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LABRADOR

(Written Specially for the Canadian Fisherman by P. W. BROWNE.)

SOME years, so the author of "Vikings of the North" tells us, during the progress of an insurance case in the British Admiralty Court, which arose out of the stranding of a fish-carrier at Tub Harbor, on the coast of Labrador, the presiding judge asked the learned counsel: "Where is Tub Harbor?" Counsel replied: "In Labrador, your Lordship." "And," continued the judge, "where is Labrador?" The learned counsel replied: "In Tub Harbor." Whether the learned judge felt wiser after this dialogue history saith not.

This incident is recorded to illustrate a fact, viz., that Labrador is a veritable terra incognita even to learned judges. Were we to ask an attendant at some of our advanced schools a similar question to that made by the Admiralty judge, we should doubtless find that pupils in schools outside of Newfoundland know just as little—less, perhaps—of Labrador than they do of Caliphate of Bagdad.

This is not to be wondered at as school geographies treat the great peninsula with scant courtesy; and it is generally assumed both by teachers and others that Labrador is somewhere near the north pole; was discovered by Dr. Grenfell; and its special characteristics are icebergs and grieving winds.

Labrador is that immense peninsula lying to the east of the Dominion of Canada, extending from the forty-ninth to the sixty-third parallel (N. lat.), and it lies between the fifty-fifth and the seventy-fifth meridian. It has a coast-line of nearly 1,100 miles, and territorially, it is equal to the combined areas of the British Isles, France and Austria.

Historically, Labrador is one of the most interesting sections of the American continent, as it was the first land in the western hemisphere seen by Columbus. He had set his eyes toward the land of the setting sun, the Norsemen had coasted the shores of Labrador (named by them Helluland, or Slabland), and here, probably, was born Snorri, the first child of European parents to see the light on American soil.

The modern discoverer of Labrador was Gaspar Corteal, to whose first voyage Labrador is said to owe its name. Following in Corteal's wake the Portuguese, during the sixteenth century, prosecuted the fisheries along the coast and banks of Labrador and Newfoundland. In a map painted by Veronense on the walls of the Loggia of Raphael in the Vatican Palace, Rome (1556) the southern part of Labrador is set down as Terra di Corte Reale and the neighbouring island of Newfoundland is called Terra di Baccaalao, baccaalao being the Portuguese word for codfish. The word baccaalao itself comes from the Latin baccaulus meaning a stick; and the product derived its name from the manner in which it was dried. The fish were split and hung up on a stick to dry. We have a similar illustration in the Norwegian "stockfish". There were no dakes in the olden days; so the only method of drying a fish was to hang it in the sun.

Basques and Bretons were evidently the first fishermen who established posts along the southern section of Labrador—the section now known as the Straits of Belle Isle; and they even made voyages into "La Grande Baie"—now known as the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Jacques Cartier made a landfall at Chateau in the eastern part of the Straits; in 1534; and we still have the names given by Cartier to sections of the coast, e.g., Blanc Sablon, Bras d'Or, Isle Verte, and Forteau. Cartier was not very favorably impressed with his new discoveries, and he is said to have declared "This must be the country which God gave to Cain!"

Cartier came in touch with the Naskopit or possibly the Montagnais Indians, whom he describes as "men of immense size, wearing their hair coiled on the top of the head like a bundle of straw, on top of which was a bunch of feathers."

When the fleur de lis waved over New France, the French carried on extensive fisheries in the Straits of Belle Isle, which were of considerable importance. There was a settlement at Brest which seems to have occupied in those days a place similar to that which St. Pierre and Miquelon occupy at the present day. Brest was a large trade centre, and remained in the occupancy of the de Courtemanche family for several generations, later coming into the possession of M. de Brouages, one of "The Council of Seven," of Quebec, who held it until the Treaty of Paris, 1763, when Canada became a British possession. Then "The Labrador Company" obtained a monopoly of the fisheries of the coast, and Labrador was annexed to New-

foundland (in 1783). But owing to difficulty arising out of the vested rights of this company, it was restored to the jurisdiction of Canada. In 1809 Labrador was again transferred to the jurisdiction of Newfoundland, under which it has since remained.

The Atlantic coast of Labrador is exceedingly irregular, being deeply indented by many long narrow fjords, so that the coast line exceeds many times the actual distance from Belle Isle to Cape Chidley.

These narrow fjords, more numerous and more picturesque than the fjords of Norway, are surrounded by rocky hills that rise abruptly from the water to heights ranging from 1,000 to 4,000. The water of the inlets is deep, and varies from ten to one hundred fathoms. A fringe of small, rocky islets extends almost continuously along the coast, with a breadth of from five to twenty-five miles. Outside these islets, banks extend seawards for an average distance of fifteen miles. The interior is undulating, and is traversed by ridges of low, rounded hills that seldom rise more than 500 feet above the surrounding level. It is covered with numerous lakes that occupy at least one-fourth of the total area. In size, they vary from small tarns to lakes with surfaces hundreds of square miles in extent.

The interior has never been explored; and it has been visited by few. The table land is sterile, and vegetation is found only in the hollows and the deep ravines. The entire surface is covered with boulders, sometimes three and four feet deep, varying in size from one to twenty feet in diameter.

The climate of Labrador ranges from cold temperate, on the southern coasts, to Arctic, in the far north. The highlands of the interior have only two seasons, summer and winter, and the transition from winter occurs, as a rule, during the first two weeks of June. Summer is of three months' duration: from early in October snow remains permanently, and all the small lakes are frozen over solidly. The coldest months are December, January and February. On the Atlantic coast the season is somewhat longer, but even here, it is only possible to raise the hardier vegetables.

When European first came to Labrador it was inhabited by a fierce, belligerent people whom they called Skraelings. They are now known as Esquimaux. The name Esquimaux is derived from the Abenaki term "eskimatsik"—to eat raw flesh. In the Greek dialect the word is "ashkimal," with a similar meaning. Esquimaux is the French equivalent. The Esquimaux in early days overran the whole peninsula as far south as Mingan; but they were gradually pushed back by the Naskopis and the Montagnais, and no Esquimaux are found at the present day south of Maccovick. At the present day they are found grouped around the Moravian Missions, and number about 1,200. They are still in the primitive stage, and get a living by sealing and fishing. Their catch is handled by the Moravian missionaries—an ecclesiastical commercial organization whose

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Besides the Esquimaux there are two other tribes on the coast, the Montagnais and the Naskopis, who are nomadic in habits, and have no permanent abode. They do but little fishing, and depend upon hunting for a livelihood—a rather precarious mode of existence—and they frequently face to face with starvation. During a recent visit to the coast the writer learned that several had died of starvation during the winter of 1914.

The greatest asset of Labrador is its seemingly inexhaustible cod fishery. Yet one rarely hears the word codfish in Newfoundland or on the coast of Labrador; fish invariably means codfish, and every other member of the finny tribe is called by its distinctive name. The fishery has been prosecuted regularly along the coast since the early days of the 18th century. Prior to this date no regular fishery was carried on by Britisheers, though the Basques and the Bretons had fishing establishments in the Straits of Belle Isle, as we have seen, long before the British visited Labrador. Under the regime of Governor Palliser (Governor of Newfoundland from 1764 to 1768) regulations were drawn up whereby the Labrador fishery should be conducted as a "ship fishery"; and in order to protect the vessels engaged in it, he established Port Pitt, in Cateau Bay, placing it under the command of Lieutenant Adams, who held the position of civil and military officer. A great impetus was thus given to the fishery, and several "rooms" were established in the Straits of Belle Isle and on the upper part of the coast.

Several Jersey firms were established in the Straits shortly afterwards. DeQuetteville had two establishments, one at Blanc Sablon, and another at Forteau, in 1779. Fall & Co. had a room at Admiral's Point in 1795. About the same time Boutillier Brothers carried on a large fishery at Isle aux Bois; and some time later Robin began operations at Long Point. These fishing establishments were practically settlements, and a fishing hamlet arose wherever a "concern" was located. They had a long list of clerks and helpers who were paid exceedingly small wages. West-of-England Adventurers, Americans and Newfoundlanders followed immediately on the trail of the Channel Islanders; and we find the firms of Darby, Cartwright and Lucas at Cape Charles in 1768, and Noble and Pinson in Temple Bay.

Permanent stations to the northward began about 1782. Cartwright established the settlement which bears his name in Sandwich Bay, in 1788; and after a short while sold out to the Hudson Bay Company, which is still operating there.

Hun and Henly located at Long Island in 1800. Warren began operations at Indian Tickle in 1830; and a few Newfoundland planters were at Domino about the same year. Newfoundland fishermen went down to Fosse Water Bay (Hamilton Inlet) in 1832; and these venturesome toilers have been pushing their way north ever since. They now go down to Cape Chidley, even venturing into Ungava Bay. The northern section of the coast affords the most promising fishing grounds, as it is fringed with a vast multitude of islands forming an almost continuous archipelago from Ailik to Cape Mugford, and extends seawards nearly thirty miles. Outside this archipelago and about fifteen miles seaward are numerous banks and shoals which form the summer feeding grounds of the large cod; and a second range of banks, outside the shoals, which are probably their winter feeding places.

This island-studded area is immense; and it is estimated at 7,000 square miles. The Arctic current which leaves these shores exerts a most beneficial influence on the fish life of these regions. The icy current flowing from the Arctic seas is in many places a living mass, a vast ocean of infusoria which accompany the icebergs and flocs, accumulate on the banks of northern Labrador, and render possible the existence of all these forms of marine life—from the crustacean to the diatom; together with the molluscous animals and starfish, which contribute to the sustenance of the great schools of cod which find their homes there.

The Labrador fishery, in former times—in the 70's of the last century—employed about 25,000 people. Today it employs hardly half that number. There were then fully 1,500 vessels, brigs, topsail-schooners, "beaver hats" and fore-and-afters engaged in the fishery, which was much more productive, as regards the catch, than it is today. The fishery has declined rapidly; but the price has increased. The writer remembers the time when Labrador fish sold at \$1.60 a quintal. During the season just ended Labrador fish touched the highest price in the history of the fishing industry—\$6.40. The shortage of the catch and abnormal conditions due to the war forced up the price.

(Continued on page 5)

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