

land contained only 350 families, or nearly 2,000 inhabitants, distributed in 15 small settlements, chiefly along the eastern shore. These constituted the resident population; but, in addition, there was a floating population of several thousands who frequented the shores during the summer, for the sake of the fisheries, which had now attained vast dimensions. Even so early as 1626, one hundred and fifty vessels were annually despatched from Devonshire alone, and the French were even more active in carrying on the fisheries than the English. While these inexhaustible sources of wealth, in the seas around Newfoundland, added greatly to the importance of the country, in another way they indirectly proved to be injurious, by retarding, for more than a century, the settlement of the island, and by giving rise to a state of matters which led to social disorder and flagrant misrule. These lucrative fisheries, as far as the English were concerned, were carried on by ship-owners and traders residing in the west of England. They sent out their ships and fishing crews early in the summer; the fish caught was salted and dried ashore, and when winter approached, the fishermen re-embarked for England, carrying with them the products of their labour. Hence it became their interest to discourage the settlement of the country, as they wished to retain the harbours and fishing coves for the use of their servants in curing the fish, and they regarded all settlers on the land as interlopers, hostile to their pursuits. Their most strenuous efforts were directed to keep the resident population within the narrowest limits. Unhappily the British Government fell in with their views; and, regarding the Newfoundland fisheries as a nursery for seamen, they prohibited all attempts at settlement. No more efforts at colonization were countenanced. The most stringent laws were promulgated forbidding fishermen to remain behind at the close of the fishing season; and masters of vessels were compelled to give bonds of a hundred pounds to bring back such persons as they took out. The commander of the convoy was ordered to bring away all planters; settlement within six miles of the shore was prohibited, and by ordinance "all plantations in Newfoundland were to be discouraged." This wretched, short sighted policy was persevered in for more than a century. Even so late as 1797 we find the Governor for the time being, in a letter to the Sheriff, sharply rebuking that officer for having permitted a Mr. Gill to erect a fence during his absence, and ordering certain sheds to be removed immediately, and forbidding others to "erect chimneys to their sheds or even light fires in them of any kind." With such laws in force, the wonder is, not that the colony did not advance, but that any resident population whatever should be found to occupy its shores. If Newfoundland is not now abreast of her sister colonies, if her resources are so imperfectly developed, her fertile lands unsettled, and her interior unexplored, we see enough in these unrighteous laws to account for such a state of matters. Progress, under such a system, was an impossibility. The unhappy residents could not legally enclose or till a piece of ground, build or repair a house without a license, which it was no easy matter to obtain, and were thus compelled to look to the stormy ocean as the sole source whence they could draw a scanty subsistence. That a certain amount of progress was secured in spite of all these obstacles, and that