

native subjects and citizens. The sovereignty of the State is concerned in maintaining its exclusive jurisdiction and possession over its merchantships on the sea, except so far as the law of nations justifies intrusion of that possession for special purposes; and all experience has shown that no member of a crew, wherever born, is safe against imprisonment 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 on 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 those 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 ships 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."

But the injuries of impressment are by no means confined to its immediate subjects, or the individuals on whom it is practised. Vessels suffer from the weakening of their crews, and voyages are often delayed, and not unfrequently broken up, by subtraction from the number of necessary hands by impressment. And what is still of greater and more general moment, the fear of impressment has been found to create great difficulty in obtaining sailors for the American merchant-service, in times of European war. Seafaring men, otherwise inclined to enter into that service are, as experience has shown, deterred by the fear of finding themselves ere long in compulsory military service in British ships of war. Many instances have occurred fully established in proof, in which raw seamen, natives of the United States, fresh from the fields of agriculture, entering for the first time on shipboard, have been impressed before they made the land, placed on the decks of British men-of-war, and compelled to serve for years before they could obtain their release, or revisit their country and their homes. Such instances become known, and their effect in discouraging young men from engaging in the merchant-service of their country, can neither be doubted nor wondered at. More than all, my Lord, the practice of impressment, wherever it has existed, has produced, not conciliation and good feeling, but resentment, exasperation, and animosity, between the two great commercial countries of the world.

In the calm and quiet which have succeeded the late war, a condition so favourable for dispassionate consideration, England herself has evidently seen the harshness of impressment, even when exercised on seamen in her own merchant-service; and she has adopted measures calculated, if not to renounce the power or to abolish the practice, yet, at least, to supersede its necessity, by other means of manning the Royal Navy more compatible with justice and the rights of individuals, and far more conformable to the spirit and sentiments of the age.