

The Herring Fisherman of the Bay of Fundy.

We must commend to the kindly regards of the reader a most singular being—the herring fisherman of this Bay. Few that see him.—He is neither so moral, so intelligent, so willing to pay his debts, or so temperate or industrious as he might be;—still he is an improved and improving man. Bred to the use of boats from his earliest youth, he displays astonishing skill in their management, and great boldness in his adventures. He will cross in the stormiest weather from island to island, and go from passage to passage, through frightful whirls of tides, which suddenly meet with a loud roar; * and he will drive headlong, as it were, upon rocks and bars, merely to show how easily he can shun them, or how rapidly he can “go about.” He is neither a landsman nor a seaman, a soldier nor a marine, but you would think by his talk, that he could appear to advantage in either of these characters. He is neither a merchant nor a mechanic, and yet he can buy and sell, mend and make as expertly as either.

In the healing art he is wise above all others; and fancies that he possesses a sovereign specific for every ailment which all the world besides considers as incurable. He holds nautical instruments in high derision; for the state of the moon, and the weather prediction of the almanac, the peculiar sound of the sea when it moans, and the particular size or shape of a “cat’s paw,” or “glin” in the sky, lead him to far surer results. He will undertake nothing upon a Friday, and can prove by a hundred incidents how infallible are the signs and omens which he believes in. He thinks to die in his bed, true it is, that he has been overset, that his boat has sunk under him, and that a vessel has run over him; but he is still alive and why should he suppose that he can be drowned? His “fish stories” are without end. In politics, he goes for the largest liberty. He has never heard of easements or prescriptions, but he occupies, at will, both beach and upland, without any claim to the right of either, and will browbeat the actual proprietor who has the temerity to remind him of their relative positions.—Against speculators he wages perpetual war; why should we not? since it is they who put

up the price of flat-hooped, fine, middlings flour, and put down the price of fish and oil!

And who shall do justice to his dress, and to his professional gear? The garments which cover his upper and nether man he calls his *ile suite*. The queer shaped thing worn upon his crown is a *sou-wester*, or, if the humour takes him, a *north-caster*. He wears neither mittens nor gloves, but has a substitute which he has named *nippers*. When he talks about *brush*, he means to speak of the matted and tangled mass which grows upon his head, or the long red hair under his chin, which serves the purpose of a neck-cloth, or of that in front of his ears, which renders him impervious to a dun. His boots are *stampers*. Lest he should lose the moveables about his person, he has them fastened to his pocket by *lanniarks*.—One of his knives is a *cut-throat*, and another is a *splitter*. His apron of leather or canvass is a *berrel*. The compartment into which he throws his fish as he catches them is a *kid*.—The state of the moon favorable for “driving” he calls *darks*. The bent up iron hoop which he uses to carry his burning torch is a *dragon*. The small net with an iron bow and wooden handle is a *dip-net*, because it is with that he dips out of the water the fish which his light draws to the surface.

His *set net* is differently hung, and much larger; it has leads on its lower edge, to sink it its width in the water, and corks upon its upper edge, at regular intervals, to buoy it up, and preserve it nearly in a perpendicular direction so that the herrings may strike it and become entangled in its meshes. Nor does his dialect end here. Chebacco boats and small schooners are known to him as *pinkies*, *hog-gies* and *jiggers*. He knows but little about the hours of the day or the night; every thing with him is reckoned by the tide. Thus, if you ask him what time he was married, he will answer, “On the young flood last night;” and he will tell you that he saw a certain man this morning about “low water slack;” or, as the case may be, “just at half flood,” “as the tide turned,” or, “at two hours to low water.” If he have fish to sell, and is questioned as to their size, he will reply that they are “two quintle” fish, by which he means that fifty will weigh one hundred and twelve pounds. If he speaks of the length of line required on the different fish-grounds, he says that *two shole* are used on the banks and in the Bay of Fundy, and but *half a shot* at the Labrador; by a *shot* he means thirty fathoms or the length of an ordinary line. He is kind and hospitable in

* The ordinary rise and fall of the tide is twenty two feet. The rapidity with which it rushes by the points of land, and through the narrow straits between the islands, creates dangerous cross tides, eddies and whirlpools.