

NOTE ON THE SCOTCH METHODS OF SMOKING HADDOCKS.

BY HUGH M. SMITH.

The haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) is one of the most important fishes of Scotland. It represents nearly one-fourth the value of the entire fish production (excluding shellfish), and is outranked by no other species except the herring (*Clupea harengus*). In 1900 the haddock catch amounted to upward of 76,000,000 pounds, worth £502,660, or about \$2,513,000. Aberdeen is the leading center of the haddock fishery. The quantity taken there in the year named was nearly 48,000,000 pounds, which was two-thirds the output of Scotland and exceeded by several million pounds the aggregate catch of haddock in the United States in 1898. Both lines and beam trawls are used in the haddock fishery, but the latter are by far the more important means of capture.

Haddock are landed on the Scotch coasts in a fresh state, and are then variously prepared for consumption. A favorite mode of treatment is smoking, and the principal place where smoking is done is Aberdeen, where the writer spent a short time in examining the methods of the haddock trade in the fall of 1900.

The fish smoked in the largest quantities and after the most approved method are known as "findon haddocks." Many changes have been rung on this name in England, Scotland, and America, and many explanations of the name have been offered. This form of prepared fish originated many years ago in the Scotch village of Findon, not far from Aberdeen, when it was an important fishing center. Findon has now no fisheries, but its method of preparing haddocks is known and more or less correctly practiced on most parts of the Scotch coast, as well as in England, the United States, and the Canadian maritime provinces. "Finnan haddies," the usual form in which the name appears in print, is simply the Scotch for "Findon haddocks."

These fish are universally popular; and although liberties have been taken with the method as originally practiced which have not been in the interest of quality, yet they are deservedly considered among the best of all smoked fish, as well as the most palatable of all haddocks.

The essential steps to which haddocks are subjected in course of

preparation as "findon haddocks" are (1) splitting, (2) salting, and (3) smoking, the last being the most important.

The fresh haddock is first treated by removing the head, splitting down the back, eviscerating, and then giving an extra cut behind the backbone from the right-hand side, in order to expose to view and facilitate the curing of the thick muscles of the back. This supplementary cut does not extend to the tail. The fish is then salted for half an hour in strong brine, and after draining is ready for smoking.

The original "findon haddocks" were smoked by hanging them in a chimney, over a peat fire; but at this time none is thus prepared, unless it be for limited home consumption. Peat is still used for producing the heat and smoke, but the primitive chimney has given way to the specially constructed small smokehouse, in which the fish, impaled and spread open on sticks, are hung in tiers. The lowermost row of fish is only 1 to 2 feet above the smudge fire of peat mixed with sawdust, and the smoking is continued without interruption for five to six hours. During smoking the fish require constant attention, in order that the various rows may be smoked thoroughly, uniformly, and not too much. One of the most successful of the Aberdeen curers smokes his fish five hours, then washes them with a brush in clean salt water, in order to remove soot and other foreign matter that would detract from the appearance.

Findons are sent to market either in barrels or boxes. The barrels contain 150 to 160 pounds of fish, and are usually consigned to the commission trade. The best fish are put in boxes holding 40 pounds. They are packed in tiers, with their backs down, with the exception of the top tier. They are sometimes sold in bunches of three tied together by their tails.

Although the canning of "findon haddocks" is a technical paradox and a theoretical absurdity, yet in practice this is done for purposes of export. It is reported that the canned smoked fish keep for several years, but it can be safely asserted that no fish cured as "findon haddocks" should be would keep for that length of time, and unless they are so cured they are not "findons." The excellent canned "findon haddocks," so called, prepared in the United States are thoroughly cooked in addition to being smoked, and often have considerable fluid in the can. It is a misnomer to designate such goods "findons."

Under the name of "smokies" small haddocks prepared in a special way are known to the Scotch trade. They are beheaded, opened along the abdomen and eviscerated, but are not split or spread. After a very short immersion in strong brine they are put on sticks and smoked over a hot fire with plenty of smoke until they have acquired a golden color. The smoking is done in a rectangular stone kiln, open above and with the fire at the bottom, the fish being hung quite close to the fire. A piece of burlap covers the top of the kiln when

the smoking begins. Smokies are somewhat in disrepute because fish of poor or doubtful quality are sometimes so prepared; but when fresh fish are treated in this way they are very palatable. When the fish come from the kiln they are cooked as well as smoked, and are ready for immediate consumption.

Still another method of preparing smoked haddocks is pursued at Aberdeen and doubtless at other places on the north coast of Scotland. The fish are beheaded, split down the abdomen, and spread open by a single cut along the backbone extending out on the caudal peduncle, but there is no supplementary cut back of the vertebræ, as in the findon haddocks. The fish are salted for about twenty minutes in brine that will float a potato, and then very lightly smoked. Such fish are known as "pale smoked haddocks," and are, of course, intended for immediate consumption.

Haddock are prepared as "findons" at a number of places on our east coast. They meet with a ready sale and are justly regarded as among the most delicious of fishery food products. The trade therein should be largely increased at the expense of the trade in haddocks that are too often improperly designated "fresh." The methods of preparing findon haddock and other kinds of smoked haddock are applicable to small cod, hake, pollock, and other gadoid fishes, all of which may be made into wholesome smoked fish. The smoking and light salting to which they would be subjected would overcome the flat taste of such fish when eaten fresh. The smoking of the ground fishes generally would greatly promote the fishing industry in many of the towns of the eastern seaboard by opening new markets, by making possible the utilization of fishes for which there is only limited local demand in the fresh condition, and by preventing gluts which now so often occur.

Following is an instance of the losses resulting to the fishermen through inability to dispose of a large catch through the absence of a market for fresh fish. On May 10, 1901, the traps on the north side of Marthas Vineyard, Mass., were filled with pollock. The fishermen reported that more pollock were caught on that day than in the previous twenty-five years combined. It was estimated that not less than 25,000 fish were in the nets. Four or five thousand were shipped, but the market was flat and the shipments did not pay expenses; the other fish were thrown away. It is reasonably certain that if the fishermen had been provided with facilities for smoking or otherwise curing these fish they could eventually have disposed of them at a fair profit, especially if previous shipments of lightly smoked pollock had prepared the way for the larger catch.