

In each bay, with tolerable land in its vicinity, and shelter for anchorage of fishing-smacks and beaching of boats, I would recommend a village or township, consistent with its size, to be laid off in half-acre sections for the fishermen and their families to reside on and supply garden produce,—thus securing the principle of co-operation, which is of more than ordinary importance in their calling,—and outside this, a belt of suburban sections of 20 or 25 acres, according to number, for each household. This area would be quite sufficient, with careful culture, to supply the respective households with wheat for bread, potatoes, and grass for a cow.

The soil, from what I have seen of the cultivations presently on the island, is good, and can always be renovated by the best of manure (fish refuse and seaweed) without cost, further than the labour of collecting and putting it on the ground.

Such a free grant of land, while it secures to provident industry a sufficiency, will not prove a lure to idleness.

Fisheries.

To experienced thrift, the fisheries around Stewart Island promise not only comfortable subsistence but wealth. The occupation has hitherto been carried on in a desultory manner by a few residents, most of whom, partly from imperfect knowledge, partly from inadequate means, have been incapacitated from properly cultivating the rich field at their disposal. That they have been able to subsist at all, support their families, and in one or two cases make money, with the disadvantages they have laboured under, is the best evidence that the undertaking could be conducted to a most successful issue by men whose life training has rendered them adepts at the occupation, masters of the position.

The fishing has been pursued entirely with set-nets and fishing lines.

The bays and harbours are, during the summer months, frequented by shoals of “trumpeter” and “moki,” both fish of rare excellence. The latter will not take a bait, and can only be caught with nets laid in the shallow waters along the edges of the bays and kelp beds inside them. These nets could be laid down with ease by the wives or children of the fishermen, in any weather. I have frequently assisted in placing them in Port William, and in two or three hours caught from fifteen to twenty moki and trumpeter, averaging in weight 5lbs., to each net.

The blue cod, a fair fish when green, and one which cures splendidly, though caught in the bays, is found in largest numbers all along the north and east coast of the island from Rugged Point to Wilson Bay. The sea, looking through its clear, pellucid water, appears to literally swarm with them. Off Smoky Cave and other favourite localities, I have seen them pulled up with lines, three or four to each, as rapidly as the baits could be fixed and let down. I believe four good fishermen could fill a whaleboat in three or four hours, at any of these spots, without moving.

The groper, a lordly fish, is also largely caught with the hook on its favourite banks off the same coast, and in the vicinity of Mason Bay. The head and shoulders of this fish, boiled, equals the best home cod, and smoked or salted is excellent: it is of such large size, and its flesh so firm and compact, it can be cut and cooked like beef-steak.

The white cod also abounds, which, though from want of firmness, does not eat well green, is good dried and smoked. These, with barracouta—which cures well and is of size—may be considered the staple fish of the island; but I have no doubt, when the trawl net is substituted for the present imperfect fishing gear, new and good varieties will be discovered in the straits and vicinity of the island.

There is every evidence that the supply of fish, most of very superior quality, is inexhaustible, and, as I have already stated, no season appears to affect it.

Although the bays are partially deserted in the winter, by their inhabitants seeking the deeper water round the coast for warmth, any fish which takes bait can be caught as readily and as numerously in the middle of winter as in spring or summer.

“Curing” is in its earliest infancy. No one of training or experience has hitherto been engaged in this branch of the business; but the attempts, though imperfect, from ignorance and defective appliances, have been sufficient to determine the practicability of establishing a great and lucrative industry.

There is abundance of timber in each bay for buildings, smoking the fish, making barrels for exporting the salt fish, and all the utensils appertaining to the trade. Vessels of any tonnage can be built on the island. Spars of size can be obtained with ease and in quantity, particularly from Port Pegasus, as also naturally-formed knees and ribs of one of the toughest known woods, the rata, or iron wood, which clothes the shores of Ports Adventure, Pegasus, and Lords River in great luxuriance; while nature has supplied any number of dockyards in the numerous sheltered coves scattered throughout the various harbours.

Tinning fish for export ought, with moderately paid labour, to pay well. The moki and trumpeter in excellence of flavour would rival the preserved salmon so largely imported into the Australian Colonies, and with the groper certainly surpass the American tinned fish, besides possessing the advantage of freshness. I have tasted some prepared in this manner, as an experiment, by an amateur, so palatable that I feel sure it would prove a great success in experienced hands; while the crayfish, which is of large size and abundant in all the bays, fully equals, when tinned, the imported lobsters, and caught easily in any quantity.

Market.

The question of next importance to obtaining with facility any article of merchandise, is its ready disposal at a remunerative price. The local market at Invercargill is very limited, the wholesale prices are as follows:—Moki and trumpeter, which average 5 lbs., and run as high as 10 lbs. each, 12s. a dozen. Blue cod, averaging 4 lbs., though running as high as 8 lbs., 6s. a dozen; and groper, which averages from 30 to 40 lbs., reaching as high as 80 lbs., from 7s. to 12s. each. Smoked and salted fish threepence per lb., but sales are restricted by the sparcity of population and irregularity of supply.

In inviting special settlement to develop a particular resource, a far wider field than this for the consumption of its produce must naturally be anticipated, and there will be little difficulty in finding it.