

dredging of the public oyster-grounds, says, "They are not over-dredged. There is a proof of that because you see Herne Bay is lost, which the dredgemen made, and it only requires to be known that they can go and dredge there the first fair wind, and they would be off to make it again—there can be no doubt about that—making it by cleansing it again from all the accumulations of five-fingers and the other enemies." Again (Mr. F. Buckland): "I do not think it would interfere a bit with oysters to dredge them during spatting time as hard as ever you could go until you see the first spat upon a shell; then you must stop. That dredging would be with the view of keeping the culch clean to the last minute. Dredging the beds and keeping them carefully cleaned is the *sine quâ non* of oyster culture. Dredging is absolutely necessary to clean the grounds in the summer months."

To the question of the Committee, "But does not it enter into your calculation at all that it is right to give some rest to the oyster-beds?" Mr. F. Buckland replies, "I think not. I say, do not take them away. By rest I do not mean quietus or sleep, because you must not do that; I mean they must be continually dredged and dredged and dredged to keep the place clean." To the question "Whether it would not very much injure any oyster-bed for breeding purpose if dredging on it were always permitted, for the sake of taking stock from it to other beds?" he says, "It would do them all the good in the world if you dredge them all the year round, and keep the culch clean, and sell the little oysters and put the breeding ones back. The increase comes from the breeders left in the beds." In reply to the question "Whether it is a good thing to go on disturbing the culch during the spatting season," Mr. H. S. Goody says, "I do not think it does any injury at all. Whatever little injury there may be is more than compensated by the good that is done, because I do not apprehend that the spat falls all in one week or month." Again, Mr. F. Wiseman: "Why, the mere fact alone of allowing an oyster-bed to remain quiescent for two or three years would be the means of causing the growth of crustacea, mud, and weed, and bring on the very evil complained of and so much dreaded—namely, the ruin of the oyster fisheries." I know several oyster merchants who work their grounds during the time spat is falling; they invariably get more than those who leave off as soon as spat can be seen adhering to the culch. I have several cases in point, having proved it for years, where several beds were worked till spat was seen, and then left for a fortnight; after that interval the grounds were found covered with mud, weed, and slime; the result was that those who kept on dredging had more than double the quantity of spat. If an oyster-bed will get foul in a fortnight, how much mud, weed, &c., will accumulate in two or three years if left untouched." Now, with regard to the enemies of the oyster, five-fingers, dog-whelks, &c., how can they be kept down except by dredging? I am in favour of dredging during the summer months, because it is necessary that the grounds should be worked during the summer months, to cleanse them and prepare them for the reception of spat." With such evidence before me, I think it is not difficult to conclude that the reason why the oyster-bed off Port William Heads, to which I have referred, has not improved much during its five years' rest, is because it has not been kept clean by dredging during those years, and that until it is dredged its infecundity will continue; and there are two other deserted beds off the same coast similarly situated. If this view be the correct one, it affects not merely the beds under consideration, but every bed at Stewart Island which may be discovered—dredged till too poor to work, and left a prey to five-fingers, dog-whelks, &c. Thus, the total exhaustion of the beds and cessation of the industry becomes a mere question of time.

21. *Bed being now worked.*—The bed in Foveaux Strait, situated off Halfmoon Bay, lying between Bench Island and Fish Rock, at a depth of 19 to 23 fathoms, on a hard, clean bottom, and which has been dredged for from three to four years, is beginning to give signs of being worked out, though it is a mile long by one and a half miles broad. The oysters dredged up this year are larger in size than any seen since the opening up of the bed, an indication, the dredgers tell me, that the original bottom is being reached, and the first parents—the patriarchs of the bed—are being torn from their resting-place of years. There has been also a far larger proportion of small oysters brought up in the dredges than formerly. So apparent is it that this bed requires rest from dredging for consumption, that the fishermen who are working it have petitioned me to get it closed. It will be closed by my request from the 20th instant to the 28th February, 1879, when it will be left a prey for mud and slime to settle on, and the natural enemies of the oyster to hold an undisturbed jubilee for nearly three years. I dredged for two hours on this bed early this year, and saw in every dredge which was hauled up great numbers of "five-fingers," sponges, crabs, sea worms, and other rubbish.

22. *Dredging for Cultivation.*—To dredge for cultivation or cleansing is readily undertaken in England, where the expense of the process is met by the sale of the "brood" or young oysters to owners of beds for artificial cultivation; and, as there is always a ready sale for "brood" and "ware," it pays the dredgers directly very well, while they profit indirectly by cleaning the natural beds during the close season. Here, however, where there is no such measure of recouping them for their time and labour spent in constant dredging during the five close months of each year, and where the individual interests and desires of each cutter-owner by no means harmonize, it cannot be expected that the dredgers would undertake the expense and trouble consequent on keeping clean deep sea beds far out from shore, without any remuneration other than that of reaping a harvest in the future, which may be equally shared by those who have had no hand in tilling the field.

23. *Suggestions for Methods to be adopted for Cleaning Beds during Close Season.*—There are three ways by which the Government may meet the difficulty. First, by leasing for a period of years portions of oyster-beds to individuals or companies. Secondly, by offering a premium to dredgers to catch and deliver on shore to some authorized person the dog-whelks and five-fingers, paying them at the rate of so much a bucketful, or some other measure which may be determined on, the expense to the Government being recouped by imposing a tax upon the sale of oysters. Thirdly, by the Government employing cutters of its own, with responsible crews, to constantly dredge or trawl over the closed beds, carrying all the dirt and enemies of the oyster to the shore. This expense to be also met by a tax upon the sale of oysters, a higher license fee for dredging for them; and if these were found insufficient to cover the cost, the Government cutters might occasionally be employed in dredging for oysters for sale during the open season.

24. *Merits of each Method: Leasing Parts of Oyster Beds.*—As regards the first proposition—