

The Press-Gang Afloat and Ashore

John R. Hutchinson

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by John R. Hutchinson

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THE PRESS-GANG AFLOAT AND ASHORE

BY J. R. HUTCHINSON

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THE PRESS-GANG.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE PRESS-GANG CAME IN.

The practice of pressing men--that is to say, of taking by intimidation or force those who will not volunteer--would seem to have been world-wide in its adoption.

Wherever man desired to have a thing done, and was powerful enough to insure the doing of it, there he attained his end by the simple expedient of compelling others to do for him what he, unaided, could not do for himself.

The individual, provided he did not conspire in sufficient numbers to impede or defeat the end in view, counted only as a food-consuming atom in the human mass which was set to work out the purpose of the master mind and hand. His face value in the problem was that of a living wage. If he sought to enhance his value by opposing the master hand, the master hand seized him and wrung his withers.

So long as the compelling power confined the doing of the things it desired done to works of construction, it met with little opposition in its designs, experienced little difficulty in coercing the labour necessary for piling its walls, excavating its tanks, raising its pyramids and castles, or for levelling its roads and building its ships and cities. These were the commonplace achievements of peace, at which even the coerced might toil unafraid; for apart from the normal incidence of death, such works entailed little danger to the lives of the multitudes who wrought upon them. Men could in consequence be procured for them by the exercise of the minimum of coercion--by, that is to say, the mere threat of it.

When peace went to the wall and the pressed man was called upon to go

to battle, the case assumed another aspect, an acuter phase. Given a state of war, the danger to life and limb, the incidence of death, at once jumped enormously, and in proportion as these disquieting factors in the pressed man's lot mounted up, just in that proportion did his opposition to the power that sought to take him become the more determined, strenuous, and undisguised.

Particularly was this true of warlike operations upon the sea, for to the extraordinary and terrible risks of war were here added the ordinary but ever-present dangers of wind and wave and storm, sufficient in themselves to appal the unaccustomed and to antagonise the unwilling. In face of these superlative risks the difficulty of procuring men was accentuated a thousand-fold, and with it both the nature and the degree of the coercive force necessary to be exercised for their procurement.

In these circumstances the Ruling Power had no option but to resort to more exigent means of attaining its end. In times of peace, working through myriad hands, it had constructed a thousand monuments of ornamental or utilitarian industry. These, with the commonweal they represented, were now threatened and must be protected at all costs. What more reasonable than to demand of those who had built, or of their successors in the perpetual inheritance of toil, that they should protect what they had reared. Hitherto, in most cases, the men required to meet the national need had submitted at a threat. They had to live, and coercive toil meant at least a living wage. Now, made rebellious by a fearful looking forward to the risks they were called upon to incur, they had to be met by more effective measures. Faced by this emergency, Power did not mince matters. It laid violent hands upon the unwilling subject and forced him, *_nolens volens_*, to sail its ships, to man its guns, and to fight its battles by sea as he already, under less overt compulsion, did its bidding by land.

It is with this phase of pressing--pressing open, violent and unashamed--that we purpose here to deal, and more particularly with pressing as it applies to the sea and sailors, to the Navy and the defence of an Island Kingdom.

At what time the pressing of men for the sea service of the Crown was first resorted to in these islands it is impossible to determine. There is evidence, however, that the practice was not only in vogue, but firmly established as an adjunct of power, as early as the days of the Saxon kings. It was, in fact, coeval with feudalism, of which it may be described as a side-issue incidental to a maritime situation; for though it is impossible to point to any species of fee, as understood of the tenure of land, under which the holder was liable to render service at sea, yet it must not be forgotten that the great ports of the kingdom, and more especially the Cinque Ports, were from time immemorial bound to find ships for national purposes, whenever called upon to do so, in return for the peculiar rights and privileges conferred upon them by the Crown. The supply of ships necessarily involved the supply of men to sail and fight them, and in this supply, or, rather, in the mode of obtaining it, we have undoubtedly the origin of the later impress system.

With the reign of John the practice springs into sudden prominence. The incessant activities of that uneasy king led to almost incessant pressing, and at certain crises in his reign commission after commission is directed, in feverish succession, to the sheriffs of

counties and the bailiffs of seaports throughout the kingdom, straitly enjoining them to arrest and stay all ships within their respective jurisdictions, and with the ships the mariners who sail them.

[Footnote: By a plausible euphemism they were said to be "hired." As a matter of fact, both ships and men were retained during the royal pleasure at rates fixed by custom.] No exception was taken to these edicts. Long usage rendered the royal lien indefeasible. [Footnote: In more modern times the pressing of ships, though still put forward as a prerogative of the Crown, was confined in the main to unforeseen exigencies of transport. On the fall of Louisburg in 1760, vessels were pressed at that port in order to carry the prisoners of war to France (_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1491--Capt. Byron, 17 June 1760); and in 1764, again, we find Capt. Brereton, of the _Falmouth_, forcibly impressing the East India ship _Revenge_ for the purpose of transporting to Fort St. George, in British India, the company, numbering some four hundred and twenty-one souls, of the _Siam_, then recently condemned at Manilla as unseaworthy.--_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1498--Letters of Capt. Brereton, 1764.]

In the carrying out of the royal commands there was consequently, at this stage in the development of pressing, little if any resort to direct coercion. From the very nature of the case the principle of coercion was there, but it was there only in the bud. The king's right to hale whom he would into his service being practically undisputed, a threat of reprisals in the event of disobedience answered all purposes, and even this threat was as yet more often implied than openly expressed. King John was perhaps the first to clothe it in words. Requisitioning the services of the mariners of Wales, a notoriously disloyal body, he gave the warrant, issued in 1208, a severely minatory turn. "Know ye for certain," it ran, "that if ye act contrary to this, we will cause you and the masters of your vessels to be hanged, and all your goods to be seized for our use."

At this point in the gradual subjection of the seaman to the needs of the nation, defensive or the contrary, we are confronted by an event as remarkable in its nature as it is epoch-making in its consequences. Magna Charta was sealed on the 13th of June 1215, and within a year of that date, on, namely, the 14th of April then next ensuing, King John issued his commission to the barons of twenty-two seaports, requiring them, in terms admitting of neither misconstruction nor compromise, to arrest all ships, and to assemble those ships, together with their companies, in the River of Thames before a certain day. [Footnote: Hardy, _Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum_, 1833.] This wholesale embargo upon the shipping and seamen of the nation, imposed as it was immediately after the en sealing of Magna Charta, raises a question of great constitutional interest. In what sense, and to what extent, was the Charter of English Liberties intended to apply to the seafaring man?

Essentially a tyrant and a ruthless promise-breaker, John's natural cruelty would in itself sufficiently account for the dire penalties threatened under the warrant of 1208; but neither his tyranny, his faithlessness of character, nor his very human irritation at the concessions wrung from him by his barons, can explain to our satisfaction why, having granted a charter affirming and safeguarding the liberties of, ostensibly, every class of his people, he should immediately inflict upon one of those classes, and that, too, the one least of all concerned in his historic dispute, the pains of a most rigorous impressment. The only rational explanation of his conduct is,

that in thus acting he was contravening no convention, doing violence to no covenant, but was, on the contrary, merely exercising, in accordance with time-honoured usage, an already well-recognised, clearly denned and firmly seated prerogative which the great charter he had so recently put his hand to was in no sense intended to limit or annul.

This view of the case is confirmed by subsequent events. Press warrants, identical in every respect save one with the historic warrant of 1216, continued to emanate from the Crown long after King John had gone to his account, and, what is more to the point, to emanate unchallenged. Stubbs himself, our greatest constitutional authority, repeatedly admits as much. Every crisis in the destinies of the Island Kingdom--and they were many and frequent--produced its batch of these procuratory documents, every batch its quota of pressed men. The inference is plain. The mariner was the bondsman of the sea, and to him the *_Nullus liber homo capiatur_* clause of the Great Charter was never intended to apply. In his case a dead-letter from the first, it so remained throughout the entire chapter of his vicissitudes.

The chief point wherein the warrants of later times differed from those of King John was this: As time went on the penalties they imposed on those who resisted the press became less and less severe. The death penalty fell into speedy disuse, if, indeed, it was ever inflicted at all. Imprisonment for a term of from one to two years, with forfeiture of goods, was held to meet all the exigencies of the case. Gradually even this modified practice underwent amelioration, until at length it dawned upon the official intelligence that a seaman who was free to respond to the summons of the boatswain's whistle constituted an infinitely more valuable physical asset than one who cursed his king and his Maker in irons. All punishment of the condign order, for contempt or resistance of the press, now went by the board, and in its stead the seaman was merely admonished in paternal fashion, as in a Proclamation of 1623, to take the king's shilling "dutifully and reverently" when it was tendered to him.

In its apparent guilelessness the admonition was nevertheless woefully deceptive. Like the subdued beat of drum by which, some five years later, the seamen of London were lured to Tower Hill, there to be seized and thrown bodily into the waiting fleet, it masked under its mild exterior the old threat of coercion in a new form. The ancient pains and penalties were indeed no more; but for the back of the sailor who was so ill-advised as to defy the press there was another rod in pickle. He could now be taken forcibly.

For side by side with the negative change involved in the abolition of the old punishments, there had been in progress, throughout the intervening centuries, a positive development of far worse omen for the hapless sailor-man. The root-principle of direct coercion, necessarily inherent in any system that seeks to foist an arbitrary and obnoxious status upon any considerable body of men, was slowly but surely bursting into bud. The years that had seen the unprestressed seaman freed from the dread of the yardarm and the horrors of the forepeak, had bred a new terror for him. Centuries of usage had strengthened the arm of that hated personage the Press-Master, and the compulsion which had once skulked under cover of a threat now threw off its disguise and stalked the seafaring man for what it really was--Force, open and unashamed. The *_dernier ressort_* of former days was now the first

resort. The seafaring man who refused the king's service when "admonished" thereto had short shrift. He was "first knocked down, and then bade to stand in the king's name." Such, literally and without undue exaggeration, was the later system which, reaching the climax of its insolent pretensions to justifiable violence in the eighteenth century, for upwards of a hundred years bestrode the neck of the unfortunate sailor like some monstrous Old Man of the Sea.

Outbursts of violent pressing before the dawn of the eighteenth century, though spasmodic and on the whole infrequent, were not entirely unknown. Times of national stress were peculiarly productive of them. Thus when, in 1545, there was reason to fear a French invasion, pressing of the most violent and unprecedented character was openly resorted to in order to man the fleet. The class who suffered most severely on that occasion were the fisher folk of Devon, "the most part" of whom were "taken as marryners to serve the king." [Footnote: *State Papers*, Henry VIII.--Lord Russell to the Privy Council, 22 Aug. 1545. Bourne, who cites the incident in his *Tudor Seamen*, misses the essential point that the fishermen were forcibly pressed.]

During the Civil Wars of the next century both parties to the strife issued press warrants which were enforced with the utmost rigour. The Restoration saw a marked recrudescence of similar measures. How great was the need of men at that time, and how exigent the means employed to procure them, may be gathered from the fact, cited by Pepys, that in 1666 the fleet lay idle for a whole fortnight "without any demand for a farthing worth of anything, but only to get men." The genial diarist was deeply moved by the scenes of violence that followed. They were, he roundly declares, "a shame to think of."

The origin of the term "pressing," with its cognates "to press" and "pressed," is not less remarkable than the genesis of the violence it so aptly describes. Originally the man who was required for the king's service at sea, like his twin brother the soldier, was not "pressed" in the sense in which we now use the term. He was merely subjected to a process called "presting." To "prest" a man meant to enlist him by means of what was technically known as "prest" money--"prest" being the English equivalent of the obsolete French *prest*, now *pret*, meaning "ready." In the recruiter's vocabulary, therefore, "prest" money stood for what is nowadays, in both services, commonly termed the "king's shilling," and the man who, either voluntarily or under duress, accepted or received that shilling at the recruiter's hands, was said to be "prest" or "prest." In other words, having taken the king's ready money, he was thenceforth, during the king's pleasure, "ready" for the king's service.

By the transfer of the prest shilling from the hand of the recruiter to the pouch of the seaman a subtle contract, as between the latter and his sovereign, was supposed to be set up, than which no more solemn or binding pact could exist save between a man and his Maker. One of the parties to the contract was more often than not, it is true, a strongly dissenting party; but although under the common law of the land this circumstance would have rendered any similar contract null and void, in this amazing transaction between the king and his "prest" subject it was held to be of no vitiating force. From the moment the king's shilling, by whatever means, found its way into the sailor's possession, from that moment he was the king's man, bound in heavy penalties to toe the line of duty, and, should circumstances

demand it, to fight the king's enemies to the death, be that fate either theirs or his.

By some strange irony of circumstance there happened to be in the English language a word--"pressed"--which tallied almost exactly in pronunciation with the old French word *_prest_*, so long employed, as we have seen, to differentiate from his fellows the man who, by the devious means we have here described, was made "ready" for the sea service. "Press" means to constrain, to urge with force--definitions precisely connoting the development and manner of violent enlistment. Hence, as the change from covert to overt violence grew in strength, "pressing," in the mouths of the people at large, came to be synonymous with that most obnoxious, oppressive and fear-inspiring system of recruiting which, in the course of time, took the place of its milder and more humane antecedent, "presting." The "prest" man disappeared, [Footnote: The Law Officers of the Crown retained him, on paper, until the close of the eighteenth century--an example in which they were followed by the Admiralty. To admit his disappearance would have been to knock the bottom out of their case.] and in his stead there came upon the scene his later substitute the "pressed" man, "forced," as Pepys so graphically describes his condition, "against all law to be gone." An odder coincidence than this gradual substitution of "pressed" for *_prest_*, or one more grimly appropriate in its application, it would surely be impossible to discover in the whole history of nomenclature.

With the growth of the power and violence of the impress there was gradually inaugurated another change, which perhaps played a larger part than any other feature of the system in making it finally obnoxious to the nation at large--finally, because, as we shall see, the nation long endured its exactions with pathetic submission and lamentable indifference. The incidence of pressing was no longer confined, as in its earlier stages, to the overflow of the populace upon the country's rivers, and bays, and seas. Gradually, as naval needs grew in volume and urgency, the press net was cast wider and wider, until at length, during the great century of struggle, when the system was almost constantly working at its highest pressure and greatest efficiency, practically every class of the population of these islands was subjected to its merciless inroads, if not decimated by its indiscriminate exactions.

On the very threshold of the century we stumble upon an episode curiously indicative of the set of the tide. Czar Peter of Russia had been recently in England, acquiring a knowledge of English customs which, on his return home, he immediately began to put in practice. His navy, such as it was, was wretchedly manned. [Footnote: The navy got together by Czar Peter had all but disappeared by the time Catherine II. came to the throne. "Ichabod" was written over the doors of the Russian Admiralty. Their ships of war were few in number, unseaworthy, ill-found, ill-manned. Two thousand able-bodied seamen could with difficulty be got together in an emergency. The nominal fighting strength of the fleet stood high, but that strength in reality consisted of men "one half of whom had never sailed out of the Gulf of Finland, whilst the other half had never sailed anywhere at all." When the fleet was ordered to sea, the Admiralty "put soldiers on board, and by calling them sailors persuaded themselves that they really were so."--*State Papers, Russia*, vol. lxxvii.--Macartney, Nov. 16-27, 1766.] Russian serfs made bad sailors and worse seamen. In the English ships thronging the quays at Archangel

there was, however, plenty of good stuff-men who could use the sea without being sick, men capable of carrying a ship to her destination without piling her up on the rocks or seeking nightly shelter under the land. He accordingly pressed every ninth man out of those ships.

When news of this high-handed proceeding reached England, it roused the Queen and her advisers to indignation. Winter though it was, they lost no time in dispatching Charles Whitworth, a rising diplomat of the suavest type, as "Envoy Extraordinary to our Good (but naughty) Brother the Czar of Muscovy," with instructions to demand the release, immediate and unconditional, of the pressed men. Whitworth found the Czar at Moscow. The Autocrat of All the Russias listened affably enough to what he had to say, but refused his demand in terms that left scant room for doubt as to his sincerity of purpose, and none for protracted "conversations." "Every Prince," he declared for sole answer, "can take what he likes out of his own havens." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1436--Capt. J. Anderson's letters and enclosures; State Papers, Russia, vol. iv.--Whitworth to Secretary Harley.] The position thus taken up was unassailable. Centuries of usage hedged the prerogative in, and Queen Anne herself, in the few years she had been on the throne, had not only exercised it with a free hand, but had laid that hand without scruple upon many a foreign seaman.

The lengths to which the system had gone by the end of the third quarter of the century is thrown into vivid relief by two incidents, one of which occurred in 1726, the other fifty years later.

In the former year one William Kingston, pressed in the Downs--a man who hailed from Lyme Regis and habitually "used the sea"--was, notwithstanding that fact, discharged by express Admiralty order because he was a "substantial man and had a landed estate." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1473--Capt Charles Browne, 25 March 1726, and endorsement.]

The incident of 1776, known as the Duncan case, occurred, or rather began, at North Shields. Lieutenant Oaks, captain of the press-gang in that town, one day met in the streets a man who, unfortunately for his future, "had the appearance of a seaman." He accordingly pressed him; whereupon the man, whose name was Duncan, produced the title-deeds of certain house property in London, down Wapping way, worth some six pounds per annum, and claimed his discharge on the ground that as a freeholder and a voter he was immune from the press. The lieutenant laughed the suggestion to scorn, and Duncan was shipped south to the fleet.

The matter did not end there. Duncan's friends espoused his cause and took energetic steps for his release. Threatened with an action at law, and averse from incurring either unnecessary risks or opprobrium where pressed men were concerned, the Admiralty referred the case to Mr. Attorney-General (afterwards Lord) Thurlow for his opinion.

The point of law Thurlow was called upon to resolve was, "Whether being a freeholder is an exception from being pressed;" and as Duncan was represented in counsel's instructions--on what ground, other than his "appearance," is not clear--to be a man Who habitually used the sea, it is hardly matter for surprise that the great jurist's opinion, biassed as it obviously was by that alleged fact, should have been

altogether inimical to the pressed man and favourable to the Admiralty.

"I see no reason," he writes, in his crabbed hand and nervous diction, "why men using the sea, and being otherwise fit objects to be impressed into His Majesty's service, should be exempted only because they are Freeholders. Nor did I ever read or hear of such an exemption. Therefore, unless some use or practice, which I am ignorant of, gives occasion to this doubt, I see no reason for a Mariner being discharged, seriously, because he is a Freeholder. It's a qualification easily attained: a single house at Wapping would ship a first-rate man-of-war. If a Freeholder is exempt, *eo nomine*, it will be impossible to go on with the pressing service. [Footnote: It would have been equally impossible to go on with the naval service had the fleet contained many freeholders like John Barnes. Granted leave of absence from his ship, the *Neptune*, early in May, "in order to give his vote in the city," he "return'd not till the 8th of August."-- *Admiralty Records* 1. 2653--Capt. Whorwood, 23 Aug. 1741.] There is no knowing a Freeholder by sight: and if claiming that character, or even showing deeds is sufficient, few Sailors will be without it." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 7. 299--Law Officers' Opinions, 1756-77, No. 64.]

Backed by this opinion, so nicely in keeping with its own inclinations, the Admiralty kept the man. Its views, like its practice, had undergone an antipodal change since the Kingston incident of fifty years before. And possession, commonly reputed to be nine points of the law, more than made up for the lack of that element in Mr. Attorney-General's sophistical reasoning.

In this respect Thurlow was in good company, for although Coke, who lived before violent pressing became the rule, had given it as his opinion that the king could not lawfully press men to serve him in his wars, the legal luminaries who came after him, and more particularly those of the eighteenth century, differed from him almost to a man. Blackstone, whilst admitting that no statute expressly legalised pressing, reminded the nation--with a leer, we might almost say--that many statutes strongly implied, and hence--so he put it--amply justified it. In thus begging the question he had in mind the so-called Statutes of Exemption which, in protecting from impressment certain persons or classes of persons, proceeded on the assumption, so dear to the Sea Lords, that the Crown possessed the right to press all. This also was the view taken by Yorke, Solicitor-General in 1757. "I take the prerogative," he declares, "to be most clearly legal." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions, 1733-56, No. 102.]

Another group of lawyers took similar, though less exalted ground. Of these the most eminent was that "great oracle of law," Lord Mansfield. "The power of pressing," he contends, "is founded upon immemorial usage allowed for ages. If not, it can have no ground to stand upon. The practice is deduced from that trite maxim of the Constitutional Law of England, that private mischief had better be submitted to than that public detriment should ensue."

The sea-lawyer had yet to be heard. With him "private mischief" counted for much, the usage of past ages for very little. He lived and suffered in the present. Of common law he knew nothing, but he possessed a fine appreciation of common justice, and this forced from

him an indictment of the system that held him in thrall as scathing in its truth, its simplicity and its logic as it is spontaneous and untutored in its diction.

"You confidently tell us," said he, dipping his pen in the gall of bitterness, "that our King is a father to us and our officers friends. They are so, we must confess, in some respects, for Indeed they use us like Children in Whiping us into Obedience. As for English Tars to be the Legitimate Sons of Liberty, it is an Old Cry which we have Experienced and Knows it to be False. God knows, the Constitution is admirable well Calculated for the Safety and Happiness of His Majesty's Subjects who live by Employments on Shore; but alas, we are not Considered as Subjects of the same Sovereign, unless it be to Drag us by Force from our Families to Fight the Battles of a Country which Refuses us Protection." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5125--Petitions of the Seamen of the Fleet, 1797.]

Such, in rough outline, was the Impress System of the eighteenth century. In its inception, its development, and more especially in its extraordinary culmination, it perhaps constitutes the greatest anomaly, as it undoubtedly constitutes the grossest imposition, any free people ever submitted to. Although unlawful in the sense of having no foundation in law, and oppressive and unjust in that it yearly enslaved, under the most noxious conditions, thousands against their will, it was nevertheless for more than a hundred years tolerated and fostered as the readiest, speediest and most effective means humanly devisable for the manning of a fleet whose toll upon a free people, in the same period of time, swelled to more than thrice its original bulk. Standing as a bulwark against aggression and conquest, it ground under its heel the very people it protected, and made them slaves in order to keep them free. Masquerading as a protector, it dragged the wage-earner from his home and cast his starving family upon the doubtful mercies of the parish. And as if this were not enough, whilst justifying its existence on the score of public benefit it played havoc with the fisheries, clipped the wings of the merchant service, and sucked the life-blood out of trade.

It was on the rising tide of such egregious contradictions as these that the press-gang came in; for the press-gang was at once the embodiment and the active exponent of all that was anomalous or bad in the Impress System.

CHAPTER II.

WHY THE GANG WAS NECESSARY.

The root of the necessity that seized the British sailor and made of him what he in time became, the most abject creature and the most efficient fighting unit the world has ever produced, lay in the fact that he was island-born.

In that island a great and vigorous people had sprung into being--a people great in their ambitions, commerce and dominion; vigorous in holding what they had won against the assaults, meditated or actual,

of those who envied their greatness and coveted their possessions. Of this island people, as of their world-wide interests, the "chiefest defence" was a "good fleet at sea." [Footnote: This famous phrase is used, perhaps for the first time, by Josiah Burchett, sometime Secretary to the Admiralty, in his *_Observations on the Navy_*, 1700.]

The Peace of Utrecht, marking though it did the close of the protracted war of the Spanish Succession, brought to the Island Kingdom not peace, but a sword; for although its Navy was now as unrivalled as its commerce and empire, the supreme struggle for existence, under the guise of the mastery of the sea, was only just begun. Decade after decade, as that struggle waxed and waned but went remorselessly on, the Navy grew in ships, the ships in tonnage and weight of metal, and with their growth the demand for men, imperative as the very existence of the nation, mounted ever higher and higher. In 1756 fifty thousand sufficed for the nation's needs. By 1780 the number had reached ninety-two thousand; and with 1802 it touched high-water mark in the unprecedented total of one hundred and twenty-nine thousand men in actual sea pay. [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_* 7. 567-Navy Progress, 1756-1805. These figures are below rather than above the mark, since the official returns on which they are based are admittedly deficient.]

Beset by this enormous and steadily growing demand, the Admiralty, the defensive proxy of the nation, had perforce to face the question as to where and how the men were to be obtained.

The source of supply was never at any time in doubt. Here, ready to hand, were some hundreds of thousands of persons using the sea, or following vocations merging into the sea in the capacity of colliers, bargemen, boatmen, longshoremen, fishermen and deep-sea sailors or merchantmen, who constituted the natural Naval Reserve of an Island Kingdom--a reserve ample, if judiciously drawn upon, to meet, and more than meet, the Navy's every need.

The question of means was one more complicated, more delicate, and hence incomparably more difficult of solution. To draw largely upon these seafaring classes, numerous and fit though they were, meant detriment to trade, and if the Navy was the fist, trade was the backbone of the nation. The sufferings of trade, moreover, reacted unpleasantly upon those in power at Whitehall. Methods of procurement must therefore be devised of a nature such as to insure that neither trade nor Admiralty should suffer--that they should, in fact, enjoy what the unfortunate sailor never knew, some reasonable measure of ease.

In its efforts to extricate itself and trade from the complex difficulties of the situation, Admiralty had at its back what an eighteenth century Beresford would doubtless have regarded as the finest talent of the service. Neither the unemployed admiral nor the half-pay captain had at that time, in his enforced retirement at Bath or Cheltenham, taken seriously to parliamentering, company promoting, or the concocting of pedigrees as a substitute for walking the quarter-deck. His occupation was indeed gone, but in its stead there had come to him what he had rarely enjoyed whilst on the active service list--opportunity. Carried away by the stimulus of so unprecedented a situation as that afforded by the chance to make himself heard, he rushed into print with projects and suggestions

which would have revolutionised the naval policy and defence of the country at a stroke had they been carried into effect. Or he devoted his leisure to the invention of signal codes, semaphore systems, embryo torpedoes, gun carriages, and--what is more to our point--methods ostensibly calculated to man the fleet in the easiest, least oppressive and most expeditious manner possible for a free people. Armed with these schemes, he bombarded the Admiralty with all the pertinacity he had shown in his quarter-deck days in applying for leave or seeking promotion. Many, perhaps most, of the inventions which it was thus sought to father upon the Sea Lords, were happily never more heard of; but here and there one, commending itself by its seeming practicability, was selected for trial and duly put to the test.

Fair to look upon while still in the air, these fruits of leisured superannuation proved deceptively unsound when plucked by the hand of experiment. Registration, first adopted in 1696, held out undeniable advantages to the seaman. Under its provisions he drew a yearly allowance when not required at sea, and extra prize-money when on active service. Yet the bait did not tempt him, and the system was soon discarded as useless and inoperative. Bounty, defined by some sentimentalist as a "bribe to Neptune," for a while made a stronger appeal; but, ranging as it did from five to almost any number of pounds under one hundred per head, it proved a bribe indeed, and by putting an irresistible premium on desertion threatened to decimate the very ships it was intended to man. In 1795 what was commonly known as the Quota Scheme superseded it. This was a plan of Pitt's devising, under which each county contributed to the fleet according to its population, the quota varying from one thousand and eighty-one men for Yorkshire to twenty-three for Rutland, whilst a minor Act levied special toll on seaports, London leading the way with five thousand seven hundred and four men. Like its predecessor Bounty, however, this mode of recruiting drained the Navy in order to feed it. Both systems, moreover, possessed another and more serious defect. When their initial enthusiasm had cooled, the counties, perhaps from force of habit as component parts of a country whose backbone was trade, bought in the cheapest market. Hence the Quota Man, consisting as he generally did of the offscourings of the merchant service, was seldom or never worth the money paid for him. An old man-o'-war's-man, picking up a miserable specimen of this class of recruit by the slack of his ragged breeches, remarked to his grinning messmates as he dangled the disreputable object before their eyes: "'Ere's a lubber as cost a guinea a pound!" He was not far out in his estimate.

As in the case of the good old method of recruiting by beat of drum and the lure of the king's shilling, system after system thus failed to draw into its net, however speciously that net was spread, either the class or the number of men whose services it was desired to requisition. And whilst these futilities were working out their own condemnation the stormcloud of necessity grew bigger and bigger on the national horizon. Let trade suffer as it might, there was nothing for it but to discard all new-fangled notions and to revert to the system which the usage of ages had sanctioned. The return was imperative. Failing what Junius stigmatised as the "spur of the Press," the right men in the right numbers were not to be procured. The wisdom of the nation was at fault. It could find no other way.

There were, moreover, other reasons why the press-gang was to the Navy an indispensable appendage--reasons perhaps of little moment singly,

but of tremendous weight in the scale of naval necessity when lumped together and taken in the aggregate.

Of these the most prominent was that fatal flaw in naval administration which Nelson was in the habit of anathematising as the "Infernal System." Due partly to lack of foresight and false economy at Whitehall, partly to the character of the sailor himself, it resolved itself into this, that whenever a ship was paid off and put out of commission, all on board of her, excepting only her captain and her lieutenants, ceased to be officially connected with the Navy. Now, as ships were for various reasons constantly going out of commission, and as the paying off of a first-second-or third-rate automatically discharged from their country's employ a body of men many hundreds in number, the "lowering" effects of such a system, working year in, year out, upon a fleet always in chronic difficulties for men, may be more readily imagined than described.

To a certain limited extent the loss to the service was minimised by a process called "turning over"; that is to say, the company of a ship paying off was turned over bodily, or as nearly intact as it was possible to preserve it, to another ship which at the moment chanced to be ready, or making ready, for sea. Or it might be that the commander of a ship paying off, transferred to another ship fitting out, carried the best men of his late command, commonly known as "old standers," along with him.

Unfortunately, the occasion of fitting out did not always coincide with the occasion of paying off; and although turnovers were frequently made by Admiralty order, there were serious obstacles in the way of their becoming general. Once the men were paid off, the Admiralty had no further hold upon them. By a stretch of authority they might, it is true, be confined to quarters or on board a guardship; but if in these circumstances they rose in a body and got ashore, they could neither be retaken nor punished as deserters, but--to use the good old service term--had to be "rose" again by means of the press-gang. Turnovers, accordingly, depended mainly upon two closely related circumstances: the goodwill of the men, and the popularity of commanders. A captain who was notorious for his use of the lash or the irons, or who was reputed unlucky, rarely if ever got a turnover except by the adoption of the most stringent measures. One who, on the other hand, treated his men with common humanity, who bested the enemy in fair fight and sent rich prizes into port, never wanted for "followers," and rarely, if ever, had recourse to the gang. [Footnote: In his Autobiography Lord Dundonald asserts that he was only once obliged to resort to pressing--a statement so remarkable, considering the times he lived in, as to call for explanation. The occasion was when, returning from a year's "exile in a tub," a converted collier that "sailed like a hay-stack," he fitted out the Pallas at Portsmouth and could obtain no volunteers. Setting his gangs to work, he got together a scratch crew of the wretchedest description; yet so marvellous were the personality and disciplinary ability of the man, that with only this unpromising material ready to his hand he intercepted the Spanish trade off Cape Finisterre and captured four successive prizes of very great value. The Pallas returned to Portsmouth with "three large golden candlesticks, each about five feet high, placed upon the mast-heads," and from that time onward Dundonald's reputation as a "lucky" commander was made. He never again had occasion to invoke the aid of the gang.] Under such men the seaman would gladly serve "even in a dung barge." [Footnote:

Admiralty Records 1. 2733--Capt. Young, 28 Sept. 1776.]

Unhappily for the service, such commanders were comparatively few, and in their absence the Infernal System drained the Navy of its best blood and accentuated a hundred-fold the already overwhelming need for the impress.

The old-time sailor, [Footnote: The use of the word "sailor" was long regarded with disfavour by the Navy Board, who saw in it only a colourless substitute for the good old terms "seaman" and "mariner." Capt. Bertie, of the _Ruby_ gunship, once reported the pressing of a "sailor," Thomas Letting by name, out of a collier in Yarmouth Roads, and was called upon by My Lords to define the new-fangled term. This he did with admirable circumlocution. "As for explaining the word 'sailor,'" said he, "I can do it no otherwise than (by) letting of you know that Thomas Letting is a Sailor."--_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1468--Capt. Bertie, 6 May 1706.] again, was essentially a creature of contradictions. Notorious for a "swearing rogue," who punctuated his strange sea-lingo with horrid oaths and appalling blasphemies, he made the responses required by the services of his Church with all the superstitious awe and tender piety of a child. Inconspicuous for his thrift or "forehandedness," it was nevertheless a common circumstance with him to have hundreds of pounds, in pay and prize-money, to his credit at his bankers, the Navy Pay-Office; and though during a voyage he earned his money as hardly as a horse, and was as poor as a church mouse, yet the moment he stepped ashore he made it fly by the handful and squandered it, as the saying went, like an ass. When he was sober, which was seldom enough provided he could obtain drink, he possessed scarcely a rag to his back; but when he was drunk he was himself the first to acknowledge that he had "too many cloths in the wind." According to his own showing, his wishes in life were limited to three: "An island of tobacco, a river of rum, and--more rum;" but according to those who knew him better than he knew himself, he would at any time sacrifice all three, together with everything else he possessed, for the gratification of a fourth and unconfessed desire, the dearest wish of his life, woman. Ward's description of him, slightly paraphrased, fits him to a hair: "A salt-water vagabond, who is never at home but when he is at sea, and never contented but when he is ashore; never at ease until he has drawn his pay, and never satisfied until he has spent it; and when his pocket is empty he is just as much respected as a father-in-law is when he has beggared himself to give a good portion with his daughter." [Footnote: Ward, _Wooden World Dissected_, 1744.] With all this he was brave beyond belief on the deck of a ship, timid to the point of cowardice on the back of a horse; and although he fought to a victorious finish many of his country's most desperate fights, and did more than any other man of his time to make her the great nation she became, yet his roving life robbed him of his patriotism and made it necessary to wring from him by violent means the allegiance he shirked. It was at this point that he came in contact with what he hated most in life, yet dearly loved to dodge--the press-gang.

That such a creature of contradictions should be averse from serving the country he loved is perhaps the most consistent trait in his character; for here at least the sailor had substantial grounds for his inconsistency.

For one thing, his aversion to naval service was as old as the Navy itself, having grown with its growth. We have seen in what manner King John was obliged to admonish the sailor in order to induce him to take

his prest-money; and Edward III., referring to his attitude in the fourteenth century, is said to have summed up the situation in the pregnant words: "There is navy enough in England, were there only the will." Raleigh, recalling with bitterness of soul those glorious Elizabethan days when no adventurer ever dreamt of pressing, scoffed at the seamen of King James's time as degenerates who went on board a man-of-war "with as great a grudging as if it were to be slaves in the galleys." A hundred years did not improve matters. The sailors of Queen Anne entered her ships like men "dragged to execution." [Footnote: Justice, *Domination and Laws of the Sea*, 1705, Appendix on Pressing.]

In the merchant service, where the sailor received his initiation into the art and mystery of the sea, life during the period under review, and indeed for long after, was hard enough in all conscience. Systematic and unspeakably inhuman brutality made the merchant seaman's lot a daily inferno. Traders sailing out of Liverpool, Bristol and a score of other British ports depended almost entirely for their crews upon drugged rum, so evil was their reputation in this respect amongst seafaring men. In the East India Company's ships, even, the conditions were little short of unendurable. Men had rather be hanged than sail to the Indies in them. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 1. 1463, 1472--Letters of Captains Bouler and Billingsley, and numerous instances.]

Of all these bitternesses the sailor tasted freely. Cosmopolite that he was, he wandered far a-sea and incurred the blows and curses of many masters, happy if, amid his manifold tribulations, he could still call his soul his own. Just here, indeed, was where the shoe of naval service pinched him most sorely; for though upon the whole life on board a man-of-war was not many shades worse than life aboard a trader, it yet introduced into his already sadly circumscribed vista of happiness the additional element of absolute loss of free-will, and the additional dangers of being shot as an enemy or hanged as a deserter. These additional things, the little things that yet meant so much, bred in him a hatred of the service so implacable that nothing less drastic than the warrant and the hanger could cope with or subdue it. Eradicated it never was.

The keynote to the sailor's treatment in the Navy may be said to have been profane abuse. Officers of all ranks kept the Recording Angel fearfully busy. With scarcely an exception they were men of blunt speech and rough tongue who never hesitated to call a spade a spade, and the ordinary seaman something many degrees worse. These were technicalities of the service which had neither use nor meaning elsewhere. But to the navigation of the ship, to daily routine and the maintenance of that exact discipline on which the Navy prided itself, they were as essential as is milk to the making of cheese. Nothing could be done without them. Decent language was thrown away upon a set of fellows who had been bred in that very shambles of language, the merchant marine. To them "'twas just all the same as High Dutch." They neither understood it nor appreciated its force. But a volley of thumping oaths, bellowed at them from the brazen throat of a speaking-trumpet, and freely interlarded with adjectives expressive of the foulness of their persons, and the ultimate state and destination of their eyes and limbs, saved the situation and sometimes the ship. Officers addicted to this necessary flow of language were sensible of only one restraint. Visiting parties caused them embarrassment, and when this was the case they fell back upon the tactics of the

commander who, unable to express himself with his usual fluency because of the presence of ladies on the quarter-deck, hailed the foreyard-arm in some such terms as these: "Foreyard-arm there! God bless you! God bless you! God bless you! _You know what I mean!_"

Hard words break no bones, and to quarter-deck language, as such, the sailor entertained no rooted objection. What he did object to, and object to with all the dogged insistence of his nature, was the fact that this habitual flow of profane scurrility was only the prelude to what, with grim pleasantry, he was accustomed to describe as "serving out slops." Anything intended to cover his back was "slops" to the sailor, and the punishments meted out to him covered him like a garment.

The old code of naval laws, the Monumenta Juridica or Black Book of the Admiralty, contained many curious disciplinary methods, not a few of which too long survived the age they originated in. If, for instance, one sailor robbed another and was found guilty of the crime, boiling pitch was poured over his head and he was powdered with feathers "to mark him," after which he was marooned on the first island the ship fell in with. Seamen guilty of undressing themselves while at sea were ducked three times from the yard-arm--a more humane use of that spar than converting it into a gallows. On this code were based Admiral the Earl of Lindsay's "Instructions" of 1695. These included ducking, keel-hauling, fasting, flogging, weighting until the "heart or back be ready to break," and "gogging" or scraping the tongue with hoop-iron for obscene or profane swearing; for although the "gentlemen of the quarter-deck" might swear to their heart's content, that form of recreation was strictly taboo in other parts of the ship. Here we have the origin of the brutal discipline of the next century, summed up in the Consolidation Act of George II. [Footnote: 22 George II. c. 33.]--an Act wherein ten out of thirty-six articles awarded capital punishment without option, and twelve death or minor penalties.

Of the latter, the one most commonly in use was flogging at the gangway or jears. This duty fell to the lot of the boatswain's mate. [Footnote: "As it is the Custom of the Army to punish with the Drums, so it is the known Practice of the Navy to punish with the Boatswain's Mate."--Admiralty Records 1. 1482--Capt. (afterwards Admiral) Boscawen, 25 Feb. 1746-7.] The instrument employed was the cat-o'-nine-tails, the regulation dose twelve lashes; but since the actual number was left to the captain's discretion or malice, as the case might be, it not infrequently ran into three figures. Thus John Watts, able seaman on board H.M.S. Harwich, _Capt. Andrew Douglas commander, in 1704 received one hundred and seventy lashes for striking a shipmate in self-defence, his captain meanwhile standing by and exhorting the boatswain's mate to "Swinge the Dog, for hee has a Tough Hide"--and that, too, with a cat waxed to make it bite the harder. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 5265--Courts-Martial, 1704-5.]

It was just this unearned increment of blows--this dash of bitter added to the regulation cup--that made Jack's gorge rise. He was not the sort of chap, it must be confessed, to be ruled with a feather. "An impudent rascal" at the best of times, he often "deserved a great deal and had but little." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1472--Capt. Balchen, 26 Jan. 1716-7.] But unmerited punishment, too often devilishly devised, maliciously inflicted and inhumanly carried

out, broke the back of his sense of justice, already sadly overstrained, and inspired him with a mortal hatred of all things naval.

For the slightest offence he was "drubbed at the gears"; for serious offences, from ship to ship. If, when reefing topsails on a dark night or in the teeth of a sudden squall, he did not handle the canvas with all the celerity desired by the officer of the watch, he and his fellow yardsmen were flogged *_en bloc_*. He was made to run the gauntlet, often with the blood gushing from nose and ears as the result of a previous dose of the cat, until he fell to the deck comatose and at the point of death. [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_* 1. 1466--Complaint of ye Abuse of a Sayler in the *_Litchfield_*, 1704. In this case the man actually died.] Logs of wood were bound to his legs as shackles, and whatever the nature of his offence, he invariably began his expiation of it, the preliminary canter, so to speak, in irons. If he had a lame leg or a bad foot, he was "started" with a rope's-end as a "slacker." If he happened to be the last to tumble up when his watch was called, the rattan [Footnote: Carried at one time by both commissioned and warrant officers.] raised weals on his back or drew blood from his head; and, as if to add insult to injury, for any of these, and a hundred and one other offences, he was liable to be black-listed and to lose his allowance of grog.

Some things, too, were reckoned sins aboard ship which, unhappily for the sailor, could not well be avoided. Laughing, or even permitting the features to relax in a smile in the official presence, was such a sin. "He beats us for laughing," declare the company of the *_Solebay_*, in a complaint against their commander, "more like *Doggs than Men*." [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_* 1. 1435--Capt. Aldred, 29 Feb. 1703-4.] One of the *_Nymph's_* company, in or about the year 1797, received three dozen for what was officially termed "Silent Contempt"--"which was nothing more than this, that when flogged by the boatswain's mate the man smiled." [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_* 1. 5125--Petitions, 1793-7.] This was the "Unpardonable Crime" of the service.

Contrariwise, a man was beaten if he sulked. And as a rule the sailor was sulky enough. Works of supererogation, such as polishing everything polishable--the shot for the guns, in extreme cases, not even excepted--until it shone like the tropical sun at noonday, left him little leisure or inclination for mirth. "Very pretty to look at," said Wellington, when confronted with these glaring evidences of hyper-discipline, "but there is one thing wanting. I have not seen a bright face in the ship."

A painful tale of discipline run mad, or nearly so, is unfolded by that fascinating series of sailor-records, the Admiralty Petitions. Many of them, it must in justice be owned, bear unqualified testimony to the kindness and humanity of officers; but in the great majority of cases the evidence they adduce is overwhelmingly to the contrary. And if their language is sometimes bombastic, if their style is almost uniformly illiterate, if they are the productions of a band of mutinous dogs standing out for rights which they never possessed and deserving of a halter rather than a hearing, these are circumstances that do not in the least detract from the veracity of the allegations they advance. The sailor appealed to his king, or to the Admiralty, "the same as a child to its father"; and no one who peruses the story

of his wrongs, as set forth in these documents, can doubt for a moment that he speaks the truth with all a child's simplicity.

The seamen of the Reunion open the tale of oppression and ill-usage. "Our Captain obliges us to Wash our Linnen twice a week in Salt Water and to put 2 Shirts on every Week, and if they do not look as Clean as if they were washed in Fresh Water, he stops the person's Grog which has the misfortune to displease him; and if our Hair is not Tyd to please him, he orders it to be Cutt Off." On the Amphitrite "flogging is their portion." The men of the Winchelsea "wold sooner be Shot at like a Targaite than to Remain." The treatment systematically meted out to the Shannon's crew is more than the heart "can Cleaverly Bear"--enough, in short, to make them "rise and Steer the Ship into an Enemies Port." The seamen of the Glory are made wretched by "beating, blacking, tarring, putting our heads in Bags," and by being forced to "drink half a Gallon of Salt Water" for the most trivial breaches of discipline or decorum. On the Blanch, if they get wet and hang or spread their clothes to dry, the captain "thros them overboard." The Nassau's company find it impossible to put the abuse they receive on paper. It is "above Humanity." Though put on board to fight for king and country, they are used worse than dogs. They have no encouragement to "face the Enemy with a chearful Heart." Besides being kept "more like Convicts than free-born Britons," the Nymph's company have an unspeakable grievance. "When Engaged with the Enemy off Brest, March the 9th, 1797, they even Beat us at our Quarters, though on the Verge of Eternity." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 5125--Petitions, 1793-7.]

On the principle advanced by Rochefoucault, that there is something not displeasing to us in the misfortunes of our friends, the sailor doubtless derived a sort of negative satisfaction from the fact that he was not the only one on shipboard liable to the pains and penalties of irascibility, brutality and excessive disciplinary zeal. Particularly was this true of his special friend the "sky-pilot" or chaplain, that super-person who perhaps most often fell a victim to quarter-deck ebullitions. Notably there is on record the case of one John Cruickshank, chaplain of H.M.S. Assurance, who was clapped in irons, court-martialled and dismissed the service merely because he happened to take--what no sailor could ever condemn him for--a drop too much, and whilst in that condition insisted on preaching to the ship's company when they were on the very point of going into action. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 5265--Courts-Martial, 1704-5. His zeal was unusual. Most naval chaplains thought "of nothing more than making His Majesty's ships sinecures"] There is also that other case of the "saucy Surgeon of the Seahorse" who incurred his captain's dire displeasure all on account of candles, of which necessary articles he, having his wife on board, thought himself entitled to a more liberal share than was consistent with strict naval economy; and who was, moreover, so "troublesome about his Provisions, that if he did not always Chuse out of ye best in ye whole Ship," he straightway got his back up and "threatened to Murder the Steward." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1470--Capt. Blowers, 3 Jan. 1710-11.] Such interludes as these would assuredly have proved highly diverting to the foremast-man had it not been for the cat and that savage litter of minor punishments awaiting the man who smiled.

In the matter of provisions, there can be little doubt that the sailor shared to the full the desire evinced by the surgeon of the

Seahorse to take blood-vengeance upon someone on account of them. His "belly-timber," as old Misson so aptly if indelicately describes it, was mostly worm-eaten or rotten, his drink indescribably nasty.

Charles II. is said to have made his breakfast off ship's diet the morning he left the Naseby, and to have pronounced it good; and Nelson in 1803 declared it "could not possibly be improved upon." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 580--Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803.] Such, however, was not the opinion of the chaplain of the Dartmouth, for after dining with his captain on an occasion which deserves to become historic, he swore that "although he liked that Sort of Living very well, as for the King's Allowance there was but a Sheat of Browne Paper between it and Hell." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1464--Misdemeanors Comited by Mr Edward Lewis, Chapling on Board H. M. Shipp Dartmouth, 1 Oct. 1702.] Which of these opinions came nearest to the truth, the sequel will serve to show.

On the face of it the sailor's dietary was not so bad. A ship's stores, in 1719, included ostensibly such items as bread, wine, beef, pork, peas, oatmeal, butter, cheese, water and beer, and if Jack had but had his fair share of these commodities, and had it in decent condition, he would have had little reason to grumble about the king's allowance. Unhappily for him, the humanities of diet were little studied by the Victualling Board.

Taking the beef, the staple article of consumption on shipboard, cooking caused it to shrink as much as 45 per cent., thus reducing the sailor's allowance by nearly one-half. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1495--Capt. Barrington, 23 Dec. 1770.] The residuum was often "mere carrion," totally unfit for human consumption. "Junk," the sailor contemptuously called it, likening it, in point of texture, digestibility and nutritive properties, to the product of picked oakum, which it in many respects strongly resembled. The pork, though it lost less in the cooking, was rancid, putrid stuff, repellent in odour and colour-particulars in which it found close competitors in the butter and cheese, which had often to be thrown overboard because they "stunk the ship." [Footnote: To disinfect a ship after she had been fouled by putrid rations or disease, burning sulphur and vinegar were commonly employed. Their use was preferable to the means adopted by the carpenter of the Feversham, who in order to "sweeten ship" once "turn'd on the cock in the hould" and through forgetfulness "left it running for eighteen howers," thereby not only endangering the vessel's safety, but incidentally spoiling twenty-one barrels of powder in the magazine.--Admiralty Records 1. 2653--Capt. Watson, 18 April 1741.] The peas "would not break." Boiled for eight hours on end, they came through the ordeal "almost as hard as shott." Only the biscuit, apart from the butter and cheese, possessed the quality of softness. Damp, sea-water, mildew and weevil converted "hard" into "soft tack" and added another horror to the sailor's mess. The water he washed these varied abominations down with was frequently "stuff that beasts would cough at." His beer was no better. It would not keep, and was in consequence both "stinking and sour." [Footnote: According to Raleigh, old oil and fish casks were used for the storing of ship's beer in Elizabeth's reign.] Although the contractor was obliged to make oath that he had used both malt and hops in the brewing, it often consisted of nothing more stimulating than "water coloured and bittered," and sometimes the "stingy dog of a brewer"

even went so far as to omit the "wormwood."

Such a dietary as this made a meal only an unavoidable part of the day's punishment and inspired the sailor with profound loathing. "Good Eating is an infallible Antidote against murmuring, as many a Big-Belly Place-Man can instance," he says in one of his petitions. Poor fellow! his opportunities of putting it to the test were few enough. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, the so-called Banyan days of the service, when his hateful ration of meat was withheld and in its stead he regaled himself on plum-duff--the "plums," according to an old regulation, "not worse than Malaga"--he had a taste of it. Hence the banyan day, though in reality a fast-day, became indelibly associated in his simple mind and vocabulary with occasions of feasting and plenty, and so remains to this day.

If the sailor's only delicacy was duff, his only comforts were rum and tobacco, and to explore some unknown island, and discover therein a goodly river of the famous Jamaica spirit, flowing deep and fragrant between towering mountains of "pig tail," is commonly reputed to have been the cherished wish of his heart. With tobacco the Navy Board did not provide him, nor afford dishonest pursers opportunity to "make dead men chew," [Footnote: Said of pursers who manipulated the Muster Books, which it was part of their duty to keep, in such a way as to make it appear that men "discharged dead" had drawn a larger quantity of tobacco than was actually the case, the difference in value of course going into their own pockets.] until 1798; but rum they allowed him at a comparatively early date. When sickness prevailed on board, when beer ran short or had to be turned over the side to preserve a sweet ship, rum or wine was issued, and although the Admiralty at first looked askance at the innovation, and at times left commanders of ships to foot the bill for spirits thus served out, the practice made gradual headway, until at length it ousted beer altogether and received the stamp of official approval. Half a pint, dealt out each morning and evening in equal portions, was the regular allowance--a quantity often doubled were the weather unusually severe or the men engaged in the arduous duty of watering ship. At first the ration of rum was served neat and appreciated accordingly; but about 1740 the practice of adding water was introduced. This was Admiral Vernon's doing. Vernon was best known to his men as "Old Grog," a nickname originating in a famous grogram coat he affected in dirty weather; and as the rum and water now served out to them was little to their liking, they marked their disapproval of the mixture, as well as of the man who invented it, by dubbing it "grog." The sailor was not without his sense of humour.

The worst feature of rum, from the sailor's point of view, worse by far than dilution, was the fact that it could be so easily stopped. Here his partiality for the spirit told heavily against him. His grog was stopped because he liked it, rather than because he deserved to lose it. The malice of the thing did not make for a contented ship.

The life of the man-o'-war's-man, according to Lord Nelson, was on an average "finished at forty-five years." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803.] Bad food and strenuous labour under exceptionally trying conditions sapped his vitals, made him prematurely old, and exposed him to a host of ills peculiar to his vocation. He "fell down daily," to employ the old formula, in spotted or putrid fevers. He was racked by agues, distorted by rheumatic pains, ruptured or double-ruptured by the

strain of pulling, hauling and lifting heavy weights. He ate no meal without incurring the pangs of acute indigestion, to which he was fearfully subject. He was liable to a "prodigious inflammation of the head, nose and eyes," occasioned by exposure. Scurvy, his most inveterate and merciless enemy, "beat up" for him on every voyage and dragged his brine-sodden body down to a lingering death. Or, did he escape these dangers and a watery grave, protracted disease sooner or later rendered him helpless, or a brush with the enemy disabled him for ever from earning his bread.

His surgeons were, as a rule, a sorry lot. Not only were they deficient in numbers, they commonly lacked both professional training and skill. Their methods were consequently of the crudest description, and long continued so. The approved treatment for rupture, to which the sailor was painfully liable, was to hang the patient up by the heels until the prolapsus was reduced. Pepys relates how he met a seaman returning from fighting the Dutch with his eye-socket "stopped with oakum," and as late at least as the Battle of Trafalgar it was customary, in amputations, to treat the bleeding stump with boiling pitch as a cauterant. In his general attitude towards the sick and wounded the old-time naval surgeon was not unlike Garth, Queen Anne's famous physician. At the Kit Cat Club he one day sat so long over his wine that Steele ventured to remind him of his patients. "No matter," said Garth. "Nine have such bad constitutions that no physician can save them, and the other six such good ones that all the physicans in the world could not kill them."

Many were the devices resorted to in order to keep the man-o'-war's-man healthy and fit. As early as 1602 a magic electuary, invented by one "Doctor Cogbourne, famous for fluxes," was by direction of the Navy Commissioners supplied for his use in the West Indies. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1464--Capt. Barker, 14 Oct. 1702.] By Admiral Vernon and his commanders he was dosed freely with "Elixir of Vitriol," which they not only "reckoned the best general medicine next to rhubarb," but pinned their faith to as a sovereign specific for scurvy and fevers. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 161--Admiral Vernon, 31 Oct. 1741.] Lime-juice, known as a valuable anti-scorbutic as early as the days of Drake and Raleigh, was not added to his rations till 1795. He did not find it very palatable. The secret of fortifying it was unknown, and oil had to be floated on its surface to make it keep. Sour-cROUT was much more to his taste as a preventive of scurvy, and in 1777, at the request of Admiral Montagu, then Governor and Commander-in-Chief over the Island of Newfoundland, the Admiralty caused to be sent out, for the use of the squadron on that station, where vegetables were unprocurable, a sufficient quantity of that succulent preparation to supply twelve hundred men for a period of two months. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 471--Admiral Montagu, 28 Feb. 1777, and endorsement.]

Rice the sailor detested. Of all species of "soft tack" it was least to his liking. He nicknamed it "strike-me-blind," being firmly convinced that its continued use would rob him of his eyesight. Tea was not added to his dietary till 1824, but as early as 1795 he could regale himself on cocoa. For the rest, sugar, essence of malt, essence of spruce, mustard, cloves, opium and "Jesuits" or Peruvian bark were considered essential to his well-being on shipboard. He was further allowed a barber-one to every hundred men-without whose attentions it was found impossible to keep him "clean and healthy."

With books he was for many years "very scantily supplied." It was not till 1812, indeed, that the Admiralty, shocked by the discovery that he had practically nothing to elevate his mind but daily association with the quarter-deck, began to pour into the fleet copious supplies of literature for his use. Thereafter the sailor could beguile his leisure with such books as the Old Chaplains Farewell Letter, Wilson's Maxims, The Whole Duty of Man, Seeker's Duties of the Sick, and, lest returning health should dissipate the piety begotten of his ailments, Gibson's Advice after Sickness. Thousands of pounds were spent upon this improving literature, which was distributed to the fleet in strict accordance with the amount of storage room available at the various dockyards. [Footnote: Admiralty Records Accountant-General, Misc. (Various), No. 106--Accounts of the Rev. Archdeacon Owen, Chaplain-General to the Fleet, 1812-7.]

A fundamental principle of man-o'-war routine was that the sailor formed no part of it for hospital purposes. Hence sickness was not encouraged. If the sailor-patient did not recover within a reasonable time, he was "put on shore sick," sometimes to the great terror of the populace, who, were he supposed to be afflicted with an infectious disease, fled from him "as if he had the plague." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 24 June 1740.] On shore he was treated for thirty days at his country's charges. If incurable, or permanently disabled, he was then turned adrift and left to shift for himself. A clean record and a sufficiently serious wound entitled him to a small pension or admission to Greenwich Hospital, an institution which had religiously docked his small pay of sixpence a month throughout his entire service. Failing these, there remained for him only the streets and the beggar's role.

His pay was far from princely. From 3d. a day in the reign of King John it rose by grudging increments to 20s. a month in 1626, and 24s. in 1797. Years sometimes elapsed before he touched a penny of his earnings, except in the form of "slop" clothing and tobacco. Amongst the instances of deferred wages in which the Admiralty records abound, there may be cited the case of the Dreadnought, whose men in 1711 had four years' pay due; and of the Dunkirk, to whose company, in the year following, six and a half years' was owing. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1470--Capt. Bennett, 8 March 1710-11. Admiralty Records 1. 1471--Capt. Butler, 19 March, 1711-12.] And at the time of the Nore Mutiny it was authoritatively stated that there were ships then in the fleet which had not been paid off for eight, ten, twelve and in one instance even fifteen years. "Keep the pay, keep the man," was the policy of the century--a sadly mistaken policy, as we shall presently see.

In another important article of contentment the sailor was hardly better off. The system of deferred pay amounted practically to a stoppage of all leave for the period, however protracted, during which the pay was withheld. Thus the Monmouth's men had in 1706 been in the ship "almost six years, and had never had the opportunity of seeing their families but once." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1468-Capt. Baker, 3 Nov. 1706.] In Boscawen's ship, the Dreadnought, there were in 1744 two hundred and fifty men who "had not set foot on shore near two year." Admiral Penrose once paid off in a seventy-four at Plymouth, many of whose crew had "never set foot on land for six or seven years"; [Footnote: Penrose (Sir V. C., Vice-Admiral of the Blue), Observations on Corporeal Punishment,

Impressment, etc.,_ 1824.] and Brenton, in his *Naval History*, instances the case of a ship whose company, after having been eleven years in the East Indies, on returning to England were drafted straightway into another ship and sent back to that quarter of the globe without so much as an hour's leave ashore.

What was true of pay and leave was also true of prize-money. The sailor was systematically kept out of it, and hence out of the means of enjoyment and carousal it afforded him, for inconscionable periods. From a moral point of view the check was hardly to his detriment. But the Navy was not a school of morals, and withholding the sailor's hard-earned prize-money over an indefinite term of years neither made for a contented heart nor enhanced his love for a service that first absorbed him against his will, and then, having got him in its clutches, imposed upon and bested him at every turn.

Although the prime object in withholding his pay was to prevent his running from his ship, so far from compassing that desirable end it had exactly the contrary effect. Both the preventive and the disease were of long standing. With De Ruyter in the Thames in 1667, menacing London and the kingdom, the seamen of the fleet flocked to town in hundreds, clamouring for their wages, whilst their wives besieged the Navy Office in Seething Lane, shrieking: "This is what comes of not paying our husbands!"

Essentially a creature of contradictions, the sailor rarely, if he could avoid it, steered the course laid down for him, and in nothing perhaps was this idiosyncrasy so glaringly apparent as in his behaviour as his country's creditor. He "would get to London if he could." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 12 Dec. 1742.] "An unaccountable humour" impelled him "to quit His Majesty's service without leave." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 480--Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts, 12 Sept. 1746.] Once the whim seized him, no ties of deferred pay or prize-money had power to hold him back. The one he could obtain on conditions; the other he could dispose of at a discount which, though ruinously heavy, still left him enough to frolic on.

The weapon of deferred pay was thus a two-edged one. If it hurt the sailor, it also cut the fingers of those who employed it against him. So exigent were the needs of the service, he could "run" with impunity. For if he ran whilst his pay was in arrears, he did so with the full knowledge that, barring untimely recapture by the press-gang, he would receive a free pardon, together with payment of all dues, on the sole condition, which he never kept if he could help it, of returning to his ship when his money was gone. He therefore deserted for two reasons: First, to obtain his pay; second, to spend it.

The penalty for desertion, under a well-known statute of George I., [Footnote: 13 George I., art. 7.] was death by hanging. As time went on, however, discipline in this respect suffered a grave relapse, and fear of the halter no longer served to check the continual exodus from the fleet. If the runaway sailor were taken, "it would only be a whipping bout." So he openly boasted. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 1479--Capt. Boscawen, 26 April 1743.] The "bout," it is true, at times ran to six, or even seven hundred lashes--the latter being the heaviest dose of the cat ever administered in the British navy; [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 482--Admiral Lord Colvill, 12 Nov. 1765.] but even this terrible ordeal had no power to

hold the sailor to his duty, and although Admiral Lord St. Vincent, better known in his day as "hanging Jervis," did his utmost to revive the ancient custom of stretching the sailor's neck, the trend of the times was against him, and within twenty-five years of the reaffirming of the penalty, in the 22nd year of George II., hanging for desertion had become practically obsolete.

In the declining days of the practice a grim game at life and death was played upon the deck of a king's ship lying in the River St. Lawrence. The year was 1760. Quebec had only recently fallen before the British onslaught. A few days before that event, at a juncture when every man in the squadron was counted upon to play his part in the coming struggle, and to play it well, three seamen, James Mike, Thomas Wilkinson and William M'Millard by name, deserted from the Vanguard. Retaken some months later, they were brought to trial; but as men were not easy to replace in that latitude, the court, whilst sentencing all three to suffer the extreme penalty of the law, added to their verdict a rider to the effect that it would be good policy to spare two of them. Admiral Lord Colvill, then Commander-in-Chief, issued his orders accordingly, and at eleven o'clock on the morning of the 12th of July the condemned men, preceded to the scaffold by two chaplains, were led to the Vanguard's forecastle, where they drew lots to determine which of them should die. The fatal lot fell to James Mike, who, in presence of the assembled boats of the squadron, was immediately "turned off" at the foreyard-arm. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 482--Admiral Lord Colvill, 10 July 1760; Captains' Logs, 1026--Log of H.M.S. Vanguard.]

Encouraged in this grim fashion, desertion assumed alarming proportions. Nelson estimated that whenever a large convoy of merchant ships assembled at Portsmouth, at least a thousand men deserted from the fleet. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 580--Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803.] This was a "liberty they would take," do what you could to prevent it.

Of those who thus deserted fully one-third, according to the same high authority, never saw the fleet again. "From loss of clothes, drinking and other debaucheries" they were "lost by death to the country." Some few of the remainder, after drinking His Majesty's health in a final bowl, voluntarily returned on board and "prayed for a fair wind"; but the majority held aloof, taking their chances and their pleasures in sailorly fashion until, their last stiver gone, they fell an easy prey to the press-gang or the crimp.

While the crimp was to the merchant service what the press-gang was to the Navy, a kind of universal provider, there was in his method of preying upon the sailor a radical difference. Like his French compeer, the recruiting sergeant of the Pont Neuf in the days of Louis the Well-Beloved, wherever sailors congregated the crimp might be heard rattling his money-bags and crying: "Who wants any? Who wants any?" Where the press-gang used the hanger or the cudgel, the crimp employed dollars. The circumstance gave him a decided "pull" in the contest for men, for the dollars he offered, whether in the way of pay or bounty, were invariably fortified with rum. The two formed a contraption no sailor could resist. "Money and liquor held out to a seaman," said Nelson, "are too much for him."

In law the offence of enticing seamen to desert His Majesty's service,

like desertion itself, was punishable with death; [Footnote: 22 George n. cap. 33.] but in fact the penalty was either commuted to imprisonment, or the offender was dealt with summarily, without invoking the law. Crimps who were caught red-handed had short shrift. Two of the fraternity, named respectively Henry Nathan and Sampson Samuel, were once taken in the Downs. "Send Nathan and Samuel," ran the Admiralty order in their case, "to Plymouth by the first conveyance. Admiral Young is to order them on board a ship going on foreign service as soon as possible." Another time an officer, boarding a boat filled with men as it was making for an Indiaman at Gravesend, found in her six crimps, all of whom suffered the same fate. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1542--Capt. Bazeley, 7 Feb. 1808. _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1513--Capt. Bowater, 12 June 1796.]

Men seduced by means of crimpage bounty were said to be "silver cooped," and the art of silver cooping was not only practised at home, it was world-wide. In whatever waters a British man-o'-war cast anchor, there the crimp appeared, plying his crafty trade. His assiduity paid a high compliment to the sterling qualities of the British seaman, but for the Navy it spelt wholesale depletion.

In home ports he was everywhere in evidence. No ship of war could lie in Leith Roads but she lost a good part of her crew through his seductions. "M'Kirdy & M'Lean, petty-fogging writers," were the chief crimps at Greenock. Sheerness crimps gave "great advance money." Liverpool was infested with them, all the leading merchant shippers at Bristol, London and other great ports having "agents" there, who offered the man-o'-war's-man tempting bounties and substantial wages to induce him to desert his ship. A specially active agent of Bristol shipowners was one Vernon Ley, who plied his trade chiefly at Exeter and Plymouth, whence he was known to send to Bristol, in the space of six months, as many as seventy or eighty men, whom he provided with postchaises for the journey and 8 Pounds per man as bounty. James White, a publican who kept the "Pail of Barm" at Bedminster, made a close second in his activity and success. Spithead had its regular contingent of crimps, and many an East India ship sailing from that famous anchorage was "entirely manned" by their efforts, of course at the expense of the ships of war lying there. At Chatham, crimpage bounty varied from fifteen to twenty guineas per head; and at Cork, a favourite recruiting ground for both merchantmen and privateers, the same sum could be had any day, with high wages to boot.

In the Crown Colonies a similar state of things prevailed. Queen's ships visiting Jamaica in or about the year 1716 lost so heavily they scarce dared venture the return voyage to England, their men having "gone a-wrecking" in the Gulf of Florida, where one armed sloop was reputed to have recovered Spanish treasure to the value of a hundred thousand dollars. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1471--Capt. Balchen, 13 May 1716.] Time did not lessen desertion in the island, though it wrought a change in the cause. When Admiral Vernon was Commander-in-Chief there in the forties, he lost five hundred men within a comparatively short time--"seduced out," to use his own words, "through the temptations of high wages and thirty gallons of rum, and conveyed drunk on board from the punch-houses where they are seduced." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 233--Admiral Vernon, 5 Sept. 1742. A rare recruiting sheet of 1780, which has for its headpiece a volunteer shouting: "Rum for nothing!" describes Jamaica as "that delightful Island, abounding in Rum, Sugar and Spanish

Dollars, where there is delicious living and plenty of GROGG and PUNCH."]

At Louisberg, in the Island of Cape Breton, the North American Squadron in 1746 lost so many men through the seductions practised by New England skippers frequenting that port, that Townsend, the admiral in command, indited a strongly worded protest to Shirley, then Governor of Massachusetts; but the latter, though deploring the "vile behaviour" of the skippers in question, could do nothing to put a stop to it. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 480--Townsend, 17 Aug.; Shirley, 12 Sept. 1746.] As a matter of fact he did not try.

On the coast of Carolina many of the English merchantmen in 1743 paid from seventeen to twenty guineas for the run home, and in addition "as many pounds of Sugar, Gallons of Rum and pounds of Tobacco as pounds in Money." [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1 1479--Capt. Bladwell, 1 July 1743.]

The lust for privateering had much to answer for in this respect. So possessed were the Virginians by the desire to get rich at the expense of their enemies that they quite "forgot their allegiance to the King." By the offer of inordinately high wages and rich prizes they did their utmost to seduce carpenters, gunners, sailmakers and able seamen from His Majesty's ships. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1480--Capt. Lord Alexander Banff, 21 Oct. 1744.] Any ship forced to winter at Rhode Island, again, always counted upon losing enough men to "disable her from putting to sea" when the spring came. Here, too, the privateering spirit was to blame, Rhode Island being notorious for its enterprise in that form of piracy. Another impenitent sinner in her inroads upon the companies of king's ships was Boston, where "a sett of people made it their Business" to entice them away. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1440--Capt. Askew, 27 Aug. 1748.] No ship could clean, refit, victual or winter there without "the loss of all her men." Capt. Young, of the Jason, was in 1753 left there with never a soul on board except "officers and servants, widows' men, the quarter-deck gentlemen and those called idlers." The rest had been seduced at 30 Pounds per head. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 6 Oct. 1753. The "widows' men" here humorously alluded to would not add much to the effectiveness of the depleted company. They were imaginary sailors, borne on the ship's books for pay and prize-money which went to Greenwich Hospital.]

So it went on. Day in, day out, at home and abroad, this ceaseless drain of men, linking hands in the decimation of the fleet with those able adjutants Disease and Death, accentuated progressively and enormously the naval needs of the country. For the apprehension and return of deserters from ships in home ports a drag-net system of rewards and conduct-money sprang into being; but this the sailor to some extent contrived to elude. He "stuck a cockade in his hat" and made shift to pass for a soldier on leave; or he laid furtive hands on a horse and set up for an equestrian traveller. In the neighbourhood of all great seaport towns, as on all main roads leading to that paradise and ultimate goal of the deserter, the metropolis, horse-stealing by sailors "on the run" prevailed to an alarming extent; and although there was a time when the law strung him up for the crime of borrowing horses to help him on his way, as it had once hanged him for deserting, the naval needs of the country eventually changed all that and brought him a permanent reprieve. Thenceforth, instead of sending the happy-go-lucky, devil-may-care felon to the

gallows, they turned him over to the press-gang and so re-consigned him, penniless and protesting, to the duty he detested.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE PRESS-GANG WAS.

From the standpoint of a systematic supply of men to the fleet, the press-gang was a legitimate means to an imperative end. This was the official view. In how different a light the people came to regard the petty man-trap of power, we shall presently see.

Designed as it was for the taking up of able-bodied adults, the main idea in the formation of the gang was strength and efficiency. It was accordingly composed of the stoutest men procurable, dare-devil fellows capable of giving a good account of themselves in fight, or of carrying off their unwilling prey against long odds. Brute strength combined with animal courage being thus the first requisite of the ganger, it followed--not perhaps as a matter of course so much as a matter of fact--that his other qualities were seldom such as to endear him to the people. Wilkes denounced him for a "lawless ruffian," and

one of the newspapers of his time describes him, with commendable candour and undeniable truth, as a "profligate and abandoned wretch, perpetually lounging about the streets and incessantly vomiting out oaths and horrid curses." [Footnote: *London Chronicle*, 16 March 1762.]

The getting of a gang together presented little difficulty. The first business of the officer charged with its formation was to find suitable quarters, rent not to exceed twenty shillings a week, inclusive of fire and candle. Here he hung out a flag as the sign of authority and a bait for volunteers. As a rule, they were easily procurable. All the roughs of the town were at his disposal, and when these did not yield material enough recourse was had to beat of drum, that instrument, together with the man who thumped it, being either hired at half-a-crown a day or "loaned" from the nearest barracks. Selected members of the crowd thus assembled were then plied with drink "to invite them to enter"--an invitation they seldom refused.

It goes without saying that gangs raised in this manner were of an exceedingly mixed character. On the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, seafaring men of course had first preference, but landsmen were by no means excluded. The gang operating at Godalming in 1782 may be cited as typical of the average inland gang. It consisted of three farmers, one weaver, one bricklayer, one labourer, and two others whose regular occupations are not divulged. They were probably sailors. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*, 1. 1502--Capt. Boston, Report on Rendezvous, 1782.]

Landsmen entered on the express understanding that they should not be pressed when the gang broke up. Sailor gangsmen, on the contrary, enjoyed no such immunity. The most they could hope for, when their arduous duties came to an end, was permission to "choose their ship."

The concession was no mean one. By choosing his ship discreetly the gangster avoided encounters with men he had pressed, thus preserving his head unbroken and his skin intact.

Ship-gangs, unlike those operating on land, were composed entirely of seamen. For dash, courage and efficiency, they had no equal and few rivals.

Apart from the officers commanding it, the number of men that went to the making of a gang varied from two to twenty or more according to the urgency of the occasion that called it into being and the importance or ill-repute of the centre selected as the scene of its operations. For Edinburgh and Leith twenty-one men, directed by a captain, two lieutenants and four midshipmen, were considered none too many. Greenock kept the same number of officers and twenty men fully employed, for here there was much visiting of ships on the water, a fast cutter being retained for that purpose. The Liverpool gang numbered eighteen men, directed by seven officers and backed by a flotilla of three tenders, each under the command of a special lieutenant. Towns such as Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Great Yarmouth, Cowes and Haverfordwest also had gangs of at least twenty men each, with boats as required; and Deal, Dover and Folkestone five gangs between them, totalling fifty men and fifteen officers, and employing as many boats as gangs for pressing in the Downs.

In the case of ship-gangs, operating directly from a ship of war in harbour or at sea, the officers in charge were as a matter of course selected from the available ward or gun-room contingent. Few, if any, of the naval men whose names at one time or another spring into prominence during the century, escaped this unpleasant but necessary duty in their younger days. But on shore an altogether different order of things prevailed.

[Illustration: MANNING THE NAVY. Reproduced by kind permission from a rare print in the collection of Mr. A. M. Broadley.]

The impress service ashore was essentially the grave of promotion. Whether through age, fault, misfortune or lack of influence in high places, the officers who directed it were generally disappointed men, service derelicts whose chances of ever sporting a second "swab," or of again commanding a ship, had practically vanished. Naval men afloat spoke of them with good-natured contempt as "Yellow Admirals," the fictitious rank denoting a kind of service quarantine that knew no pratique.

Like the salt junk of the foremast--man, the Yellow Admiral got fearfully "out of character" through over-keeping. With the service he lost all touch save in one degrading particular. His pay was better than his reputation, but his position was isolated, his duties and his actions subject to little official supervision. With opportunity came peculiar temptations to bribery and peculation, and to these he often succumbed. The absence of congenial society frequently weighed heavy upon him and drove him to immoderate drinking. Had he lived a generation or so later the average impress officer ashore could have echoed with perfect truth, and almost nightly iteration, the crapulous sentiment in which Byron is said to have toasted his hosts when dining on board H.M.S. Hector at Malta:--

"Glorious Hector, son of Priam,

Was ever mortal drunk as I am!"

[Footnote: The authenticity of the anecdote, notwithstanding the fact that it was long current in naval circles, is more than doubtful. When Bryon visited Malta in 1808 the Hector was doing duty at Plymouth as a prison-ship, and naval records disclose no other ship of that name till 1864.]

A lieutenant attached to the gang at Chester is responsible for a piece of descriptive writing, of a biographical nature, which perhaps depicts the impress officer of the century at his worst. Addressing a brother lieutenant at Waterford, to which station his superior was on the point of being transferred, "I think but right," says he, "to give you a character of Capt. P., who is to be your Regulating Captain. I have been with him six months here, and if it had not been that he is leaving the place, I should have wrote to the Board of Admiralty to have been removed from under his command. At first you'll think him a Fine old Fellow, but if it's possible he will make you Quarrel with all your Acquaintance. Be very Careful not to Introduce him to any Family that you have a regard for, for although he is near Seventy Years of Age, he is the greatest Debauchee you ever met with--a Man of No Religion, a Man who is Capable of any Meanness, Arbitrary and Tyrannicall in his Disposition. This City has been several times just on the point of writing against him to the Board of Admiralty. He has a wife, and Children grown up to Man's Estate. The Woman he brings over with him is Bird the Builder's Daughter. To Conclude, there is not a House in Chester that he can go into but his own and the Rendezvous, after having been Six Months in one of the agreeablest Cities in England." [Footnote: Ad, 1. 1500--Lieut. Shuckford, 7 March 1780.]

Ignorant of the fact that his reputation had thus preceded him, Capt. P. found himself assailed, on his arrival at Waterford, by a "most Infamous Epitaph," emanating none knew whence, nor cared. This circumstance, accentuated by certain indiscretions of which the hectoring old officer was guilty shortly after his arrival, aroused strong hostility against him. A mob of fishwives, attacking his house at Passage, smashed the windows and were with difficulty restrained from levelling the place with the ground. His junior officers conspired against him. Piqued by the loss of certain perquisites which the newcomer remorselessly swept away, they denounced him to the Admiralty, who ordered an inquiry into his conduct. After a hearing of ten days it went heavily against him, practically every charge being proved. He was immediately superseded and never again employed--a sad ending to a career of forty years under such men as Anson, Boscawen, Hawke and Vernon. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1500--Capt. Bennett, 13 Nov. 1780, and enclosures constituting the inquiry.] Yet such was the ultimate fate of many an impress officer. A stronger light focussed him ashore, and habits, proclivities and weaknesses that escaped censure at sea, were here projected odiously upon the sensitive retina of public opinion.

Of the younger men who drifted into the shore service there were some, it need scarcely be said, who for obvious reasons escaped, or, rather, did not succumb to the common odium. A notable example of this type of officer was Capt. Jahleel Brenton, who for some years commanded the gangs at Leith and Greenock. Though a man of blunt sensibilities and speech, he possessed qualities which carried him out of the stagnant back-water of pressing into the swim of service afloat, where he

eventually secured a baronetcy and the rank of Vice-Admiral. Singularly enough, he was American-born.

The senior officer in charge of a gang, commonly known as the Regulating Captain, might in rank be either captain or lieutenant. It was his duty to hire, but not to "keep" the official headquarters of the gang, to organise that body, to direct its operations, to account for all moneys expended and men pressed, and to "regulate" or inspect the latter and certify them fit for service or otherwise. In this last-named duty a surgeon often assisted him, usually a local practitioner, who received a shilling a head for his pains. One or more lieutenants, each of whom had one or more midshipmen at his beck and call, served under the Regulating Captain. They "kept" the headquarters and led the gang, or contingents of the gang, on pressing forays, thus coming in for much of the hard work, and many of the harder knocks, that unpopular body was liable to. Sometimes, as in the case of Dover, Deal and Folkestone, several gangs were grouped under a single regulating officer.

The pay of the Regulating Captain was 1 Pound a day, with an additional 5s. subsistence money. Lieutenants received their usual service pay, and for subsistence 3s. 6d. In special cases grants were made for coach-hire [Footnote: Capt. William Bennett's bill for the double journey between Waterford and Cork, on the occasion of the inquiry into the conduct of the Regulating Officer at the former place, over which he presided, amounted to forty-three guineas--a sum he considered "as moderate as any gentleman's could have been, laying aside the wearing of my uniform every day." Half the amount went in chaise and horse hire, "there being," we are told, "no chaises upon the road as in England," and "only one to be had at Cork, all the rest being gone to Dublin with the Lawyers and the Players, the Sessions being just ended and the Play House broke up" (Admiralty Records_ 1. 1503--Capt. Bennett, 24 March 1782). Nelson's bill for posting from Burnham, Norfolk, to London and back, 260 miles, in the year 1789, amounted to 19 Pounds, 5s. 2d. (Admiralty Records_ Victualling Dept, Miscellanea, No. 26).] and such purposes as "entertainments to the Mayor and Corporation, the Magistrates and the Officers of the Regulars and the Militia, by way of return for their civilities and for their assistance in carrying on the impress." The grant to the Newcastle officers, under this head, in 1763 amounted to upwards of 93 Pounds. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1493--Capt. Bover, 6 March 1763, and endorsement.]

"Road-money" was generally allowed at the rate of 3d. a mile for officers and 1d. a mile for gangers when on the press; but as a matter of fact these modest figures were often largely exceeded--to the no small emolument of the regulating officer. Lieut. Gaydon, commanding at Ilfracombe, in 1795 debited the Navy Board with a sum of 148 Pounds for 1776 miles of travel; Capt. Gibbs, of Swansea, with 190 Pounds for 1561 miles; and Capt. Longcroft, of Haverfordwest, with 524 Pounds for 8388 miles--a charge characterised by Admiral M'Bride, who that year reported upon the working of the impress, as "immense." [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral M'Bride, 19 March 1795.] He might well have used a stronger term.

An item which it was at one time permissible to charge, possesses a special interest. This was a bonus of 1s. a head on all men pressed--a bonus that was in reality nothing more than the historic prest shilling of other days, now no longer paid to pressed men, diverted

into the pockets of those who did the pressing. The practice, however, was short-lived. Tending as it did to fill the ships with unserviceable men, it was speedily discontinued and the historic shilling made over to the certifying surgeon.

The shore midshipman could boast but little affinity with his namesake of the quarter-deck. John Richards, midshipman of the Godalming gang, had never in his life set foot on board a man-of-war or been to sea. His age was forty. The case of James Good, of Hull, is even more remarkable. He had served as "Midshipman of the Impress" for thirty years out of sixty-three. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1455--Capt. Acklom, 6 Oct. 1814. Admiralty Records_ 1.1502--Capt. Boston, Report on Rendezvous, 1782.] The pay of these elderly youths at no time exceeded a guinea a week.

The gangster was more variously, if not more generously remunerated. At Deal, in 1743, he had 1s. per day for his boat, and "found himself," or, in the alternative, "ten shillings for every good seaman procured, in full for his trouble and the hire of the boat." At Dover, in 1776, he received 2s. 6d. a day; at Godalming, six years later, 10s. 6d. a week; and at Exeter, during the American War of Independence, when the demand for seamen was phenomenal, 14s. a week, 5s. for every man pressed, and clothing and shoes "when he deserved it." Pay and allowances were thus far from uniform. Both depended largely upon the scarcity or abundance of suitable gangsters, the demand for seamen, and the astuteness of the officer organising the gang. Some gangs not on regular wages received as much as "twenty shillings for each man impressed, and six-pence a mile for as many miles as they could make it appear each man had travelled, not exceeding twenty, besides (a noteworthy addition) the twelve-pence press-money "; but if a man pressed under these conditions were found to be unserviceable after his appearance on shipboard, all money considerations for his capture were either withheld or recalled. On the whole, considering the arduous and disagreeable nature of the gangster's calling, the Navy Board cannot be accused of dealing any too generously by him.

"If ever you intend to man the fleet without being cheated by the captains and pursers," Charles II. is credited with having once said to his council, "you may go to bed." What in this sense was true of the service afloat was certainly not less true of that loosely organised and laxly supervised naval department, the impress ashore. Considering the repute of the officers engaged in it, and the opportunities they enjoyed for peculation and the taking of bribes--considering, above all, the extreme difficulty of keeping a watchful eye upon officers scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land, the wonder is, not that irregularities crept in, but that they should have been, upon the whole, so few and so venial.

To allow the gangsters to go fishing for sea-fish or dredging for oysters, as was commonly done when there was little prospect of a catch on land, was no more heinous than the custom prevailing--to everybody's knowledge--at King's Lynn in Norfolk, where the gang had no need to go a-fishing because, regularly as the cobbles came in, the midshipman attached to the gang appeared on the quay and had the "insolence to demand Three of the Best Fysh for the Regulating Captain, the Lieutenant and himself." [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1546--Petition of the Owners of the Fishing Cobbles of Lynn, 3 March 1809.] And if, again, rating a gangster in choicest

quarterdeck language were no serious offence, why should not the Regulating Captain rate his son as midshipman, even though "not proper to be employed as such." And similarly, granting it to be right to earn half a sovereign by pressing a man contrary to law, where was the wrong in "clearing him of the impress" for the same amount, as was commonly done by the middies at Sunderland and Shields. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1557--Capt. Bell, 27 June 1806, enclosure.] These were works of supererogation rather than sins against the service, and little official notice was taken of them unless, as in the case of Liverpool, they were carried to such lengths as to create a public scandal. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 579 --Admiral Child, 30 Jan. 1800.]

There were, as a matter of course, some officers in the service who went far beyond the limits of such venial irregularities and, like Falstaff, "misused the king's press damnably." Though according to the terms of their warrant they were "to take care not to demand or receive any money, gratuity, reward, or any other consideration whatsoever for the sparing, exchanging or discharging any person or persons impressed or to be impressed," the taking of "gratifications" for these express purposes prevailed to a notorious extent. The difficulty was to fasten the offence upon the offenders. "Bailed men," as they were called, did not "peach." Their immunity from the press was too dearly bought to admit of their indulging personal animus against the officer who had taken their money. It was only through some tangle of circumstance over which the delinquent had no control that the truth leaked out. Such a case was that of the officer in command of the Mary tender at Sunderland, a lieutenant of over thirty years' standing. Having pressed one Michael Dryden, a master's mate whom he ought never to have pressed at all, he so far "forgot" himself as to accept a bribe of 15 Pounds for the man's release, and then, "having that day been dining with a party of military officers," forgot to release the man. The double lapse of memory proved his ruin. Representations were made to the Admiralty, and the unfortunately constituted lieutenant was "broke" and black-listed. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 2740--Lieut. Atkinson, 24 June 1798, and endorsement.]

Another species of fraud upon which the Admiralty was equally severe, was that long practised with impunity by a certain regulating officer at Poole. Not only did he habitually put back the dates on which men were pressed, thus "bearing" them for subsistence money they never received, he made it a further practice to enter on his books the names of fictitious pressed men who opportunely "escaped" after adding their quota to his dishonest perquisites. So general was misappropriation of funds by means of this ingenious fraud that detection was deservedly visited with instant dismissal. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1526--Capt. Boyle, 2 Oct. 1801, and endorsement.]

Though to the gangster all things were reputedly lawful, some things were by no means expedient. He could with impunity deprive almost any able-bodied adult of his freedom, and he could sometimes, with equal impunity, add to his scanty earnings by restoring that freedom for a consideration in coin of the realm; but when, like Josh Cooper, sometime gangster at Hull, he extended his prerogative to the occupants of hen-roosts, he was apt to find himself at cross-purposes with the law as interpreted by the sitting magistrates.

Amongst less questionable perquisites accruing to the gangster two only need be mentioned here. One was the "straggling-money" paid to him for the apprehension of deserters--20s. for every deserter taken, with "conduct" money to boot; the other, the anker of brandy designedly thrown overboard by smugglers when chased by a gang engaged in pressing afloat. Occasionally the brandy checked the pursuit; but more often it gave an added zest to the chase and so hastened the capture of the fugitive donors.

To the unscrupulous outsider the opportunities for illicit gain afforded by the service made an irresistible appeal. Sham gangs and make-believe press-masters abounded, thriving exceedingly upon the fears and credulity of the people until capture put a term to their activities and sent them to the pillory, the prison or the fleet they pretended to cater for.

Their mode of operation seldom varied. They pressed a man, and then took money for "discharging" him; or they threatened to press and were bought off. One Philpot was in 1709 fined ten nobles and sentenced to the pillory for this fraud. He had many imitators, amongst them John Love, who posed as a midshipman, and William Moore, his gangster, both of whom were eventually brought to justice and turned over to His Majesty's ships.

The role adopted by these last-named pretenders was a favourite one with men engaged in crimping for the merchant service. Shrewsbury in 1780 received a visit from one of these individuals--"a Person named Hopkins, who appeared in a Lieutenant's Uniform and committed many fraudulent Actions and Scandalous Abuses in raising Men," as he said, "for the Navy." Two months later another impostor of the same type appeared at Birmingham, where he scattered broadcast a leaflet, headed with the royal arms and couched in the following seductive terms: "Eleven Pounds for every Able Seaman, Five Pounds for every ordinary Seaman, and Three Pounds for every Able-bodied Landsman, exclusive of a compleat set of Sea Clothing, given by the Marine Society. All Good Seamen, and other hearty young Fellows of Spirit, that are willing to serve on board any of His Majesty's Vessels or Ships of War, Let them with Chearfulness repair to the Sailors' Head Rendezvous in this Town, where a proper Officer attends, who will give them every encouragement they can desire. Now my Jolly Lads is the time to fill your Pockets with Dollars, Double Doubloon's & Luidores. Conduct Money allowed, Chest and Bedding sent Carriage Free." Soon after, the two united forces at Coventry, whither Capt. Beecher desired to "send a party to take them," but to this request the Admiralty turned a deaf ear. In their opinion the game was not worth the candle. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1500--Letters of Capt. Beecher, 1780]

Ex-midshipman Rookhad, who when dismissed the service took to boarding vessels in the Thames and extorting money and liquor from the masters as a consideration for not pressing their men, did not escape so lightly. Him the Admiralty prosecuted. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions, 1733-56, No. 12. Process was by information in the Court of King's Bench, for a misdemeanour.]

It was in companies, however, that the sham gangster most frequently took the road, for numbers not only enhanced his chances of obtaining money, they materially diminished the risk of capture. One such gang was composed of "eighteen desperate villains," who were nevertheless taken. Another, a "parcel of fellows armed with cutlasses like a

pressgang," appeared at Dublin in 1743, where they boldly entered public-houses on pretence of looking for sailors, and there extorted money and drink. What became of them we are not told; but in the case of the pretended gang whose victim, after handing over two guineas as the price of his release, was pressed by a regularly constituted gang, we learn the gratifying sequel. The real gang gave chase to the sham gang and pressed every man of them.

According to the "Humble Petition of Grace Blackmore of Stratford le Bow, widow," on Friday the 29th of May, in an unknown year of Queen Anne's reign, "there came to Bow ffaire severall pretended pressmasters, endeavouring to impress." A tumult ensued. Murder was freely "cried out," apparently with good reason, for in the melee petitioner's husband, then constable of Bow, was "wounded soe that he shortly after dyed." [Footnote: *_State Papers Domestic, _ Anne, xxxvi. No. 17.*]

There were occasions when the sham gang operated under cover of a real press-warrant, and for this the Admiralty was directly to blame. It had become customary at the Navy Office to send out warrants, whether to commanders of ships or to Regulating Captains, in blank, the person to whom the warrant was directed filling in the name for himself. Such warrants were frequently stolen and put to irregular uses, and of this a remarkable instance occurred in 1755.

In that year one Nicholas Cooke, having by some means obtained possession of such a warrant, "filled up the blank thereof by directing it to himself, by the name and description of Lieutenant Nicholas Cooke, tho' in truth not a Lieutenant nor an Officer in His Majesty's Navy," hired a vessel--the *_Providence_* snow of Dublin--and in her cruised the coasts of Ireland, pressing men. After thus raising as many as he could carry, he shaped his course for Liverpool, no doubt intending, on his arrival at that port, to sell his unsuspecting victims to the merchant ships in the Mersey at so much a head. Through bad seamanship, however, the vessel was run aground at Seacombe, opposite to Liverpool, and Capt. Darby, of H.M.S. *_Seahorse_*, perceiving her plight, and thinking to render assistance in return for perhaps a man or two, took boat and rowed across to her. To his astonishment he found her full of Irishmen to the number of seventy-three, whom he immediately pressed and removed to his own ship. The circumstance of the false warrant now came to light, and with it another, of worse omen for the mock lieutenant. In the hold a quantity of undeclared spirits was discovered, and this fact afforded the Admiralty a handle they were not slow to avail themselves of. They put the Excise Officers on the scent, and Cooke was prosecuted for smuggling. [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_ 7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions, 1733-56, No. 101.*]

The most successful sham gang ever organised was perhaps that said to have been got together by a trio of mischievous Somerset girls. The scene of the exploit was the Denny-Bowl quarry, near Taunton. The quarrymen there were a hard-bitten set and great braggarts, openly boasting that no gang dare attack them, and threatening, in the event of so unlikely a contingency, to knock the gangsmen on the head and bury them in the rubbish of the pit. There happened to be in the neighbouring town "three merry maids," who heard of this tall talk and secretly determined to put the vaunted courage of the quarrymen to the test. They accordingly dressed themselves in men's clothing, stuck cockades in their hats, and with hangers under their arms stealthily

approached the pit. Sixty men were at work there; but no sooner did they catch sight of the supposed gang than they one and all threw down their tools and ran for their lives.

Officially known as the Rendezvous, a French term long associated with English recruiting, the headquarters of the gang were more familiarly, and for brevity's sake, called the "rondy." Publicans were partial to having the rondy on their premises because of the trade it brought them. Hence it was usually an alehouse, frequently one of the shadiest description, situated in the lowest slum of the town; but on occasions, as when the gang was of uncommon strength and the number of pressed men dealt with proportionately large, a private house or other suitable building was taken for the exclusive use of the service. It was distinguished by a flag--a Jack--displayed upon a pole. The cost of the two was 27s., and in theory they were supposed to last a year; but in towns where the populace evinced their love for the press by hewing down the pole and tearing the flag in ribbons, these emblems of national liberty had frequently to be renewed. At King's Lynn as much as 13 Pounds was spent upon them in four years--an outlay regarded by the Navy Board with absolute dismay. It would have been not less dismayed, perhaps, could it have seen the bunting displayed by rendezvous whose surroundings were friendly. There the same old Jack did duty year after year until, grimy and bedraggled, it more resembled the black flag than anything else that flew, wanting only the skull and cross-bones to make it a fitting emblem of authorised piracy.

The rondy was hardly a spot to which one would have resorted for a rest-cure. When not engaged in pressing, the gangsmen were a roistering, drinking crew, under lax control and never averse from a row, either amongst themselves or with outsiders. Sometimes the commanding officer made the place his residence, and when this was the case some sort of order prevailed. The floors were regularly swept, the beds made, the frowsy "general" gratified by a weekly "tip" on pay-day. But when, on the other hand, the gangsmen who did not "find themselves" occupied the rondy to the exclusion of the officer, eating and sleeping there, tramping in and out at all hours of the day and night, dragging pressed men in to be "regulated" and locked up, and diverting such infrequent intervals of leisure as they enjoyed by pastimes in which fear of the "gent overhead" played no part--when this was the case the rondy became a veritable bear-garden, a place of unspeakable confusion wherein papers and pistols, boots and blankets, cutlasses, hats, beer-pots and staves cumbered the floors, the lockers and the beds with a medley of articles torn, rusty, mud-stained, dirt-begrimed and unkept.

Amongst accessories essential to the efficient activity of gangs stationed at coast or river towns the boat had first place. Sometimes both sail and row-boats were employed. Luggers of the old type, fast boats carrying a great press of sail, served best for overhauling ships; but on inland waterways, such as the Thames, the Humber or the Tyne, a "sort of wherry, constructed for rowing fast," was the favourite vehicle of pursuit. The rate of hire varied from 1s. a day to two or more guineas a week, according to the size and class of boat. At Cork it was "five shillings Irish" per day.

Accessories of a less indispensable nature, occasionally allowed, were, at Dartmouth and a few other places, cockades for the gangsmen's hats, supplied at a cost of 1s. each; at Tower Hill a messenger, pay

20s. a week; and at Appledore an umbrella for use in rainy weather, price 12s. 6d.

The arms of the gang comprised, first, a press-warrant, and, second, such weapons as were necessary to enforce it.

In the literature of the eighteenth century the warrant is inseparably associated with the short, incurvated service sword commonly known as the cutlass or hanger; but in the press-gang prints of the period the gangsmen are generally armed with stout clubs answering to Smollett's "good oak plant." Apart from this artistic evidence, however, there is no valid reason for believing that the bludgeon ever came into general use as the ganger's weapon. As early as the reign of Anne he went armed with the "Queen's broad cutlash," and for most gangs, certainly for all called upon to operate in rough neighbourhoods, the hanger remained the stock weapon throughout the century. In expeditions involving special risk or danger, the musket and the pistol supplemented what must have been in itself no mean weapon.

As we have already seen, the earliest recorded press-warrants emanated from the king in person, whilst later ones were issued by the king in council and endorsed by the naval authorities. As the need of men became more and more imperative, however, this mode of issue was found to be too cumbersome and inexpedient. Hence, by the time the eighteenth century came in, with its tremendously enhanced demands on behalf of the Navy, the royal prerogative in respect to warrants had been virtually delegated to the Admiralty, who issued them on their own initiative, though ostensibly in pursuance of His Majesty's Orders in Council.

An Admiralty warrant empowered the person to whom it was directed to "impress" as many "seamen" as possibly he could procure, giving to each man so impressed 1s. "for prest money." He was to impress none but such as "were strong bodies and capable to serve the king"; and, having so impressed such persons, he was to deliver them up to the officer regulating the nearest rendezvous. All civil authorities were to be "aiding and assisting" to him in the discharge of this duty.

Now this document, the stereotyped press-warrant of the century, here concisely summarised in its own phraseology, was not at all what it purported to be. It was in fact a warrant out of time, an official anachronism, a red-tape survival of that bygone period when pressing still meant "presting" and force went no further than a threat. For men were now no longer "prestred." They were pressed, and that, too, in the most drastic sense of the term. The king's shilling no longer changed hands. Even in Pepys' time men were pressed "without money," and in none of the accounts of expenses incurred in pressing during the century which followed, excepting only a very few of the earlier ones, can any such item as the king's shilling or prest-money be discovered. Its abolition was a logical sequence of the change from presting to pressing.

The seaman, moreover, so far from being the sole quarry of the warrant-holder, now sought concealment amongst a people almost without exception equally liable with himself to the capture he endeavoured to elude. Retained merely as a matter of form, and totally out of keeping with altered conditions, the warrant was in effect obsolete save as an instrument authorising one man to deprive another of his liberty in the king's name. Even the standard of "able bodies and capable" had

deteriorated to such an extent that the officers of the fleet were kept nearly as busy weeding out and rejecting men as were the officers of the impress in taking them.

Still, the warrant served. Stripped of its obsolete injunctions, it read: "Go ye out into the highways and hedges, and water-ways, and compel them to come in"--enough, surely, for any officer imbued with zeal for His Majesty's service.

Though according to the strict letter of the law as defined by various decisions of the courts a press-warrant was legally executable only by the officer to whom it was addressed, in practice the limitation was very widely departed from, if not altogether ignored; for just as a constable or sheriff may call upon bystanders to assist him in the execution of his office, so the holder of a press-warrant, though legally unable to delegate his authority by other means, could call upon others to aid him in the execution of his duty. Naturally, the gangsmen being at hand, and being at hand for that very purpose, he gave them first preference. Hence, the gangsmen pressed on the strength of a warrant which in reality gave him no power to press.

While the law relating to the intensive force of warrants was thus deliberately set at naught, an extraordinary punctiliousness for legal formality was displayed in another direction. According to tradition and custom no warrant was valid until it had received the sanction of the civil power. Solicitor-General Yorke could find no statutory authority for such procedure. [Footnote: *_Admiralty Records_* 7. 298--*Law Officers' Opinions*, 1733-56, No. 102.] He accordingly pronounced it to be non-essential to the validity of warrants. Nevertheless, save in cases where the civil power refused its endorsement, it was universally adhered to. What was bad law was notoriously good policy, for a disaffected mayor, or an unfriendly Justice of the Peace, had it in his power to make the path of the impress officer a thorny one indeed. "Make unto yourselves friends," was therefore one of the first injunctions laid upon officers whose duties unavoidably made them many enemies.

CHAPTER IV.

WHOM THE GANG MIGHT TAKE.

In theory an authority for the taking of seafaring men only, the press-warrant was in practice invested with all the force of a Writ of Quo Warranto requiring every able-bodied male adult to show by what right he remained at large. The difference between the theory and the practice of pressing was consequently as wide as the poles.

While the primary and ostensible objective of the impress remained always what it had been from the outset, the seaman who had few if any land-ties except those of blood or sex, from this root principle there sprang up a very Upas tree of pretension, whose noxious branches overspread practically every section of the community. Hence the press-gang, the embodiment of this pretension, eventually threw aside ostence and took its pick of all who came its way, let their

occupation or position be what it might. It was no duty of the gangster to employ his hanger in splitting hairs. "First catch your man," was for him the greatest of all the commandments. Discrimination was for his masters. The weeding out could be done when the pressing was over.

The classes hardest hit by this lamentable want of discrimination were the classes engaged in trade. "Mr. Coventry," wrote Pepys some four years after the Restoration, "showed how the medium of the men the King hath one year with another employed in his navy since his coming, hath not been above 3000 men, or at most 4000; and now having occasion for 30,000, the remaining 26,000 _must be found out of the Trade of the Nation_." Naturally. Where a nation of shopkeepers was concerned it could hardly have been otherwise. They who go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters, returning laden with the spoils of the commercial world, have perforce to render tribute unto Caesar; but Mr. Commissioner Coventry little guessed, when he enunciated his corollary with such nice precision, to what it was destined to lead in the next hundred years or so.

Under the merciless exactions of the press-gang Trade did not, however, prove the submissive thing that was wont to stand at its doors and cry: "Will you buy? will you buy?" or to bow prospective customers into its rich emporiums with unctuous rubbing of hands and suave words. Trade knew its power and determined to use it. "Look you! my Lords Commissioners," cried Trade, truculently cocking its hat in the face of Admiralty, "I have had enough. You have taken my butcher, my baker, my candlestick-maker, nor have you spared that worthy youth, the 'prentice who was to have wed my daughter. My coachman, the driver of my gilded chariot, goes in fear of you, and as for my sedan-chair man, he is no more found. My colliers, draymen, watermen, the carpenters who build my ships and the mariners who sail them, the ablest of these my necessary helpers sling their hammocks in your fleet. You have crippled the printing of my Bible and the brewing of my Beer, and I can bear no more. Protect me from my arch-enemy the foreigner if you must and will, but not, my Lords Commissioners, by such monstrous personal methods as these." "Your servant!" said Admiralty, obsequious before the only power it feared--"your servant to command!" and straightway set about finding a remedy for the evils Trade complained of.

Now, to attain this end, so desirable if Trade were to be placated, it was necessary to define with precision either whom the gang might take, or whom it might not take; and here Admiralty, though notoriously a body without a brain, achieved a stroke of genius, for it brought down both birds with a single stone. Postulating first of all the old _lex sine lege_ fiction that every native-born Briton and every British male subject born abroad was legally pressable, it laid it down as a logical sequence that no man, whatever his vocation or station in life, was lawfully exempt; that exemption was in consequence an official indulgence and not a right; and that apart from such indulgence every man, unless idiotic, blind, lame, maimed or otherwise physically unfit, was not only liable to be pressed, but could be legally pressed for the king's service at sea. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 26; and _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, 14 Feb. 1805, well express the official view.] Having thus cleared the ground root and branch, Admiralty magnanimously proceeded to frame a category of persons whom, as an act of grace and a concession to Trade, it was

willing to protect from assault and capture by its emissary the press-gang.

These exemptions from the wholesale incidence of the impress were not granted all at once. Embodied from time to time in Acts of Parliament and so-called acts of official grace--slowly and painfully wrung from a reluctant Admiralty by the persistent demands and ever-growing power of Trade--they spread themselves over the entire century of struggle for the mastery of the sea, from which they were a reaction, and, touching the lives of the common people in a hundred and one intimate points and interests, culminated at length in the abolition of that most odious system of oppression from which they had sprung, and in a charter of liberties before which the famous charter of King John sinks into insignificance.

[Illustration: THE PRESS-GANG SEIZING A VICTIM.]

As a matter of policy the foreigner had first place in the list of exemptions. He could volunteer if he chose, [Footnote: Strenuous efforts were made in 1709 to induce the "Poor Palatines"--seven thousand of them encamped at Blackheath, and two thousand in Sir John Parson's brewhouse at Camberwell--to enter for the navy. But the "thing was New to them to go aboard a Man of Warr," so they declined the invitation, "having the Notion of being sent to Carolina." --_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1437--Letters of Capt. Aston.] but he must not be pressed. [Footnote: 13 George II. cap. 17.] To deprive him of his right in this respect was to invite unpleasant diplomatic complications, of which England had already too many on her hands. Trade, too, looked upon the foreigner as her perquisite, and Trade must be indulged. Moreover, he fostered mutiny in the fleet, where he was prone to "fly in the face" of authority and to refuse to work, much less fight, for an alien people. If, however, he served on board British merchant ships for two years, or if he married in England, he at once lost caste, since he then became a naturalised British subject and was liable to have even his honeymoon curtailed by a visit from the press-gang. Such, in fact, was the fate of one William Castle of Bristol in 1806. Pressed there in that year on his return from the West Indies, he was discharged as a person of alien birth; but having immediately afterwards committed the indiscretion of taking a Bristol woman to wife, he was again pressed, this time within three weeks of his wedding-day, and kept by express order of Admiralty. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1537--Capt. Barker, 23 July 1806.]

For some years after the passing of the Act exempting the foreigner, his rights appear to have been generally, though by no means universally respected. "Discharge him if not married or settled in England," was the usual order when he chanced to be taken by the gang. With the turn of the century, however, a reaction set in. Pressed men claiming to be of alien birth were thenceforth only liberated "if unfit for service." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2733--Capt. Young, 11 March 1756, endorsement, and numerous instances.] For this untoward change the foreigner could blame none but himself. When taxed with having an English wife, he could seldom or never be induced to admit the soft impeachment. Consequently, whenever he was taken by the gang he was assumed, in the absence of proof to the contrary, to have committed the fatal act of naturalisation. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Phillip, 26 Feb. 1805.] Alien seamen in distress through shipwreck or other accidental causes, formed a humane

exception to this unwritten law.

The negro was never reckoned an alien. Looked upon as a proprietary subject of the Crown, and having no one in particular to speak up for or defend him, he "shared the same fate as the free-born white man." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 482--Admiral Lord Colvill, 29 Oct. 1762.] Many blacks, picked up in the West Indies or on the American coast "without hurting commerce," were to be found on board our ships of war, where, when not incapacitated by climatic conditions, they made active, alert seamen and "generally imagined themselves free." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 585--Admiral Donnelly, 22 Feb. 1815.] Their point of view, poor fellows, was doubtless a strictly comparative one.

Theoretically exempt by virtue of his calling, whatever that might be, the landsman was in reality scarcely less marked down by the gang than his unfortunate brother the seafaring man; for notwithstanding all its professions to the contrary, Admiralty could not afford to ignore the potentialities of the reserve the landsman represented. Hence no occupation, no property qualification, could or did protect him. As early as 1705 old Justice, in his treatise on sea law, deplores bitterly the "barbarous custom of pressing promiscuously landsmen and seamen," and declares that the gang, in its purblind zeal, "hurried away tradesmen from their houses, 'prentices and journeymen from their masters' shops, and even housekeepers (householders) too." By 1744 the practice had become confirmed. In that year Capt. Innes, of His Majesty's armed sloop the Hind, applied to the Lords Commissioners for "Twenty Landsmen from Twenty to Twenty-five years of Age." The Admiralty order, "Let the Regulating Captains send them as he desires," [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1983--Capt. Innes, 3 May 1744, and endorsement.] leaves no room for doubt as to the class of men provided. They were pressed men, not volunteers.

Nor is this a solitary instance of a practice that was rapidly growing to large proportions. Many a landsman, in the years that followed, shared the fate of the Irish "country farmer" who went into Waterford to sell his corn, and was there pressed and sent on board the tender; of James Whitefoot, the Bristol glover, "a timid, unformed young man, the comfort and support of his parents," who, although he had "never seen a ship in his life," was yet pressed whilst "passing to follow his business," which knew him no more; and of Winstanley, the London butcher, who served for upwards of sixteen years as a pressed man. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1501--Capt. Bligh, 16 May 1781. Admiralty Records 1. 1531--Duchess of Gordon, 14 Feb. 1804. Admiralty Records 1. 584--Humble Petition of Betsey Winstanley, 2 Sept. 1814.] Wilkes' historic barber would have entered upon the same enforced career had not that astute Alderman discovered, to the astonishment of the nation at large, that a warrant which authorised the pressing of seamen did not necessarily authorise the pressing of a city tonsor.

Amongst landsmen the harvester, as a worker of vital utility to the country, enjoyed a degree of exemption accorded to few. Impress officers had particular instructions concerning him. They were to delete him from the category of those who might be taken. Armed with a certificate from the minister and churchwardens of his parish, this migratory farm-hand, provided always he were not a sailor masquerading in that disguise, could traverse the length and breadth of the land to all intents and purposes a free man. To him, as well as to the grower

of corn who depended so largely upon his aid in getting his crop, the concession proved an inestimable boon. There were violations of the harvester's status, it is true; [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 5125--Memorial of Sir William Oglander, Bart., July 1796.] but these were too infrequent to affect seriously the industry he represented.

So far as the press was concerned, the harvester was better off than the gentleman, for while the former could dress as he pleased, the latter was often obliged to dress as he could, and in this lay an element of danger. So long as his clothes were as good as the blood he boasted, and he wore them with an aplomb suggestive of position and influence, the gentleman was safe; but let his pretensions to gentility lie more in the past than in the suit on his back, and woe betide him! In spite of his protestations the gang took him, and he was lucky indeed if, like the gentleman who narrates his experience in the Review for the both of February 1706, he was able to convince his captors that he was foreign born by "talking Latin and Greek."

To the people at large, whether landmen or seafarers, the Act exempting from the press every male under eighteen and over fifty-five years of age would have brought a sorely needed relief had not Admiralty been a past-master in the subtle art of outwitting the law. In this instance a simple regulation did the trick. Every man or boy who claimed the benefit of the age-limit when pressed, was required to prove his claim ere he could obtain his discharge. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 43: "It is incumbent on those who claim to be exempted to prove the facts."] The impossibility of any general compliance with such a demand on the part of persons often as ignorant of birth certificates as they were of the sea, practically wiped the exemption off the slate.

In the eyes of the Regulating Captain no man was older than he looked, no lad as young as he avowed. Hence thousands of pressed men over fifty-five, who did not look the age they could not prove, figured on the books of the fleet with boys whose precocity of appearance gave the lie to their assertions. George Stephens, son of a clerk in the Transport Office, suffered impressment when barely thirteen; and the son of a corporal in Lord Elkinton's regiment, one Alexander M'Donald, was listed in the same manner while still "under the age of twelve." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 583--Vice-Admiral Hunter, 10 May 1813. Admiralty Records 1. 1503--Capt. Butchart, 22 Jan. 1782, and enclosure.] The gang did not pause by the way to discuss such questions.

Apprentices fell into a double category--those bound to the sea, those apprenticed on land. Nominally, the sea apprentice was protected from the impress for a term of three years from the date of his indentures, provided he had not used the sea before; [Footnote: 2 & 3 Anne, cap. 6, re-affirmed 13 George II. cap. 17.] while the land apprentice enjoyed immunity under the minimum age-limit of eighteen years. The proviso in the first case, however, left open a loop-hole the impress officer was never slow to take advantage of; and the minimum age-limit, as we have just seen, had little if any existence in fact. Apprentices pressed after the three years' exemption had expired were never given up, nor could their masters successfully claim them in law. They dropped like ripe fruit into the lap of Admiralty. On the other hand, apprentices pressed within the three years' exemption

period were generally discharged, for if they were not, they could be freed by a writ of Habeas Corpus, or else the masters could maintain an action for damages against the Admiralty. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 25.]

'Prentices who "eloped" or ran away from their masters, and then entered voluntarily, could not be reclaimed by any known process at law if they were over eighteen years of age. On the whole, the position of the apprentice, whether by land or sea, was highly anomalous and uncertain. Often taken by the gang in the hurry of visiting a ship, or in the scurry of a hot press on shore, he was in effect the shuttlecock of the service, to-day singing merrily at his capstan or bench, to-morrow bewailing his hard fate on board a man-o'-war.

When it came to the exemption of seamen, Admiralty found itself on the horns of a dilemma. Both the Navy and the merchant service depended in a very large degree upon the seaman who knew the ropes--who could take his turn at the wheel, scud aloft without going through the lubber-hole, and act promptly and sailorly in emergency. To take wholesale such men as these, while it would enormously enhance the effectiveness of His Majesty's ships of war, must inevitably cripple sea-borne trade. It was therefore necessary, for the well-being of both services, to discover the golden mean. According to statute law [Footnote: 13 George II. cap. 17.] every person using the sea, of what age soever he might be, was exempt from the impress for two years from the time of his first making the venture. The concession did not greatly improve the situation from a trade point of view. It merely touched the fringe of the problem, and Trade was insistent.

A further concession was accordingly made. All masters, mates, boatswains and carpenters of vessels of fifty tons and upwards were exempted from the impress on condition of their going before a Justice of the Peace and making oath to their several qualifications. This affidavit, coupled with a succinct description of the deponent, constituted the holder's "protection" and shielded him, or was supposed to shield him, from molestation by the gang. Masters and mates of colliers, and of vessels laid up for the winter, came under this head; but masters or mates of vessels detected in running dutiable goods, or caught harbouring deserters from the fleet, could be summarily dealt with notwithstanding their protections. The same fate befell the mate or apprentice who was lent by one ship to another.

In addition to the executive of the vessel, as defined in the foregoing paragraph, it was of course necessary to extend protection to as many of her "hands", as were essential to her safe and efficient working. How many were really required for this purpose was, however, a moot point on which ship-masters and naval officers rarely saw eye to eye; and since the arbiter in all such disputes was the "quarter-deck gentlemen," the decision seldom if ever went in favour of the master.

The importance of the coal trade won for colliers an early concession, which left no room for differences of opinion. Every vessel employed in that trade was entitled to carry one exempt able-bodied man for each hundred units of her registered tonnage, provided it did not exceed three hundred. The penalty for pressing such men was 10 Pounds for each man taken. [Footnote: 2 & 3 Anne, cap. 6.]

On the coasts of Scotland commanders of warships whose carpenters had run or broken their leave, and who perhaps were left, like Capt. Gage of the Otter sloop, "without so much as a Gimblett on board," [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1829--Capt. Gage, 29 Sept. 1742.] might press shipwrights from the yards on shore to fill the vacancy, and suffer no untoward consequences; but south of the Tweed this mode of collecting "chips" was viewed with disfavour. There, although ship-carpenters, sailmakers and men employed in rope-walks were by a stretch of the official imagination reckoned as persons using the sea, and although they were generally acknowledged to be no less indispensable to the complete economy of a ship than the able-bodied seaman, legal questions of an extremely embarrassing nature nevertheless cropped up when the scene of their activities underwent too sudden and violent a change. The pressing of such artificers consequently met with little official encouragement. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 2.]

Where the Admiralty scored, in the matter of ship protections, and scored heavily, was when the protected person went ashore. For when on shore the protected master, mate, boatswain, carpenter, apprentice or seaman no longer enjoyed protection unless he was there "on ship's duty." The rule was most rigorously, not to say arbitrarily, enforced. Thus at Plymouth, in the year 1746, a seaman who protested in broken English that he had come ashore to "look after his master's sheep" was pressed because the naval officer who met and questioned him "imagined sheep to have no affinity with a ship!"

[Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2381--Capt. John Roberts, 11 July 1746. Capt. Roberts was a very downright individual, and years before the characteristic had got him into hot water. The occasion was when, in 1712, an Admiralty letter, addressed to him at Harwich and containing important instructions, by some mischance went astray and Roberts accused the Clerk of the Check of having appropriated it. The latter called him a liar, whereupon Roberts "gave him a slap in the face and bid him learn more manners." For this exhibition of temper he was superseded and kept on the half-pay list for some six years. Admiralty Records 1. 1471--Capt. Brand, 8 March 1711-12. Admiralty Records 1. 2378, section 11, Admiralty note.]

Any mate who failed to register his name at the rendezvous, as soon as his ship arrived in port, did so at his peril. Without that formality he was "not entitled to liberty." So strict was the rule that when William Tassell, mate of the Elizabeth ketch, was caught drinking in a Lynn alehouse one night at ten o'clock, after having obtained "leave to run about the town" until eight only, he was immediately pressed and kept, the Admiralty refusing to declare the act irregular. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1546--Capt. Bowyer, 25 July 1809, and enclosure.]

In many ports it was customary for sailors to sleep ashore while their ships lay at the quay or at moorings. The proceeding was highly dangerous. No sailor ever courted sleep in such circumstances, even though armed with a "line from the master setting forth his business," without grave risk of waking to find himself in the bilboes. The Mayor of Poole once refused to "back" press-warrants for local use unless protected men belonging to trading vessels of the port were granted the privilege of lodging ashore. "Certainly not!" retorted the Admiralty. "We cannot grant Poole an indulgence _that other towns do

not enjoy_." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2485--Capt. Scott, 4 Jan. 1780, and endorsement.]

In spite of the risk involved, the sailor slept ashore and--if he survived the night--tried to steal back to his ship in the grey of the morning. Now and then, by a run of luck, he made his offing in safety; but more frequently he met the fate of John White of Bristol, who was taken by the gang when only "about ninety yards from his vessel."

The only exceptions to this stringent rule were certain classes of men engaged in the Greenland and South Seas whale fisheries. Skilled harpooners, linesmen and boat-steerers, on their return from a whaling cruise, could obtain from any Collector of Customs, for sufficient bond put in, a protection from the impress which no Admiralty regulation, however sweeping, could invalidate or override. Safeguarded by this document, they were at liberty to live and work ashore, or to sail in the coal trade, until such time as they should be required to proceed on another whaling voyage. If, however, they took service on board any vessel other than a collier, they forfeited their protections and could be "legally detained." [Footnote: 13 George II. cap. 28. _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 14 March 1756. _Admiralty Records_ 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 42.]

In one ironic respect the gang strongly resembled a boomerang. So thoroughly and impartially did it do its work that it recoiled upon those who used it. The evil was one of long standing. Pepys complained of it bitterly in his day, asserting that owing to its prevalence letters could neither be received nor sent, and that the departmental machinery for victualling and arming the fleet was like to be undone. With the growth of pressing the imposition was carried to absurd lengths. The crews of the impress tenders, engaged in conveying pressed men to the fleet, could not "proceed down" without falling victims to the very service they were employed in. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1486--Capt. Baird, 27 Feb. 1755, and numerous instances.] To check this egregious robbing of Peter to pay Paul, both the Navy Board and the Government were obliged to "protect" their own sea-going hirelings, and even then the protections were not always effective.

Between the extremes represented by the landsman who enjoyed nominal exemption and the seaman who enjoyed none, there existed a middle or amphibious class of persons who lived exclusively on neither land nor water, but habitually used both in the pursuit of their various callings. These were the wherry or watermen, the lightermen, bargemen, keelmen, trowmen and canal-boat dwellers frequenting mainly the inland waterways of the country.

In the reign of Richard II. the jurisdiction of Admirals was denned as extending, in a certain particular, to the "main stream of great rivers nigh the sea." [Footnote: 15 Richard II. cap. 2.] Had the same line of demarcation been observed in the pressing of those whose occupations lay upon rivers, there would have been little cause for outcry or complaint. But the Admiralty, the successors of the ancient "Guardians of the Sea" whose powers were so clearly limited by the Ricardian statute, gradually extended the old-time jurisdiction until, for the purposes of the impress, it included all waterways, whether "nigh the sea" or inland, natural or artificial, whereon it was possible for craft to navigate. All persons working upon or habitually

using such waterways were regarded as "using the sea," and later warrants expressly authorised the gangs to take as many of them as they should be able, not excepting even the ferryman. The extension was one of tremendous consequence, since it swept into the Navy thousands of men who, like the Ely and Cambridge bargemen, were "hardy, strong fellows, who never failed to make good seamen."

[Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1486--Capt. Baird, 29 April 1755.]

Amongst these denizens of the country's waterways the position of the Thames wherryman was peculiar in that from very early times he had been exempt from the ordinary incidence of the press on condition of his periodically supplying from his own numbers a certain quota of able-bodied men for the use of the fleet. The rule applied to all watermen using the river between Gravesend and Windsor, and members of the fraternity who "withdrew and hid themselves" at the time of the making of such levies, were liable to be imprisoned for two years and "banished any more to row for a year and a day." [Footnote: 2 & 3 Philip and Mary, cap. 16.] The exemption he otherwise enjoyed appears to have conduced not a little to the waterman's proverbial joviality.

As a youth he spent his leisure in "dancing and carolling," thus earning the familiar sobriquet of "the jolly young waterman." Even so, his tenure of happiness was anything but secure. With the naval officer and the gang he was no favourite, and few opportunities of dashing his happiness were allowed to pass unimproved. In the person of John Golden, however, they caught a Tartar. To the dismay of the Admiralty and the officer responsible for pressing him, he proved to be one of my Lord Mayor's bargemen. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2733--Capt. Young, 7 March 1756.]

Apart from the watermen of the Thames, the purchase of immunity from the press by periodic levies met with little favour, and though the levy was in many cases reluctantly adopted, it was only because it entailed the lesser of two evils. The basis of such levies varied from one man in ten to one in five--a percentage which the Admiralty considered a "matter of no distress"; and the penalty for refusing to entertain them was wholesale pressing.

The Tyne keelmen, while ostensibly consenting to buy immunity on this basis, seldom levied the quota upon themselves. By offering bounties they drew the price of their freedom to work in the keels from outside sources. Lord Thurlow confessed that he did not know what "working in the keels" meant. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 7. 299--Law Officers' Opinions, 1752-77, No. 70.] There were few in the fleet who could have enlightened him of their own experience. The keelmen kept their ranks as far as possible intact. In this they were materially aided by the Mayor and Corporation of Newcastle, who held a "Grand Protection" of the Admiralty, and in return for this exceptional mark of their Lordships' favour did all they could to further the pressing of persons less essential to the trade of the town and river than were their own keelmen.

On the rivers Severn and Wye there was plying in 1806 a flotilla of ninety-eight trows, ranging in capacity from sixty to one hundred and thirty tons, and employing five hundred and eighty-eight men, of whom practically all enjoyed exemption from the press. It being a time of exceptional stress for men, the Admiralty considered this proportion excessive, and Capt. Barker, at that time regulating the press at Bristol, was ordered to negotiate terms. He proposed a contribution of

throwmen on the basis of one in every ten, coupling the suggestion with a thinly veiled threat that if it were not complied with he would set his gangs to work and take all he could get. The Association of Severn Traders, finding themselves thus placed between the devil and the deep sea, agreed to the proposal with a reluctance they in vain endeavoured to hide under ardent protestations of loyalty. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 1537--Capt. Barker, 24 April and 9 May 1806, and enclosure.]

In the three hundred "flats" engaged in carrying salt, coals and other commodities between Nantwich and Liverpool there were employed, in 1795, some nine hundred men who had up to that time largely escaped the attentions of the gang. In that year, however, an arrangement was entered into, under duress of the usual threat, to the effect that they should contribute one man in six, or at the least one man in nine, in return for exemption to be granted to the remainder. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 578--Admiral Pringle, Report on Rendezvous, 2 April 1795.]

Turf-boats plying on the Blackwater and the Shannon seem to have enjoyed no special concessions. The men working them were pressed when-ever they could be laid hold of, and if they were not always kept, their discharge was due to reasons of physical unfitness rather than to any acknowledged right to labour unmolested. Ireland's contribution to the fleet, apart from the notoriously disaffected, was of too much consequence to be played with; for the Irishman was essentially a good-natured soul, and when his native indolence and slowness of movement had been duly corrected by a judicious use of the rattan and the rope's-end, his services were highly esteemed in His Majesty's ships of war.

In the category of exemptions the fisheries occupied a place entirely their own. They were carefully fostered, but indifferently protected.

Previous to the year 1729 the most important concession granted to those engaged in the taking of fish was the establishing of two extra "Fishe Dayes" in the week. The provision was embodied in a statute of 1563, whereby the people were required, under a penalty of, 3 Pounds for each omission, "or els three monethes close Imprisonment without Baile or Mainepriise," to eat fish, to the total exclusion of meat, on Fridays and Saturdays, and to content themselves with "one dish of flesh to three dishes of fish" on Wednesdays. [Footnote: 5 Elizabeth, cap. 5.] The enactment had no religious significance whatever; but in order to avoid any suspicion of Popish tendencies it was deemed advisable, by those responsible for the measure, to saddle it with a rider to the effect that all persons teaching, preaching or proclaiming the eating of fish, as enjoined by the Act, to be of "necessitee for the saving of the soule of man," should be punished as "spreaders of fause newes." The true significance of the measure lay in this. The abolition of Romish fast-days had resulted, since the Reformation, in an enormous falling off in the consumption of fish, and this decrease had in turn played havoc with the fisheries. Now the fisheries were in reality the national incubator for seamen, and Cecil, Elizabeth's astute Secretary of State, perceiving in their decadence a grave menace to the manning of prospective fleets, determined, for that reason if for no other, to reanimate the dying industry. The Act in question was the practical outcome of his deliberations. [Footnote: State Papers Domestic_, Elizabeth, vol. xxvii. Nos. 71 and 72, comprising Cecil's original memoranda.]

An enactment which combined so happily the interests of the fisher classes with those of national defence could not but be productive of far-reaching consequences. The fishing industry not only thrived exceedingly because of it, it in time became, as Cecil clearly foresaw it would become, a nursery for seamen and a feeder of the fleet as unrivalled for the excellence of its material as it was inexhaustible in its resources. Its prosperity was in fact its curse. Few exemptions were granted it. Adventurers after whale and cod had special concessions, suited to the peculiar conditions of their calling; but with these exceptions craft of every description employed in the taking or the carrying of fish, for a very protracted period enjoyed only such exemptions as were grudgingly extended to sea-going craft in general. The source of supply represented by the leviathan industry was too valuable to be lightly restricted.

On the other hand, it was too important to be lightly depleted. Therefore under Cecil's Act establishing extra "Fishe Dayes," no fisherman "using or haunting the sea" could be pressed off-hand to serve in the Queen's Navy. The "taker," as the press-master was at that time called, was obliged to carry his warrant to the Justices inhabiting the place or places where it was proposed that the fishermen should be pressed, and of these Justices any two were empowered to "choose out such number of hable men" as the warrant specified. In this way originated the "backing" or endorsing of warrants by the civil power. At first obligatory only as regards the pressing of fishermen, it came to be regarded in time as an essential preliminary to all pressing done on land.

No further provision of a special nature would appear to have been made for the protecting of fisher folk from the press until the year 1729, when an exemption was granted which covered the master, one apprentice, one seaman and one landsman for each vessel. [Footnote: 2 George n. cap. 15.] In 1801, however, a sweeping change was inaugurated. A statute of that date provided that no person engaged in the taking, curing or selling of fish should be impressed. [Footnote: 41 George in. cap. 21.] The exemption came too late to prove substantially beneficial to an industry which had suffered incalculable injury from the then recent wars. The press-gang was already nearing its last days.

Prior to the Act of 1801 persons whose sole occupation was "to pick oysters and mussels at low water" were accounted fishermen and habitually pressed as "using the sea."

The position of the smaller fry of fishermen is thrown into vivid relief by an official communique of 1709 as opposed to an incident of later date. "These poor people," runs the note, which was addressed to a naval commander who had pressed a fisherman out of a boat of less than three tons, "have been always protected for the support of their indigent families, and therefore they must not Be taken into the service unless there is a pressing occasion, _and then they will be all forced therinto_" [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.2377 --Capt. Robinson, 4 Feb. 1708-9, and endorsement.] Captain Boscowen, writing from the Nore in 1745, supplies the antithesis. He had been instructed to procure half a dozen fishing smacks, each of not less than sixty tons burden, for transport purposes. None were to be had. "The reason the fishermen give for not employing vessels of that size," he states, in explanation of the fact, "is that all the

young men are pressed, and that the old men and boys are not able to work them." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1481--Capt. Boscawen, 23 Dec. 1745.]

Conditions such as these in time taught the fisherman wisdom, and he awoke to the fact that exemption for a consideration, as in the case of workers on rivers and canals, was preferable to paying through the nose. The Admiralty was never averse from driving a bargain of this description. It saved much distress, much bad blood, much good money. In this way Worthing fishermen bought exemption in 1780. The fishery of that town was then in its infancy, the people engaged in it "very poor and needy." They employed only sixteen boats. Yet they found it cheaper to contribute five men to the Navy, at a cost of 40 Pounds in bounties, than to entertain the gang. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1446--Capt. Alms, 2 Jan. 1780.]

The Orkney fisherman bought his freedom, both on his fishing-grounds and when carrying his catch to market, on similar terms; but being a person of frugal turn of mind, he gradually developed the habit of withholding his stipulated quota. The unexpected arrival in his midst of an armed smack, followed by a spell of vigorous pressing, taught him that to be penny-wise is sometimes to be pound-foolish. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2740--Lieut. Abbs, 11 May 1798, and Admiralty note.]

On the Scottish coasts fishermen and ferrymen--the latter a numerous class on that deeply indented seaboard--offered up one man in every five or six on the altar of protection. The sacrifice distressed them less than indiscriminate pressing. A prosperous people, they chose out those of their number who could best be spared, supporting the families thus left destitute by common subscription. Buss fishermen, who followed the migratory herring; from fishing-ground to fishing-ground, were in another category. Their contribution, when on the Scottish coast, figured out at a man per buss, but as they were for some inscrutable reason called upon to pay similar tribute on other parts of the coast, they cannot be said to have escaped any too lightly. Neither did the four hundred fishing-boats composing the Isle of Man fleet. Their crews were obliged to surrender one man in every seven. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral Pringle, Report on Rendezvous, 2 April 1795; Admiral Philip, Report on Rendezvous, 1 Aug. 1801.]

Opinions as to the value of material drawn from these sources differed widely. The buss fisherman was on all hands acknowledged to be a seasoned sailor; but when it came to those employed in smaller craft, it was held that heaving at the capstan for a matter of only six or seven weeks in the year could never convert raw lads into useful seamen, even though they continued that healthful form of exercise all their lives. This was the view entertained by the masters of fishing-smacks smarting from loss of "hands." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1497--Thomas Hurry, master, 3 March 1777.]

Admiralty saw things in quite another light. "What you admit," said their Lordships, expressing the counter-view, "it is our business to prevent. We will therefore take these lads, who are admittedly of no service to you save for hauling in your nets or getting your anchors, and will make of them what you, on your own showing, can never make--able seamen.": The argument, backed as it was by the strong arm of the press-gang, was unanswerable.

The fact that the fisherman passed much of his time on shore did not free him from the press any more than it freed the waterman, or the worker in keel or trow. In his main vocation he "used the sea," and that was enough. For the use of the sea was the rule and standard by which every man's liability to the press was supposed to be measured and determined.

Except in the case of masters, mates and apprentices to the sea, whose affidavits or indentures constituted their respective safeguards against the press, every person exempt from that infliction, whether by statute law or Admiralty indulgence, was required to have in his possession an official voucher setting forth the fact and ground of his exemption. This document was ironically termed his "protection."

Admiralty protections were issued under the hand of the Lord High Admiral; ordinary protections, by departments and persons who possessed either delegated or vested powers of issue. Thus each Trinity House protected its own pilots; the Customs protected whale fishermen and apprentices to the sea; impress officers protected seamen temporarily lent to ships in lieu of men taken out of them by the gangs. Some protections were issued for a limited period and lapsed when that period expired; others were of perpetual "force," unless invalidated by some irregular action on the part of the holder. No protection was good unless it bore a minute description of the person to whom it applied, and all protections had to be carried on the person and produced upon demand. Thomas Moverty was pressed out of a wherry in the Thames owing to his having changed his clothes and left his protection at home; and John Scott of Mistley, in Suffolk, was taken whilst working in his shirtsleeves, though his protection lay in the pocket of his jacket, only a few yards away. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1479--Capt. Bridges, 11 August 1743. Admiralty Records 1. 1531--Capt. Ballard, 15 March 1804, and enclosure.]

The most trifling irregularity in the protection itself, or the slightest discrepancy between the personal appearance of the bearer and the written description of him, was enough to convert the protection into so much waste paper and the bearer into a naval seaman. North-country apprentices, whose indentures bore a 14s. stamp in accordance with Scottish law, were pressed because that document did not bear a 15s. stamp according to English law. A seaman was in one instance described in his protection as "smooth-faced," that is, beardless. The impress officer scrutinised him closely. "Aha!" said he, "you are not smooth-faced. You are pockmarked"; and he pressed the poor fellow for that reason.

To be over-protected was as bad as having no protection at all. Thomas Letting, a collier's man, and John Anthony of the merchant ship Providence, learnt this fact to their cost when they were taken out of their respective ships for having each two protections. In short, the slightest pretext served. If a protection had but a few more days to run; if the name, date, place or other essential particular showed signs of "coaxing," that is, of having been "on purpose rubbed out" or altered; if a man's description did not figure in his protection, or if it figured on the back instead of in the margin, or in the margin instead of on the back; if his face wore a ruddy rather than a pale look, if his hair were red when it ought to have been brown, if he proved to be "tall and remarkable thin" when he

should have been middle-sized and thick-set--in any of these, as in a hundred and one similar cases, the bearer of the protection paid the penalty for what the impress officer regarded as a "hoodwinking attempt" to cheat the King's service of an eligible man.

Notwithstanding the fact that the impress officer regarded every pressable man as a person who made it his chief business in life to defraud the Navy of his services on the "miserable plea of a protection," it by no means followed that his zeal in pressing him on that account had in every case the countenance or met with the unqualified approval of the Admiralty. Thousands of men and boys taken in this irresponsible fashion obtained their discharge, though with more or less difficulty and delay, when the facts of the case were laid before the naval authorities; and in general it may be said, that although the Lords Commissioners were only too ready to wink at any colourable excuse whereby another physical unit might be added to the fleet, they nevertheless laid it down as a rule, inviolable at least on paper, "never to press any man from protections," since it brought "great trouble and clamour upon them." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 3. 50--Admiralty Minutes, 26 Feb. 1744-5.] To assert that the rule was generally obeyed would be to turn the truth into a lie. On the contrary, it was almost universally disregarded. Both officers and gangs traversed it on every possible occasion, leaving the justice or injustice of the act to the arbitrament of the higher tribunal. Zeal for the service was no crime, and to release a man was always so much easier than to catch him.

"Pressing from protections," as the phrase ran in the service, did not therefore mean that the Admiralty over-rode its own protections at pleasure. It merely signified that on occasion more than ordinarily stringent measures were adopted for the holding-up and examining of all protected persons, or of as many of them as could be got at by the gangs, to the end that all false or fraudulent vouchers might be weeded out and the dishonest bearers of them consigned to another place. And yet there were times when "pressing from protections" had its plenary significance too.

Lovers of prints who are familiar with Hogarth's "Stage Coach; or, a Country Inn Yard," date 1747, will readily recall the two "outsides"--the one a down-in-the-mouth soldier, the other a jolly Jack-tar on whose bundle may be read the word "Centurion." Now the Centurion was Anson's flag-ship, and in this print Hogarth has incidentally recorded the fact that her crew, on their return from that famous voyage round the world, were awarded life-protections from the press. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1440--Capt. Anson, 24 July 1744.]

The life-protection was an indulgence extended to few. Samuel Davidson of Newcastle, sailor, aged fifty, who had "served for nine years during the late wars," in 1777 made bold to plead that fact as a reason why he should be freed from the attentions of the press-gang for the rest of his life. But the Lords Commissioners refused to admit the plea "unless he was in a position not inferior to that of chief mate." On the other hand, Henry Love of Hastings, who had merely served in a single Dutch expedition, but had the promise of Pitt and Dundas that both he and those who volunteered with him should never be pressed, was immediately discharged when that calamity befell him. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1449--Capt. Columbine, 21 July 1800.]

The granting of extraordinary protections was thus something entirely erratic and not to be counted upon. Captain Balchen in 1708 had special protections for ten of his ship's company whom he desired to bring to London as witnesses in a suit then pending against him; but the building of the three earlier Eddystone lighthouses was allowed to be seriously impeded by the pressing of the unprotected workmen when on shore at Plymouth, and the keepers of the first erection of that name were once carried off bag and baggage by the gang.

Smeaton, who built the third Eddystone, protected his men by means of silver badges, and his storeboat enjoyed similar immunity--presumably with the consent of Admiralty--by reason of a picture of the lighthouse painted on her sail. Other great constructors, as well as rich mercantile firms, bought protection at a price. They supplied a stipulated number of men for the fleet, and found the arrangement a highly convenient one for ridding themselves of those who were useless to them or had incurred their displeasure. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 583--Admiral Thornborough, 30 Nov. 1813.]

Private protections, of which great numbers saw the light, were in no case worth the paper they were written on. Joseph Bettsworth of Ryde, Isle of Wight, Attorney-at-Law and Lord of the Manor of Ashe and Ryde, by virtue of an ancient privilege pertaining to that Manor and confirmed by royal Letters Patent, in 1790 protected some twenty seafaring men to work his "Antient Ferry or Passage for the Wafting of Passengers to and from Ride, Portsmouth and Gosport, in a smack of about 14 tons, and a wherry." The regulating captain at the last-named place asked what he should do about it. "Press every man as soon as possible," replied their Lordships. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1506--Capt. John Bligh, June 1790, and enclosure.]

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE GANG DID AFLOAT.

"A man we want, and a man we must have," was the naval cry of the century. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1531--Deposition of John Swinburn, 28 July 1804.]

Nowhere was the cry so loud or so insistent as on the sea, where every ship of war added to its volume. In times of peace, when the demand for men was gauged by those every-day factors, sickness, death and desertion, it dwindled, if it did not altogether die away; but given a war-cloud on the near horizon and the cry for men swelled, as many-voiced as there were keels in the fleet, to a sudden clamour of formidable proportions--a clamour that only the most strenuous and unrelenting exertions could in any measure appease.

Every navy is argus-eyed, and in crises such as these, when the very existence of the nation was perhaps at stake, it was first and principally towards the crews of the country's merchant ships that the eyes of the Navy were directed; for, shipboard life and shipboard duty being largely identical in both services, no elaborate training was

required to convert the merchant sailor into a first-rate man-o'-war's-man. The ships of both services were sailing ships. Both, as a rule, went armed. Hence, not only was the merchant sailor an able seaman, he was also trained in the handling of great guns, and in the use of the cutlass, the musket and the boarding-pike. In a word, he was that most valuable of all assets to a people seeking to dominate the sea--a man-o'-war's-man ready-made, needing only to be called in in order to become immediately effective.

The problem was how to catch him--how to take him fresh and vigorous from his deep-sea voyaging--how to enroll him in the King's Navy ere he got ashore with a pocketful of money and relaxed his hardened muscles in the uncontrolled debauchery he was so partial to after long abstention.

A device of the simplest yet of the most elaborate description met the difficulty. It was based upon the fact that to take the sailor afloat was a much easier piece of strategy than to ferret him out of his hiding-places after he got ashore. The impress trap was therefore set in such a way as to catch him before he reached the land.

With infinite ingenuity and foresight sea-gangs were picketed from harbour to harbour, from headland to headland, until they formed an almost unbroken chain around the coasts and guarded the sailor's every point of accustomed approach from overseas: This was the outer cordon of the system, the beginning of the gauntlet the returning sailor had to run, and he was a smart seaman indeed who could successfully negotiate the uncharted rocks and shoals with which the coast was everywhere strewn in his despite.

The composition of this chain of sea-gangs was mixed to a degree, yet singularly homogeneous.

First of all, on its extreme outer confines, perhaps as far down Channel as the Scillies, or as far north as the thirteen-mile stretch of sea running between the Mull of Kintyre and the Irish coast, where the trade for Liverpool, Whitehaven, Dublin and the Clyde commonly came in, the homing sailor would suddenly descry, bearing down upon him under press of sail, the trim figure of one of His Majesty's frigates, or the clean, swift lines of an armed sloop. The meeting was no chance one. Both the frigate and the sloop were there by design, the former cruising to complete her own complement, the latter to complete that of some ship-of-the-line at Plymouth, Spithead or the Nore, to which she stood in the relation of tender.

Tenders were vessels taken into the king's service "at the time of Impressing Seamen." Hired at certain rates per month, they continued in the service as long as they were required, often most unwillingly, and were principally employed in obtaining men for the king's ships or in matters relative thereto. In burden they varied from thirty or forty to one hundred tons, [Footnote: This was the maximum tonnage for which the Navy Board paid, but when trade was slack larger vessels could be had, and were as a matter of fact frequently employed, at the nominal tonnage rate.] the smaller craft hugging the coast and dropping in from port to port, the larger cruising far beyond shore limits. For deep-sea or trade-route cruising the smaller craft were of little use. No ship of force would bring-to for them.

While press-warrants were supplied regularly to every warship, no

matter what her rating, the supply of tenders was less general and much more erratic. It was only when occasion demanded it, and then only to ships of the first, second and third rate, that tenders were assigned for the purpose of bringing their crews up to full strength. The urgency of the occasion, the men to be "rose," the diplomacy of the commander determined the number. A tender to each ship was the rule, but however parsimonious the Navy Board might be on such occasions, a carefully worded appeal to its prejudices seldom failed to produce a second, or even a third attendant vessel. Boscawen once had recourse to this ingenious ruse in order to obtain tender number two. The Navy Board detested straggling seamen, so he suggested that, with several tenders lying idle in the Thames, his men might be far more profitably employed than in straggling about town. "Most reprehensible practice!" assented the Board, and placed a second vessel at his disposal without more ado. Lieut. Upton was immediately put in charge of her and ordered seawards. He returned within a week with twenty-seven men, pressed out of merchantmen in Margate Roads. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1478--Letters of Capt. Boscawen, July and August 1743.]

The tender assigned to Boscawen on this occasion was the Galloper, an American-built vessel, "rigged in the manner the West Indians do their sloops." Her armament consisted of six 9-pounders and threescore small-arms, but as a sea-boat she belied her name, for she was hopelessly sluggish under sail, and the great depth of her waist, and her consequent liability to ship seas in rough weather, rendered her "very improper" for cruising in the Channel.

For her company she had a master, a mate and six hands supplied by the owners, in addition to thirty-four seamen temporarily drafted into her from Boscawen's ship, the Dreadnought. It was the duty of the former to work the vessel, of the latter to do the pressing; but these duties were largely interchangeable. All were under the command of the lieutenant, who with forty-two men at his beck and call could organise, on a pinch, five gangs of formidable strength and yet leave sufficient hands, given fair weather, to mind the tender in their temporary absence. Tender's men were generally the flower of a ship's company, old hands of tried fidelity, equal to any emergency and reputedly proof against bribery, rum and petticoats. Yet the temptation to give duty the slip and enjoy the pleasures of town for a season sometimes proved too strong, even for them, and we read of one boat's-crew of eight, who, overcome in this way, were discovered after many days in a French prison. Instead of going pressing in the Downs, they had gone to Boulogne.

On the commanders of His Majesty's ships the onus of raising men fell with intolerable insistence. Nelson's greatest pleasure in his promotion to Admiral's rank is said to have been derived from the fact that with it there came a blessed cessation to the scurvy business of pressing; and there were in the service few captains, whether before or after Nelson's day, who could not echo with hearty approval the sentiment of Capt. Brett of the Roebuck, when he said: "I can solemnly declare that the getting and taking care of my men has given me more trouble and uneasiness than all the rest of my duty." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1478--Capt. Brett, 27 Oct. 1742.]

Commanders of smaller and less effective ships found themselves on the horns of a cruel dilemma did they dare to ask for tenders. Beg and

pray as they would, these were rarely allowed them save as a special indulgence or a crying necessity. To most applications from this source the Admiralty opposed a front well calculated "to encourage the others." "If he has not men enough to proceed on service," ran its dictum, "their Lordships will lay up the ship." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1471--Capt. Boyle, 1 March 1715-6, endorsement, and numerous instances.] Faced with the summary loss of his command, their Lordships' high displeasure, and consequent inactivity and half-pay for an indefinite period, the captain whose complement was short, and who could obtain neither men nor tender from the constituted authority, had no option but to put to sea with such hands as he already bore and there beat up for others. This, with their Lordships' gracious permission, he accordingly did, thus adding another unit to the fleet of armed vessels already prowling the Narrow Seas on a similar errand. It can be readily imagined that such commanders were not out for pleasure.

To the great and incessantly active flotilla got together in this way, the regulating captains on shore contributed a further large contingent. Every seaport of consequence had its rendezvous, every seaport rendezvous its amphibious gang or gangs who ranged the adjacent coast for many leagues in swift bottoms whose character and mission often remained wholly unsuspected until some skilful manoeuvre laid them aboard their intended victim and brought the gang swarming over her decks, armed to the teeth and resolute to press her crew.

We have now three classes of vessels, of varying build, rig, tonnage and armament, engaged in a common endeavour to intercept and take the homing sailor. Let us next see how they were disposed upon the coast.

Tenders from Greenwich and Blackwall ransacked the Thames below bridge as far as Blackstakes in the river Medway, the Nore and the Swin channel. Tenders from Margate, Ramsgate, Deal and Dover watched the lower Thames estuary, swept the Downs, and kept a sharp lookout along the coasts of Kent and Sussex, of Essex and of Norfolk. To these tenders from Lynn dipped their colours off Wells-on-Sea or Cromer, whence they bore away for the mouth of Humber, where Hull tenders took up the running till met by those belonging to Sunderland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Shields, which in turn joined up the cordon with others hailing from Leith and the Firth of Forth. Northward of the Forth, away to the extreme Orkneys, and all down the west coast of Scotland through the two Minches and amongst the Hebrides, specially armed sloops from Leith and Greenock made periodic cruises. Greenock tenders, again, united with tenders from Belfast and Whitehaven in a lurking watch for ships making home ports by way of the North Channel; or circled the Isle of Man, ran thence across to Morecambe Bay, and so down the Lancashire coast the length of Formby Head, where the Mersey tenders, alert for the Jamaica trade, relieved them of their vigil. Dublin tenders guarded St. George's Channel, aided by others from Milford Haven and Haverfordwest. Bristol tenders cruised the channel of that name keeping a sharp eye on Lundy Island and the Holmes, where shipmasters were wont to play them tricks if they were not watchful. Falmouth and Plymouth tenders guarded the coast from Land's End to Portland Bill, Portsmouth tenders from Portland Bill to Beachy Head, and Folkestone and Dover tenders from Beachy Head to the North Foreland, thus completing the encircling chain. Nor was Ireland forgotten in the general sea-rummage. As a converging point for the great overseas trade-routes it was of prime importance, and tenders hailing from Belfast, Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Limerick, or making

those places their chief ports of call, exercised unceasing vigilance over all the coast.

In this general scouring of the coastal waters of the kingdom certain points were of necessity subjected to a much closer surveillance than others. Particularly was this true of the sea routes followed by the East and West India, and the Baltic, Virginia, Newfoundland, Dutch and Greenland trades, where these converged upon such centres of world-commerce as London, Poole, Bristol, Liverpool and the great northern entrepôts on the Forth and Clyde, the Humber and the Tyne. A tender stationed off Poole, when a Newfoundland fish-convoy was expected in, never failed to reap a rich harvest. At Highlake, near the mouth of the Mersey, many a fine haul was made from the sugar and rum-laden Jamaica ships, the privateers and slavers from which Liverpool drew her wealth. Early in the century sloops of war had orders "to cruise between Beechy and the Downs to Impress men out of homeward-bound Merchant Ships," and in 1755 Rodney's lieutenants found the Channel "full of tenders." Except in times of profound peace--few and brief in the century under review--it was rarely or never in any other state. An ocean highway so congested with the winged vehicles of commerce could not escape the constant vigilance of those whose business it was to waylay the inward-bound sailor.

A favourite station in the Channel was "at ye west end of ye Isle of Wight, near Hurst Castle," where the watchful tender, having under her eye all ships coming from the westward, as well as all passing through the Needles, could press at pleasure by the simple expedient of sending gangs aboard of them. At certain times of the year such ports as Grimsby, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Brixham came in for similar attention. When the fleets were due back from the "Great Fishery" on the Dogger Banks, tenders cruising off those ports netted more men than they could find room for; and so heavy was the tribute paid in this way by the fishermen of the last-named port in 1805, that "not a single man was to be found in Brixham liable to the impress." Every unprotected man, out of a total of ninety-six fishing-smacks then belonging to the place, had been snapped up by the tenders and ships of war cruising off the bay or further up-Channel. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 15 Sept.]

The double cordon composed of ships and tenders on the cruise by no means exhausted the resources called into play for the intercepting of the sailor afloat. Still nearer the land was a third or innermost line composed of boat-gangs operating, like so many of the tenders, from rendezvous on shore, or from ships of war lying in dock or riding at anchor. Less continuous than the outer cordon, it was not less effective, and many a sailor who by strategy or good luck had all but won through, struck his flag to the gang when perhaps only the cast of a line separated him from shore and liberty.

It was across the entrance to harbours and navigable estuaries that this innermost line was most frequently and most successfully drawn. Pill, the pilot station for the port of Bristol, threw out such a line to the further bank of Avon and thereby caught many an able seaman who had evaded the tenders below King Road. On Southampton Water it was generally so impassable that few men who could in the slightest degree be considered liable to the press escaped its toils. [Footnote: Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 5 Aug. 1805.] Dublin Bay knew it well. A press "on float"

there, carried out silently and swiftly in the grey of a September morning, 1801, whilst the mists still hung thick over the water, resulted in the seizure of seventy-four seamen who had eluded the press-smacks cruising without the bay; but of this number two proving to be protected apprentices, the Lord Mayor sent the Water Bailiff of the city, "with a detachment of the army," and took them by force out of the hands of the gang. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1526--Capt. Brabazon, 16 Sept. 1801.] On the Thames, notwithstanding the ceaseless activity of the outer cordons, the innermost line of capture yielded enormously. The night of October the 28th, 1776, saw three hundred and ninety-nine men, the greater part of them good seamen, pressed by the boats of a single ship--the Princess Augusta, Captain Sir Richard Bickerton commander, then fitting out at Woolwich. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1497--Capt. Bickerton, 29 Oct. 1776.] Such a raid was very properly termed a "hot press."

The amazing feature of this exploit is, that it should have been possible at all, in view of what was going on in the Thames estuary below a line drawn across the river's mouth from Foulness to Sheerness-reach. Seawards of this line lay the two most famous anchorages in the world, where ships foregathered from every quarter of the navigable globe. Than the Nore and the Downs no finer recruiting-ground could anywhere be found, and here the shore-gangs afloat, and the boat-gangs from ships of war, were for ever on the alert. No ship, whether inward or outward bound, could pass the Nore without being visited. Nothing went by unsearched. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2733--Capt. Young, 7 March 1756.] The wonder is that any unprotected sailor ever found his way to London.

Between the Nore and the North Foreland the conditions were equally rigorous. Through all the channels leading to the sea, channels affording anchorage to innumerable ships of every conceivable rig and tonnage, the gangs roamed at will, exacting toll of everything that carried canvas. Even the smaller craft left high and dry upon the flats, or awaiting the tide in some sand-girt pool, did not escape their hawk-like vigilance.

[Illustration: SEIZING A WATERMAN ON TOWER HILL ON THE MORNING OF HIS WEDDING DAY.]

In the Downs these conditions reached their climax, for thither, in never-ending procession, came the larger ships which were so fruitful of good hauls. With the wind at north, or between north and east, few ships came in and little could be done. But when the wind veered and came piping out of the west or sou'-west, in they came in such numbers that the gangs, however numerous they might be, had all their work cut out to board them. A special tender, swift and exceedingly well-found, was accordingly stationed here, whose duty it was to be "very watchful that no vessel passed without a visit from the impress boats." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2733--Orders of Vice-Admiral Buckle to Capt. Yates, 29 April 1778.] In such work as this man-o'-war boats were of little use. Just as they could not negotiate Deal beach without danger of being reduced to matchwood, so they could not live in the choppy sea kicked up in the Downs by a westerly gale. Folkstone market boats and Deal cutters had to be requisitioned for pressing in those waters. Their seaworthiness and speed made the Downs the crux of inward-bound ships, whose only means of escaping their attentions was to incur another danger by "going back of the Goodwins."

The procedure of boat-gangs pressing in harbour or on rivers seldom varied, unless it were by accident. As a rule, night was the time selected, for to catch the sailor asleep conduced greatly to the success and safety of the venture. The hour chosen was consequently either close upon midnight, some little time after he had turned in, or in the early morning before he turned out. The darker the night and the dirtier the weather the better. Surprise, swiftly and silently carried out, was half the battle.

A case in point is the attempt made by Lieut. Rudsdale, of H.M.S. *Licorne*, "to impress all men (without exception) from the ships and vessels lying at Cheek Point above Passage of Waterford," in the year '79. Putting-off in the pinnace with a picked crew at eleven o'clock on a dark and tempestuous October night, he had scarcely left the ship astern ere he overtook a boatload of men, how many he could not well discern in the darkness, pulling in the direction he himself was bound. Fearful lest they should suspect the nature of his errand and alarm the ships at Passage, he ran alongside of them and pressed the entire number, sending the boat adrift. Putting back, he set his capture on board the *Licorne* and once more turned the nose of the pinnace towards Passage. There, dropping noiselessly aboard the *Triton* brig, he caught the hands asleep, pressed as many of them as he had room for, and with them returned to the ship. Meanwhile, the master of the *Triton* armed what hands he had left and met Rudsdale's second attempt to board him with a formidable array of handspikes, hatchets and crowbars. A fusillade of bottles and billets of wood further evinced his determination to protect the brig against all comers, and lest there should be any doubt on that point he swore roundly that he would be the death of every man in the pinnace if they did not immediately sheer off and leave him in peace. This the lieutenant wisely did. No further surprises were possible that night, for by this time the alarm had spread, the pinnace was half-full of missiles, and one of his men lay in the bottom of her severely wounded. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 1. 471--Deposition of Lieut. Rudsdale, 24 Oct. 1779.] As it was, he had a very fair night's work to his credit. Between the occupants of the boat and those of the brig he had obtained close upon a score of men.

The expedients resorted to by commanders of ships of war temporarily in port and short of their tale of men are vividly depicted in a report made to the Admiralty in 1711. "Three days ago, very privately," writes Capt. Billingsley, whose ship, the *Vanguard*, was then lying at Blackstakes, "I Sent two fishing Smacks with a Lieutenant and some Men, with orders to proceede along the Essex Coast, and downe as far as the Wallet, to the Naze, with directions to take all the men out of Oyster Vessels and others that were not Exempted. The project succeeded, and they are return'd with fourteen men, all fit, and but one has ever been in the Service. The coast was Alarm'd, and the country people came downe and fir'd from the Shore upon the Smacks, and no doubt but they doe still take 'em to be privateers." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records* 1. 1470--Capt. Billingsley, 5 May 1711.]

Pressing at sea differed materially in many of its aspects from pressing on the more sheltered waters of rivers and harbours. Carried out as a rule in the broad light of day, it was for that very reason accompanied with a more open and determined display of force than those quieter ventures which depended so largely for their success

upon the element of surprise. Situated as we are in these latter days, when anyone who chooses may drive his craft from Land's End to John o' Groats without hindrance, it is difficult to conceive that there was ever a time when the whole extent of the coastal waters of the kingdom, as ranged by the impress tender, was under rigorous martial law. Yet such was unquestionably the case. Throughout the eighteenth century the flag was everywhere in armed evidence in those waters, and no sailing master of the time could make even so much as a day's run with any certainty that the peremptory summons: "Bring to! I'm coming aboard of you," would not be bawled at him from the mouth of a gun.

The retention of the command of a tender depended entirely upon her success in procuring men. As a rule, she was out for no other purpose, and this being so, it is not to be supposed that the officer in charge of her would do otherwise than employ the means ordained for that end. Accordingly, as soon as a sail was sighted by the tender's lookout man, a gun was loaded, shotted with roundshot, and run out ready for the moment when the vessel should come within range.

The first intimation the intended victim had of the fate in store for her was the shriek of the roundshot athwart her bows. This was the signal, universally known as such, for her to back her topsails and await the coming of the gang, already tumbling in ordered haste into the armed boat prepared for them under the tender's quarter. And yet it was not always easy for the sprat to catch the whale. A variety of factors entered into the problem and made for failure as often as for success. Sometimes the tender's powder was bad--so bad that in spite of an extra pound or so added to the charge, the shot could not be got to carry as far as a common musket ball. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2485--Capt. Shirley, 5 Nov. 1780, and numerous instances.] When this was the case her commander suffered a double mortification. His shot, the symbol of authority and coercion, took the water far short of its destined goal, whilst the vessel it was intended to check and intimidate surged by amid the derisive cat-calls and laughter of her crew.

Even with the powder beyond reproach, ships did not always obey the summons, peremptory though it was. One pretended not to hear it, or to misunderstand it, or to believe it was meant for some other craft, and so held stolidly on her course, vouchsafing no sign till a second shot, fired point-blank, but at a safe elevation, hurtled across her decks and brought her to her senses. Another, perhaps some well-armed Levantine trader or tall Indiaman whose crew had little mind to strike their colours submissively at the behest of a midget press-smack, would pipe to quarters and put up a stiff fight for liberty and the dear delights of London town--a fight from which the tender, supposing her to have accepted the gage of battle, rarely came off victor. Or the challenged ship, believing herself to be the faster craft of the two, clapped on all sail, caught an opportune "slatch of wind," and showed her pursuer a clean pair of heels, the tender's guns meanwhile barking away at her until she passed out of range. These were incidents in the chapter of pressing afloat which every tender's commander was familiar with. Back of them all lay a substantial fact, and on that he relied for his supply of men. There was somehow a magic in the boom of a naval gun that had its due effect upon most ship-masters. They brought-to, however reluctantly, and awaited the pleasure of the gang. But the sailor had still to be reckoned with.

In order to invest the business of taking the sailor with some

semblance of legality, it was necessary that the commander of the tender, in whose name the press-warrant was made out, or one of his two midshipmen, each of whom usually held a similar warrant, should conduct the proceedings in person; and the first duty of this officer, on setting foot upon the deck of the vessel held up in the manner just described, was to order her entire company to be mustered for his inspection. If the master proved civil, this preliminary passed off quickly and with no more confusion than was incidental to a general and hasty rummaging of sea-chests and lockers in search of those magic protections on which hung the immediate destiny of every man in the ship, excepting only the skipper, his mate and that privileged person, the boatswain. The muster effected, the officer next subjected each protection to the closest possible scrutiny, for none who knew the innate trickery of seamen would ever "take their words for it."

[Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1482--Capt. Boscawen, 20 March 1745-6.] Men who had no protections, men whose papers bore evident traces of "coaxing" or falsification, men whose appearance and persons failed to tally exactly with the description there written down--these were set apart from their more fortunate messmates, to be dealt with presently. To their ranks were added others whose protections had either expired or were on the point of expiry, as well as skulkers who sought to evade His Majesty's press by stowing themselves away between or below decks, and who had been by this time more or less thoroughly routed out by members of the gang armed with hangers. The two contingents now lined up, and their total was checked by reference to the ship's articles, the officer never omitting to make affectionate inquiries after men marked down as "run," "drowned," or "discharged"; for none knew better than he, if an old hand at the game, how often the "run" man ran no further afield than some secure hiding-place overlooked by his gangers, or how miraculously the "drowned" bobbed up once more to the surface of things when the gang had ceased from troubling. If the ship happened to be an inward-bound, and to possess a general protection exempting her from the press only for the voyage then just ending, that fact greatly simplified and abbreviated the proceedings, for then her whole company was looked upon as the ganger's lawful prey. In the case of an outward-bound ship, the gang-officer's duty was confined to seeing that she carried no more hands than her protection and tonnage permitted her to carry. All others were pressed. Cowed by armed authority, or wounded and bleeding in a lost cause as hereafter to be related, the men were hustled into the boat with "no more violence than was necessary for securing them."

[Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1437--Capt. Aldred, 12 June 1708.] Their chests and bedding followed, making a full boat; and so, having cleared the ship of all her pressable hands, the gang prepared to return to the tender. But first there was a last stroke of business to be done. The gunner must have his bit.

Up to this point, beyond producing the ship's papers for inspection and gruffly answering such questions as were put to, him, the master of the vessel had taken little part in what was going on. His turn now came. By virtue of his position he could not be pressed, but there existed a very ancient naval usage according to which he could be, and was, required to pay for the powder and shot expended in inducing him to receive the gang on board. In law the exaction was indefensible. Litigation often followed it, and as the century grew old the practice for that reason fell into gradual desuetude, a circumstance almost universally deplored by naval commanders of the old school, [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1511--Capt. Bowen, 13 Oct. 1795, and Admiralty endorsement.] who were ever sticklers for respect to the

flag; but during the first five or six decades of the century the shipmaster who had to be fired upon rarely escaped paying the shot. The money accruing from his compliance with the demand, 6s. 8d., went to the gunner, whose perquisite it was, and as several shots were frequently necessary to reduce a crew to becoming submissiveness, the gunners must have done very well out of it. Refusal to "pay the shot" could be visited upon the skipper only indirectly. Another man or two were taken out of him by way of reprisals, and the press-boat shoved off--to return a second, or even a third time, if the pressed men numbered more than she could stow.

From this summary mode of depriving a ship of a part or the whole of her crew two serious complications arose, the first of which had to do with the wages of the men pressed, the second with what was technically called "carrying the ship up," that is to say, sailing her to her destination.

According to the law of the land, the sailor who was pressed out of a ship was entitled to his wages in full till the day he was pressed, and not only was every shipmaster bound to provide such men with tickets good for the sums severally due to them, tickets drawn upon the owners and payable upon demand, but it was the duty of every impress officer to see that such tickets were duly made out and delivered to the men. Refusal to comply with the law in this respect led to legal proceedings, in which, except in the case of foreign ships, the Admiralty invariably won. Eminently fair to the sailor, the provision was desperately hard on masters and owners, for they, after having shipped their crews for the run or voyage, now found themselves left either with insufficient hands to carry the ship up, or with no hands at all. As a concession to the necessity of the moment a gang was sometimes put on board a ship for the avowed purpose of pressing her hands when she arrived in port; but such concessions were not always possible, [Footnote: Nor were they always effective, as witness the following: "Tuesday the 15th, the Shandois sloop from Holland came by this place (the Nore). I put 15 men on board her to secure her Company till their Protection was expired. Soon after came from Sheerness the Master Attendant's boat to assist me on that service. I immediately sent her away with more Men and Armes for the better Securing of the Sloop's Company, but that night, in Longreach, the Vessel being near the Shore, and almost Calme, they hoisted the boat out to tow the Sloop about, and all the Sloop's men, being 18, got into her and Run ashore, bidding defiance to my people's firing."--Admiralty Records 1. 1473--Capt. Boulter, H.M.S. Argyle, 18 Feb. 1725-6.] and common equity demanded that in their absence ample provision should be made for the safety of vessels suddenly disabled by the gang. This the Admiralty undertook to do, and hence there grew up that appendage to the impress afloat generally known as "men in lieu" or "ticket men."

The vocation of the better type "man in lieu" was a vicarious sort of employment, entailing any but disagreeable consequences upon him who followed it. At every point on the coast where a gang was stationed, and at many where they were not, great numbers of these men were retained for service afloat whenever required. The three ports of Dover, Deal and Folkestone alone at one time boasted no less than four hundred and fifty of them, and when a hot press was in full swing in the Downs even this number was found insufficient to meet the demand. Mostly fishermen, Sea-Fencibles and others of a quasi-seafaring type, they enjoyed complete exemption from the impress as a consideration

for "going in pressed men's rooms," received a shilling, and in some cases eighteen-pence a day while so employed, and had a penny a mile road-money for their return to the place of their abode, where they were free, in the intervals between carrying ships up, to follow any longshore occupation they found agreeable, save only smuggling. The enjoyment of these privileges, and particularly the privilege of exemption from the press, made them, as a class, notorious for their independence and insolence--characteristics which still survive in not a few of their descendants. Tenders going a-pressing often bore a score or two of these privileged individuals as supers, who were drafted into ships, as the crews were taken out, to assist the master, mate and few remaining hands, were any of the latter left, in carrying them up. Or, if no supers of this class were borne by the tender, she "loaned" the master a sufficient number of her own company, duly protected by tickets from the commanding officer, and invariably the most unserviceable people on board, to work the ship into the nearest port where regular "men in lieu" could be obtained.

Had all "men in lieu" conformed to the standard of the better class substitute of that name, the system would have been laudable in the extreme and trade would have suffered little inconvenience from the depredations of the gangs; but there was in the system a flaw that generally reduced the aid lent to ships to something little better than a mere travesty of assistance. That flaw lay in the fact that Admiralty never gave as good as it took. Clearly, it could not. True, it supplied substitutes to go in "pressed men's rooms," but to call them "men in lieu" was a gross abuse of language. In reality the substitutes supplied were in the great majority of cases mere scum in lieu, the unpressable residuum of the population, consisting of men too old or lads too young to appeal to the cupidity of the gangs, poor creatures whom the regulating captains had refused, useless on land and worse than useless at sea.

In the general character of the persons sent in pressed men's rooms Admiralty thus had Trade on the hip, and Trade suffered much in consequence. More than one rich merchantman, rusty from long voyaging, strewn the coast with her cargo and timbers because all the able seamen had been taken out of her, and none better than old men and boys could be found to sail her. Few seaport towns were as wise as Sunderland, where they had a Society of Shipowners for mutual insurance against the risks arising from the pressing of their men. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1541--Capt. Bligh, 8 Jan. 1807, enclosure.] Elsewhere masters, owners and underwriters groaned under the galling imposition; but the wrecker rejoiced exceedingly, thanking the gangs whose ceaseless activities rendered such an outrageous state of things possible.

Whichever of these two classes the ticket man belonged to, he was an incorrigible deserter. "Thirteen out of the fifteen men in lieu that I sent up in the Beaufort East-Indiaman," writes the disgusted commander of the Comet bombship, from the Downs, "have never returned. As they are not worth inquiring for, I have made them run." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1478--Capt. Burvill, 4 Sept. 1742. A man-o'-war's-man was "made run" when he failed to return to his ship after a reasonable absence and an R was written over against his name on the ship's books.] Such instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Once the ticket man had drawn his money for the trip, there was no such thing as holding him. The temptation to spend his earnings in town proved too strong, and he went on the spree with

great consistency and enjoyment till his money was gone and his protection worthless, when the inevitable overtook him. The ubiquitous gang deprived him of his only remaining possession, his worthless liberty, and sent him to the fleet, a ragged but shameless derelict, as a punishment for his breach of privilege.

The protecting ticket carried by the man in lieu dated from 1702, when it appears to have been first instituted; [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1433--Capt. Anderson, 5 April 1702.] but even when the bearer was no deserter in fact or intention, it had little power to protect him. No ticket man could count upon remaining unmolested by the gangs except the undoubted foreigner and the marine, both of whom were much used as men in lieu. The former escaped because his alien tongue provided him with a natural protection; the latter because he was reputedly useless on shipboard. In the person of the marine, indeed, the man in lieu achieved the climax of ineptitude. It was an ironical rule of the service that persons refusing to act as men in lieu should suffer the very fate they stood in so much danger of in the event of their consenting. Broadstairs fishermen in 1803 objected to serving in that capacity, though tendered the exceptional wage of 27s. for the run to London. "If not compelled to go in that way," they alleged, "they could make their own terms with shipmasters and have as many guineas as they were now offered shillings." Orders to press them for their contumacy were immediately sent down. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1450--Capt. Carter, 16 Aug. 1803.]

By the year 1811 the halcyon days of the man in lieu were at an end. As a class he was then practically extinct. Inveterate and long-continued pressing had drained the merchant service of all able-bodied British seamen except those who were absolutely essential to its existence. These were fully protected, and when their number fell short of the requirements of the service the deficiency was supplied by foreigners and apprentices similarly exempt. So few pressable men were to be found in any one ship that it was no longer considered necessary to send ticket men in their stead when they were taken out, and as a matter of fact less than a dozen such men were that year put on board ships passing the Downs. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1453--Capt. Anderson, 31 Aug. 1811.] Pressing itself was in its decline, and as for the vocation of the man in lieu, it had gone never to return.

Ships and tenders out for men met with varied fortunes. In the winter season the length of the nights, the tempestuous weather and the cold told heavily against success, as did at all times that factor in the problem which one old sea-dog so picturesquely describes as "the room there is for missing you." Capt. Barker, of the Thetis, in 1748 made a haul of thirty men off the Old-Head of Kinsale, but lost his barge in doing so, "it blowed so hard." Byng, of the Sutherland, grumbled atrociously because in the course of his run up-Channel in '42 he was able to press "no more than seventeen." Anson, looking quite casually into Falmouth on his way down-Channel, found there in '46 the Betsey tender, then just recently condemned, and took out of her every man she possessed at the cost of a mere hour's work, ignorant of the fact that when pressing eight of those men the commander of the Betsey had been "eight hours about it." It was all a game of chance, and when you played it the only thing you could count upon was the certainty of having both the sailor and the elements dead against you.

[Illustration: JACK IN THE BILBOES. From the painting by Morland.]

But if the "room there is for missing you," conspiring with other unfavourable conditions, rendered pressing afloat an uncertain and vexatious business, the chances of making a haul were on the other hand augmented by every ship that entered or left the Narrow Seas, not even excepting the foreigner. The foreign sailor could not be pressed unless, as we have seen, he had naturalised himself by marrying an English wife, but the foreign ship was fair game for every hunter of British seamen.--An ancient assumption of right made it so.

From the British point of view the "Right of Search" was an eminently reasonable thing. Here was an island people to whose keeping Heaven had by special dispensation committed the dominion of the seas. To defend that dominion they needed every seaman they possessed or could produce. They could spare none to other nations; and when their sailors, who enjoyed no rights under their own flag, had the temerity to seek refuge under another, there was nothing for it but to fire on that flag if necessary, and to take the refugee by armed force from under its protection. This in effect constituted the time-honoured "Right of Search," and none were so reluctant to forego the prerogative, or so keen to enforce it, as those naval officers who saw in it a certain prospect of adding to their ships' companies. The right of search was always good for another man or two.

It was often good for a great many more, for the foreign skipper was at the best an arrant man-stealing rogue. If a Yankee, he hated the British because he had beaten them; if a Frenchman or a Hollander, because they had beaten him. His animus was all against the British Navy, his sympathies all in favour of the British sailor, in whom he recognised as good, if not a better seaman than himself. He accordingly enticed him with the greatest pertinacity and hid him away with the greatest cunning.

Every impress officer worth his salt was fully alive to these facts, and on all the coast no ship was so thoroughly ransacked as the ship whose skipper affected a bland ignorance of the English tongue or called Heaven to witness the blamelessness of his conduct with many gesticulations and strange oaths. Lieut. Oakley, regulating officer at Deal, once boarded an outward-bound Dutch East-Indiaman in the Downs. The master strenuously denied having any English sailors on board, but the lieutenant, being suspicious, sent his men below with instructions to leave no part of the ship unsearched. They speedily routed out three, "who discovered that there were in all thirteen on board, most of them good and able seamen." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 3363--Lieut. Oakley, 8 Dec. 1743.] The case is a typical one.

Another source of joy and profit to the gangs afloat were the great annual convoys from overseas. For safety's sake merchantmen in times of hostilities sailed in fleets, protected by ships of war, and when a fleet of this description was due back from Jamaica, Newfoundland or the Baltic, that part of the coast where it might be expected to make its land-fall literally swarmed with tenders, all on the qui vive for human plunder. They were seldom disappointed. The Admiralty protections under which the ships had put to sea in the first instance expired with the home voyage, leaving the crews at the mercy of the gangs. If, that is to say, the commanders of the convoying men-o'-war had not forestalled them, or the ships' companies were not composed, as in one case we read of, of men who were all

"either sick or Dutchmen."

The privateer had to be approached more warily than the merchantman, since the number of men and the weight of metal she carried made her an ugly customer to deal with. She was in consequence notorious for being the sauciest craft afloat, and though "sauce" was to the naval officer what a red rag is to a bull, there were few in the service who did not think twice before attempting to violate the armed sanctity of the privateer. At the same time the hands who crowded her deck were the flower of British seamen, and in this fact lay a tremendous incentive to dare all risks and press her men. Her commission or letter of marque of course protected her, but when she was inward-bound that circumstance carried no weight.

Against such an adversary the tender stood little chance. When she hailed the privateer, the latter laughed at her, threatening to sink her out of hand, or, if ordered to bring to, answered with all the insolent contempt of the Spanish grandee: "Mariana!" Accident sometimes stood the tender in better stead, where the pressing of privateer's-men was concerned, than all the guns she carried. Capt. Adams, cruising for men in the Bristol Channel, one day fell in with the *Princess Augusta*, a letter of marque whose crew had risen upon their officers and tried to take the ship. After hard fighting the mutiny was quelled and the mutineers confined to quarters, in which condition Adams found them. The whole batch, twenty-nine in number, was handed over to him, "though 'twas only with great threats" that he could induce them to submit, "they all swearing to die to a man rather than surrender." [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 1440--Capt. Adams, 28 June 1745.]

A year or two prior to this event this same ship, the *Princess Augusta*, had a remarkable adventure whilst sailing under the merchant flag of England. On the homeward run from Barbadoes, some fifty leagues to the westward of the Scillies, she fell in with a Spanish privateer, who at once engaged and would undoubtedly have taken her but for an extraordinary occurrence. Just as the trader's assailants were on the point of boarding her the Spaniard blew up, strewing the sea with his wreckage, but leaving the merchantman providentially unharmed. Capt. Dansays, of H.M.S. the *Fubbs* yacht, who happened to be out for men at the time in the chops of the Channel, brought the news to England. Meeting with the trader a few days after her miraculous escape, he had boarded her and pressed nine of her crew. [Footnote: *Admiralty Records*_ 1. 1439--Capt. Ambrose, 7 Feb. 1741-2.]

From the smuggling vessels infesting the coasts the sea-going gangs drew sure returns and rich booty. In the south and east of England people who were "in the know" could always buy tobacco, wines and silks for a mere song; and in Cumberland, in the coast towns there, and inland too, the very beggars are said to have regaled themselves on tea at sixpence or a shilling the pound. These commodities, as well as others dealt in by runners of contraband, were worth far more on the water than on land, and none was so keenly alive to the fact as the gangster who prowled the coast. Animated by the prospect of double booty, he was by all odds the best "preventive man" the country ever had.

There was a certainty, too, about the pressing of a smuggler that was wanting in other cases. The sailor taken out of a merchant ship, or

the fisherman out of a smack, might at the eleventh hour spring upon you a protection good for his discharge. Not so the smuggler. There was in his case no room for the unexpected. No form of protection could save him from the consequences of his trade. Once caught, his fate was a foregone conclusion, for he carried with him evidence enough to make him a pressed man twenty times over. Hence the gangster and the naval officer loved the smuggler and lost no opportunity of showing their affection.

"Strong Breezes and Cloudy," records the officer in command of H.M.S. Stag, a twenty-eight gun frigate, in his log. "Having made the Signal for Two Strange Sail in the West, proceeded on under Courses & Double Reeft Topsails. At 1 sett the Jibb and Driver, at 3 boarded a Smugling Cutter, but having papers proving she was from Guernsey, and being out limits, pressed one Man and let her go." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2734--Log of H.M.S. Stag, Capt. Yorke commander, 5 Oct. 1794.]

"Friday last," says the captain of the Spy sloop of war, "I sail'd out of Yarmouth Roads with a Fleet of Colliers in order to press Men, & in my way fell in with Two Dutch Built Scoots sail'd by Englishmen, bound for Holland, one belonging to Hull, call'd the Mary, the other to Lyn, call'd the Willing Traveller. I search'd 'em and took out of the former 64 Pounds 14. and out of the latter 300 Pounds 6, all English Money, which I've deliver'd to the Collector of Custome at Yarmouth. I likewise Imprest out of the Two Vessells seven men." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1438 --Capt. Arnold, 29 May 1727. The exporting of coin was illegal.]

"In the execution of my orders for pressing," reports Capt. Young, from on board the Bonetta sloop under his command, "I lately met with two Smuglers, & landing my boats into a Rocky Bay where they were running of Goods, the Weather came on so Violent I had my pinnace Stove so much as to be rendered unservisable. They threw overboard all their Brandy, Tea and Tobacco, of which last wee recover'd about 14 Baggs and put it to the Custom house. In Endeavouring to bring one of them to Sail, my Boatswain, who is a very Brisk and Deserving Man, had his arm broke, so that tho' wee got no more of their Cargo, it has broke their Voyage and Trade this bout." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 6 April 1739.]

On the 13th of December 1703, George Messenger, boatswain of the Wolf armed sloop, whilst pressing on the Humber descried a "keel" lying high and dry apart from the other shipping in the river, where it was then low water. Boarding her with the intention of pressing her men, he found her deserted save for the master, and thinking that some of the hands might be in hiding below--where the master assured him he would find nothing but ballast--he "did order one of his Boat's crew to goe down in the Hold and see what was therein"; who presently returned and reported "a quantity of wool conceal'd under some Coales a foot thik." The exportation of wool being at that time forbidden under heavy penalties, the vessel was seized and the master pressed--a course frequently adopted in such circumstances, and uniformly approved. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1465--Deposition of George Messenger, 20 Dec. 1703. Owling, ooling or wooling, as the exportation of wool contrary to law was variously termed, was a felony punishable, according to an enactment of Edward III., with "forfeiture of life and member." So serious was the offence considered that in 1565 a further enactment

was formulated against it. Thereafter any person convicted of exporting a live ram, lamb or sheep, was not only liable to forfeit all his goods, but to suffer imprisonment for a year, and at the end of the year "in some open market town, in the fulness of the market on the market day, to have his right hand cut off and nailed up in the openest place of such market." The first of these Acts remained in nominal force till 1863.]

While the gangs afloat in this way lent their aid in the suppression of smuggling, they themselves were sometimes subjected to disagreeable espionage on the part of those whose duty it was to keep a special lookout for runners of contraband goods. An amusing instance of this once occurred in the Downs. The commanding officer of H.M.S. Orford, discovering his complement to be short, sent one of his lieutenants, Richardson by name, in quest of men to make up the deficiency. In the course of his visits from ship to ship there somehow found their way into the lieutenant's boat a fifteen-gallon keg of rum and ten bottles of white wine. Between seven and eight o'clock in the evening he boarded an Indiaman and went below with the master. Scarcely had he done so, however, when an uproar alongside brought him hurriedly on deck--to find his boat full of strange faces. A Customs cutter, in some unaccountable way getting wind of what was in the boat, had unexpectedly "clapt them aboard," collared the man-o'-war's-men for a set of rascally smugglers, and confiscated the unexplainable rum and wine, becoming so fuddled on the latter, which they lost no time in consigning to bond, that one of their number fell into the sea and was with difficulty fished out by Richardson's disgusted gangsmen. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1473--Capt. Brown, 30 July 1727, and enclosures.]

The only inward-bound ship the gangsmen were forbidden to press from was the "sick ship" or vessel undergoing quarantine because of the presence, or the suspected presence, on board of her of some "catching" disease, and more particularly of that terrible scourge the plague. Dread of the plague in those days rode the country like a nightmare, and just as the earliest quarantine precautions had their origin in that fact, so those precautions were never more rigorously enforced than in the case of ships trading to countries known to be subject to plague or reported to be in the grip of it. The Levantine trader suffered most severely in this respect. In 1721 two vessels from Cyprus, where plague was then prevalent, were burned to the water's edge by order of the authorities, and as late as 1800 two others from Morocco, suspected of carrying the dread disease in the hides composing their cargo, were scuttled and sent to the bottom at the Nore. This was quarantine in excelsis. Ordinary preventive measures went no further than the withdrawal of "pratique," as communication with the shore was called, for a period varying usually from ten to sixty-five days, and during this period no gang was allowed to board the ship.

The seamen belonging to such ships always got ashore if they could; for though the penalty for deserting a ship in quarantine was death, [Footnote: 26 George II. cap. 6.] it might be death to remain, and the sailor was ever an opportunist careless of consequences. So, for that matter, was the gangsmen. Knowing well that Jack would make a break for it the first chance he got, he hovered about the ship both day and night, alert for every movement on board, watchful of every ripple on the water, taunting the woebegone sailors with the irksomeness of their captivity or the certainty of their capture, and awaiting with

what patience he could the hour that should see pratique restored and the crew at his mercy. Whether the ship had "catching" disease on board or not might be an open question. There was no mistaking its symptoms in the gangman.

Stangate Creek, on the river Medway, was the great quarantine station for the port of London, and here, in the year 1744, was enacted one of the most remarkable scenes ever witnessed in connection with pressing afloat. The previous year had seen a recrudescence of plague in the Levant and consequent panic in England, where extraordinary precautions were adopted against possible infection. In December of that year there lay in Stangate Creek a fleet of not less than a dozen Levantine ships, in which were cooped up, under the most exacting conditions imaginable, more than two hundred sailors. At Sheerness, only a few miles distant, a number of ships of war, amongst them Rodney's, were at the same time fitting out and wanting men. The situation was thus charged with possibilities.

It was estimated that in order to press the two hundred sailors from the quarantine ships, when the period of detention should come to an end, a force of not less than one hundred and fifty men would be required. These were accordingly got together from the various ships of war and sent into the Creek on board a tender belonging to the Royal Sovereign. This was on the 15th of December, and quarantine expired on the 22nd.

The arrival of the tender threw the Creek into a state of consternation bordering on panic, and that very day a number of sailors broke bounds and fell a prey to the gangs in attempting to steal ashore. Seymour, the lieutenant in command of the tender, did not improve matters by his idiotic and unofficerlike behaviour. Every day he rowed up and down the Creek, in and out amongst the ships, taunting the men with what he would do unless they volunteered, when the 22nd arrived, and he was free to work his will upon them. He would have them all, he assured them, if he had to "shoot them like small birds."

By the 22nd the sailors were in a state of "mutinous insolence." When the tender's boats approached the ships they were welcomed "with presented arms," and obliged to sheer off in order to obtain "more force," so menacing did the situation appear. Seeing this, and either mistaking or guessing the import of the move, the desperate seamen rushed the cabins, secured all the arms and ammunition they could lay hands on, hoisted out the ship's boats, and in these reached the shore in safety ere the tender's men, by this time out in strength, could prevent or come up with them. The fugitives, to the number of a hundred or more, made off into the country to the accompaniment, we are told, of "smart firing on both sides." With this exchange of shots the curtain falls on the "Fray at Stangate Creek." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1480--Capt. Berkeley, 30 Dec. 1744, and enclosure.] In the engagement two of the seamen were wounded, but all escaped the snare of the fowler, and in that happy denouement our sympathies are with them.

Returning transports paid immediate and heavy tribute to the gangs afloat. Out of a fleet of such vessels arriving at the Nore in 1756 two hundred and thirty men, "a parcel of as fine fellows as were ever pressed," fell to the gangs. Not a man escaped from any of the ships, and the boats were kept busy all next day shifting chests and bedding

and putting in ticket men to navigate the depleted vessels to London. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1487--Capt. Boys, 6, 7 and 8 July 1756.] A similar press at the Cove of Cork, on the return of the transports from America in '79, proved equally productive. Hundreds of sailors were secured, to the unspeakable grief of the local crimps, who were then offering long prices in order to recruit Paul Jones, at that time cruising off the Irish coast. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1499--Letters of Capt. Bennett, 1779.]

The cartel ship was an object of peculiar solicitude to the sea-going gangster. In her, after weary months passed in French, Spanish or Dutch prisons, hundreds of able-bodied British seamen returned to their native land in more or less prime condition for His Majesty's Navy. The warmest welcome they received was from the waiting gangster. Often they got no other. Few cartels had the extraordinary luck of the ship of that description that crept into Rye harbour one night in March 1800, and in bright moonlight landed three hundred lusty sailor-men fresh from French prisons, under the very nose of the battery, the guard at the port head and the _Clinker_ gun-brig. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1449--Capt. Aylmer, 9 March 1800.]

Of all the seafaring men the gangster took, there was perhaps none whom he pressed with greater relish than the pilot. The every-day pilot of the old school was a curious compound. When he knew his business, which was only too seldom, he was frequently too many sheets in the wind to embody his knowledge in intelligent orders; and when he happened to be sober enough to issue intelligent orders, he not infrequently showed his ignorance of what he was supposed to know by issuing wrong ones. The upshot of these contradictions was, that instead of piloting His Majesty's ships in a becoming seamanly manner, he was for ever running them aground. Fortunately for the service, an error of this description incapacitated him and made him fair game for the gangs, who lost no time in transferring him to those foremast regions where ship's grog was strictly limited and the captain's quite unknown. William Cook, impressed upon an occasion at Lynn, with unconscious humour styled himself a landsman. He was really a pilot who had qualified for that distinction by running vessels ashore.

In the aggregate this unremitting and practically unbroken surveillance of the coast was tremendously effective. Like Van Tromp, the vessels and gangs engaged in it rode the seas with a broom at their masthead, sweeping into the service, not every man, it is true, but enormous numbers of them. As for their quality, "One man out of a merchant ship is better than three the lieutenants get in town." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2379--Capt. Roberts, 27 June 1732.] This was the general opinion early in the century; but as the century wore on the quality of the man pressed in town steadily deteriorated, till at length the sailor taken fresh from the sea was reckoned to be worth six of him.

CHAPTER VI.

EVADING THE GANG.

As we have just seen, it was when returning from overseas that the British sailor ran the gravest risk of summary conversion into Falstaff's famous commodity, "food for powder."

Outward bound, the ship's protection--that "sweet little cherub" which, contrary to all Dibdinic precedent, lay down below--had spread its kindly aegis over him, and, generally speaking, saved him harmless from the warrant and the hanger. But now the run for which he has signed on is almost finished, and as the Channel opens before him the magic Admiralty paper ceases to be of "force" for his protection. No sooner, therefore, does he make his land-fall off the fair green hills or shimmering cliffs than his troubles begin. He is now within the outer zone of danger, and all about him hover those dreaded sharks of the Narrow Seas, the rapacious press-smacks, seeking whom they may devour. Conning the compass-card of his chances as they bear down upon him and send their shot whizzing across his bows, the sailor, in his fixed resolve to evade the gang at any cost, resorted first of all to the most simple and sailorly expedient imaginable. He "let go all" and made a run for it. That way lay the line of least resistance, and, with luck on his side, of surest escape.

Three modes of flight were his to choose between--three modes involving as many nice distinctions, plus a possible difference with the master. He could run away in his ship, run away with her, or as a last resort he could sacrifice his slops, his bedding, his pet monkey and the gaudy parrot that was just beginning to swear, and run from her. Which should it be? It was all a toss-up. The chance of the moment, instantly detected and as instantly acted upon, determined his choice.

The sailor's flight in his ship depended mainly upon her sailing qualities and the master's willingness to risk being dismasted or hulled by the pursuer's shot. Granted a capful of wind on his beam, a fleet keel under foot, and a complacent skipper aft, the flight direct was perhaps the means of escape the sailor loved above all others. The spice of danger it involved, the dash and frolic of the chase, the joy of seeing his leaping "barky" draw slowly away from her pursuer in the contest of speed, and of watching the stretch of water lying between him and capture surely widen out, were sensations dear to his heart.

Running away with his ship was a more serious business, since the adoption of such a course meant depriving the master of his command, and this again meant mutiny. Happily, masters took a lenient view of mutinies begotten of such conditions. Not infrequently, indeed, they were consenting parties, winking at what they could not prevent, and assuming the command again when the safety of ship and crew was assured by successful flight, with never a hint of the irons, indictment or death decreed by law as the mutineer's portion.

These modes of flight did not in every instance follow the hard-and-fast lines here laid down. Under stress of circumstance each was liable to become merged in the other; or both, perhaps, had to be abandoned in favour of fresh tactics rendered necessary by the accident or the exigency of the moment. The Triton and Norfolk Indiamen, after successfully running the gauntlet of the Channel tenders, in the Downs fell in with the Falmouth man-o'-war. The meeting was entirely accidental. Both merchantmen were congratulating themselves on having negotiated the Channel without the

loss of a man. The Triton had all furled except her fore and mizen topsails, preparatory to coming to an anchor; but as the wind was strong southerly, with a lee tide running, the Falmouth's boats could not forge ahead to board her before the set of the tide carried her astern of the warship's guns, whereupon her crew mutinied, threw shot into the man-o'-war's boats, which had by this time drawn alongside, and so, making sail with all possible speed, got clear away. Meantime a shot had brought the Norfolk to on the Falmouth's starboard bow, where she was immediately boarded. On her decks an ominous state of things prevailed. Her crew would not assist to clew up the sails, the anchor had been seized to the chain-plates and could not be let go, and when the gang from the Falmouth attempted to cut the buoy ropes with which it was secured, the "crew attacked them with hatchets and treenails, made sail and obliged them to quit the ship." Being by that time astern of the Falmouth's guns, they too made their escape. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1485--Capt. Brett, 25 June 1755.]

Never, perhaps, did the sailor adopt the expedient of running away, ship and all, with so malicious a goodwill or so bright a prospect of success, as when sailing under convoy. In those days he seldom ventured to "risk the run," even to Dutch ports and back, without the protection of one or more ships of war, and in this precaution there was danger as well as safety; for although the king's ships safeguarded him against the enemy if hostilities were in progress, as well as against the "little rogues" of privateers infesting the coasts and the adjacent seas, no sooner did the voyage near its end than the captains of the convoying ships took out of him, by force if necessary, as many men as they happened to require. This was a quid pro quo of which the sailor could see neither the force nor the fairness, and he therefore let slip no opportunity of evading it.

"Their Lordships," writes a commander who had been thus cheated, "need not be surprised that I pressed so few men out of so large a Convoy, for the Wind taking me Short before I got the length of Leostaff (Lowestoft), the Pilot would not take Charge of the Shipp to turn her out over the Stamford in the Night, which Oblig'd me to come to an Anchor in Corton Road. This I did by Signal, but the Convoy took no Notice of it, and all of them Run away and Left me, my Bottom being like a Rock for Roughness, so that I could not Follow them." [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 2732--Letters of Capt. Young, 1742.]

Supposing, however, that all these manoeuvres failed him and the gang after a hot chase appeared in force on deck, the game was not yet up so far as the sailor was concerned. A ship, it is true, had neither the length of the Great North Road nor yet the depth of the Forest of Dean, but all the same there was within the narrow compass of her timbers many a lurking place wherein the artful sailor, by a judicious exercise of forethought and tools, might contrive to lie undetected until the gang had gone over the side.

About five o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th of June 1756, Capt. William Boys, from the quarter-deck of his ship the Royal Sovereign, then riding at anchor at the Nore, observed a snow on fire in the five-fathom channel, a little below the Spoil Buoy. He immediately sent his cutter to her assistance, but in spite of all efforts to save her she ran aground and burnt to the water's edge. Her cargo consisted of wine, and the loss of the vessel was occasioned by

one of her crew, who was fearful of being pressed, hiding himself in the hold with a lighted candle. He was burnt with the ship. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1487--Capt. Boys, 26 June 1756. Oddly enough, a somewhat similar accident was indirectly the cause of Capt. Boys' entering the Navy. In 1727, whilst the merchantman of which he was then mate was on the voyage home from Jamaica, two mischievous imps of black boys, inquisitive to know whether some liquor spilt on deck was rum or water, applied a lighted candle to it. It proved to be rum, and when the officers and crew, who were obliged to take to the boats in consequence, were eventually picked up by a Newfoundland fishing vessel, unspeakable sufferings had reduced their number from twenty-three to seven, and these had only survived by feeding on the bodies of their dead shipmates. In memory of that harrowing time Boys adopted as his seal the device of a burning ship and the motto: "From Fire, Water and Famine by Providence Preserved."]

Barring the lighted candle and the lamentable accident which followed its use, the means of evading the gang resorted to in this instance was of a piece with many adopted by the sailor. He contrived cunning hiding-places in the cargo, where the gangsmen systematically "pricked" for him with their cutlasses when the nature of the vessel's lading admitted of it, or he stowed himself away in seachests, lockers and empty "harness" casks with an ingenuity and thoroughness that often baffled the astutest gangsmen and the most protracted search. The spare sails forward, the readily accessible hiding-hole of the green-hand, afforded less secure concealment. Pierre Flountinherre, routed out of hiding there, endeavoured to save his face by declaring that he had "left France on purpose to get on board an English man-of-war." Frenchman though he was, the gang obliged him. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1510--Capt. Baskerville, 5 Aug. 1795.]

In his endeavours to best the impress officers and gangsmen the sailor found a willing backer in his skipper, who systematically falsified the ship's articles by writing "run," "drowned," "discharged" or "dead" against the names of such men as he particularly desired to save harmless from the press. [Footnote: Admiralty Records 1. 1525--Capt. Berry, 31 March 1801.] This done, the men were industriously coached in the various parts they were to play at the critical moment. In the skipper's stead, supposing him to be for some reason unfit for naval service, some specially valuable hand was dubbed master. Failing this substitution, which was of course intended to save the man and not the skipper, the ablest seaman in the ship figured as mate, whilst others became putative boatswain or carpenter and apprentices--privileged persons whom no gang could lawfully take, but who, to render their position doubly secure, were furnished with spurious papers, of which every provident skipper kept a supply at hand for use in emergencies. When all hands were finally mustered to quarters, so to speak, there remained on deck only a "master" who could not navigate the ship, a "mate" unable to figure out the day's

run, a "carpenter" who did not know how to handle an adze, and some make-believe apprentices "bound" only to outwit the gang. And if in spite of all these precautions an able seaman were pressed, the real master immediately came forward and swore he was the mate.

Such thoroughly organised preparedness as this, however, was the exception rather than the rule, for though often attempted, it rarely reached perfection or stood the actual test. The sailor was too childlike by nature to play the fraud successfully, and as for the

impress officer and the gangster, neither was easily gulled. Supposing the sailor, then, to have nothing to hope for from deception or concealment, and supposing, too, that it was he who had the rough bottom beneath him and the fleet keel in pursuit, how was he to outwit the gang and evade the pinch? Nothing remained for him but to heave duty by the board and abandon his ship to the doubtful mercies of wind and wave. He accordingly went over the side with all the haste he could, appropriating the boats in defiance of authority, and leaving only the master and his mate, the protected carpenter and the apprentices to work the ship. Many a trader from overseas, summarily abandoned in this way, crawled into some outlying port, far from her destination, in quest--since a rigorous press often left no others available--of "old men and boys to carry her up." There is even on record the case of a ship that passed

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