

VI.—THE ICELAND HERRING-FISHERIES.*

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Towards the end of last year (1879) a market report received from Gottenburg by the "Deutsche Fischerei-Zeitung" mentioned the fact that a new article had been introduced into the Gottenburg market, viz, Iceland salt herring, which on account of its superior quality had commanded a very high price. Some time later the same kind of herrings was mentioned in reports from other places. Quite recently news was received from Elmshorn (Holstein) that a vessel which from that place had gone to Iceland in spring to engage in the herring-fisheries had returned with a full cargo. These communications aroused my interest, and as in the Danish official reports I found but very few data regarding the Iceland herring-fisheries, I applied to Norway for further information, for, strange to say, neither the Icelanders nor the Danes, but the Norwegians, have begun herring-fisheries on a large scale near Iceland, and they are rapidly developing them to an extent which cannot fail to exercise an important influence on the world's commerce. The information relating to these fisheries which I received from Norway, and which in the highest degree deserves the attention of our ship-owners and capitalists, is given in the following:

It is now eleven years since an association called the Iceland Fishing Company was formed in Mandal, Norway. A mere accident furnished the occasion for forming this association. The captain of a Norwegian vessel, who often visited Iceland, had his attention directed to the large schools of herrings in the Sejdís fiord on the east coast of Iceland. He communicated his observations to the owner of the vessel, a Mandal merchant, Mr. Albert Jacobsen. This gentleman, one of the most energetic business men of Mandal, resolved to make an attempt to establish regular fisheries on the coast of Iceland, although he hardly looked for favorable results, as neither Icelanders nor Danes had hitherto attempted anything in this direction. Mr. Jacobsen bought a piece of land in a favorable location on the shore of the Sejdís fiord, and sent a vessel to Iceland well furnished with everything required for fishing. This first

* *Die Hdringsfischerei bei Island.* Translated by HERMAN JACOBSON.

expedition was successful, and the vessel returned with a full cargo of herrings of the finest quality. This result created quite a sensation in Mandal business circles, and seven other merchants associated themselves with Mr. Jacobsen in the above-mentioned company. Alongside of the land near the Sejdis fiord bought by Mr. Jacobsen, another and larger piece of land was bought by the company, and a large and somewhat expensive establishment, answering to the great expectations entertained with regard to this enterprise, was started on the Sejdis fiord. During the first year these expectations were not disappointed, for about 2,000 tons of herrings were sent to Mandal. But now there followed a number of poor years. The herrings did not make their appearance, and the heavy expense of keeping up the establishment caused serious losses to the stockholders. The consequence was that the company was dissolved and the whole establishment sold for a mere song to a new company rising from the ruins of the old one. Among those who had not yet given up all hope was Mr. Jacobsen, who was also one of the stockholders of the new company. But as the enterprise did not flourish, and did not seem to promise any profits in the future, the number of stockholders gradually decreased until only two were left, Mr. Jacobsen and another merchant, Mr. Carl Lund. These two men, not discouraged by temporary failures, and able, by reason of their pecuniary circumstances, to stand the pressure for some time, bought up the shares of all those stockholders who desired to withdraw from the company. At last, in 1877, the herrings again made their appearance in the Sejdis fiord, and came again in the following year. But in spite of the moderately successful fisheries the net profits were not large, owing principally to the low price of herrings. Last autumn, however, the sensational news reached Mandal from Iceland that such an enormous number of herrings had entered the nets that there were not enough barrels and salt. These articles were sent out at once, but nevertheless a considerable number of herrings was lost. In spite of this loss, however, the result was very satisfactory, no less than 8,000 barrels of herrings having been salted, and as prices were high (in Mandal 26½ crowns—\$7.12—wholesale price, were paid for a barrel; and in Gottenburg and Stockholm the retail price was 36 to 40 crowns (\$9.64 to \$10.72, per barrel), the two stockholders were fully rewarded for their perseverance, and amply repaid for former losses and disappointments. During the last few years the company has every year sent two vessels with a crew of 28 men to Iceland. Barrels, salt, food, &c., are of course taken along from Norway. Last year's expedition unfortunately closed with a very sad occurrence. In December the Dutch steamer Anna was to take the remainder of that year's yield of herrings—2,117 barrels—and the officers and workmen of the Sejdis fiord establishment back to Bergen. At Feiosen, near Bergeln, the steamer ran against a rock and immediately sank to a depth of 8 fathoms. Besides the first mate, the pilot, and two coopers, Captain Abrahamsen, the director of the Sejdis fiord establishment, also met his death in the

waves. His death was a very serious loss to the company, for he was an exceptionally able and energetic man, whose place it will be difficult to fill. Of the cargo only a small portion was saved.

The magnificent results obtained last year by the "Iceland Fishing Company" had a magic influence on all the ship-owners on the west coast of Norway. Every vessel which could be spared was in the beginning of last summer fitted out and sent to Iceland to engage in the herring-fisheries. From Mandal alone 30 vessels, with a total burden of about 2,000 tons, are said to have sailed for Iceland. In June last an "Iceland Fishing Company" was organized in Aalesund, with a capital of 20,000 crowns (\$8,040).

To obtain the right to fish in Iceland waters, a foreigner must be naturalized, which is done in a very simple way, by taking out an Iceland citizen's paper (cost about 4 crowns, \$1.75), swearing an oath of allegiance to the King of Denmark, and settling down on the island. This settling down, however, generally only consists in putting up in some favorable location on the shores of the fiord the frame house which has been brought ready-made from Norway. Although, according to a circular of the governor of Iceland, addressed to all officials in the island, these regulations are to be strictly observed, it is a fact that many Norwegian fishermen who have taken out Icelandic citizen's papers, never think of settling permanently in Iceland.

Last summer the herring-fisheries carried on by Norwegians were chiefly confined to the east coast of the island, although a few vessels also fished in the Oe fiord and the Ise fiord. Both during this and last year the Eske fiord was the principal place for herring-fishing during summer, whilst the richest autumn fisheries have taken place in the Sejdís fiord. During last summer 28,000 tons of herring were caught in the Eske fiord (6,000 of these by a Bergen company—J. E. Lehmkul), whilst during the same period scarcely 1,000 tons were caught in the Sejdís fiord. In this last mentioned fiord, however, upwards of 40,000 tons were caught during the third week in October, whilst the quantity of herrings left in the nets was estimated at 20,000 tons. As according to the last reports from Iceland fishing was still going on, we are not prepared to give any absolutely reliable information as to the total yield, but in all probability the Norwegian fishermen will this year bring home from Iceland about 100,000 tons of herrings. If such harvests should prove the rule,* ship-owners fitting out vessels for Iceland will do well to remember this.

We shall doubtless soon be in possession of all the data regarding the Iceland herring-fisheries.

* During last summer the herring-fisheries on the coast of Norway have been very poor, whilst all reports from Iceland speak of the Iceland herring-fisheries as being remarkably successful. See "*Die Norwegische Nordsee-Expedition, 1877*" (the Norwegian North Sea Expedition), p. 181, volume for 1878 of this journal.

To the Norwegian merchant, Albert Jacobsen, belongs all the honor of having inaugurated these fisheries; and other nations owe him a debt of gratitude, if in the future this enormous wealth of fish, which its rightful owners have hitherto neglected with inexplicable short-sightedness, proves a practical benefit, not only to Norway, but also to many other countries (let us also hope Germany).