

Duke of Clarence

Pub: AA

September 21. 1786

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Pegasus

S. Johns

Sept. 21. 1786

Sir,

Since, I last wrote, the necessary duty
of a sea officer employed on the Newfoundland station has already given
me an opportunity of making remarks on the fishery, as of course I
shall be enabled to be better acquainted with this most useful settle-
ment of Great Britain as I pursue the orders & instructions left me
by Captain Hawley during his absence to the Westward. Your Ma-
jesty may remember in my last letter I mentioned that the Pega-
sus was to proceed to the British islands & thence in company with
the Rose to range the Western coasts as far as the Magdalen islands.

However in making over our instructions we both were of an opinion
that it would be improper to leave the Eastern part of our station with-
out a ship. I therefore proposed to Captain Harvey, that as there
might arise disputes between us & the French, who usually frequent
to the Westward, that if he thought proper, I should wish to be em-
ployed to the Eastward, he approved of it accordingly & has ac-
cordingly given me orders to remain for the purposes of protecting the
fisheries & carrying on settling disputes among the fishermen
till 11 of August & then proceed to join him at a settled rendez-
vous before you in the Commodore at St. John's.

The face of the country is truly deplorable. There was as far back-
ward as the beginning of April, a small brushwood for the first
five hundred yards in shore, then a most dreadful insupporta-
ble & barren country intersected by fresh water ponds, lakes & bays.
I am informed that these woods are very large thirty miles from the coast
and are of prodigious size & extent. Two people have been visited the island

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parts of the island, so that they are scarce known; it is not well known
whether they are inhabited on the Northern coast the Esqui-
maux Indians proper from Labrador, & others in the island have
there employed as servants to dress the fish. During the fishing
season the number of people and prodigious that come out to
attend the different branches concerned in the Cod fishery is not five
out of a hundred remain in the winter but return to Europe, the
servants, whose business is to cure the fish & go along shore in the
shallops, are all next to a man Irish & full of savage and
debauched that has had no education. The Cod fishery is divided into
two branches, one on the Great Banks caught in ships or brigs,
that must be manned by British seamen, & whose owners must
live in Great Britain according to the act of Parliament, the
other carried on along shore by these Irish servants & whose owners in
occasionally as their boats or shallops are full, which rather than

son is a good one, requires two days to fill the Bark's crew in gene-
-ral six weeks or so before this loading is completed. They usually
make from three to four trips on the Bank during the fishing
season: the method of curing the fish is as follows: they are first of
all washed, then salted, & washed again. They are spread out ei-
-ther on beach, or on flats: a beach is a piece of ground divided
off by large stones & then paved by pieces of rounded rock; but as
this method is very expensive, the merchants who are not very
rich, use the flats, which are easily constructed, with no great
expense by driving stakes into the ground & placing beams
across them: the former way is far to be preferred to the latter. In
most of the process to cure the fish is done as we dry hay in Eng-
-land by burning them, putting them into heaps, & collecting
them into greater bodies as they grow dry. after having been per-
-fectly cured they are put into casks & shipped off to the differ-

sent markets the merchants consign them to, but mostly up the
Mediterranean. The bait with which the fish are caught, are
worms during the first part of the season, & capelans fish dur-
ing the latter. There are like the English smelt both in look
and taste & swarms in such numbers on the coast, that the waves
as they come on shore are absolutely black: with the quanti-
ty of this fish thrown up which the men catch in buckets
at every haul of the sea: they are salted & then sent out to the
ships & brigs on the Great Banks. In the fresh water rivers & lakes
there are plenty of salmon & trout, & also along shore lobsters flat fish
& flounders in such numbers that in three hours I have with my barge
more caught enough to serve the ship's company. Deer, hares, par-
tridges & many other sorts of game frequent the woods in the summer & the
coast in the winter.

According to the plan I have already had the honour of mentioning to Your
Majesty, on the 11th of July Captain Henry sailed & on the 12th made every
signal to part company: that same evening the Pegasus got safe
into Great St. Lawrence Harbour, & on the 14th moved into Little St.
Lawrence: these two harbours are divided from each other by a neck of
land of a mile extent & are 40 Leagues from the passage. The appear-
ance of the country here is far more preferable than we left to the
eastward, & the weather is far more favourable. The Querey and
Jersey people are settled in these parts, & are peaceable & well beha-
-vour'd. On the 17th of Sept Little St. Lawrence arrived the same evening at
Placentia: this was formerly the principal establishment in the
island; but the seat of government was removed about seven-
-ty years ago to St. Johns: since that time this has become the
second establishment & has a Lieutenant Governor: an officer &
eight more of the Royal Artillery are detached here to garrison a

small fort: the town looks more decent than any we have as yet seen
in Newfoundland: it is reckoned to contain from five or six hundred to
two thousand inhabitants: they are a quiet well behaved people, prin-
cipally Irish, & Roman Catholics. The late Governor Admiral
Campbell gave a licence for them to build a Roman Chapel,
which will be finished this autumn: their houses are tolerably good
and clean. The fishery is carried on here in the same manner as in
the other parts of the island: the person principally concerned in it
is a Merchant from Port by the name of Saunders, who is suppo-
sed to have a venture of 50000 £ in his business: he builds
his own vessels of boats here: there are at present on the stocks
two fine large Brigs. The great intent of sending out them of
War is for the Captains to Sarrogate that is to settle disputes that
may arise in the fishery for which purpose the commanding
officer gives them a commission, the different acts of Parliament: &c

Accordingly on the 21 of July I went to the Court House to attend to all
complaints & have since that time attended twice a week. Various
& numberless have been the different things brought before me. Your
Majesty well knows that I am no lawyer: however the inhabitants
and those that have had causes in court, have been so well satis-
fied with my sentences that upon my departing I was so pre-
sented on the 8th of August to join Captain Perry, they desired me
to continue here till the end of that month. I therefore sent an op-
er to Captain Perry to inform him of my reasons for re-
-maining after my orders were expired. On 5th of that month the
boat went. The next day as it was a Sunday, the Irish ser-
-vants came in from fishing & after having got drunk they
assembled to the number of 300 before the Court where the ma-
-gistrate being absent, abused them most grossly upon his going
out to help them, they attempted to break the Court table & so
I let them go.

boats immediately came on board to acquaint me of the riot. I then
went on shore with the boat, manned by James of the Phoenix: upon
our landing they dispersed & I pursued them over the beach till the
ring leader was apprehended: I then called a court, & sentenced him
to receive a hundred lashes, which punishment was immedi-
ately inflicted with the utmost severity. On the 8th of August
a man was sent in from one of the out harbours for having com-
mitted a multiplicity of crimes of robbing, murthering, & after
an examination of more than two hours, it was so far from
being necessary he should be sent to St. Johns to
take his trial for his life. After what had happened in
that riot, I thought it proper for all the inhabitants to
take the oaths of allegiance, which they did accordingly and
I have since that time attended court three times in the week.

On the 17th of August I received a letter from Captain Flacey, in which
he highly approved of my remaining at Placentia, & at the same
time he sent me an order to remain there till 1st of September. The
same day I sent the magistrates & principal merchants of the
Bay presented memorials to be forwarded to the Governor, concerning
the alarming growth of popery since Admiral Campbell gave leave
for a Church to be built at Placentia of the Roman religion
& to be seated, & requesting Mr. Elliot would advise the building
of the English Chapel, as the rising opinion very much grieves
point in which the merchants are very much concerned from
the prodigious influence the Papist Priests have over the
minds of the weak Irish, On the 22nd I sent an express over
land to the Governor to ask his permission to carry on the construc-
tion of the English Church & to be informed by his excellency

how I am to proceed with the governing powers of these Priests. On the
 same day I opened a subscription for a fund to carry this plan
 of the magistrates & merchants into execution: it gave me great
 pleasure to see the liberal donations the Protestant inhabi-
 tants have made. Since the Regent arrived in Placentia
 harbour, the weather was fine & without any fog, but times as warm
 as it is in England till the 15th of August, when it suddenly
 changed to violent gusts of winds with hard squalls of rain
 & severe cold: this lasted sometimes moderating for a few hours
 & then blowing fresh again till the 27th, when at daylight
 a most extraordinary heat, full as intense as Paris felt in the
 West Indies attended a very strong breeze of wind from S. S. W.
 & lasted all that day: in the evening it blew a hurricane from

the same quarter: tho' the ship was made as snug as possible, and
she was in a harbour perfectly landlocked, the gusts of wind
came down so very violent that she could not ride it out, and
she drove at two in the morning, but soon was brought up: a
few days wind suddenly shifted round in a most severe
squall to the Westward, & immediately became cold & mo-
derate weather: every vessel in the harbour drove from their
anchors, & two houses were blown down: tho' the height of the
gale was either at full or change of the moon, the damage
would have been dreadful indeed, from the houses being so
close to the water: From the quarter of the compass from
which it blew, & from the excessive heat during the latter
of the gale, & the immediate change from heat to cold after

the gale at this, it is the universal opinion of the inhabitants & of
 the professional men that a most dreadful hurricane must
 have blown at Jamaica, & if so far to the Westward we felt
 the gale so severely, in the West Indies the havoc must
 have been dreadful. I sincerely hope though that this
 Phenomenon may have been partial only to this country.

Nothing material happened till 4th of September, when the party of the
 Royal Artillery arrived from St. Johns. the officer brought me the answer
 from Mr. Elliot to my letter of 29th of August: in which he highly approu-
 ved of the building the Church at St. Andrew's & sent me instructions how
 to act with the Roman Catholics. The same morning I called on extra-
 ordinary court & published the Governor's edict & put his orders into execu-
 tion: at the same time I desired the Protestant inhabitants to pay into
 the justices hands their subscriptions for building the Church, which amounted

to 150 £ sterling, which will defray the expenses of a neat Chapelin in this found-
land: they have likewise rais'd a few, which amounts to 30 £. This was part
of the revenues for the Clergyman that will be sent out next spring from En-
-gland. I then closed the court of Surrogate for this year at day light on
the 5th of October from Placentia towards the safety Harbour according
to the last orders. I had received from Captain Snow, which was set to be
in that port by 1st of September, but not with the landing which I was
obliged to wait for the Governor's orders. During the last fortnight of
our stay at Placentia I read divine service in the Court House for
an example to the magistrates to perform that duty every Sunday
till the arrival of the missionary from England. There was pray-
-ers of my congregation consisted of all the Protestants of ma-
-ny of the Catholics. Your Majesty will conceive the severity of the
cold in this Island to be such at the latter end of August and the begin-

-ring of September as to freeze in one night puddles of water over with ice
 of half a crown thickness, which was actually the case during the last
 ten days of our remaining in the harbour of Placentia. On the 7th in
 the morning I arrived in St. John's Harbour, where Captain Throop had
 preceded me a day. He gave me order to proceed to join Commodore Collier
 at St. John's. Sailed & got clear of St. John's harbour the same evening.
 Before I have done with Captain Throop, I must by leave be mentioned to your
 Majesty the polite, officer like, & friendly manner in which he has uniformly
 behaved to me. I have had the honour & pleasure of serving under
 his command. On the 8th fell in with the French Schooner, *Le Sable*, of the
Le Sable before seeing she was a man of war. Thought to best to
 -ed sail & went under my stern. Shook him first; he answered my
 question of. Answered his: he was very civil: neither made sail &
 stood away from each other. On the 9th at noon I arrived at St. John's where
 I found the *Salisbury* with the Commodore's broad Pendant. Upon my

arrival I immediately waited upon Mr. Elliot who received me in the
best manner & expressed himself satisfied with my conduct in the fish
the town of St. Johns is very large, & scattered: it extends two miles in length
is built on the side of a steep hill in a very irregular manner for the
convenience of drying the fish on the flabie: for in this harbour there is no
beach: the flabies are thirty feet high so as to be considerably above the
houses: the town is very populous: the inhabitation is computed to
be only to amount to five thousand souls: however well as in the other har-
bours of this island there are ten Roman Catholic towns: though the
people here are very orderly from the number of Magistrates & the
number of military. There are in Carachi three Companies of the 60th Reg-
ment & the best part of a Company of the Royal Artillery: the entrance
of the harbour is about a mile in length & is defended at the South
head by a strong fort: above the town is the Citadel, a small work built
by the

North Head a Signal house is erected from whence they have a view of the
 - some view: there are two Churches in town, the one the Church of England
 the congregation of which consists of 500 people besides the Army &
 Party of the rest of your Majesty's servants in this island, together the
 Roman Catholic's Chapel where many thousands attend daily to the
 detriment of the fishery: the trade at St. Johns is prodigious: seventy
 Sloopes are employ'd out of this port to catch fish; besides many
 hundreds of boats for the same purpose: there are at present more than
 a hundred Ships & Briggs preparing to sail for the European coun-
 - tries with fish, & several Schooners loading for the West Indies with
 the same commodity. I can give your Majesty great satisfaction in
 to hear how prosperously the new colony of New Brunswick's set-
 - tlers: they have put the trade with this country to bring in the com-
 - - mers from America's live stock, flowers, & lumber: & on the contrary to carry from

henceforth to the West Indies.

To-morrow morning I sail for Halifax from whence if any opportunity offers I shall do myself the honour of writing to you if more should from the West Indies on my arrival plenty of occasions are

to be found.

I am,

Sir,

Your Majesty's most affectionate
and most dutiful Grand Subject,

J. O.
William