

**INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES
EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1883. THE
ECONOMIC CONDITION OF
FISHERMEN; PP. 1-46
(INCOMPLETE)**

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LEONE LEVI

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BY
PROFESSOR LEONE LEVI
&c., &c., &c.

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International Fisheries Exhibition.

LONDON, 1883.

CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 1883.

THE chair was taken at 2 o'clock by Sir ALLEN YOUNG.

THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF
FISHERMEN.

§ 1.—INTRODUCTORY.

I FEEL it almost presumptuous in me to read a paper before this Congress of Specialists, on topics nearly akin to those on which His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh contributed an excellent and valuable address. Nevertheless, having taken some part in suggesting to the Committee the formation of a special class in this Exhibition illustrative of the Economic Condition of Fishermen, and written a short preface for the same in the Catalogue, I have gladly responded to the invitation of the Executive Committee, and now venture to lay before you a few observations on this important subject.

It is much to be desired that this Exhibition, which, we trust, will benefit the fisheries not only of this country, but of the world, may likewise promote the welfare of the fishermen—the providers, if not the producers, of a much needed addition of our supply of food. There is a community of interest between the producer and the consumer. If it is the interest of the producer to foresee and provide

for the wants of the consumer, it is not less the interest of the consumer to look to the welfare of the producer. In one sense, indeed, it is erroneous to divide a nation into producers and consumers, and to have regard to the condition of the one separately from, or in contrast with, that of the other ; for we all are consumers, and all, whether by land, capital, or labour, take our share—some more and some less—in the work of production. Nevertheless, there are cases where we need cast a special glance on the condition of the producer, and see whether his lot may not be improved, or his power to fight the battle of life may not be increased by the removal of any trammels and hindrances, in themselves economically wrong, and in practice injurious and unnecessary.

§ 2.—CHARACTER OF THE FISHERMAN'S OCCUPATION.

The fisherman's calling is an arduous and an anxious one. Hard as is the lot of the miner who digs in the bowels of the earth, harder still is the lot of the fisherman who, in his fragile boat, toils day and night, often on the raging sea ; harder, not so much, perhaps, from excessive physical exertions, as from lengthened wearisome anxiety and expectancy. Fancy Connemara men pursuing the lobster fishery all round the coast of Mayo, hundreds of miles away from their own homes, in open boats, without shelter or covering of any kind, save one or two old sails. Fancy Shetland fishermen sailing on the stormy Northern Sea in boats barely one ton burthen. At one time Scotch fishermen were content to await the approach of the herrings to their own shores, now they boldly meet them fifty miles from land. Beautiful is the sea in calm ; the

blue water, canopied by the azure sky, studded with hundreds of tiny white sails; but oh! how oft "there is sorrow on the sea." And then, how true is the lament, "It's no fish ye're buying—it's men's lives!"

§ 3.—THE FISHERMAN'S REMUNERATION.

And is the remuneration of fishermen for so much risk and fatigue adequate? Alas! no. Much as we might wish that those who provide us with food, clothing, or luxury should themselves share in due proportion in the produce of their labour, it does by no means follow that this is the case. Silk manufacturers are not themselves able to dress in silk attire. Witness the Spitalfields' weaver. The providers of the richest stores of mental wealth are often themselves very poor. And fishermen, who procure for us salmon and turbot, and other rare and costly fish, have themselves but a meagre fare to live upon. "Two fishermen, Asphalion and Opis," said Theocritus in one of his beautiful idylls, "passed the night in a poor hut which they built on the seashore, their only shelter, their sole riches. When they awoke during the night, waiting for dawn, Asphalion told his companion a dream he had. He fancied he had caught a fish of gold, and that he thereupon swore to give up for ever the art of fishing. And now that he was awake he was afraid to fish lest he should be guilty of perjury. But Opis assured him that the oath he had taken whilst asleep was as unreal as the dream itself, and that he must throw his hook, for otherwise he would starve to death." Ah, yes, often, too often, the poor fisherman dreams he had caught gold in his crans of herrings, but when he awakes he finds the gold melted away, and but a pittance left for himself and his family.

§ 4.—PROPORTION OF FISHERMEN TO THE VALUE OF
THE FISHERIES.

Why is the economic condition of fishermen generally unsatisfactory? Partly from economic reasons, and partly from faults inherent in the fishermen themselves. In the first instance, too many men and women are employed in the fisheries in proportion, at least, to the amount of production; or, better still, there are too many idle men, so-called fishermen, who had better abandon their calling than cumbering the ground with their lazy habits. Fishing is a favourite occupation in this country. The sea is the natural resort of the Briton. Born on the shore of his island home, he plunges into it from infancy, for health and pleasure. With navigation as a necessity, and with all his impulses towards countries beyond the sea, the Briton learns as he grows to defy its dangers, and ride on its storms. And so it happens, as Adam Smith said, "that when the natural taste for certain employments makes more people follow them than can live comfortably by them, the produce of their labour, in proportion to its quantity, comes always too cheap to market to afford anything but the most scanty subsistence to the labourers." As I have already shown in my preface to the Catalogue, there are in the United Kingdom about 120,000 persons constantly or occasionally employed in fishing, who, with their dependents, may be taken to represent upwards of 500,000 persons. And the total annual value of the British fisheries is estimated at over £11,000,000, giving an average produce per head of about £22. In agricultural pursuits there are employed about 3,300,000 persons, and they raise annually produce to the value of about £270,000,000, giving an average of about £82 per head; that proportion being considerably

exceeded in the manufacturing industry, which is so greatly aided by mechanical contrivances and the use of steam. When an occupation is pursued for pleasure it matters not how many are engaged in it, but when it is followed from necessity, it makes all the difference when too large a number of men, women and children are depending on its results. The exact number of persons employed in the fisheries is not easily ascertainable, many combining other occupations with that of fishing. But the Commissioners of Customs, in their annual Statement of the Navigation and Shipping of the United Kingdom for the year 1882, gave the number, approximately, as follows :—

Countries.	Number of Men and Boys constantly employed in Fishery, resident within the limits of the Port.	Number of Persons, other than regular Fishermen, occasionally employed in Fishing.	Total.
England	30,802	12,798	43,600
Scotland	28,020	24,932	52,952
Ireland	7,417	19,717	27,134
Isle of Man	1,566	1,226	2,792
Channel Islands	1,288	606	1,894
	69,093	59,279	128,372

§ 5.—CONDITION OF FISHING BOATS.

A very large proportion of the boats in which fishermen pursue their calling is of very small burthen. In England and Scotland three-fifths, and in Ireland nine-tenths of the boats are of the second and third class, that is, of from one to four tons burthen, and of very small dimensions.