

CHARLES TAYLOR examined. (No. 43.)

1. *Mr. Bruce.*] You are a member of the firm of Taylor Bros., fish-merchants, of the Thames?—Yes.

2. You entered upon this business about two years ago?—Yes.

3. Prior to that you were for a number of years engaged in fishing?—Yes.

4. You were the owner of your own boats and gear?—Yes.

5. How many years ago is it since you started fishing?—About seventeen or eighteen years ago.

6. At that time what was the state of the bottom of the foreshore right round within the Port of the Thames—I mean, above low-water mark?—Of course there were always patches of soft and hard, but there is more hard now than there used to be.

7. At that time was not the foreshore, generally speaking, of a soft, oozy mud?—Yes.

8. But the bottom now is hard?—Yes.

9. Has the bottom become perceptibly harder, say, during the last six or seven years?—Yes.

10. Prior to this, fishing-poles were pushed down into the mud to fasten the nets?—Yes.

11. I presume that was fairly easy work?—Yes.

12. Of late years what has been the position?—Anchors have taken the place of the poles, because it is too difficult to drive the poles through.

13. The poles would be much more preferable?—Oh, yes!

14. You know the Thames River very well?—Fairly well.

15. You used to fish up the river?—Yes, a good deal.

16. How far from the mouth?—As far as what we call Whitehouse's, which is the reach above Turua.

17. Did you fish successfully there?—Yes, very.

18. Up till when?—Till about seven or eight years ago, and it has gradually fallen off since.

19. *The Chairman.*] Is that the quality or the quantity of the fish?—Quantity.

20. The quality is the same?—To a certain extent—not the size so much, but we get a great many dead fish.

21. *Mr. Bruce.*] Do you attribute the falling-off in the quantity of the fish to the bottom becoming harder?—Well, yes. The mud at the bottom has become different. The silt is taking the place of the natural sea-mud.

22. *The Chairman.*] How do you know that the silt is now taking the place of the natural sea-mud? What are your reasons for making that statement?—I am strongly of that opinion.

23. Have you any reasons, or is it only an opinion?—Well, certainly I have my reasons.

24. You have given us one—the larger number of dead fish?—Yes. We could also see the difference in the colour of the mud. It is much whiter than it used to be, and of course we attribute the bottom becoming so much harder to that.

25. May it not be due to the fact that the place has been overfished, and that the natural food of the fish has been eaten out?—If that was the reason I believe it would apply elsewhere, but across the flats it does not. Why should that be an exception?

26. I do not know: I am asking you?—I fail to see why there should be any exception.

27. You do not think it is so?—I do not.

28. Do you think there is as much shellfish and food on the flats as there used to be?—Yes, exactly.

29. So there is no loss of life in the shellfish?—Well, when you get well clear of the rivers there is no difference, but it has affected round the rivers.

30. *Mr. Bruce.*] And also the portions of the flat abutting on the river?—Yes.

31. You contend that wherever the bottom has become hard the fish-food has been destroyed?—Yes, where it is hard through what we think is the silt.

32. That is to say, it is more difficult for the shellfish to get through the crust than if it was soft?—Yes.

33. In your opinion, is it on account of the tailings of the Olinamuri district being taken into that river and being brought down that the bottom has become harder?—Yes.

34. And the tendency of that hardening is to reduce the fish?—Yes.

35. *The Chairman.*] So far the witness has been merely giving evidence in regard to the foreshores: what about the part outside that is not uncovered at low water? Do you think that has become harder on the bottom, too?—I do not think that it is affected perceptibly.

36. *Mr. Bruce.*] There used to be good fishing opposite the town on the eastern bank of the river?—Very good.

37. Is it so now?—It is very exceptional to be anything of consequence now.

38. The waters inside the river from the mouth up to Turua have always been of a dirty nature?—Yes, owing to the scour of the tide.

39. Have you noticed any difference in the colour of this water of recent years?—Yes.

40. At what state of the tide?—On the strong ebb tides of spring tides it is whiter than with the usual current.

41. *The Chairman.*] Captain Bayldon told us that at the slackest time there was always a velocity down the river of two knots: how can you have the harbour-mud up as far as Turua against that current?—A strong current runs up on the flood tides.

42. Do you agree that running up with the flood there is a minimum velocity of two knots running out?—Yes.

43. And three and a half on the ebb?—Yes, about that.

44. And that carries the mud up as far as Turua?—Yes.

45. *Mr. Bruce.*] Is the main fishing in the Thames River from the mouth to a point opposite Kopu?—Yes, from Opani Point to abreast of Kopu.

46. How many boats have you seen at one time engaged fishing there?—Twelve to fourteen is the most.