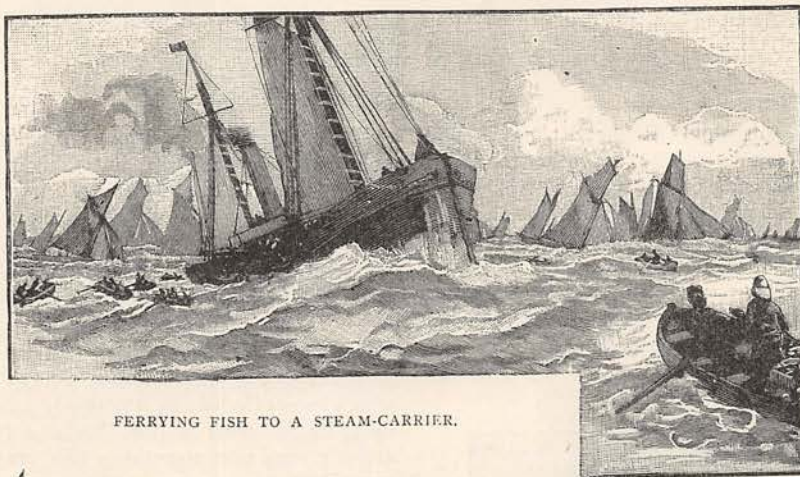


their growth in the open ground, take care not to encourage more branches than the beauty and general appearance of the plant requires, and you may find it necessary to take off a few, so as to throw all the strength of the plant into the stems; and, indeed, any branches that appear to be taking the lead too much should be cut back, otherwise the uniform vigour of your plant will be spoiled. Sometimes, for example, you

may notice in a shrubbery an ugly and, as it were, one-sided specimen of the rhododendron, with one or two bunches of bloom on one side only, and the remaining part of the shrub all spindly and exhausted. Uniformity of growth is a principle that at this time of the year cannot be too much insisted upon, for it is in the bursting spring season that we can train and check growth more than at any other time of the year.

HOW LONDON GETS ITS FISH.

BY F. M. HOLMES.



FERRYING FISH TO A STEAM-CARRIER.



THROUGH the hours of night steam swiftly large fish-carriers from the grey North Sea; more swiftly, flash quick railway trains from the ends of Britain, bringing loads of fish to the mighty metropolis.

And if you rise very early in the morning, and make your way through the long lines of half-awakened or still sleeping streets, down to the well-known mart of Billingsgate, you may

see something of the way in which London is supplied with fish.

You should have stout boots, steady nerves, and a keen eye. Stout boots, because the place and the approaches thereto cannot be called exactly dry or particularly clean; steady nerves, because there is very much crowding through which you must thread your way, and much shouting and noise to which you may prefer to be deaf; a keen eye, for there is much to see and much to avoid.

It is well, for instance, to keep out of the way of that line of fish-porters who are bringing boxes of soles or skate, or what not, from the steamer out there on the river. Nor is it pleasant to be so jostled and hustled by fishy folk, with fishy clothes and fishy loads, that on your exit from the little world of general fishiness you carry with you an odour that is not savoury. Therefore, be wary, be vigilant, and dress to suit the occasion.

Billingsgate, of course, is down by the river. It lies not far from the east side of London Bridge. Thames Street, which runs in front of it, has the reputation of being the coolest street in London in summer, and the warmest in winter. Perhaps its proximity to the river and the high buildings on either side conduce to this, the latter keeping off the sun and wind.

Now, before you, on entering the market from Thames Street, are the lines of the roof and pillars framing the grey sky, the crowds of men, and if you are near enough to see them, the grey river and the craft thereon. Within, all seems chaos and confusion. Who are those men perched up somewhat higher than their fellows, and shouting lustily? What is the key to the confusion? What is being done? Simply this: the fish is being sold by auction almost as fast as it is being brought into the market.



FISHING FLEET ON THE DOGGER BANK.

“Roker-buyers, this way! Roker! Roker!” You hear a loud cry like this, and buyers gather round an individual, who proceeds to put up the “roker” to auction. Roker is fish lingo for skate, and the fish you now see sold will perhaps appear later on in the day cooked for some snug little dinner.

If the morning is yet young—say half-past five or six—the prime fish, such as soles, are most likely being offered. As the day rises to eight or nine, the coarser fish, such as plaice, are being disposed of. And the

and plaice, or herrings, from Yarmouth or Lowestoft, mackerel from the west, and salmon from Scotland, though salmon, like the lordly fish it is, comes in more or less at all hours of the day. Steam-carriers have probably brought some of the fish from fleets “far away on the billow” to the harbour where it is transferred to the railway. Thence the fish trains start for London, and flying over the rails, discharge their finny freight at about three or four the next morning. There is a train known as the “Scotch fish and meat,” which leaves Carlisle as late as 9.9 p. m., and yet pulls up at Broad Street Station, City, at 4.15 next morning. It has rushed over something like 300 miles in a little more than seven hours; within another hour its fishy contents have probably been “vanned” to Billingsgate, and before yet another hour has passed they have been sold.

The fish are usually packed in ice. It is said that a thousand tons a day were used in the London fish trade during the summer of 1889. Another method of keeping fish is to confine them in wells of water on board vessels. These are the welled smacks, and the wells will sometimes hold about a thousand codfish. When brought to port, the fish are pressed into large boxes, and, if desired, may be sunk in a fish dock. Numbers are said to die from starving and imprisonment. But if the muscles contract when the fish is crimped or cut, it is still called “live cod.” Much of this fish is sold at Billingsgate, though there is not a fish dock at this market, nor do these welled vessels bring fish to it. But the market is now within a few hours’ travelling of many of the British fishing ports.

Practically, there are but two fish markets for London. These are Billingsgate and Shadwell. The business at Columbia is substantially nothing, and at the London Central, Smithfield, the trade is retail almost entirely, while the fish is taken there from Billingsgate.

To estimate, 140,000 tons come through this latter market yearly, and of these 60,000 tons are borne over the sea. To Shadwell last year (1889)



CARTING ARTIFICIAL ICE.

market, which opens about five, is practically over at from nine to ten. The gates are thrown open at five, but the actual selling may not commence until half-past. Within these few hours scores of tons of fish change hands, and carts or vans soon whirl them away to other localities.

But before that time huge vans have brought boxes of fish from the railway stations. Here, for instance, are turbot, cod, and brill, say, from Grimsby; haddock

came 18,000 tons, the value of which was some £168,000. The Annual Fisheries Report, however, for that year shows there were 7,452 tons decrease at Billingsgate.

Of the Billingsgate fish, about 1,727 tons were salmon. That delectable food is brought in boxes, each one of which weighs about a hundredweight. Large as the total seems, it was larger in the two preceding years, and salmon is clearly one of the fish decreasing at Billingsgate.

By far the larger quantity of the lordly fish comes from Scotland. Berwick-on-Tweed, which, curiously enough, is given separately in the report as being neither Scotland nor England, sends a good deal in proportion to its size, viz., 1,105 boxes. England and Wales did not send double this quantity. Ireland is next to Scotland, sending a little more than seven times that of Berwick, while Scotland sent not quite twenty times the quantity. Small supplies also come from Holland—of all places—and Sweden and Norway.

In addition, great quantities of tinned salmon are now used in this country. The great bulk of this comes from Canada. Over 8,500 tons are said to be used here yearly, and the sale is increasing. It is retailed, we suppose, at sixpence a pound, which is less than half the price—sometimes, indeed, a third of the price of fresh British salmon! This, however, by the way.

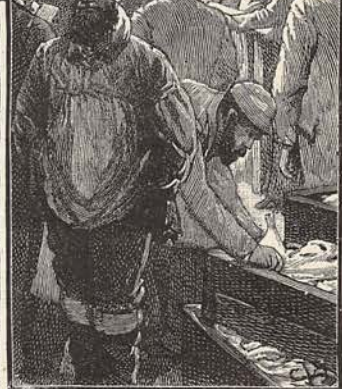
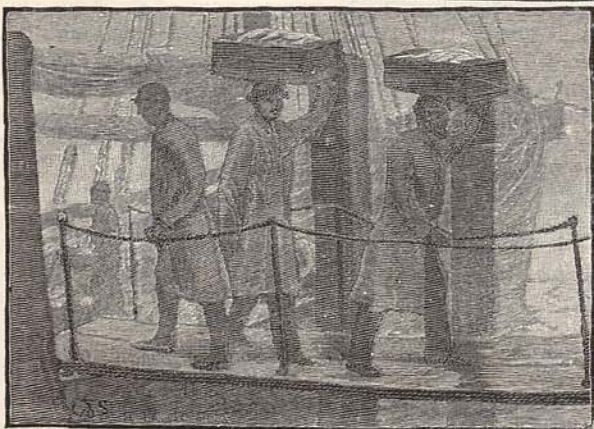
Now, it must not be supposed that all the fish sent to London is consumed in the metropolis. We cannot say, for instance, that Londoners consumed all those 150,548 tons of fish which were brought to its markets last year. London is also the channel through which fish flows—if we may use such a term—to many parts of the country. And here we begin to see signs of anomaly and needs of reform. Thus, even at seaside places it is no uncommon thing to find that the fish has come from Billingsgate. Indeed, Mr. J.

Lawrence Hamilton, of Brighton, estimates in his Report on Fish Trade Reforms, &c., “that upwards of 10,000,000 persons get their partial or entire fish supply from London.” Bearing in mind that Britain is comparatively a small island, it certainly seems strange that so large a proportion of the population should receive their supply of fish food through the metropolis. Yet so it is. The causes thereof are somewhat complicated. Probably it may be explained something in this way—that both custom and readiness of sale conspire to keep the fishermen to the plan of consigning their fish straight away to Billingsgate. In other words, the fishermen have not the trouble and risk of finding a customer.

But there may be other causes. Mr. Hamilton, in the pamphlet referred to, asserts that the auctioneer advances money on fishing boats, which prevents the fishermen consigning their fish to any other person.

Of course it is impossible to say how far this practice obtains. Another alleged practice is that fish is sold to middle-men dealers, who gather round the auctioneer, and often prevent fishmongers, &c., from buying, and who sell again by auction. Chiefly on account of this practice a great firm of fishermen left Billingsgate for Shadwell.

But Mr. Hamilton quotes from a law passed in Queen Anne's reign, which enacted that, “in order to supply London and its neighbourhood with good, wholesome, cheap, and seasonable fish, no fish shall be sold more than once within Billingsgate Market, nor within 150 yards of Billingsgate Dock.” This would seem to show that the practice of re-selling by



BRINGING FISH ASHORE AT SHADWELL ON A FOGGY MORNING.

FISH AUCTION—SHADWELL FISH MARKET.

middle-men was not unknown even in those far-away days, and it also indicates that summary interference was taken with the liberty of the subject in that respect, even at that time.

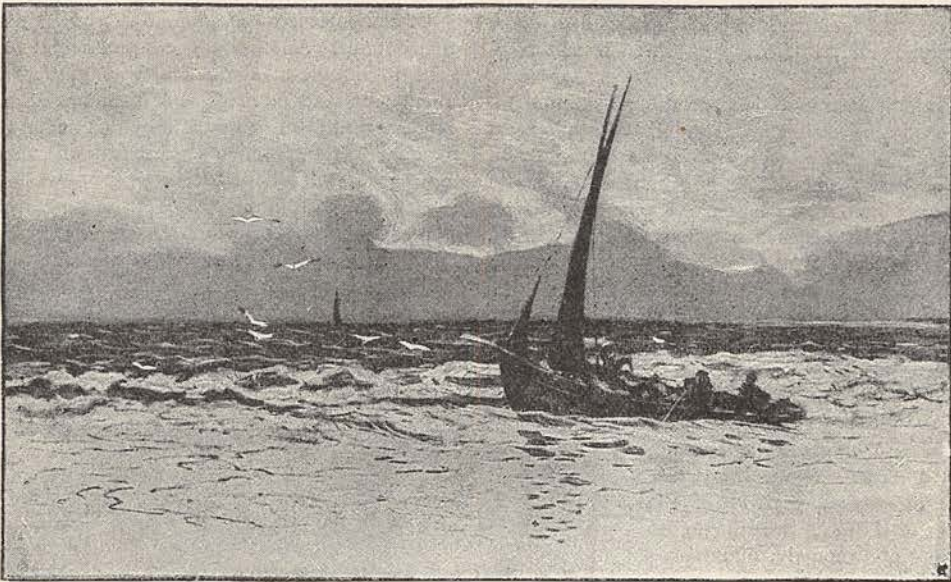
This law, Mr. Hamilton maintains, should be enforced "in a public market held on trust for the people." Fish should then be cheaper for the people on the one hand, while the fisherman would obtain more money for his arduous toil. This we believe is, in a few words, the "Billingsgate ring" question, of which at times we have heard so much.

On the other hand, it may be urged that, being an open market, the auctioneer must sell to whoever will bid the highest price, and it is not his business to inquire what the purchaser does with his purchase:

would go much farther than this. He would abolish Billingsgate Market, and render its companion at Shadwell "a modern model Metropolitan Fish Market," under the County Council.

The great importance of Home Fisheries, as a means of industry, will be seen when we say that according to the estimate of the Collectors of Customs, as given in the Fisheries Report, no fewer than 33,474 men and boys were constantly employed in sea-fishing in 1889, while 9,999 "persons other than regular fishermen" were occasionally engaged. The depression or decay of this industry, therefore, would be a serious matter, and of more than local importance.

Now, Mr. Hamilton is an industrial scientist who appears to have given great attention to the question,



FISHERS BY NIGHT.

whether he sells it again or not. Moreover, it may answer his purpose to sell in large quantities, while the secondary auctioneer may break up the bulk and offer smaller quantities for sale. The business is called that of an open market, and doubtless it is so; but it must be obvious that the dweller in Kensington, in Hampstead, in Clapham, and other suburbs, would not care to journey down to Billingsgate early in the morning to jostle with the dealers, and buy a shilling's worth of fish! But as we understand Mr. Hamilton's contention, that is not so much what is wanted. It is that the auctioneer shall sell to *bonâ fide* fish tradesmen, *i.e.*, fish shopkeepers and costermongers, who, in their turn, sell direct to the public. But Mr. Hamilton

and he contends that the principal point with regard to the improvement of the fishing industry and the cheapening of fish is the immediate bleeding and cleansing of fish on capture, and their transference as soon as possible to a dry air refrigerator. In other words, he would have fish cleaned and frozen as soon after capture as possible, thus converting a perishable article into a reliable and comparatively permanent commodity. As a result he contends that instead of the poor of London paying from a half-penny to twopence for a "bad herring," six two-eyed steaks or Billingsgate pheasants—which is London slang for that useful fish—could be bought for a penny, frozen, fresh and clean!