

Unhappily the years from 1815 to 1850 are the dark ages of politics. Their events are too old to be remembered—too fresh to be recorded in history. But for this, the authors of the Case could hardly have been misled by erroneous impressions so far as to venture on the assertions quoted above. As they have thus ventured, however, and as nothing can be more desirable than that the British Nation should at this crisis correctly appreciate the lessons of our past diplomatic relations with America, we propose to invade the obscurity of the last fifty or sixty years, and to exhibit the real nature of those half-forgotten transactions, on account of which the United States now claim from us a grateful acknowledgment of their generosity.

It is worth while to notice that even with regard to the war of 1812—into the causes of which it would be beside our present purpose to enter—the language of the Case is inaccurate, and the implied charge against this country unfair. The American people were not 'forced into war' in 1812 by the claim of England to impress seamen on the high seas from vessels of the United States. We claimed the right to search American merchantmen for deserters from the British navy, and never advanced any claim in reference to impressment; and though some British naval officers were overbearing and aggressive, their worst acts were promptly disavowed and made the subject of apologies.*

The Orders in Council, which had originally given rise to the disputes between this country and the Americans, were repealed by us before Congress declared war in 1812; and the United States, in going to war, presented the odd spectacle of a nation attacking another to exhale feelings of anger, the principal justification of which had passed away.

But passing over this episode in our relations with America, we venture to assert that from the treaty of Ghent to the present day all important disputes between the two countries have ended, not only in settlements favourable to the United States, but in the actual surrender by Great Britain of advantages to which she has established sound and equitable claims. Such claims she has several times abandoned, in the hope of securing the friendship of America or for the sake of averting imminent danger of war.

Let us examine first the story of the

Maine boundary.* The treaty of Paris of 1783, recognising the independence of the United States, defined a boundary between British and American territory from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains. At that time, it is well to remember, no claim was advanced on behalf of the new republic for any territory west of the Rocky Mountains. The line was appointed to run as follows:—

'From the north-west angle of Nova Scotia viz., that angle which is formed by a line drawn due north from the sources of St. Croix River to the highlands; along the said highlands which divide those rivers that empty themselves into the River St. Lawrence, from those which fall into the Atlantic Ocean to the north-westernmost head of Connecticut River; thence along the middle of that river to the 45th degree of north latitude; from thence, by a line drawn due west on the said latitude, until it strikes the River Irroquois, &c., &c.'

The boundary is then traced through the great lakes, but we need not follow it so far west at present. The eastern boundary is further defined in these words:—

'East, by a line to be drawn along the middle of the River St. Croix, from its mouth in the Bay of Fundy to its source, and from its source directly north to the aforesaid highlands, which divide the Rivers that fall into the Atlantic from those which fall into the River St. Lawrence, &c., &c.'

Thirty years after these confused and ungrammatical sentences were written, when British and American plenipotentiaries were again assembled, this time at Ghent, in 1814, to adjust terms of peace at the close of the war, the country lying about the sources of the St. Croix River was already a disputed territory. As far back as 1792 the settlers in Maine, exploring the country between the Bay of Fundy and the St. Lawrence, a region that was but imperfectly known at the time the treaty of 1783 was concluded, had advanced the claim that afterwards became the subject of the celebrated boundary dispute. They asserted that the highlands mentioned in the treaty were to be found far away in the north—north of the sources of the St. John River. A glance at a map will render easily intelligible the geographical references we are compelled to make. If the boundary

* To avoid the repeated quotation of authorities in the text we may refer the reader for all facts in the next few pages to the great debate in the House of Commons on the Ashburton Treaty that took place on the 21st of March, 1843, and to Mr. G. W. Featherstonhaugh's 'Observations upon the Treaty of Washington, signed 9th August, 1842.' Also to an article which appeared in the 'Quarterly Review,' for March, 1843.

* It was shown in the 'Quarterly Review' for July, 1838, that Great Britain never impressed an American, knowing him to be such.

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