

**THE ROYAL FISHERY
COMPANIES OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

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The Royal Fishery Companies of the Seventeenth Century by John R. Elder

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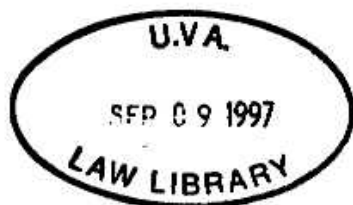
JOHN R. ELDER

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SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

BY
JOHN R. ELDER, M.A.



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PREFACE

THE distinguishing feature of the commercial development of Britain during the seventeenth century is the entry of the idea of co-operation and unification of effort into national trade, the displacement of the individual by the State-directed company. Throughout the century England assiduously set herself to develop her trade resources, both foreign and domestic, by the establishment of manufactories and companies. Inspired by the efforts of her neighbour and rival, Scotland sought to build up her commerce in a similar fashion.

It was but natural that the directors of these efforts in both countries should at an early period turn their attention to the development of the fisheries. To Scotland, in particular, poor in soil and scanty in resources, the fisheries upon her coasts seemed the one natural source of wealth. Those in both countries who strove to establish a national fishery were the more impelled to effort by the knowledge of the value of her State-controlled fishery to Holland, a nation whose great commercial prosperity had already inspired that spirit of jealous rivalry which was to dominate the foreign policy of Britain until maritime supremacy no longer remained with the Dutch.

Thus, the Royal Fisheries of the seventeenth century represent not only a particular phase of a general commercial development, but also a determined effort to wrest from a

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powerful commercial rival a trade which was admittedly her greatest source of wealth. Since the members of the societies for the fishing included both Englishmen and Scotsmen, they represent also, in lesser degree, that growing recognition of the necessity for co-operation between England and Scotland in commercial undertakings which ultimately proved one of the essential factors in the movement for a closer union between the two countries.

The materials for this account of the Royal Fisheries have been found in the University Library, Aberdeen, the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, the British Museum and the Record Office, London. I here acknowledge gratefully my indebtedness to Mr. P. J. Anderson, Librarian, Aberdeen University, and to his assistants, to Mr. Dickson of the Advocates' Library, and to the authorities and officials in the British Museum and the Record Office. I have to thank Mr. John Clarke, Lecturer in Education in the University of Aberdeen, for calling my attention to certain publications bearing on my subject.

My deepest thanks are due to Professor C. Sanford Terry, of Aberdeen University, who has evinced the greatest interest in my research, and whose kindly advice has throughout been invaluable to me.

Finally, I would express my obligation to the Carnegie Trustees for their generous grant in aid of the publication of this book.

JOHN R. ELDER.

ABERDEEN, *November*, 1911.

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CHAPTER I.

THE DUTCH GRAND FISHERY; JAMES I; MARE LIBERUM AND DOMINIUM MARIS.

THE history of the Royal Fishery Companies of England is the history of a series of attempts made during the seventeenth century by the sovereigns of Britain to unite English and Scotch noblemen, gentlemen of private means, merchants and fishermen in an enterprise which had for its ultimate object the ousting of the Dutch from the position of pre-eminence in the North Sea which the Hollanders enjoyed as the result of centuries of strenuous toil and untiring enterprise. Recognising from the first its national importance to a maritime people, the Dutch, with dogged perseverance, had striven to develop the fishing industry, and with such success as made their fisheries at once the envy and the inspiration of all those who, in various ways, laboured in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to establish Britain as a sea power. Roused to action by the success of the Dutch, numerous public-spirited pamphleteers wrote with the intention of impressing upon the British people the fact that the Hollanders were fast becoming a great maritime power through the wealth derived from the exploitation of those resources of the North Sea fisheries which Britain had so long neglected. That British jealousy of the Dutch which is such a factor in the foreign policy of Britain during the seventeenth century, sprang in no small measure from the growing knowledge of the wealth derived