

seamen found on board of American vessels. This measure was based on the doctrine, then recognized by all European nations, that a subject could not renounce his allegiance, and that the government under whose flag he was born had a right to his services wherever he might be found. This doctrine therefore involved the right of search, both of war vessels and commercial ships—a claim most obnoxious in every way, but more especially as the exercise of this right was liable to great abuse. It is singular that in 1861, long after the right of search had been abandoned by Great Britain, it was revived by Commodore Wilkes of the United States Navy, when he boarded the British Mail Steamer Trent, and took from her Messrs. Mason and Slidell, the Confederate Commissioners then on their way home to England. It is still more singular that this act, so universally condemned in Great Britain, was almost as universally approved by public opinion in the United States, so true it is that nations are generally guided in their views of public questions by motives of expediency and self interest. Congress in 1812 regarded the exercise of the right of search by Great Britain as a “crying enormity” and declared war against her for that cause, yet Congress in 1861 passed a vote of thanks to Commodore Wilkes for his exercise of the right of search in an extremely aggravated form. In neither case was Congress fortunate in its expression of opinion, for in 1815, the Government of the United States was forced to conclude a treaty of peace with Great Britain in which the right of search, the ostensible cause of the war, was not so much as mentioned; while in 1861, a few days after the vote of thanks was passed, the same Government was obliged to give up Messrs. Mason and