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GENERAL REMARKS
ON THE
BRITISH FISHERIES.

[Price One Shilling and Six Pence.]

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BRITISH FISHERIES.

BY

A NORTH BRITON.



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MDCCLXXXIV.

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IN the time of the late Frederic Prince of Wales, after the Rebellion in the year 1745, a spirit was exerted to attempt an improvement of the British Fisheries; and great sums of money were misapplied, as well in building warehouses at or near Leostoffe, as in providing large ships for that purpose. But notwithstanding all the efforts generously made by Government, and the Public in England, and like endeavours by other nations, such as the Swedes, Danes, and Pruffians, at Ostend,
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Dunkirk, and Hamburgh; neither they nor we, have ever yet been able to rival the Dutch, in their methods of catching and salting their fish. The contrary has, indeed, been confidently affirmed in print; but in what I am enabled to offer, I mean, candidly, and without reserve, to explain whatever I think have been the errors committed, that may, as I humbly presume, if properly attended to, prove of some utility to the Public.

In the city and suburbs of London, there are computed to be 800,000 or more inhabitants, above two-thirds of whom daily subsist on butchers meat throughout the year; and seldom taste fish, on account of the dearness of the price. What the poorer sort of people eat, are of those kinds, which, coming in shoals at particular seasons, are then sold reasonable, as mackerel, herrings, and sprats; while the opulent think nothing of giving a guinea for a turbot! All these turbots are caught and

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brought to London by Dutchmen; and in the course of a year, the purchase of this one article will amount to a very great sum of money, which entirely goes out of the kingdom. The people in London are very fond of eels; a small Dutch vessel will come up the river Thames with 10,000 eels on board, and will sell them off in a few days at eight pence *per* pound, and thus carry away two or three hundred pounds in cash, with very little trouble.

To what extent the inhabitants of the metropolis are dependent on foreigners for a supply of fish, and how much money is drained from the public stock, for the importation of this class of provisions; will clearly appear from the Table in the next page.

Account of the Number, Tonnage, and Value, of Foreign Vessels, bringing Turbot, Eels, Lobsters, Crab-fish, and Plaice, to the Port of London; according to an Abstract taken from the Custom House Books.

Date of Entry.	Number of Vessels.	Value.	Aver. Tonnage.
From Feb. 3, 1783, to Nov. 1, 1784.	332 Vessels with Turbot, from 40 to 60 tons, value at least 500 l. each.	£ 166,000	16,600
From Feb. 3, 1783, to Nov. 1, 1784.	221 Vessels with Lobsters and Crab-fish, from 30 to 40 tons, value at least 200 l. each.	44,200	7,735
From Jan. 1, 1783, to Jan. 1, 1784.	46 Vessels with Eels, from 30 to 50 tons, value 333 l. each, at least.	15,318	1,840
Vessels —	599		Tons 26,175
1,500 large boats, with one mast, contrary to Act of Parliament, loaded with Dutch Plaice, value 30 l. each.		45,000	
		£ 270,518	

An inland nation on the Continent must purchase what sea-fish they want, from their maritime neighbours; but that islanders should pay so enormous a tribute to foreigners for the produce of the surrounding sea! is a solecism not easily reconciled to the most obvious dictates of policy: and which will appear the more absurd, the more we examine into particular circumstances.

I have been very credibly informed, that the London fishmongers artfully have their fish brought alive in well-boats to Gravesend; where they lie to supply the orders from town, in such a sparing proportion only, as the price these monopolizing dealers determine to keep their fish at may require. Whatever fish drop while they are kept in these close receptacles, are sold to the women who cry fish about the streets, at a price which, under due regulation, ought to furnish the inhabitants with the best. Even the boats that come to

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to London with mackarel, herrings, and sprats, when too many arrive at one time to suit the purposes of the fishermen, they are known to fettle among themselves what boats shall proceed to market, and how many shall return to sea. Those that are thus countermanded are openly seen shovelling their fish over-board all the while they are passing down the river! What is the natural inference, when a government suffers such glaring abuses to be systematically carried on with impunity?

London is supplied with lobsters and crab-fish from Norway, and, as we have seen, to the annual value of above 44,000 *l.* when at Aberdeen there is a profusion of both kinds exceedingly cheap; fine lobsters at 2 *d.* and 3 *d.* each, and the best crabs at a halfpenny and a penny! Lobsters are very plentiful at the Orkney islands, and at many other places on the coast of Britain; and yet, however it is to be accounted for, I never heard of any being
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sent from such places to London. If the fish from Norway derive any peculiar delicacy by their price keeping them from vulgar tables, the poor might at least be permitted to eat such as our own coast will afford them. The present kind of embargo is therefore a twofold oppression, both on those who have them to sell, and on those who are willing to buy; and it is a subject of wonder, that no intermediate agents perceive their own interest in opening an intercourse between the two distant classes!

Fish are not only extravagantly dear in London, but very often so bad, that a person who has been used to eat fish on the coast, is as sensible of the difference in taste as in price. This most necessary article of subsistence is almost wholly under the power of fishmongers, who make a perfect monopoly of it. In Westminster, in Southwark, and in Wapping, there are no fish-markets, but only fishmongers shops
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scattered up and down, who all maintain a correspondence with each other, for their mutual co-operation against the interest of the Public. If a person goes to buy fish, he sees it laid out on a wooden stand, and a man every now and then dashing fresh water upon it; by which treatment, and by being also exposed to the heat of the sun, it soon spoils. While Billingsgate is the only regular market for fish to supply the vast capital of the British empire, there are many country towns in Britain, with much larger fish-markets. It is therefore an object well worth the consideration of those to whom the welfare of the people is confided, to establish proper markets in convenient parts of that extensive town, that the inhabitants on the banks of so noble a river might be more upon an equality with their neighbours near the sea-coast. This is no impracticable scheme to attempt; and if once effectually done by parliamentary authority, under regula-

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tions to secure the supply of such markets from the interference of the London fish-mongers; a door of consumption would be opened, that would give spirit to the British fisheries to the remotest parts of the island. The Dutch have done every thing in their power to prevent our fisheries from receiving any encouragement in their country; they have even succeeded so far, as to intrude themselves into our markets: the question then is, Whether Britain is so far gone in luxury and infatuation, as to invite over foreign fish by extravagant prices, when Providence has spread such plenty of all sorts around our own shores; and when the greatest epicure on earth need not search beyond our bays and rivers, to satiate his utmost desires? Do we not allow foreigners to run away with our salt to cure their fish with, and then to sell that fish in Britain at exorbitant rates? Let known facts speak for themselves.

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How widely different is the conduct of the Dutch? All foreign herrings that come to Holland, must, according to their laws, pay eighteen guilders the last; and they are not allowed to be exported again from Holland. Whalebone imported by foreigners, pays eight guilders ten stivers, for the value of every hundred guilders; for cut whalebone, the value of every hundred florins, twelve guilders; for train oil, three guilders; for English sprats, seven guilders ten stivers the last; and five guilders on exportation. The laws of Holland expressly prohibit the exportation of any one material, as salt, herring-barrels, nets, hoops, or any article belonging to the Fisheries: yet we Britons are good-natured enough to allow great numbers of ships from Embden, Bremen, &c. to come to Liverpool, and carry away whole cargoes of rock-salt; when at the same time we send vessels from all parts of Britain to France, Spain, and Lisbon, for

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salt to cure our own fish! This fact, so intirely contrary to our real interest, is so notoriously true, that no person is able to contradict it: those who reap a profit from the exportation of this salt, will do every thing in their power to oppose a prohibition of it, and I wish them no injury; but the public good should never yield to private gain, nor the many suffer, to enrich a few.

A great saving of expence would accrue to Britain, by refining this salt for home consumption, in the curing of fish; and were the Government to purchase these salt-works from the proprietors at a fair price, the Public might be great gainers, and those who parted with them, have no cause for complaint. At the same time, I sincerely wish, that no duty whatever were laid on the importation of salt; this, as well as every other material relating to the fishery, ought always to be ready at

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hand at the cheapest rate, if ever we intend to profit by the stock of fish on our coasts.

The present allowance for the waste of foreign salt, is by far too small; and let a person be ever so honest, it is impossible to clear the custom-house bonds, without privately feeding the officers. Lisbon salt is esteemed the whitest, strongest, and the best in all respects for curing of fish. I wish the same could be said of Scots salt, but this salt is not strong enough in its quality: and though in the Frith of Forth, there are annually made 300,000 bushels of salt, beside what is made in other parts of Scotland; yet great care should be taken not to suffer any fish to be cured for exportation with Scots salt; or even to allow the mixing of it with foreign salt, which is frequently done.

It were to be wished, that gentlemen who have salt pans were more careful in the water they use; because their salt is
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found to contain a bitumen. The Dutch have an instrument on board their water schuyts, to try the strength of salt water, in the manner we prove spirits: these schuyts, which are each of them furnished with four copper pumps, go out to sea far from the fresh rivers, and the vessels are never filled but with the purest and strongest sea water. This water is emptied into cast-iron pans, where being mixed with Lisbon salt, it is boiled to a due consistence, and produces a salt for the curing of fish, with which no other salt, but that from Lisbon, can enter into competition. Their salt is sweet, and strong; while our Scots salt is bitter, and weak. Lord Abercorn, and others who have the ability, ought to try the Dutch method, or to send to Liverpool for rock-salt, and refine it in their own pans: and if an example were once given, all the salt manufacturers in the Frith, in the west of Scotland, and at Newcastle, would soon find it their interest
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to adopt the practice. The Dutch use kelp in making glass bottles; and also, what in Scotland we call the Sundays salt pan, salt which answers as well as kelp for the making of bottles. I do not believe this experiment was ever tried in Britain; but every one there attempts something for the good of their country. While we are upon this subject, it may be added, that at Rotterdam, and other places, they have a peculiar way of making their salt with peat, without using either wood or coal. In Scotland, where there are immense quantities of peat, this method might be tried with advantage; particularly in Shetland, where they have hills full of peat, at Barra, or on the Long Islands, where they have neither wood nor coal, but abound with peat. To have salt of their own, as well as such amazing plenty of fish, would be a great step to improve these remote forlorn places; and iron pans might be procured from Carron at an easy rate.

Archibald

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Archibald Duke of Argyle endeavoured to encourage manufactures, and all kinds of improvement, greatly to his honour as a patriot; and the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates were appointed with that intention. Among these Commissioners were, the Lord President of the Session, the Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, the Lord Advocate, &c. all men of great rank and merit, who certainly had the welfare of their country at heart; but their education had not been suitable to the objects in view, and their time was so much engaged in their professional business, that it was impossible for them to bestow due attention to their trust. Beside, no salary was annexed to the appointment of Commissioners, the Secretary only being allowed 300 l. a year; hence this plan did not turn out so beneficial to the country as might naturally have been expected.

In order to a general consideration of the British Fisheries, it may be necessary to form
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some idea of the neighbouring islands, particularly those of Shetland; and I am sorry the account I have to give of these latter, is not more favourable: but the manners and conduct of every people are adapted to their situation and circumstances; so that an improvement of the latter, is the first step to be taken toward any improvement of the former.

It is the duty of a wise and equitable government, to extend its benefits to all parts of the country, and to act impartially for the general good of the whole community: it is therefore to be lamented, that the people in South Britain should know little more of the inhabitants of Shetland, and how those islands are governed, than they know about the people in Lapland, or Nova Zembla! Nevertheless these poor northern natives of a few detached sterile spots of land are our fellow-subjects, and possess an equal claim to every advantage of the constitution, with the

more

more fortunate citizens of London. The only motive for this remark is, that these needy oppressed people, or rather slaves, may obtain that redress from Government, to which they are so justly intitled. Though the heritable jurisdictions in North Britain are abolished by law, the spirit of the feudal system still reigns in that country; and the farther north we go, the stronger its influence is found over the minds of the natives.

The Shetland Islands lie north-east of the Orkneys, between 60 and 61 degrees of north latitude, and are reckoned part of the shire of Orkney. There are forty-four of them inhabited, beside small ones, where they only keep cattle; they extend 72 miles in length, and from 20 to 24 in breadth; and the number of inhabitants is computed to be about 20,000. Their land is for the most part mossy, though here and there valleys are to be found of a tolerable clay soil; but nothing

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is to be seen there that deserves the name of a tree. What few stunted trees there are in inclosures, grow no higher than the walls. I once indeed saw five apples on a tree in a garden, of which the gentleman who owned it was not a little proud!

The country produces black oats, barley, potatoes, cabbages, carrots, turnips, and some peas and beans. Their beef is not fit for roasting, being so thin, but eats tolerably well when smoked. Their sheep and hogs are very small, and their poultry bad, and fishy tasted; their little horses are however exceedingly strong, hardy, and useful.

The climate, in winter, is not so severe as might be expected from the latitude; the sea air moderating the extremity of the cold: but they scarcely have a blink of the Sun for three months. In September it begins to be foggy, with terrible high winds, which are very injurious to the natives, and destructive of their crops; for

the hay of their meadow grounds has hardly any strength in it, and after a storm, the waves of the sea break on the high rocks with such dreadful force, that the white salt froth is carried over their lands, falls on the grass, and burns up wherever it comes. It is an extraordinary good year, when the inhabitants can barely raise black oats for their own consumption.

The country is generally hilly, but in some places the earth is not six inches deep to the solid rock; and in many parts, it is impossible to make a good public road. The soil is full of iron ore, and I found a coarse asbestos, of the same quality with that in Aberdeenshire.

The only town of any consideration on these islands is Lerewick: they have no other fuel than peat; but of this there is a great abundance. Very little land is cultivated, as their whole employment in Summer is fishing; so that I imagine there

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might be room for 10,000 more people, to engage in agriculture and other improvements. The gentleman of the largest property in these islands, is Mr. Gifford of Bosto, whose estate amounts to 500*l.* a year; but whatever the landed income may be, they compute that care and attention to the fishery will produce as much more; so that fifty years purchase has lately been given for land in Shetland on that account.

To prevent emigration, they endeavour to induce their young lads to marry early, at seventeen or eighteen, which fixes them for life; as, without this tie, they are apt to run away, and seldom return. To this end the Laird gives a young married man three acres of mossy ground, and this grant is the utmost of all his expectations. He begins by cutting ditches to drain the land, and between these ditches he sows black oats, and plants potatoes. He then joins with six or seven others like himself in fitting out a fishing-boat; in which they
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sometimes venture fifteen leagues from the shore. These fishing-boats now go to sea under the care of small sloops, of from ten to twenty tons burden; which are of the utmost consequence for their preservation in bad weather, and enable them to go farther out to sea than they could venture to do, destitute of such a protection in cases of emergency. They generally throw their lines at midnight, and when the boats are loaded with turks, cod, ling, or thornbacks, they return to the Laird's steward or factor, with their fish. These fish are brought on shore, and delivered with the guts in them, which is very prejudicial to their goodness; for gutting ought to be the first thing done after they are caught, otherwise the blood soon contaminates the whole body of the fish. The same rule ought to be observed with regard to salmon; for speedy gutting and krimping make all the odds imaginable in the delicate taste of the fish. There is but one
fishing

... fishing town in Scotland, where due attention is paid to this precaution, and that is Gardenstown in the North. The proprietor of this place, by persuasion and small rewards, induced the fishermen to adopt this method; and it were to be wished that it were universal; for then fish would be firm and hard, whereas the greater part of what is brought to market, is soft and flabby.

The poor Shetland fisherman obtains credit from the Laird's steward, at the rate of one penny for a large tusk fish, from 3*d.* to 6*d.* for a large cod or ling, and is allowed the heads of the fish for himself. This man, with a wife and children, pines for the common necessaries of life; he has no public market to go to for the disposal of his fish, nor dare he conceal any; for should he be detected in such a crime, he is instantly banished from the islands. He is obliged to apply to the Laird's factor, who has a warehouse filled with necessaries from

from Scotland, Hamburgh, and Holland; and has been known to be charged no less than five shillings sterling for one peck of oatmeal of eight pounds weight, and been very glad to get it even at this exorbitant rate! For Hamburgh linen, corn spirits, snuff, coarse tobacco, hats, ribbons, and gowns for his wife, the Laird charges him at least 50 *per cent.* profit! The fisherman and his wife are employed in making worsted stockings, mittins, and nightcaps; and can sell their stockings for no more than five pence a pair. The Dutch fishermen are the purchasers of these coarse worsted goods for ready money; but as they lay out no more than about 500 *l.* in a season, this is no grand object. One year with another, the Shetlanders receive from Government, from 2 to 3,000 *l.* a year in bounties for their white fish, exported to foreign markets, as Hamburgh, Barcelona, Bilboa, and up the Straits: but it deserves notice, that they pay no kind of attention

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attention to the herring fishery. They smoke no fish, nor do they know how to cure mud fish, in barrels, called by us salted cod, by the Dutch, Iceland cod; by the French, *moruë*; and by other foreigners, *baccalao*. As they have no wood in Shetland, nothing could favour their fishery more, than to have staves erected for them, the same as at Newfoundland; for, on account of the fogs, their fish is never properly dried, being only exposed on the stone beach. The British Government receives no more than 2 or 300 *l.* of revenue from the whole country; for it is next to an impossibility to prevent smuggling: some hundreds of cutters would be required to watch their motions, on account of the many inlets of the sea, some of which are 15 or 20 miles long. It is confessedly hard, that the Government should give these people a bounty for their fish, when at the same time they smuggle Dutch salt to cure it with! A custom-house

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house officer often comes into a room full of half and whole ankers of Holland gin, without daring to seize one! To talk to them of excise, or of paying duties to the King, is a language they do not understand: they actually once set fire to the custom-house, and burned all the books! They know their distant situation, and naturally take the advantage of it; the gentlemen will not act as Justices of the Peace, and no soldiers, till of late, were seen on the islands. If it should not be admitted as extenuation, it is nevertheless a truth, that smuggling is by no means a vice peculiar to the Shetland Islands. Sir Laurence Dundas has a steward or factor here, who is Collector of the Customs, Sheriff of the county, and Deputy Judge-Admiral; so that, when considered in all these capacities, he is as great a being in Shetland, as a Turkish Bashaw is in Asia.

The poor British subjects, in this frigid corner of the world, ought indeed to have

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their very offences viewed with some degree of indulgence. In this cold damp climate, their water is mossy and unwholesome; and as nature must be supported, it is almost impossible for them to carry on their fishery without a little gin, or Hamburgh corn spirits; and in such circumstances it is very natural to contract a propensity toward spirituous liquors. Both on account of their health and morals, it were certainly to be wished, that they could procure small-beer as easily and as cheaply as the fishermen on the coast of Scotland: but the Shetlanders are obliged to drink sour whey, and live mostly on fish, except in the Summer-time, when they can get milk. The effect of this diet is, that both men and women are liable to convulsion fits; particularly in the most northerly islands.

If the bounty granted to their Fishery, instead of being given to the Laird, or exporter of the fish, were distributed among the

the fishermen, according to the quantity of fish they caught; it would create a spirit of industry and emulation among the common people. They should enjoy the same degree of liberty as the other inhabitants of Scotland; I would break those iron chains of bondage, the old feudal usages; and by a legislative act, give them free liberty to sell their fish to the highest bidder, and to go to the King's, or county warehouse, to purchase oats, salt, and other necessaries for their families and fishery, upon equitable terms: for without magazines of such a kind are established by Government, every thing that we can urge on the subject of the Fisheries, will be utterly in vain. They should not be subjected to the mercy of any superior; and it were moreover to be wished, that all services in Scotland were commuted into money. The bounty of 4s. 6d. the barrel on salted salmon, should be granted to the poor men by whose labour they are

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procured, and not to the owner, merchant, or exporter; whose profit at foreign markets is sufficient. And if the value of the bounty were bestowed in oats, instead of money, it would answer the good purpose of rescuing them from the extortions of the dealers in grain.

The storing of oats in granaries, is far better than the present method of grinding them into meal; meal will not keep good as long as the grain; and often sells, from 1*s.* 6*d.* to 2*s.* the peck of eight pounds weight. As a private man, I am a great enemy to the distilling of corn spirits; for the people in Scotland never think of a bad crop, but make all their surplus grain into whisky!

The small cows in Shetland are almost starved by the sterility of the land, and give each of them but a pint of milk in a day. Both cows and horses are often obliged to eat sea-weeds for want of other food; and, next to oats, the greatest assistance

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ance that could be afforded to the country, would be in the article of hay for their cattle. To add to the miserable situation of these half-famished kine, the wild crows, as hungry as themselves, have sometimes been known to pick the very eyes out of their heads!

The butter they make in these islands, and the Orkneys, is bad, owing to an absurd custom they have of throwing red hot stones into the churn, as they say, to make the butter come quick; but however this may be, both the butter and milk are spoiled in the operation. They still use the Danish weights, measures, and coins; all which ought to be abolished, and one uniform standard of each established throughout the British empire. Every house in Shetland has a fiddle in it; they are fond of dancing and playing at cards, being cheerful in the midst of penury; and very courteous to strangers to the extent of their small ability.

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The two principal bays in these islands are, Braffa Sound, near Lerewick, in the south, and Balta Sound, in the north; two of the finest bays perhaps in the world. Each bay is four or five miles long; vessels go in at the south, and out at the north end, and have no danger to apprehend. There arrive annually in Braffa Sound, between two and three hundred Dutch Iceland ships, of 80 tons; two or three hundred Dutch herring buffes; thirty Dunkirk herring buffes; thirty from Ostend; about thirty Danish, twenty or thirty Prussian; two Dutch convoys, or hospital ships; several jagers, beside Dutch and British Greenland ships. The Dutch and other foreign ships rendezvous near Lerewick by Midsummer-day at farthest, and stay but two or three days. They then go out to find where the great shoals of herrings pass, sail after them, and catch the fish chiefly in the night-time. Whatever they catch, they immediately
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gut, and cure with salt; and if any remain after Sun-set, they are thrown overboard. They follow the herrings till the end of November, even to Yarmouth, at 15 or 20 miles from the British coast; though sometimes the shoals come very near the shore. When the fishermen are in want of peat, water, or salt, they return to their hospital ships at Lerewick, which provide for them. They pay nothing for anchoring-ground, nor for the liberty of fishing on the British shore! During the reigns of Charles I. Charles II. and James II. the Dutch are reported to have paid 30,000 £. a year for this privilege; but since the Revolution, from whatever cause it may proceed, the Government have not received six-pence; and all attention to this important consideration seems to be sunk in oblivion!

The Dutch begin their operations by making what they call Summer-herrings,
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which are very little salted, and sweet tasted; and continue running between Shetland and Holland on this business for several months. In Holland, when these herrings first come, they will give two or three guilders or a ducat for one; and eat them with fallad, esteeming them as good as anchovies: in London they sell for 6*d.* each, being our own fish originally, cured and sold to us by our more vigilant and politic neighbours. After November, they make a kind of little herring, which they smoke no longer than two hours, for eating the next day; but longer, according to the time they are to be kept. They are delicious eating, as good as our Finnan haddocks, or Pipen haddocks at Montrose; but in Britain, this kind of herring is totally unknown. They are used for supper at the first tables at the Hague, as well as by the poor people; and are also eaten with fallad.

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In Holland, as soon as the salt herrings are brought ashore on the quay, there are several men employed to unpack them, which they do with the greatest circumspection. They divide the good from the bad, the fat from the lean; and, after carefully packing each sort again in little barrels, they are sent to all parts of the world. In Scotland, no distinction is made, or care taken; all kinds of herrings are thrown together, good and bad, and for a very sufficient reason, their not knowing the one from the other! It would be of service to get some Dutchmen over privately to instruct them in sorting their fish. The Scotch herrings are often red at the bone, hard, and no better than a mouthful of salt; the Dutch are white, delicate, and soft, and melt in the mouth like an anchovy. This is nothing but the truth, notwithstanding all that has been said to the contrary. It was with great detestation and abhorrence, I one day observed

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their method of unpacking falt herrings at Greenock: for when the herrings were taken out, the pickle, with all the remaining falt, instead of being used to manure the land, was thrown into the river! I was equally astonished and vexed at this instance of ignorance; because the soil about Greenock is very poor and barren. In Scotland, in some years, there are 100,000 barrels of falt herrings consumed at home; and 400,000 barrels sent abroad. It is with pleasure I observe, that of late, the common people in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire, are beginning to use falt herrings. Had not the merchants of Glasgow opened a conveyance for them to the West Indies, I confess I know not what market would have taken them off. The Negroes there eat them with yams, a kind of potatoe. Up the Mediterranean no person will touch a falt herring excepting the Jews; and but few persons are fond of them in London.

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They are beginning to cure smoaked herrings, or what are called red herrings, after the Yarmouth method, in the Isle of Man, on the Western coast, and at Greenock. The lean Autumn herring is the best for this purpose; and they are worth about 3*l.* a barrel abroad, when the falt herrings are only worth 1*l.* The markets for these herrings are, Leghorn, Naples, Venice, Ancona, Genoa, and Civita Vecchia. The people there are fond of smoaked herrings, and yet these markets are sometimes overstocked; therefore this article ought to be encouraged at home. The herrings are smoaked with oak chips, or still better, where juniper can be procured; and the great art is to smoak them to the proper medium; for in Britain they are generally over-smoaked: I would therefore recommend the bringing over some Dutchmen to improve our method in this operation.

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When a thick shoal of herrings comes upon the coast, and the inhabitants are unprovided with salt, they have been advised to catch all they can, and boil them for the oil: this is certainly making the most of them, under the circumstance stated; and on some coasts they even manure the land with fish.

Herrings come annually from the North, where they remain all the winter; they are never known to come farther south than Yarmouth, Holland, or Dieppe in France; and are fattest in the month of June. For these thirty years past, they have run eastward to a sand-bank near Gottenburgh; sometimes they extend to Craile, the Buchanefs, and all the east coast of Scotland. Another branch of them turn to the west side of Britain, and our Scotch herrings are principally taken on the West coast. The herrings seldom fail in crowding into the lakes, whither the
boats

boats follow, and few of those that once enter these basons are lost.

In Shetland, there is a small fish known to the inhabitants by the name of feliks; and the coast is everywhere full of them during the greater part of the year. This fish is one of the most beneficial they have, a boy being able to gain 1*s.* 6*d.* or 2*s.* a day, merely from the oil they afford.

The coast of the Orkney islands is surrounded with funk rocks, far jutting out from the land, always covered and hid by the sea. In addition to this disadvantage, the tides are there very rapid, and often meet in different directions; so that this country is not well adapted for a fishery. The inhabitants are about 32,000 in number; the soil of these islands is of a sufficient depth, some of it very rich; and they have good public roads. If the Orkney people should ever attempt the fishery from Stromness and Kirkwall, they must
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go some distance from home, before they can expect success.

The Hebrides, Western Islands, or more popularly the Long Islands, extend about 160 miles in length, and from six to twenty-four miles in breadth in different parts. On the east side of the northernmost island there is a town called Stornaway, and a custom-house. The inhabitants of the Long Islands are wholly occupied, during summer, in making kelp; in the Orkneys they are chiefly employed in the same way; and I compute the annual value of the kelp made in Scotland may amount to near 10,000*l*. I am happy to observe a prosperous fishery going on at Stornaway, both for herrings and cod; a good many are caught in other parts near Barra, most of which go to Ireland. The lords Macdonald and Clanronald might gain fine land here, if they would drain the country with Dutch water-mills; and might employ

employ many hands to good profit, as vegetation is here inconceivably quick.

Far to the west of the Hebrides, though reckoned as one of the number, lies a small island called St. Kilda. It contains about 500 inhabitants, who, from their little connection with the rest of the world, are unacquainted with the use of money; and live principally on the eggs of sea-fowls, and on fish. During the rebellion in the year 1745, a man of war's boat going on shore there, and asking for news, they replied, they heard of none, but that their laird had declared war against the king of France. One of them being carried to Glasgow, and asked what he thought of the great cathedral, answered, that there were much larger rocks in his country. They fasten thongs of hides, like ropes, to blocks of wood fixed in the earth, and let themselves down the cliffs by them to take young sea-fowls, and their eggs. They have some sheep, and once a year

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year Macleod's factor comes to the island to receive feathers and wool from these poor people; and they have a current notion among them, that whenever he comes, all the inhabitants are sure to catch cold. They have no landing-place round the island; but are obliged to wade into the sea to bring in a boat. These people, as I am informed, learn to imitate the cries of sea birds so naturally, that they will crawl along the grafs, and catch wild geese and other fowls, by answering their different calls.

The principal rivers for salmon in Scotland are, the Tweed, Spey, Dee, Don, Tay, Devern, Findhorn, Inverness, &c. That the salmon fisheries are now brought to great perfection on the east coast of Scotland is a certain fact, and of great national importance; they compute that in the river Tweed alone to be worth 70,000*l.* annually: but on the west coast they are still careless and ignorant. At

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Leghorn, they esteem the small fish, or grilles; they will give two dollars the barrel more for them than for others, and consume 2000 barrels in a year. Venice, Genoa, Ancona, Naples, and Civita Vecchia, are also fond of the small fish; but Flanders, France, and Spain, prefer those that are large. These fish run into the sea in order to purge and purify their blood, and then return to the rivers to spawn; which they do in the sand, covering it up with great caution: it is almost incredible to what a height they will spring into the air, to get up a river where any waterfall or other obstruction interrupts their passage! The avarice of man has, in some rivers, invented what are called krives, to catch the salmon as they pass; which ought all to be destroyed and prohibited, for two very strong reasons: in the first place, the fish are thus often killed in passing up the river to spawn, a circumstance very hurtful to their increase;

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and, secondly, this mode of intercepting the salmon is injurious to the fishery of proprietors on each side of the river, for forty or fifty miles above the places where it is practised.

Some years ago, the salt salmon cured from the produce of the river Spey, was very badly managed. Their casks were so ill made, that they would not retain the pickle; and not only so, but, I believe, this pickle was made by a mixture of Scotch salt with that from Lisbon. They took no precaution to collect the oil from the fish before it was exported; which is performed by letting the barrels lie open on the quay for several days, with little earthen pigs on them, which pressing on the fish, throw up the oil to be taken off. If this operation be not carefully performed before a long voyage, the oil grows rancid, and totally spoils the fish before it gets to market; making it turn yellow like rusty bacon! Still worse was the treatment of the fish

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fish before it came under the hands of the pickier; for when a fisherman caught a salmon, he used to beat it with a stick on the beach to kill it; and every stroke left a black bruise, so that no person at a foreign market would buy it. Such damaged ill-cured fish was indeed fit for no market; but the whimsical taste of a people must be attended to, as well as their more justifiable objections, if we wish to preserve their custom. Leghorn may be cited as an instance, where no person will buy pickled salmon, but all are very fond of salted salmon, which they boil in oil to extract the salt from it, and then eat it with greens; nor will any one purchase less than a whole fish. However rudely the Pope may be treated in effigy every year by the London mob, his fast-days are very favourable to the consumption of British fish!

Four gentlemen at Portsoy undertook jointly a salmon fishery in the river Spey; and gave the Gordon family 500*l.* a year

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in advance for the duke's share, there being other proprietors. They immediately employed Aberdeen coopers, adopted their method of curing the fish, and prosecuted the business so successfully, that for several years they gained a great profit themselves, as well as improved the Gordon estate. I have presumed to mention this fact, because on all the West coast of Scotland, I am apprehensive that as yet they are far from perfection in the mode of conducting the salmon fishery.

The Scotch method of smoking salmon is yet in its infancy; for the finest and best cured in all Europe, is that prepared by the Dutch. Their salmon is much fatter than any other, and I have lately gained a knowledge of their methods of curing it on the spot. The best Scotch smoked salmon is made at present at Alloa near Stirling; but even this is not so well cured and delicious as that made in Holland. The Dutch salmon, when packed up individually,

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vidually, each in a white iron case well tinned, and run over with melted butter, is sent to Batavia, Curaçoa, Surinam, and other remote parts.

The present bounty of 4s. 6d. the barrel of 400 pound weight of salted salmon, engages numbers of stout able-bodied fishermen, coopers, carpenters, and porters, in this branch of business. They build what they call cobs, or flat-bottomed boats; because most of the rivers in Scotland, such as the Dee and the Don, are shallow, clear, rapid streams, sometimes gravelly. It is pretended that the finest salmon is found in these two rivers; and that in muddy water, like the river Tay, the fish is fatter, but not so well tasted. Such nice distinctions, however, are not regarded by the people abroad; the points of most consequence to them being to have the fish well cured, the rising oil carefully taken off, and to have sufficient casks, tightly hooped; and the custom-house officers

officers have it in charge to suffer no faulty casks to go abroad. A barrel of salmon is worth from fifty shillings to three or four pounds; the fluctuation of price depending on the quantity caught, the foreign demand; or the place where the fish is cured: rainy seasons are the most favourable for the salmon fishery.

The kitted salmon, from 7s. 6d. to 10s. 6d. the kit, goes most of it to the London market, under the name of Newcastle salmon; though it chiefly comes from the seaport towns in Scotland, even as far north as Thurso in Caithness. They continue this important branch of business of pickling salmon for London, from January to August 25; when they begin to salt the fish for other markets: and this extensive article of commerce, beside the boilers and coopers employed in it, engages a great number of small vessels, and is a fine nursery for seamen! It is no difficult matter to estimate the amount of the salmon trade

trade for home consumption; but this adds nothing to the national stock: and though Ireland is one of the best markets for Scotch fish, yet the money, thus brought in, is not from foreign countries. I am apprehensive the tides round Ireland are too rapid to favour fisheries.

There is a remarkable fine large bank for the catching of cod-fish near Barra, which are a few barren islands at the south end of the Long Islands, or Hebrides. There is also a considerable quantity caught in Shetland, and sometimes in the dead of winter: the winter cod is the fattest and most esteemed; and, in general, the farther north the finer the sea fish. At Campbell-town, at Eymouth, at Aberdeen, and indeed all round Scotland, they catch fine cod; in Shetland, I was told, they made a few stock fish.

I could wish, that wherever cod is to be found, some fishermen from Pool were distributed, who are perfectly masters of the

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the art of curing mud fish in barrels, as they do at Newfoundland. In Holland, they have a method of taking the salt out of this fish with milk and water, which makes it exceeding good eating; a method of which they are wholly ignorant in Scotland. This fish sells from three to four pounds a barrel, and is a branch that alone employs from two to three hundred vessels of 80 tons, who touch twice a year at Shetland, going to, and coming from, Iceland and Holland: and the fish is sent to Flanders, Germany, and Bremen.

I would most earnestly recommend to the public attention, the encouragement of the British fisheries. The great object is to stimulate industry, and inspire emulation. A Norway boat, which answers exceedingly well upon inland bays, rivers, and lakes, costs only twenty shillings in Norway. To give one of these boats to an industrious young man, at an expence not worth mentioning to Government, would

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add vigour to his industry; and if he were encouraged to marry, by a grant of five acres of ground, according to the Shetland custom, fishermen might be planted wherever we pleased, like cabbages. Such grants should, however, be liable to forfeiture on notorious misconduct; and poor sailors, wounded in the service of their country, should have the preference. Every village formed by such modes of encouragement, ought to be carefully fixed on spots marked out by conveniency of situation, and be built according to approved plans. Could government be induced to contribute 1000*l.* toward the formation of each village, and would the gentlemen in the country co-operate in such establishments; many new fishing towns would in a short time start up, the country round would assume the face of cheerful industry, and the whole island reap sensible benefit from their labours.

I am sorry to have occasion to remark the mismanagement of the whale fisheries in Scotland; however, upon the whole, they have much improved; for we were obliged, forty years ago, to procure all our whalebone from Holland at a very high rate. The good intentions of Government, and of the country gentlemen, have, according to my information, been greatly abused by a class of men, who in England are called ship's husbands. The only place that I know in Scotland, where this business has been well managed, is at Dunbar; where they divided annually from 10 to 12 *per cent.*

The whale fishery is a business of vast importance and profit, and to which Government would, no doubt, give every proper encouragement; but it must be observed, that like all other fisheries in general, it is a mere lottery. The undertakers will, perhaps, be for seven years unsuccessful, and incur continual expences; when,

when, at length, a lucky year will repay both principal and interest with profit. This business therefore is not suitable to a man with a small capital; because, even though his capital should not be exhausted by it, he cannot afford to lie long out of his money. The method of carrying on this extensive concern in Holland is in the following manner: all the artists and tradesmen necessary to fit out and equip a vessel for a Greenland voyage, unite in the adventure; and their accounts are publicly examined, to see that every charge is fairly made: should no profit accrue for seven years, they still persist; the ship proceeds on her voyage, and the partners wait till fortune favours them. It is by means of this uncommon perseverance, that the Dutch have excelled all the nations around them in the whale fishery.

There is no country in Europe so conveniently situated for the Greenland fishery as Scotland; particularly the Orkney and

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Shetland islands, and all the west coast. This fishery is principally calculated to breed the hardiest and best seamen for the British navy. At Leith they had four Greenland ships, at Aberdeen they had two, at Borrowstounness two, and seven more in other parts of Scotland; in all which places there is not now one remaining; not owing to any want of success in fishing, but to the crafty management in the ship's husbands. The making of train oil is also deserving of proper attention and due encouragement.

On various parts of the coast of Britain, there sometimes appear amazing shoals of a species of shark called the dog fish; which drives all other fish before it. This dog-fish is full of oil, and the skin is very valuable to joiners, turners, cabinet-makers, and other artists in wood, for finishing their work. Porpoises, selghs, and sun-fish, are killed in great numbers on the west of Scotland; and the

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numbers might be much increased, if Government would allow a small bounty on the taking of them, or a premium *per* ton on the oil made from them.

If we except the salmon fisheries, the British fisheries, especially in Scotland, are under no kind of regulation. They go out in open boats, a few miles from their town, if the weather is fair and promising; otherwise they hurry back as expeditiously as they can, and very often with great hazard of their lives. They ought not to be permitted to go to sea in any other than decked vessels, of the size of Gravesend boats. At present their voyages can be but short, for instance, as far as the Isle of May, in the Frith; when, for the good of the country, vessels from 10 to 80 tons should be encouraged, built after the manner of Dutch doggers. These vessels are clumsy in appearance, but there is no vessel we know of, so capable of weathering out a storm. They generally have
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four cables and anchors on board, with a small mast and sail; and indeed I attribute the superiority of the Dutch in the fisheries, greatly to the good properties of this heavy looking vessel, as we seldom hear of their being lost. Open boats might indeed attend them, and be used to advantage in good weather; and when it becomes squally or bad, would receive protection from the larger vessels: a regulation that might allow the whole body of fishermen to go 15 or 20 leagues from the coast without apprehension of danger. The command of these vessels should be given to poor midshipmen, half pay lieutenants, or other naval officers whose circumstances may render such a situation eligible. They should not be commissioned by the Lords of the Admiralty, but immediately from the town or place where the fishery they are employed in is carried on; and these commanders, and all their crews, should enjoy a share in the fishery, and be authorized

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thorized to seize smuggled goods, and protect all ships stranded or wrecked on the coast. Care and activity on the part of these gentlemen, would procure them commendations from the towns or corporations they belonged to, for naval preferment on the event of a war. An effectual check to smuggling might thus be given; because all these fishermen are thoroughly well acquainted with the smuggling connexions; and in each of these large fishing vessels a Dutch fisherman should be retained, to instruct our people in the Dutch methods, and should be protected by the magistrates from any insults he might be exposed to from the Scotch fishermen. It is not long since some gentlemen near Montrose, brought over a Dutchman, who caught more fish of all kinds in one day, with his single boat, than almost a whole Scotch fishing town; but the consequence was, that the Scotch fishers grew envious, and threatened to burn his boat, which
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frightened the poor man out of the country. These gentlemen were not only grossly inattentive to their own interest, but failed in their obligation to a poor man invited over to a strange land, by not making his cause their own.

The quality of nets, and other implements, is no trivial object of attention in fishing; and from their peculiar address in making them, at Hamburgh particularly, for catching flat fish, what are called Hamburgh nets, lines, and hooks, obtain the preference over all others in the world. To introduce the manufacture of these articles, after the best Hamburgh patterns, would give bread to thousands, by applying the money now sent abroad, to the promotion of industry and ingenuity at home.

It is with great satisfaction I observe, that in the western parts of Scotland, particularly about Greenock, they are beginning to plant willows to make hoops for the

the fisheries; and the situation is happily suited to the growth of this tree, because much more rain falls on the west coast than on the east. An immense quantity of money is annually sent out of Britain for this very article; and if the cultivation of willows should be encouraged, it is not to be questioned, that we might be able to supply ourselves with hoops, without foreign assistance. The salmon barrels are made of Hamburgh staves, the herring barrels, of Virginia staves; and these two articles we must always be content to procure from abroad.

In every sea-port town of Britain, where plenty of fish is to be caught, I could wish to see established a magazine or warehouse, as I hinted before, under the regulation of the officers of the customs, or magistrates of the place; where proper nets, fish-hooks, lines, salt, barrels, hoops, oats, oatmeal, spirits; every thing, in brief, necessary for the catching and curing of fish, and for the accommodation of the
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fishermen, should at all times be ready on the most reasonable terms. Immense shoals of fish come very often so close upon the shore, that a woman may go into the water with a basket, and bring it out full of herrings or mackarel! However incredible this may appear, it is a fact that happens, more or less in every year; and when it also happens that no salt is at hand, nor large kettles to boil them for the oil, this favourable opportunity for making occasional profit is so far lost, that nothing remains but to cast them on their fields to manure the land!

All that we know concerning the whale fishery, we learned from Holstein men on board our vessels; but as to other fisheries, we have never thought of learning from the Dutch or any nation whatever. I believe the Norwegians must be excellent fishermen, because I know no country in Europe from whence such a quantity of fish is exported, as from Norway; and as

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we are on good terms with the Danes, the court of Denmark would not hesitate to allow us assistance from that country. Mankind will always have something to learn, so long as human nature exists, and be very imperfect beings at best!

After regulating and improving our home fisheries, I would recommend a proper degree of attention to those of Nova Scotia, St. John's, and Newfoundland. The object I have here in view is salmon, which is overlooked, while we attend solely to cod; but if some experienced young men from Aberdeen were sent thither to cure this fish, they might raise their own fortunes, in promoting very essential service to their country.

If every King's ship were ordered to take on board a certain quantity of stock-fish, to be used on what seamen term banyan days, another door would be opened for the consumption of fish: and no physician could object to this addition to a ship's stores, as

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injurious to the health of the crew; stock-fish being certainly more wholesome food than Irish salt beef. All other nations use fish on board their men of war and merchantmen, except ourselves; and should we adopt the custom, the only caution necessary to give it utility, will be to use none but our own produce.

As a private man, I have thus, in my opinion, discharged a duty to my country, in briefly communicating what little knowledge I have acquired, and what information I have received, on a subject of great national importance. My view is, humbly to explain to the legislature, and the Public, the errors committed in our fisheries; of which errors the most capital one is, that of continuing tributary to foreigners, for what a due share of well-conducted industry only, would qualify us to procure with our own hands at our own doors!

F I N I S.