

British people almost without exception looked upon the right of impressment as absolutely necessary to the security of their country. No government would stand for a day which even suggested giving up that right, a right given by common law and, in effect, asserted by Magna Charta.

Jonathan Russell shortly afterwards was instructed to negotiate for an armistice. He made the proposition to Castlereagh; but Russell also made the same stipulation that Monroe had made to Warren, and was contemptuously rebuffed. Russell found that the view taken by most of his countrymen then, as it is now, of the importance of the war was not shared then—as it is not now—by the English-speaking across the sea. Americans, because it was their first war, and, still more, Canadians, because it was waged in large part on their soil, are wont to magnify the war, making it one of the great struggles of history; the American and Canadian school-books were (perhaps still are) full of the story of that conflict. Englishmen then and now looked and look upon it as an insignificant and regrettable episode in the midst of a real fight, the life and death struggle with Napoleon for freedom and indeed for national existence.

An offer by the Czar of Russia to mediate was eagerly grasped by Madison, though rejected with irritation, even scant courtesy, by the British Government; the substitute offer of Castlereagh to negotiate direct was even more promptly accepted by the United States. The President wisely appointed Henry Clay one of the Commissioners; he would certainly fight for American rights to the last and at the same time he would be across the Atlantic and unable effectually to balk or even to embarrass the government in any steps they might take towards peace.

It is impossible not to recognize that at no time would Britain have agreed to abandon the practice of impressment; Bayard and Gallatin saw this and made it perfectly clear to the Washington administration; their instructions that Britain must agree to this, they knew to be hopeless of accomplishment and they said so in