After this date the Basque and Portuguese fishermen engaged in these fisheries rapidly diminished in numbers, and before many years, they entirely withdrew, leaving the fisheries to the French and English. The wealth to be acquired in the gold regions of South America proved a stronger attraction to the Spaniards than the sea harvest which could only be gathered amid toils and dangers. The Portuguese preferred colonization in South America, and the acquisition of wealth in the mines of Brazil. But it is noteworthy that it was the rich fisheries on the banks and around the shores of Newfoundland which first drew European nations to the shores of North America, and it was the wealth derived from them that led to the colonization of North America. But for the attractions presented in the Newfoundland fisheries, the settlement of the northern portion of the new world might have been delayed for an indefinite period. At first, settlements were attempted rather with a view to the protection and expansion of the fisheries than with the idea of the cultivation of the soil. The fisheries pioneered the way to that great civilization which has now extended to the Pacific coast. The possession of these fisheries was the great object of national ambition, and at the present moment they are no less subjects of international contention and diplomatic wrangling.

But who were these Basques, two of whose tombstones still stand at Placentia? Humboldt considers the modern Basque nation as the representatives and descendants of the great nation of the Iberi who were spread over the whole peninsula, and spoke one language modified into different dialects. In fact this language was at one time spoken by all the primitive inhabitants of Spain and Portugal. The etymology of the words denoting the ancient names of mountains, rivers and towns, in almost every part of the peninsula, proves the early universality of the Basque language. It is very peculiar in its structure, terminations, etc.; and has no resemblance to modern Spanish or Italian.