

cal reverses which Great Britain had met with in this short war, the sagacious and reflecting saw in them matter for serious apprehension and alarm. They knew that the former triumphs of their admirals had not so much grown out of an unusual ability to manœuvre fleets, as in the national aptitude to manage single ships, and they saw the proofs of the same aptitude, in the conduct of the Americans during this struggle, improved on by a skill in gunnery, that had never before been so uniformly manifested in naval warfare. In a word, it may be questioned if all the great victories of the last European conflicts caused more exultation among the uninstructed of that nation, than the defeats of this gave rise to misgivings and apprehensions, among those who were able to appreciate causes and to anticipate consequences in a matter so purely professional, as the construction, powers, and handling of ships. Many false modes of accounting for the novel character that had been given to naval battles was resorted to, and among other reasons, it was affirmed that the American vessels of war sailed with crews of picked seamen. That a nation which practised impressment, should imagine that another in which enlistments were voluntary, could possess an advantage of this nature, infers a strong disposition to listen to any means but the right one to account for an unpleasant truth. It is not known that a single vessel left the country, the case of the *Constitution* on her two last cruises excepted, with a crew that could be deemed extraordinary in this respect. No American man-of-war ever sailed with a complement composed of nothing but able seamen; and some of the hardest fought battles that occurred during this war, were fought by ship's companies that were materially worse than common. The people of the vessels on Lake Champlain, in particular, were of a quality much inferior to those usually found in ships of war. Neither were the officers, in general, old or very experienced. The navy itself had existed but fourteen years, when the war commenced; and some of the commanders began their professional careers, several years after the first appointments had been made. Perhaps one half of the lieutenants, in the service at the peace of 1815, had gone on board ship, for the first time, within six years from the declaration of the war, and very many of them within three or four. So far from the midshipmen having been masters and mates of merchantmen, as was reported at the time, they were generally youths that first quitted the ease and comforts of the paternal home, when they appeared on the quarter-deck of a man-of-war.

That the tone and discipline of the service were high, is true; but it must be ascribed to moral, and not to physical causes; to that aptitude in the American character for the sea, which has been so constantly manifested from the day the first pinnace sailed along the coast on the trading voyages of the seventeenth century, down to the present moment.