

THE ALABAMA CLAIMS.

We on our part might have resented it by an instant declaration of war; but when it comes up for consideration long afterwards, as a matter of national complaint, it must be viewed with more calmness. If our insurrection had in fact proved to be a mere riot which had been suppressed by our civil authorities, the belligerent rights conceded to the insurgents would have been only an expression of ill-will against us, of as little practical importance perhaps as our own recognition of Hungary, some years ago, not merely as a belligerent, but as a nation. The concession of belligerent rights to our insurgents was not the cause of the fitting out of the privateers. They were not fitted out till long after the war had become a perfectly established fact, recognized as such by the whole civilized world.

This item in one list of grievances is usually spoken of as the climax of all injuries,—the crowning wrong and indignity that no merely human patience could be expected tamely to endure. Mr. Sumner denounces the declaration of neutrality as a declaration of equality between our national government and the rebel "slavemongers;" as an insult to our government; as a "moral absurdity,—offensive to reason and to all those precedents which makes the glory of the British name." Is there not some slight confusion of ideas in this view of the case? All that we had any legal right to demand of England was a strict and impartial neutrality;—and the sum and substance of all our complaints against her government is simply that she did not faithfully fulfil that obligation. The Queen's Proclamation of neutrality can hardly be said to have been intrinsically wrongful and offensive of itself. It was a warning and command to her subjects to do the very thing that we insist they were bound to do, and the very thing and only thing which we had a *right* to insist that they should do. The fact that the rebels were "slavemongers" (to use the classical expression of Mr. Sumner) has nothing to do with the matter. So far as the obligation of neutrality was concerned, England placed both combatant parties upon equal ground. If she had done otherwise, it would not have been neutrality; if any thing in the time and manner of issuing the proclamation justifies us in saying that it was a premature concession, "a hasty recognition," we may have had cause to take offence: but it is difficult to conceive how it can be made the subject of a treaty. It cannot be paid for in money; it is too late now to resent it by a declaration of war; it is sheer absurdity to talk of retraction or apology. There is absolutely nothing that we can ask the British government to do about it,—and it is impossible to understand what Mr. Sumner proposes that we should do as to this (as he seems to consider it) most important item in our list of wrongs.

By far the greatest part of the wrong which

England inflicted upon us during our late struggle, is one which money cannot pay for, and which no treaty can adjust. When our rebellion, unprovoked and unreasonable as we considered it, first broke out, we flattered ourselves that we were upholding lawful authority against revolutionary violence and disorganization; that the world generally would understand that our disturbances had their origin in the domestic conflict of opinion in this country on the subject of slavery: that it was also universally known that the entire secession movement was in the interest of slavery as a permanent and dominant national interest; and that although, from our position, we claimed only to uphold and maintain the Constitution, and the existence and authority of the Union under it, and so were not at liberty directly to assail slavery in its local strongholds, we at the North at least deplored its existence, and would be glad to witness its downfall. We supposed that England also was sincerely, and on principle, a foe to slavery; but we were not at all prepared for the discovery that she was a thousand times more a foe to democracy. Nothing could have been more dismal and overwhelming than our disappointment at finding that all the sympathies of the British public and all the moral weight of British opinion were on the side of our foes. Of course, it was no matter of surprise that a large portion of the people of Great Britain, imperfectly informed of the merits of the case, and perhaps caring about them but little, should have bestowed their applause and sympathy upon the party which seemed numerically the weaker, yet defended its cause with such spirit, and with such a brilliant promise of success. But the difficulty lay much deeper. The cry everywhere throughout the kingdom was that the great republic had broken down, and all England clapped its hands with delight. England rejoiced and triumphed at the prospect of our downfall without reserve and without disguise. We were everywhere denounced as mere wrong-doers. Our efforts to defend our Union and preserve our nationality were stigmatized everywhere as unjustifiable and unchristian obstinacy, in prolonging a hopeless and meaningless, and for that reason a brutal and inhuman war. There was not a word of encouragement or sympathy for us (with a very few honourable exceptions) from the periodical press—from the peerage—from parliament—the clergy—the army—the navy—or the commercial classes. Bankers hastened to lend their money to the rebels, and the confederate loan was current on the London Exchange at a higher rate than that of the United States. So far as the public opinion of a country can be expressed in any mode intelligible to other nations, it was with substantial unanimity against us, and in favour of our enemies. The whole moral weight of England was upon the side of the Confederates; and she did about all she could, short of actually declaring war