

## CHAPTER IX.

# THE FISH AND FISHERIES OF SOUTH AFRICA.\*

TO understand the present state and the possible future of the fishing industry in South Africa it will be well to keep in view its historical development. Like most other industries, its progress has been bound up with the history of the country in which it has appeared, and, owing to the somewhat unique history of South Africa, the development of the industry has not been on quite the usual lines. The progress of an industry is also connected with the physical features of the country; the "Cape of Storms" is not the best environment for the beginnings of a prosperous fishing industry. It is true that this region in the early days of the East India trade very soon acquired a great reputation for the abundance of fish in its seas, and a curious, and at the same time convenient, superstition arose among seafaring men that it was not lucky to pass the Cape on the long journey to the East without a short delay for the purpose of fishing on the Agulhas Bank. Some of the older captains of sailing ships have still wonderful stories to relate as to the great abundance of fish they found when, on passing the stormy Cape, they stood in towards the quieter waters near Cape Agulhas. Though fish were undoubtedly there, and could be caught in large numbers, the justification for any delay of the ship was not probably sufficiently strong in the eyes of her owners without an appeal to seamen's superstition.

### Van Riebeeck's Policy.

If the Cape seas were as prolific as their reputation seemed to indicate, why, it may be asked, did no great fishing industry develop, or even show any signs of development from the time when the

early settlers took up their abode on the shores of Table Bay? The reason is not difficult to discover, as it is recorded in the early history of the Cape, more especially in the interesting pages of van Riebeeck's Journal. Here we very soon learn that the policy of van Riebeeck was, not to develop the Cape, but to utilize its resources to increase the wealth of the home country. The early settlers had little say in the matter, and they were enjoined to make every endeavour to increase their agricultural produce, and to trade with the natives, for the purpose of export and procuring provisions for the passing ships. These were not the days of refrigerators, skilled canning and curing processes, and there was no need for the encouragement of a fishing industry. Dutchmen are, however, born fishermen, and, whether for sport or the procuring of fresh fish, some were apparently inclined to turn their attention to fishing, for an official order was issued that they were not to "waste their time fishing." This was the official attitude towards the industry at that time, and it continued to be so for many years to follow; indeed, one seems to find a faint echo of the old order even in recent times and under conditions entirely altered.

It is instructive to look back on some few incidental remarks on fish in the early records. Even van Riebeeck was interested enough in fish to mention in his journal that, in an expedition to Saldanha Bay, a fish very like the well-known pike of his native country had been caught. The pike—known as the "snoek" in Holland—is a freshwater fish, and as this fish was found in the sea he calls it a "sea-pike" or "zeesnoek." It is mentioned casually, without enthusiasm, and

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