

MINOR BRITISH FISHERIES.—Crab and Lobster Fisheries.

—The demand for these crustaceans has increased so much within the last few years that the supply from the coasts of Britain has been insufficient, and from 400,000 to 600,000 lobsters have for some little time been annually imported from Norway. They travel without much loss in vessels fitted with wells; and for journeys lasting no longer than two or three days they will live very well if packed with wet seaweed in boxes. The places from which the principal home supplies are sent to the large markets being now mostly within easy reach of railways, there is little occasion to use welled vessels for collecting them.¹ The English markets are mainly supplied from Cornwall and the south coast of England, from the Orkneys and Hebrides in Scotland, and from the west coast of Ireland. Besides these about 200,000 come from France, the fishery for them being in the neighbourhood of Cherbourg, and a few from Sweden. The means adopted for catching lobsters and crabs in the British Islands are either circular basket-work "pots" with a mouse-trap entrance at the top, or cages covered with netting and with one or two entrances as in the pots. These cages are commonly called "creels." Crabs are taken in most abundance in the west and south of England, and more or less generally on the east coast, and in Scotland and Ireland, those from parts of Devon and Cornwall being the finest which are sent to market. There is a general disposition on the part of the fishermen to submit to some law limiting the size of both crabs and lobsters to be offered for sale, so as to put a stop to the falling off in these fisheries, which is apparent on some parts of the coast. A close time is objected to, as no month in the year is generally suitable, and "berried" lobsters are so valuable for the market that if they had to be returned to the sea the fishermen would lose a great part of their present profits. A limit to the size allowed to be sold seems therefore to be the best means of protecting these fisheries; and such a law is now enforced on the coast of Norfolk.

Shrimp and Prawn Fisheries.—The most important of these fisheries are carried on in the estuary of the Thames, Pegwell Bay near Ramsgate, and Morecambe Bay on the Lancashire coast, but they are more or less general wherever suitable ground is met with. Leigh is the headquarters of the Thames shrimpers. They fish with a net mounted very much like a beam-trawl, but having a long, straight piece of wood at the lower part of the mouth to work over the ground instead of the ordinary ground-rope. This is in fact like the common form of hand-shrimping net, but so fitted as to be towed instead of pushed. Ordinary trawls are used for prawns or "red shrimps," and in some other places for true shrimps. The supply of shrimps from Leigh sometimes amounts to 2000 gallons in a day.

Shellfish:—Oysters, Mussels, Whelks, Periwinkles.—The oyster fisheries of the British Islands have been in a failing condition for some few years past, owing to a deficiency of spat, the cause of which has been the subject of active controversy, not only between rival theorists, but also among practical fishermen. Over-fishing has been regarded by many as the main cause of the decrease, and it may possibly have helped to make matters worse than they would otherwise have been; but it is difficult to explain in this manner the fact that, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, there has been a general failure of spat for some years past, on all kinds of ground and under every condition, in public and private beds, and whether they have been carefully protected, as in the case of old established private companies, or left to the working of the general public, except

during a definite close time, more or less enforced. In Ireland, where there are regulations for close time, and restrictions as to the size of oysters allowed to be sold, and where in some cases all fishing has been stopped for two or three years, the decrease of oysters has been as decided as in England or Scotland; and Mr Blake, until recently one of the inspectors of Irish fisheries, and chairman of the oyster commission in 1868, stated in his evidence given before the select committee of the House of Commons in 1876 that the decline in the oyster fisheries was due to the bad spatting seasons, and to the great increase of dredging; "but if the spatting went on as it formerly did, the amount of dredging would not be of much importance."

The bulk of English supplies is obtained from the oyster beds of private companies, of which the Whitstable company is the most ancient, having worked from time immemorial on their present ground on the south shore of the entrance to the Thames. In 1793 they purchased from the lord of the manor the exclusive right of fishing there. The company is a corporation of fishermen governed by elected members of their own body. The men are paid for the daily work done by them, and each member of the company also receives his share of the profits on the sale of the oysters. A great part of their employment, besides dredging and keeping their own ground clean and free from vermin, consists in dredging for spat in the public portion of the river for the purpose of laying it down on their own beds. A general failure of spat, such as there has been in recent years, is therefore not only felt by them on their own limited ground, but they suffer from the scarcity in what may be called their reserves. The Whitstable company is, however, only one among many which occupy the shores of the Thames estuary and the small rivers which flow into it. The oysters thus laid down or bred in these situations become remarkable for the thinness of their shells, and the good flavour and comparatively large size of their contents, and are what are known as "natives." There are numerous companies or individual proprietors engaged in cultivating oysters on various parts of the coasts, but at the present time they are, we believe, all more or less suffering from deficiency of spat. Channel or deep-sea oysters are generally large and coarse, and do not fetch more than one tenth of the price given for the more delicate "natives." Attempts at the artificial cultivation of oysters have not met with much success.

Mussels and whelks, while in some request for food among the lower classes, are in especial demand for the purposes of fish-bait, and the value of mussels in this respect has recently led to a more careful protection of the older banks, and some attempts at the cultivation of new ones. Whelks are particularly valuable in the North Sea cod fishery, and a number of vessels at Grimsby are regularly engaged in fishing for them. A mode of catching them is by means of shallow hoop-nets baited with refuse fish, and sunk to the bottom on suitable ground; in these the whelks collect in large numbers, and are caught without any difficulty. A considerable supply is also obtained from the oyster dredgers; and at the mouth of the Thames they are caught largely by using "trots" or "bulters"—long-lines of small dimensions; but instead of having baited hooks, they have common small shore-crabs threaded on the snoods, about twenty on each; these are seized by the whelks and so firmly held whilst being devoured that the line may easily be hauled in without disturbing the numbers found on every snood. *Periwinkles* are all procured between tide marks, and are of course collected by hand. The London market is mainly supplied from the western islands of Scotland, the Orkneys, the Shetlands, and parts of the Irish coast.

¹ Report of Commission on Crab and Lobster Fisheries, p. ii. (1877).