

ties in circumstances of great destitution, and the charities of the country, both public and private, are severely taxed to relieve their immediate wants. In time they mingle with the new community in which they find themselves, and seek means of living; some find employment in the cities, others go to the frontiers, to cultivated lands reclaimed from the forest, and a greater or less number of the residue, becoming in time naturalized citizens, enter into the merchant service, under the flag of their adopted country.

Now, my lord, if war should break out between England and a European power, can any thing be more unjust, any thing more irreconcilable to the general sentiments of mankind, than that England should seek out these persons, thus encouraged by her, and compelled by their own condition to leave their native homes, tear them away from their new employments, their new political relations, and their domestic connexions, and force them to undergo the dangers and hardships of military service, for a country which has thus ceased to be their own country? Certainly, certainly, my lord, there can be but one answer to this question. Is it far more reasonable that England should either prevent such emigration of her subjects, or that, if she encourage and promote it, she should leave them not to the embroilment of a double and a contradictory allegiance, but to their own voluntary choice, to form such relations, political or social, as they see fit in the country where they are to find their bread, and to the laws and institutions of which they are to look for defence and protection?

A question of such serious importance ought now to be put at rest. If the United States give shelter and protection to those whom the policy of England annually casts upon their shores—if, by the benign influences of their Government and institutions, and by the happy condition of the country, those emigrants become raised from poverty to comfort, finding it easy even to become landholders, and being allowed to partake in the enjoyment of all civil rights—if all this may be done, (and all this is done, under the countenance and encouragement of England herself,) is it not high time, my lord, that, yielding that which had its origin in feudal ideas, as inconsistent with the present state of society, and especially with the intercourse and relations subsisting between the old world and the new, England should at length formally disclaim all right to the services of such persons, and renounce all control over their conduct?

But impressment is subject to objections of a much wider range. If it could be justified in its application to those who are declared to be its only objects, it still remains true that, in its exercise, it touches the political rights of other Governments, and endangers the security of their own native subjects and citizens. The sovereignty of the State is concerned in maintaining its exclusive jurisdiction and possession over its merchant ships on the seas, except so far as the law of nations justifies intrusion upon that possession for special purposes; and all experience has shown that no member of a crew, wherever born, is safe against impressment when a ship is visited.

The evils and injuries resulting from the actual practice can hardly be overstated, and have ever proved themselves to be such as should lead to its relinquishment, even if it were founded in any defensible principle. The difficulty of discriminating between English subjects and American citizens has always been found to be great, even when an honest purpose of discrimination has existed. But the lieutenant of a man-of-war, having necessity for men, is apt to be a summary judge, and his decisions will be quite as significant of his own wants and his own power as of the truth and justice of the case. An extract from a letter of Mr. King, of the 13th of April, 1797, to the American Secretary of State, shows something of the enormous extent of these wrongful seizures:

"Instead of a few, and these in many instances equivocal cases, I have," says he, "since the month of July past, made application for the discharge, from British men-of-war, of two hundred and seventy-one seamen, who, stating themselves to be Americans, have claimed my interference. Of this number eighty-six have been ordered by the Admiralty to be discharged, thirty-seven more have been detained as British subjects or as American volunteers, or for want of proof that they are Americans, and to my applications for the discharge of the remaining one hundred and forty-eight, I have received no answer—the slips on board of which these seamen were detained having, in many instances, sailed before an examination was made in consequence of my application.

"It is certain that some of those who have applied to me are not American citizens, but the exceptions are in my opinion few, and the evidence, exclusive of certificates, has been such as, in most cases, to satisfy me that the applicants were real Americans, who have been forced into the British service, and who, with singular constancy, have generally persevered in refusing pay or bounty, though in some instances they have been in service more than two years."