such a natural product is discovered and appeals to the wants of civilized man there is converged upon it a strain so sudden and vast as to surpass all innocent and unprepared defence. Man, by his calculating and inventive genius, both by wholesale mechanical seizure from the natural areas and by effective transport inland far beyond the original distribution, imposes a demand upon the natural product which is not only additional to the original demand, but is overwhelmingly greater in amount. The oyster-fishery, like every other fishery that has been exploited by man, is forced soon to respond by such decided falling-off in numbers as to rouse fears of depletion and final extinction. To permit it to readjust itself naturally would require restriction of the fishery almost to the point of prohibition, in which case, as a natural resource, it would cease to be of any economic value.

The only way to turn the natural supply of oysters to almost limitless value as a national asset is by artificial cultivation. That is what has been done in agriculture, forestry, and the like, where the natural production became too meagre for human requirements. We need not only to conserve the original stock, but to increase its productivity in order to keep pace with growing demands. This offers scope for man's intellectual and constructive activities in furnishing practical and productive methods of culture.

The importance of method in oyster-culture can hardly be overestimated. Everybody has had sufficient contact with some employment or mode of livelihood to recognize the advantages of methodical over methodless procedure. From the most commonplace elementary duty of the individual to the most completely elaborated and correlated operations of great organizations there should be that relation between proposed action and desired result which is indicated by the terms "method" and "system." The managers of every business or profession draw on their accumulated stock of personal experience and acquired knowledge in forecasting a plan of action, and even assistants and employees are selected or rejected according to their ability or inability to work towards a required end. Since this is true for long-established and well-tested occupations of the masses, it must be acknowledged as all the more urgent in a pursuit (such as oyster-culture) where the accumulation of information is in the hands of relatively few people, the operations at times exposed to unusually great difficulties, and the results not immediately or distinctly exhibited.

Methods are estimated by results, and in consequence are spoken of as good or bad. But a complete method of oyster-culture is not a simple thing; it is composed of many separate acts of which each may be regarded as a method in itself and its advantages weighed. It may happen that the end-result depends especially upon the result of a single action. Such a critical analysis is not often thought out, but more commonly people rush ahead and sum up the whole as a sort of get-rich-quick business or as a failure. Much depends upon the application of the method. A good method in poor hands may be no more productive than a poor method in good hands. Yet a rigid following to the letter of a blind rule is not advocated for all places alike, but rather the intelligent adaptation of a good general method to the special conditions of the locality.

Methods of oyster-culture have originated in different countries and at different times. There is nothing remarkable about an independent origin in countries far distant and having no communication with each other. The accidental observation of oysters on anchors, ropes,