

A gentleman from the Magdalen Islands, informed me that the practice of set-line fishing on the Banks of those islands, by United States fishermen and others, but chiefly United States fishermen, is completely destroying the cod-fishery in the neighborhood of those islands, and that the inhabitants have to leave and go elsewhere in search of fish; when, before set-line fishing was practiced, they had no difficulty in getting good fares at home.

It is the duty of every person interested in the preservation of the North American fisheries (and who among us is not?) do all in their power to have a stop put to set-line fishing and all other injurious methods of taking fish.

I may here add that the United States fishermen, with scarcely an exception, are now fully aware of the injurious effects of set-line fishing, and wish that it was put down by law. The only reason they give for practising it is because others do so.

Set-line fishing by the French, on the Banks off the coasts of Newfoundland, is not only destroying the fishery on these banks, but is also materially affecting the fishery on the coast of Newfoundland,—the fish being intercepted in their course towards the shore and taken there by the constant baiting of millions of hooks.

Set-line fishing is very generally condemned by the French themselves, but it is a serious matter to change the whole system of fishing, so long practiced, of between six and seven hundred sail of vessels, four-fifths of which are of heavy tonnage, especially at a time when they can hardly make both ends meet. They will, it is likely, continue their present method of fishing until necessity compels them to abandon it or the fishery altogether. With a few years like the past, the French fishery will not be worth following, even with the ten franc bounty. Set-line fishing realizes the fatal result of sweeping off all the fish within its reach. Like all evil systems, it is sure to entail ruin in the end on those who practice it. Man is certainly a strange animal, and extremely inconsistent; he builds monuments of all kinds for posterity, but does not hesitate for a moment to destroy the bountiful provisions of Providence intended for all times.

It is to be hoped that the commission, agreed to by the British and United States Governments, to enquire into the state of the North American Fisheries, with a view to the best means of fostering and protecting them, will take the whole system of fishing in the North American waters into consideration.

In my letter of last year to you, I stated that I did not believe that any arrangement could be made with the French Government, and the refusal to appoint a Commissioner proves that my anticipations were correct. The French Government cannot, I almost say dare not, interfere with the method of fishing so long practiced by the French fishermen. It is well known that the French fisheries at St. Pierre and Newfoundland are not in a prosperous condition, even with the ten franc bounty, and I believe that many of the French fishing firms would gladly avail themselves of any dictation or interference in their manner of taking codfish, to give up the business and impute their loss to such interference, and demand redress.

The French fisheries at St. Pierre and Newfoundland are very expensively conducted. The one fact that nearly all their fishing craft and crews have to traverse near six thousand miles, every fishing season, to get on the fishing ground, is a heavy drawback to their profits. This was not felt when fish were plenty, but the vile system of fishing which they have practised