

THE STORY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

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The story of Newfoundland by Birkenhead

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BIRKENHEAD

**THE STORY OF
NEWFOUNDLAND**

THE STORY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

BY THE RIGHT HON. THE
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PREFACE

TWENTY-TWO years ago the enterprise of Horace Marshall & Son produced a series of small books known as "The Story of the Empire Series." These volumes rendered a great service in bringing home to the citizens of the Empire in a simple and intelligible form their community of interest, and the romantic history of the development of the British Empire.

I was asked more than twenty-one years ago to write the volume which dealt with Newfoundland. I did so. The little book which was the result has been for many years out of print. I have been asked by my friends in Newfoundland and elsewhere to bring it up to date for the purpose of a Second Edition. The publishers assented to this proposal, and this volume is the result.

The book, of course, never pretended to be anything but a slight sketch. An attempt has been made—while errors have been corrected and the

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subject matter has been brought up to date—to maintain such character as it ever possessed.

I shall be well rewarded for any trouble I have taken if it is recognized by my friends in Newfoundland that the reproduction of this little book places on record an admiration for, and an interest in, our oldest colony which has endured for considerably more than twenty-one years.

BIRKENHEAD.

HOUSE OF LORDS,

May 1920.

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CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

THE island of Newfoundland, which is the tenth largest in the world, is about 1640 miles distant from Ireland, and of all the American coast is the nearest point to the Old World. Its relative position in the northern hemisphere may well be indicated by saying that the most northern point at Belle Isle Strait is in the same latitude as that of Edinburgh, whilst St. John's, near the southern extremity, lies in the same latitude as that of Paris. Strategically it forms the key to British North America. St. John's lies about half-way between Liverpool and New York, so that it offers a haven of refuge for needy craft plying between England and the American metropolis. The adjacent part of the coast is also the landing-place for most of the Transatlantic cables: it was at St. John's, too, that the first wireless ocean signals were received. From the sentimental point of view Newfoundland is the oldest of the English colonies, for our brave fishermen were familiar with its

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banks at a time when Virginia and New England were given over to solitude and the Redskin. Commercially it is the centre of the most bountiful fishing industry in the world, and the great potential wealth of its mines is now beyond question. On all these grounds the story of the colony is one with which every citizen of Greater Britain should be familiar. The historians of the island have been capable and in the main judicious, and to the works of Reeves, Bonnycastle, Pedley, Hatton, Harvey, and above all Chief Justice Prowse, and more recently to J. D. Rogers,¹ every writer on Newfoundland must owe much. Of such elaborate work a writer in the present series may say with Virgil's shepherd, "Non invideo, miror magis"; for such a one is committed only to a sketch, made lighter by their labours, of the chief stages in the story of Newfoundland.

To understand that story a short account must be given at the outset of the situation and character of the island. But for the north-eastern side of the country, which is indented by deep and wide inlets, its shape might be roughly described as that of an equilateral triangle. Its area is nearly 43,000 square miles, so that it is larger than Scotland and considerably greater than Ireland, the area of which is 31,760 square miles. Compared to some of the smaller states of Europe, it is found to be

¹ "A Historical Geography of the British Colonies," Vol. v. Part 4. Newfoundland. (Oxford, 1911.)