

CHAPTER XI.—THE FISHERIES.¹

Section 1.—The Early Fisheries.

Fishing is one of the earliest and most historic industries of Canada. From a date which precedes authentic record, the Normans, the Bretons and the Basques were on the cod banks of Newfoundland. Cabot, in 1498, when he first sighted the mainland of North America, gave it the name of "Bacalaos", the Basque word for cod fish which he found already in use among those hardy seamen. Cape Breton, one of the oldest place-names in America, is another memorial of the early French fishermen—and the Spaniards and the Portuguese were but little behind. Fernandez de Navarrete mentions all three as frequenters of the Grand Bank before 1502. The fishing was by hand lines over barrels made fast to the bulwarks to prevent fouling, the vessels remaining during fine weather then returning to France with from 30,000 to 50,000 cod. Voyages along the coast soon showed the cod as plentiful inshore as on the outer banks, and it became common for a crew to anchor in a bay, erect a hut on shore, and make daily excursions to the fishing grounds. The product was salted and dried on land and at the end of the season shipped to France. In 1534 Jacques Cartier found traces in the gulf of St. Lawrence of these early "Captains Courageous" and their rivalries in arms, as well as in the capture of the teeming product which had tempted them so far from home. An establishment of the kind just mentioned was founded at Tadoussac by Chauvin in 1599. Soon the fishermen began to stay all winter and thus to erect permanent fishing settlements. Fishing, therefore, may well be regarded as the first industry to be systematically prosecuted by Europeans in what is to-day the Canadian domain. It has never since ceased to yield a perennial harvest to both Europe and America.

By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Britain became the owner of Newfoundland and excluded France from fishing and drying fish on certain sections of the coast, but France retained rights of fishing and of drying fish on other sections of the Newfoundland coast together with the fisheries of Cape Breton and the Gulf. These French rights resulted in the French shore question which remained unsettled for nearly two centuries. The Seven Years' War (1756-63) put a stop to continuous fishing. At its close the Robin family of Jersey came to Canada and gradually acquired the former French fishing stations. Until the arrival of the Loyalists all other fishing but cod was neglected. Inshore fisheries alone (including those of the Labrador coast) were developed during this phase; no deep-sea fishing vessel put out from Lunenburg, now the chief centre of the deep-sea fishery, until 1873.

Section 2.—The Canadian Fishing Grounds.

The fishing grounds of the Dominion of Canada are perhaps the most extensive in the world. On the Atlantic, from Grand Manan to Labrador, the coast line, not including the lesser bays and indentations, measures over 5,000 miles. The bay of Fundy, 8,000 square miles in extent, the gulf of St. Lawrence, fully ten times that size, and other ocean waters comprise not less than 200,000 square miles, or over four-fifths of the area of the fishing grounds of the North Atlantic.

¹ Revised by Miss F. A. Brown, Chief, Fisheries Statistics Branch, Dominion Bureau of Statistics. This Branch publishes an Annual Report on the Fisheries Statistics of Canada, together with advance summaries on Fish Caught, Marketed and Prepared, by provinces. These may be obtained from the Dominion Statistician.