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REPORT AND TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
DEVONSHIRE ASSOCIATION

FOR
THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE, LITERATURE,
AND ART.

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PART III.

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1864.

ON THE FISHERIES OF DEVONSHIRE.

BY DR. SCOTT.

The following list will give some idea of the extent to which various fish is used in England. There are sold in the London Markets yearly—

WET FISH.	
Description of Fish.	No. of Fish.
Salmon and Salmon-trout	406,000
Turbot	800,000
Brill and Mullet	1,200,000
Live Cod	400,000
Soles	97,520,000
Whiting	17,920,000
Haddock	2,470,000
Plaice	33,000,000
Mackerel	23,520,000
Fresh Herrings	175,000,000
Ditto in bulk	1,050,000,000
Sprats	120,000,000
Eels	9,797,000,000
Flounders	259,200,000
Dabs	270,000
SHELL FISH.	
Oysters	495,896,000
Lobsters	1,200,000
Crabs	600,000
Shrimps	498,428,648
Whelks	4,493,200
Mussels	50,400,000
Cockles	67,392,000
Periwinkles	304,000,000

now must be given up.

Formerly, we possessed several oyster beds on our coast, now, nearly all, if not all, of these are gone. The last bed that I heard of, was one discovered between Dartmouth and Kingsbridge. Immediately its existence became known, dredgers came from all parts for a share of the spoil, and in a very short time, all the oysters were taken away. The last account that I heard of the bed was, that a steamer had come, and was endeavouring with all her superior power to try and scrape up any that might have been left. The native oysters that used to be found near Exmouth are also all gone. There is also reason to believe, that this mollusk is scarcer in the neighbouring county of Cornwall than it used to be. A gentleman, who has given attention to oyster culture in Devonshire, says that the native oyster of the river Exe has become nearly extinct from over-dredging—dredging being carried on at all times and seasons, without let or hindrance from the lord of the manor, and further, that the stocks of oysters at Lympstone are almost exhausted.

In the year 1859 they amounted to 12,900 cubic feet.

„	1860	„	9,500	„
„	1861	„	7,440	„
„	1862	„	1,660	„
„	1863	„	none.	„

The recent and almost sudden increase in the value of

oysters at Falmouth (whence the dealers at Lympstone usually obtain their stocks) from 2s. to 16s. the tub, is stated by them to have obliged them to discontinue importing them. Oysters laid down at Lympstone do not generally renew the beds with their own young, the oysters here being imported, and laid down to grow or fatten. The ground at Lympstone is chiefly mud, and some writers on the oyster assert, that oysters on mud-banks fatten well, but do not breed. But it was nevertheless found, that at least one oyster in every twenty in those beds showed spawn in the months of September and October of 1862. The native oyster breeds freely in the channel of the river Exe; but the spawn of the oyster in the Lympstone beds, being deposited on the mud-banks, is almost immediately destroyed. There is every reason to believe, however, that with scientific culture, the spawn might be preserved, and that the river Exe might easily become a nursery for oysters. Mr. Barry, one of her Majesty's Commissioners of Fisheries in Ireland, reports the coast from Exmouth to Brixham as favourable, and most excellent for the cultivation of oysters. The value of the oyster having largely increased, it is most important that the capabilities of our rivers, as well as our coasts, should be carefully considered, and especially so by the lords of the manors.

Some years ago, a considerable trade in mussels sprang up between London and Starcross; but the fishermen there acted so imprudently, and sent so many at once to market, that they destroyed their stock, and have not yet fully recovered it. The Dutch, however, have in the mean time come

Again, it has been authoritatively pronounced that some parts of our coast are eminently fitted for oyster culture; and gentlemen possessing manorial rights in the estuaries of rivers, might assist greatly by encouraging in such places the growth of this fish. A London company has been established for carrying on the breeding of oysters in the Thames, and we know that on the eastern coast there are many very productive oyster beds. This fish is becoming dearer yearly, and so its cultivation promises the most profitable results to persons who are willing to undertake its culture in our county.