The Press-Gang Afloat and Ashore by John R. Hutchinson

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THE PRESS-GANG AFLOAT AND ASHORE

BY J. R. HUTCHINSON

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SAILORS CAROUSING. From the Mezzotint after J. IBBETSON.

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MARY ANNE TALBOT.
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 procuration.

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 ensealing 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 unprested 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
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 "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 "prested" 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 whose 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 Russians 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 alass, 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 "chiepest 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
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 procuration 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 parliamenteering, 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 doe 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
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."

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. 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 littles 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 "slopes" 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 jeers. 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 oblidges 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--Misdemenors 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 physicians 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.
l06--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

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 carousel 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: _Aimiralty 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,
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 gangsman 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 Folkstone 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 Byron 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, 55. 2d. (_Admiralty Records_
"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 gangsman 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 gangsmen, 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 gangsman'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 purser," 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 gangsman 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 gangsman 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 gangsman all things were reputedly lawful, some things
were by no means expedient. He could with impunity deprive almost any
ablebodied 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 gangsman 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 gangsman 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 gangsman, both
of whom were eventually brought to justice and turned over to His
Majesty's ships.

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 Cheerfulness 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 ganger 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 villians," 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 faire severall pretended pressmasters, endeavouring to impress." A tumult ensued. Murder was 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 indispensible 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 inexpeditious. 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 "prested." 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 gangsman being at hand, and being at hand for that very purpose, he gave them first preference. Hence, the gangsman 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
gangsman 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
sauve 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
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 landsmen 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 trowmen 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
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 Maineprise," 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 throve 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 thereinto_." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.2377]
Captain Boscawen, 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 Admiral 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 Bettesworth of Ryde,
Isle of Wight, Attorney-at-Law and Lord of the Manor of Ashey and
Rye, 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 unremitting 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."
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 names 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 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. Bouler, 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,
strewed 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.
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 contrabrand, were worth far more on the water than on land, and none was so keenly alive to the fact as the gangsman 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 gangsman 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 gangsman. 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 gangsman.

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 be 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 crims, 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 gangsman. 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 gangsman. 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 gangsman 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 foremost
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 gangsman and the most protracted search. The spare sails forward, the readily accessible hiding-hole of the green-hand, afforded less secure concealment. Pierre Floutinherrre, 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 gangsman, 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 the Nore "without a man belonging to her but the master, the passengers helping him to sail her." Her people had "all got ashore by Harwich." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1473--Capt. Bouler, 18 Feb. 1725-6.]

Few shipowners were so foolhardy as to incur the risk of being thus hit in the pocket by the sailor's well-known predilection for French leave when in danger of the press. Nor were the masters, for they, even when not part owners, had still an appreciable stake in the safety of the ships they sailed. As between masters, owners and men there consequently sprang up a sort of triangular sympathy, having for its base a common dread of the gangs, and for its apex their circumvention. This apex necessarily touched the coast at a point contiguous to the ocean tracks of the respective trades in which the ships sailed; and here, in some spot far removed from the regular haunts of the gangsman, an emergency crew was mustered by those indefatigable purveyors, the crimps, and held in readiness against the expected arrival.

Composed of seafaring men too old, too feeble, or too diseased to excite the cupidity of the most zealous lieutenant who eked out his
pay on impress perquisites; of lads but recently embarked on the
adventurous voyage of their teens; of pilots willing, for a
consideration, to forego the pleasure of running ships aground; of
fishermen who evaded His Majesty's press under colour of Sea-Fencible,
Militia, or Admiralty protections; and of unpressable foreigners whose
wives bewailed them more or less beyond the seas, this scratch
crew--the Preventive Men of the merchant service--here awaited the
preconcerted signal which should apprise them that their employer's
ship was ready for a change of hands.

For safety's sake the transfer was generally effected by night, when
that course was possible; but the untimely appearance of a press-smack
on the scene not infrequently necessitated the shifting of the crews
in the broad light of day and the hottest of haste. On shore all had
been in readiness perhaps for days. At the signal off dashed the
deeply laden boats to the frantic ship, the scratch crew scrambled
aboard, and the regular hands, thus released from duty, tumbled
pell-mell into the empty boats and pulled for shore with a will
mightily heartened by a running fire of round-shot from the smack and
of musketry from her cutter, already out to intercept the fugitives.
Then it was:--

"Cheerily, lads, cheerily! there's a ganger hard to wind'ard;
Cheerily, lads, cheerily! there's a ganger hard a-lee;
Cheerily, lads, cheerily! else 'tis farewell home and kindred,
And the bosun's mate a-raisin' hell in the King's Navee.
Cheerily, lads, cheerily ho! the warrant's out, the hanger's drawn!"
Cheerily, lads, so cheerily! we'll leave 'em an _R_ in pawn!"

[Footnote: When Jack deserted his ship under other conditions than those here described, an _R_ was written against his name to denote that he had "run." So, when he shirked an obligation, monetary or moral, by running away from it, he was said to "leave an _R_ in pawn." ]

The place of muster of the emergency men thus became in turn the landing-place of the fugitive crew. Its whereabouts depended as a matter of course upon the trade in which the ship sailed. The spot chosen for the relief of the Holland, Baltic and Greenland traders of the East Coast was generally some wild, inaccessible part abutting directly on the German Ocean or the North Sea. London skippers in those trades favoured the neighbourhood of Great Yarmouth, where the maze of inland waterways constituting the Broads enabled the shifty sailor to lead the gangs a merry game at hide and seek. King's Lynners affected Skegness and the Norfolk lip of the Wash. Of the men who sailed out of Hull not one in ten could be picked up, on their return, by the gangs haunting the Humber. They went ashore at Dimlington on the coast of Holderness, or at the Spurn. The homing sailors of Leith, as of the ports on the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth, enjoyed an immunity from the press scarcely less absolute than that of the Orkney Islanders, who for upwards of forty years contributed not a single man to the Navy. Having on either hand an easily accessible coast, inhabited by a people upon whose hospitality the gangs were chary of intruding, and abounding in lurking-places as secure as they were
snug, the Mother Firth held on to her sailor sons with a pertinacity
and success that excited the envy of the merchant seaman at large and
drove impress officers to despair. The towns and villages to the north
of the Firth were "full of men." On no part of the north coast,
indeed, from St. Abb's Head clear round to Annan Water, was it an easy
matter to circumvent the canny Scot who went a-sailoring. He had a
trick of stopping short of his destination, when homeward bound, that
proved as baffling to the gangs as it was in seeming contradiction to
all the traditions of a race who pride themselves on "getting there."
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral Pringle, Report on
Rendezvous, 2 April 1795, and Captains' Letters, _passim_.]

In the case of outward-bound ships, the disposition of the two crews
was of course reversed. The scratch crew carried the ship down to the
stipulated point of exchange, where they vacated her in favour of the
actual crew, who had been secretly conveyed to that point by land.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Admiral Lord Nelson,
Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803.] Whichever way the trick
was worked, it proved highly effective, for, except from the sea, no
gang durst venture near such points of debarkation and departure
without strong military support.

There still remained the emergency crew itself. The most decrepit,
crippled or youthful were of course out of the question. But the
foreigner and our shifty friend the man in lieu were fair game.
Entering largely as they did into the make-up of almost every scratch
crew, they were pressed without compunction whenever and wherever
caught abusing their privileges by playing the emergency man. To keep such persons always and in all circumstances was a point of honour with the Navy Board. It had no other means of squaring accounts with the scratch crew.

The emergency man who plied "on his own" was more difficult to deal with. Keepers of the Eddystone made a "great deal of money" by putting inward-bound ships' crews ashore; but when one of their number, Matthew Dolon by name, was pressed as a punishment for that offence, the Admiralty, having the fear of outraged Trade before its eyes, ordered his immediate discharge. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2732--Capt. Yeo, 25 July 1727.]

The pilot, the fisherman and the longshoreman were notorious offenders in this respect. Whenever they saw a vessel bound in, they were in the habit of putting off to her and of first inciting the crew to escape and then hiring themselves at exorbitant rates to work the vessel into port. On such mischievous interlopers the gangsman had no mercy. He took them whenever he could, confident that when their respective cases were stated to the Board, that body would "tumble" to the occasion.

Any attempt at estimating the number of seafaring men who evaded the gangs and the call of the State by means of the devices and subterfuges here roughly sketched into the broad canvas of our picture would prove a task as profitless as it is impossible of
accomplishment. One thing only is certain. The number fluctuated greatly from time to time with the activity or inactivity of the gangs. When the press was lax, there arose no question as there existed no need of escape; when it was hot, it was evaded systematically and with a degree of success extremely gratifying to the sailor. Taking the sea-borne coal trade of the port of London alone, it is estimated that in the single month of September 1770, at a time when an exceptionally severe press from protections was in full swing, not less than three thousand collier seamen got ashore between Yarmouth Roads and Foulness Point. As the coal trade was only one of many, and as the stretch of coast concerned comprised but a few miles out of hundreds equally well if not better adapted to the sailor's furtive habits, the total of escapes must have been little short of enormous. It could not have been otherwise. In this grand battue of the sea it was clearly impossible to round-up and capture every skittish son of Neptune.

On shore, as at sea, the sailor's course, when the gang was on his track, followed the lines of least resistance, only here he became a skulk as well as a fugitive. It was not that he was a less stout-hearted fellow than when at sea. He was merely the victim of a type of land neurosis. Drink and his recent escape from the gang got on his nerves and rendered him singularly liable to panic. The faintest hint of a press was enough to make his hair rise. At the first alarm he scuttled into hiding in the towns, or broke cover like a frightened hare.
The great press of 1755 affords many instances of such panic flights. Abounding in "lurking holes" where a man might lie perdue in comparative safety, King's Lynn nevertheless emptied itself of seamen in a few hours' time, and when the gang hurried to Wells by water, intending to intercept the fugitives there, the "idle fishermen on shore" sounded a fresh alarm and again they stampeded, going off to the eastward in great numbers and burying themselves in the thickly wooded dells and hills of that bit of Devon in Norfolk which lies between Clay-next-the-Sea and Sheringham. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1486--Capt. Baird, 29 March and 21 April 1755.]

A similar exodus occurred at Ipswich. The day the warrants came down, as for many days previous, the ancient borough was full of seamen; but no sooner did it become known that the press was out than they vanished like the dew of the morning. For weeks the face of but one sailor was seen in the town, and he was only ferreted out, with the assistance of a dozen constables, after prolonged and none too legal search. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1486--Capt. Brand, 26 Feb. 1755.]

How effectually the sailor could hide when dread of the press had him in its grip is strikingly illustrated by the hot London press of 1740. On that occasion the docks, the riverside slums and dens, the river itself both above and below bridge, were scoured by gangs who left no stratagem untried for unearthing and taking the hidden sailor. When the rigour of the press was past not a seaman, it is said, was to be
found at large in London; yet within four-and-twenty hours sixteen thousand emerged from their retreats. [Footnote: Griffiths, _Impressment Fully Considered_.]

The secret of such effectual concealment lay in the fact that the nature of his hiding-place mattered little to the sailor so long as it was secure. Accustomed to quarters of the most cramped description on shipboard, he required little room for his stowing. The roughest bed, the worst ventilated hole, the most insanitary surroundings and conditions were all one to him. He could thus hide himself away in places and receptacles from which the average landsman would have turned in fear or disgust. In quarry, clay-pit, cellar or well; in holt, hill or cave; in chimney, hayloft or secret cell behind some old-time oven; in shady alehouse or malodorous slum where a man's life was worth nothing unless he had the smell of tar upon him, and not much then; on isolated farmsteads and eyots, or in towns too remote or too hostile for the gangsman to penetrate--somewhere, somehow and of some sort the sailor found his lurking-place, and in it, by good providence, lay safe and snug throughout the hottest press.

Many of the seamen employed in the Newfoundland trade of Poole, gaining the shore at Chapman's Pool or Lulworth, whiled away their stolen leisure either in the clay-pits of the Isle of Purbeck, where they defied intrusion by posting armed sentries at every point of access to their stronghold, or--their favourite haunt--on Portland Island, which the number and ill-repute of the labourers employed in its stone quarries rendered well-nigh impregnable. To search for, let
alone to take the seamen frequenting that natural fortress—who of course "squared" the hard-bitten quarrymen—was more than any gang durst undertake unless, as was seldom the case, it consisted of some "very superior force." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581

--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 5 Aug. 1805.]

With the solitary exception of Falmouth town, the Cornish coast was merely another Portland Neck enormously extended. From Rame Head to the Lizard and Land's End, and in a minor sense from Land's End away to Bude Haven in the far nor'-east, the entire littoral of this remote part of the kingdom was forbidden ground whereon no gangsman's life was worth a moment's purchase. The two hundred seins and twice two hundred drift-boats belonging to that coast employed at least six thousand fishermen, and of these the greater part, as soon as the fishing season was at an end, either turned "tinners" and went into the mines, where they were unassailable,

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 28 Sept. 1805.] or betook themselves to their strongholds at Newquay, St. Ives, Newland, Mousehole, Coversack, Polpero, Cawsand and other places where, in common with smugglers, deserters from the king's ships at Hamoaze, and an endless succession of fugitive merchant seamen, they were as safe from intrusion or capture as they would have been on the coast of Labrador. It was impossible either to hunt them down or to take them on a coast so "completely perforated." A thousand "stout, able young fellows" could have been drawn from this source without being missed; but the gangs
fought shy of the task, and only when they carried vessels in distress into Falmouth were the redoubtable sons of the coves ever molested. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral M'Bride, 9 March 1795. _Admiralty Records_ 1. 578--Petition of the Inhabitants of the Village of Coversack, 31 Jan. 1778.]

On the Bristol Channel side Lundy Island offered unrivalled facilities for evasion, and many were the crews marooned there by far-sighted skippers who calculated on thus securing them against their return from Bristol, outward bound. The gangs as a rule gave this little Heligoland a wide berth, and when carried thither against their will they had a disconcerting habit of running away with the press-boat, and of thus marooning their commanding officer, that contributed not a little to the immunity the island enjoyed. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. Aylmer, 22 Dec. 1743.]

The sailor's objection to Lundy was as strong as the gangsman's. From his point of view it was no ideal place to hide in, and the effect upon him of enforced sojourn there was to make him sulky and mutinous. Rather the shore with all its dangers than an island that produced neither tobacco, rum, nor women! He therefore preferred sticking to his ship, even though he thereby ran the risk of impressment, until she arrived the length of the Holmes.

These islands are two in number, Steep Holme and Flat Holme, and so closely can vessels approach the latter, given favourable weather
conditions, that a stone may be cast on shore from the deck. The business of landing and embarking was consequently easy, and though the islands themselves were as barren as Lundy of the three commodities the sailor loved, he was nevertheless content to terminate his voyage there for the following reasons. Under the lee of one or other of the islands there was generally to be found a boat-load of men who were willing, for a suitable return in coin of the realm, to work the ship into King Road, the anchorage of the port of Bristol. The sailor was thus left free to gain the shore in the neighbourhood of Uphill, Weston, or Clevedon Bay, whence it was an easy tramp, not to Bristol, of which he steered clear because of its gangs, but to Bath, or, did he prefer a place nearer at hand, to the little town of Pill, near Avon-mouth.

A favourite haunt of seafaring men, fishermen, pilots and pilots’ assistants, with a liberal sprinkling of that class of female known in sailor lingo as "brutes," this lively little town was a place after Jack's own heart. The gangsmen gave it a wide berth. It offered an abundance of material for him to work upon, but that material was a trifle too rough even for his infastidious taste. The majority of the permanent indwellers of Pill, as well as the casual ones, not only protected themselves from the press, when such a course was necessary, by a ready use of the fist and the club, but, when this means of exemption failed them, pleaded the special nature of their calling with great plausibility and success. They were "pilots’ assistants," and as such they enjoyed for many years the unqualified indulgence of the naval authorities. The appellation they bore was nevertheless
purely euphemistic. As a matter of fact they were sailors’ assistants who, under cover of an ostensible vocation, made it their real business, at the instigation and expense of Bristol shipowners, to save crews harmless from the gangs by boarding ships at the Holmes and working them from thence into the roadstead or to the quays. They are said to have been “very fine young men,” and many a longing look did the impress officers at Bristol cast their way whilst struggling to swell their monthly returns. So essentially necessary to the trade of the place were they considered to be, however, that they were allowed to checkmate the gangs, practically without molestation or hindrance, till about the beginning of the last century, when the Admiralty, suddenly awaking to the unpatriotic nature of a practice that so effectually deprived the Navy of its due, caused them to be served with a notice to the effect that “for the future all who navigated ships from the Holmes should be pressed as belonging to those ships.” At this threat the Pill men jeered. Relying on the length of pilotage water between King Road and Bristol, they took a leaf from the sailor’s log and ran before the press-boats could reach the ships in which they were temporarily employed. For four years this state of things continued. Then there was struck at the practice a blow which not even the Admiralty had foreseen. Tow-paths were constructed along the river-bank, and the pilots’ assistants, ousted by horses, fell an easy prey to the gangs. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 14 April 1805.]

Bath had no gang, and was in consequence much frequented by sailors of the better class. In 1803--taking that as a normal year--the number
within its limits was estimated at three hundred--enough to man a
ship-of-the-line. The fact being duly reported to the Admiralty, a
lieutenant and gang were ordered over from Bristol to do some
pressing. The civic authorities--mayor, magistrates, constables and
watchmen--fired with sudden zeal for the service, all came forward "in
the most handsome manner" with offers of countenance and support. In
the purlieus of the town, however, the advent of the gang created
panic. The seamen went into prompt hiding, the mob turned out in
force, angry and threatening, resolved that no gang should violate the
sanctuary of a cathedral city. Seeing how the wind set, the mayor and
magistrates, having begun by backing the warrant, continued backing
until they backed out of the affair altogether. The zealous watchmen
could not be found, the eager constables ran away. Dismayed by these
untimely defections, the lieutenant hurriedly resolved "to drop the
business." So the gang marched back to Bristol empty-handed, followed
by the hearty execrations of the rabble and the heartier good wishes
of the mayor, who assured them that as soon as he should be able to
clap the skulking seamen in jail "on suspicion of various
misdemeanours," he would send for them again. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1528--Capt. Barker, 3 and 11 July 1803.] We do not
learn that he ever did.

To Bristol no unprotected sailor ever repaired of his own free will,
for early in the century of pressing the chickens of the most
notorious kidnapping city in England began to come home to roost. The
mantle of the Bristol mayor whom Jeffreys tried for a "kidnapping
knave" fell upon a succession of regulating captains whose doings put
their civic prototype to open shame, and more petitions and protests
against the lawlessness of the gangs emanated from Bristol than from
any other city in the kingdom.

The trowmen who navigated the Severn and the Wye, belonging as they
did mainly to extra-parochial spots in the Forest of Dean, were exempt
from the Militia ballot and the Army of Reserve. On the ground that
they came under the protection of inland navigation, they likewise
considered themselves exempt from the sea service, but this contention
the Court of Exchequer in 1798 completely overset by deciding that the
"passage of the River Severn between Gloucester and Bristol is open
sea." A press-gang was immediately let loose upon the numerous tribe
frequenting it, whereupon the whole body of newly created sailors
deserted their trows and fled to the Forest, where they remained in
hiding till the disappointed gang sought other and more fruitful
fields. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley,
Report on Rendezvous, 14 April 1805.]

Within Chester gates the sailor for many years slept as securely as
upon the high seas. No householder would admit the gangsmen beneath
his roof; and when at length they succeeded in gaining a foothold
within the city, all who were liable to the press immediately deserted
it--"as they do every town where there is a gang"--and went "to reside
at Parkgate." Parkgate in this way became a resort of sea-faring men
without parallel in the kingdom--a "nest" whose hornet bands were
long, and with good reason, notorious for their ferocity and
aggressiveness. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1446--Capt.
An attempt to establish a rendezvous here in 1804 proved a failure. The seamen fled, no "business" could be done, and officer and gang were soon withdrawn.

In comparison with the seething Deeside hamlet, Liverpool was tameness itself. Now and then, as in 1745, the sailor element rose in arms, demanding who was master; but as a rule it suffered the gang, if not gladly, at least with exemplary patience. Homing seamen who desired to evade the press in that city---and they were many---fled ashore from their ships at Highlake, a spot so well adapted to their purpose that it required "strict care to catch them." From Highlake they made their way to Parkgate, swelling still further the sailor population of that far-famed nest of skulkers.

Cork was a minor Parkgate. A graphic account of the conditions obtaining in that city has been left to us by Capt. Bennett, of H.M.S. _Lennox_, who did port duty there from May 1779 till March 1783. "Many hundreds of the best Seamen in this Province," he tells us, "resort in Bodys in Country Villages round about here, where they are maintained by the Crimps, who dispose of them to Bristol, Liverpool and other Privateers, who appoint what part of the Coast to take them on Board. They go in Bodys, even in the Town of Cork, and bid defiance to the Press-gangs, and resort in houses armed, and laugh at both civil and military Power. This they did at Kinsale, where they threatened to pull the Jail down in a garrison'd Town." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1502--Capt. Bennett, 12 and 26 April 1782.] These tactics rendered the costly press-gangs all but useless.
A hot press at Cork, in 1796, yielded only sixteen men fit for the service.

Space fails us to tell of how, owing to a three days' delay in the London post that brought the warrants to Newhaven in the spring of '78, the "alarm of soon pressing" spread like wildfire along that coast and drove every vessel to sea; of how "three or four hundred young fellows" belonging to Great Yarmouth and Gorleston, who had no families and could well have been spared without hindrance to the seafaring business of those towns, thought otherwise and took a little trip of "thirty or forty miles in the country to hide from the service"; or of how Capt. Routh, of the rendezvous at Leeds, happened upon a great concourse of skulkers at Castleford, whither they had been drawn by reasons of safety and the alleged fact that "Castleford woman must needs be fair,

Because they wash both in Calder and Aire,"

and after two unsuccessful attempts at surprise, at length took them with the aid of the military. These were everyday incidents which were accepted as matters of course and surprised nobody. Nevertheless the vagaries of the wayward children of the State, who chose to run away and hide instead of remaining to play the game, cost the naval authorities many an anxious moment. __They__ had to face both evasion and invasion, and the prevalence of the one did not help to repel the other.
His country's fear of invasion by the French afforded the seafaring man the chance of the century. Pitt's Quota Bill put good money in his pocket at the expense of his liberty, but in Admiral Sir Home Popham's great scheme for the defence of the coasts against Boney and his flat-bottomed boats he scented something far more to his advantage and taste.

From the day in 1796 when Capt. Moriarty, press-gang-officer at Cork, reported the arrival of the long-expected Brest fleet off the Irish coast, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1621--Capt. Crosby, 30 Dec. 1796.] the question how best to defend from sudden attack so enormously extended and highly vulnerable a seaboard as that of the United Kingdom, became one of feverish moment. At least a hundred different projects for compassing that desirable end at one time or another claimed the attention of the Navy Board. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Knowles, 25 Jan. 1805.] One of these was decidedly ingenious. It aimed at destroying the French flotilla by means of logs of wood bored hollow and charged with gunpowder and ball. These were to be launched against the invaders somewhat after the manner of the modern torpedo, of which they were, in fact, the primitive type and original. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Rear-Admiral Young, 14 Aug. 1803, and secret enclosure, as in the Appendix. The Admiral's "machine," as he termed it, though embodying the true torpedo idea of an explosive device to be propelled against an enemy's ship, was not designed to be so propelled on its own buoyancy, but by means of a fishing-boat, in
which it lay concealed. Had his inventive genius taken a bolder flight
and given us a more finished product in place of this crudity, the
Whitehead torpedo would have been anticipated, in something more than
mere principle, by upwards of half a century.]

Meantime, however, the Admiralty had adopted another plan--Admiral
Popham, already famous for his improved code of signals, its
originator. On paper it possessed the merits of all Haldanic
substitutes for the real thing. It was patriotic, cheap, simple as
kissing your hand. All you had to do was to take the fisherman, the
longshoreman and other stalwarts who lived "one foot in sea and one on
shore," enroll them in corps under the command (as distinguished from
the control) of naval officers, and practise them (on Sundays, since
it was a work of strict necessity) in the use of the pike and the
cannon, and, hey presto! the country was as safe from invasion as if
the meddlesome French had never been. The expense would be trivial.
Granting that the French did not take alarm and incontinently drop
their hostile designs upon the tight little island, there would be a
small outlay for pay, a trifle of a shilling a day on exercise days,
but nothing more--except for martello towers. The boats it was
proposed to enroll and arm would cost nothing. Their patriotic owners
were to provide them free of charge.

Such was the Popham scheme on paper. On a working basis it proved
quite another thing. The pikes provided were old ship-pikes, rotten
and worthless. The only occasion on which they appear to have served
any good purpose was when, at Gerrans and St. Mawes, the Fencibles
joined the mob and terrified the farmers, who were ignorant of the actual condition of the pikes, into selling their corn at something less than famine prices. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Capt. Spry, 14 April 1801.] Guns hoary with age, requisitioned from country churchyards and village greens where they had rusted, some of them, ever since the days of Drake and Raleigh, were dragged forth and proudly grouped as "parks of artillery." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1513--Capt. Bradley, 21 Aug. 1796.] Signal stations could not be seen one from the other, or, if visible, perpetrated signals no one could read. The armed smacks were equally unreliable. In Ireland they could not be "trusted out of sight with a gun." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1529--Capt. Bowen, 12 Oct. 1803.] In England they left the guns behind them. The weight, the patriotic owners discovered, seriously hampered the carrying capacity and seaworthiness of their boats; so to abate the nuisance they hove the guns overboard on to the beach, where they were speedily buried in sand or shingle, while the appliances were carried off by those who had other uses for them than their country's defence. The vessels thus armed, moreover, were always at sea, the men never at home. When it was desired to practise them in the raising of the sluice-gates which, in the event of invasion, were to convert Romney Marsh into an inland sea, no efforts availed to get together sufficient men for the purpose. Immune from the press by reason of their newly created status of Sea-Fencibles, they were all elsewhere, following their time-honoured vocations of fishing and smuggling with industry and gladness of heart. As a means of repelling invasion the Popham scheme was farcical and worthless; as a means of evading the press it was the finest thing ever invented. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
Admiral Berkeley, Reports on Sea-Fencibles, 1805; Admiral Lord Keith, Sentiments upon the Sea-Fencible System, 7 Jan. 1805.] The only benefits the country ever drew from it, apart from this, were two. It provided the Admiralty with an incomparable register of seafaring men, and some modern artists with secluded summer retreats.

It goes without saying that a document of such vital consequence to the seafaring man as an Admiralty protection did not escape the attention of those who, from various motives, sought to aid and abet the sailor in his evasion of the press. Protections were freely lent and exchanged, bought and sold, "coaxed," concocted and stolen. Skilful predecessors of Jim the Penman imitated to the life the signatures of Pembroke and Sandwich, Lord High Admirals, and of the lesser fry who put the official hand to those magic papers. "Great abuses" were "committed that way." Bogus protections could be obtained at Sunderland for 8s. 6d., Stephenson and Collins, the disreputable schoolmasters who made a business of faking them, coining money by the "infamous practice." In London "one Broucher, living in St. Michael's Lane," supplied them to all comers at 3 Pounds apiece. Even the Navy Office was not above suspicion in this respect, for in '98 a clerk there, whose name does not transpire, was accused of adding to his income by the sale of bogus protections at a guinea a head. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2740--Lieut. Abbs, 5 Oct. 1798.]

American protections were the Admiralty's pet bugbear. For many years after the successful issue of the War of Independence a bitter animosity characterised the attitude of the British naval officer
towards the American sailor. Whenever he could be laid hold of he was
pressed, and no matter what documents he produced in evidence of his
American birth and citizenship, those documents were almost invariably
pronounced false and fraudulent. There were weighty reasons, however,
for refusing to accept the claim of the alleged American sailor at its
face value. No class of protection was so generally forged, so
extensively bought and sold, as the American. Practically every
British seaman who made the run to an American port took the
precaution, during his sojourn in that land of liberty, to provide
himself with spurious papers against his return to England, where he
hoped, by means of them, to checkmate the gang. The process of
obtaining such papers was simplicity itself. All the sailor had to do,
at, say, New York, was to apply himself to one Riley, whose other name
was Paddy. The sum of three dollars having changed hands, Riley and
his client betook themselves to the retreat of some shady Notary
Public, where the Irishman made ready oath that the British seaman was
as much American born as himself. The business was now as good as
done, for on the strength of this lying affidavit any Collector of
Customs on the Atlantic coast would for a trifling fee grant the
sailor a certificate of citizenship. Riley created American citizens
in this way at the rate, it is said, of a dozen a day, [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1523-Deposition of Zacharias Pasco, 20
Jan. 1800.] and as he was only one of many plying the same lucrative
trade, the effect of such wholesale creations upon the impress service
in England, had they been allowed to pass unchallenged, may be readily
conceived.
The fraud, worse luck for the service, was by no means confined to America. Almost every home seaport had its recognised perveyor of "false American passes." At Liverpool a former clerk to the Collector of Customs for Pembroke, Pilsbury by name, grew rich on them, whilst at Greenock, Shields and other north-country shipping centres they were for many years readily procurable of one Walter Gilly and his confederates, whose transactions in this kind of paper drove the Navy Board to desperation. They accordingly instructed Capt. Brown, gang-officer at Greenock, to take Gilly at all hazards, but the fabricator of passes fled the town ere the gang could be put on his track. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1549--Capt. Brown, 22 Aug. 1809.]

Considering that every naval officer, from the Lord High Admiral downwards, had these facts and circumstances at his fingers’ end, it is hardly surprising that protections having, or purporting to have, an American origin, should have been viewed with profound distrust --distrust too often justified, and more than justified, by the very nature of the documents themselves. Thus a gentleman of colour, Cato Martin by name, when taken out of the West-Indiaman at Bristol, had the assurance to produce a white man’s pass certifying his eyes, which were undeniably yellow, to be a soft sky-blue, and his hair, which was hopelessly black and woolly, to be of that well-known hue most commonly associated with hair grown north of the Tweed. It was reserved, however, for an able seaman bearing the distinguished name of Oliver Cromwell to break all known records in this respect. When pressed, he unblushingly produced a pass dated in
the 6th of June immediately following, thus conferring on its bearer
the unique distinction of having crossed the Atlantic in eight days at
a time when the voyage occupied honester men nearly as many weeks. To
press such frauds was a public benefit. On the other hand, one
confesses to a certain sympathy with the American sailor who was
pressed because he "spoke English very well." [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 2734--Capt. Yorke, 8 March 1798.]

Believing in the simplicity of his heart that others were as gullible
as himself, the fugitive sailor sought habitually to hide his identity
beneath some temporary disguise of greater or less transparency. That
of farm labourer was perhaps his favourite choice. The number of
seamen so disguised, and employed on farms within ten miles of the
coast between Hull and Whitby prior to the sailing of the Greenland
and Baltic ships in 1803, was estimated at more than a thousand
able-bodied men. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Admiral
Phillip, Report on Rendezvous, 25 April 1804.] Seamen using the
Newfoundland trade of Dartmouth were "half-farmer, half-sailor." When
the call of the sea no longer lured them, they returned to the land in
an agricultural sense, resorting in hundreds to the farmsteads in the
Southams, where they were far out of reach of the gangs. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral M'Bride, Report on Rendezvous,
28 Feb. 1795]

CHAPTER VII.
WHAT THE GANG DID ASHORE.

In his endeavours to escape the gang the sailor resembled nothing so much as that hopelessly impotent fugitive the flying-fish. For both the sea swarmed with enemies bent on catching them. Both sought to evade those enemies by flight, and both, their ineffectual flight ended, returned to the sea again whether they would or not. It was their fate, a deep-sea kismet as unavoidable as death.

The ultimate destination of the sailor who by strategy or accident succeeded in eluding the triple line of sea-gangs so placed as to head him off from the coast, was thus never in doubt. His longest flights were those he made on land, for here the broad horizon that stood the gangs in such good stead at sea was measurably narrower, while hiding-places abounded and were never far to seek. All the same, in spite of these adventitious aids to self-effacement, the predestined end of the seafaring man sooner or later overtook him. The gang met him at the turning of the ways and wiped him off the face of the land. In the expressive words of a naval officer who knew the conditions thoroughly well, the sailor’s chances of obtaining a good run for his money "were not worth a chaw of tobacco."

For this inevitable finish to all the sailor’s attempts at flight on shore there existed in the main two reasons. The first of these lay in the sailor himself, making of him an unconscious aider and abettor in his own capture. Just as love and a cough cannot be hid, so there was
no disguising the fact that the sailor was a sailor. He was marked by characteristics that infallibly betrayed him. His bandy legs and rolling gait suggested irresistibly the way of a ship at sea, and no "soaking" in alehouse or tavern could eliminate the salt from the peculiar oaths that were as natural to him as the breath of life. Assume what disguise he would, he fell under suspicion at sight, and he had only to open his mouth to turn that suspicion into certainty. It needed no Sherlock Holmes of a gangsman to divine what he was or whence he came.

The second reason why the sailor could never long escape the gangs was because the gangs were numerically too many for him. It was no question of a chance gang here and there. The country swarmed with them.

Take the coast. Here every seaport of any pretensions in the way of trade, together with every spot between such ports known to be favoured or habitually used by the homing sailor as a landing-place, with certain exceptions already noted, either had its own particular gang or was closely watched by some gang stationed within easy access of the spot. In this way the whole island was ringed in by gangs on shore, just as it was similarly ringed in by other gangs afloat.

"If their Lordships would give me authority to press here," says Lieut. Oakley, writing to the Sea Lords from Deal in 1743, "I could frequently pick up good seamen ashoar. I mean seamen who by some
means escape being prest by the men of war and tenders_._

In this modest request the lieutenant states the whole case for the land-gang, at once demonstrating its utility and defining its functions. Unconsciously he does more. He echoes a cry that incessantly assailed the ears of Admiralty: "The sailor has escaped! Send us warrants and give us gangs, and we will catch him yet."

It was this call, the call of the fleet, that dominated the situation and forced order out of chaos. The men must be "rose," and only method could do it. The demand was a heavy one to make upon the most unsystematic system ever known, yet it survived the ordeal. The coast was mapped out, warrants were dispatched to this point and that, rendezvous were opened, gangs formed. No effort or outlay was spared to take the sailor the moment he got ashore, or very soon after.

In this systematic setting of land-traps that vast head-centre of the nation's overseas trade, the metropolis, naturally had first place. The streets, and especially the waterside streets, were infested with gangs. At times it was unsafe for any able-bodied man to venture abroad unless he had on him an undeniable protection or wore a dress that unmistakeably proclaimed the gentleman. The general rendezvous was on Tower Hill; but as ships completing their complement nearly always sent a gang or two to London, minor rendezvous abounded. St. Katherine's by the Tower was specially favoured by them. The "Rotterdam Arms" and the "Two Dutch Skippers," well-known taverns
within that precinct, were seldom without the bit of bunting that
proclaimed the headquarters of the gang. At Westminster the "White
Swan" in King's Street usually bore a similar decoration, as did also
the "Ship" in Holborn.

A characteristic case of pressing by a gang using the last-named house
occurred in 1706. Ransacking the town in quest of pressable subjects
of Her Majesty, they came one day to the "Cock and Rummer" in Bow
Street, where a big dinner was in progress. Here nothing would suit
their tooth but mine host's apprentice, and as ill-luck would have it
the apprentice was cook to the establishment and responsible for the
dinner. Him they nevertheless seized and would have hurried away in
spite of his master's supplications, protests and offers of free
drinks, had it not been for the fact that a mob collected and forcibly
prevented them. Other gangs hurrying to the assistance of their
hard-pressed comrades--to the number, it is said, of sixty men--a free
fight ensued, in the course of which a burly constable, armed with a
formidable longstaff, was singled out by the original gang, doubtless
on account of the prominent part he took in the fray, as a fitting
substitute for the apprentice. By dint of beating the poor fellow till
he was past resistance they at length got him to the "Ship," where
they were in the very act of bundling him into a coach, with the
intention of carrying him to the waterside below bridge, and of their
putting him on board the press-smack, when in the general confusion he
somehow effected his escape. [Footnote: "A Horrible Relation,"
_Review_, 17 March 1705-6.] Such incidents were common enough not
only at that time but long after.
At Gravesend sailors came ashore in such numbers from East India and other ships as to keep a brace of gangs busy. Another found enough to do at Broadstairs, whence a large number of vessels sailed in the Iceland cod fishery and similar industries. Faversham was a port and had its gang, and from Margate right away to Portsmouth, and from Portsmouth to Plymouth, nearly every town of any size that offered ready hiding to the fugitive sailor from the Channel was similarly favoured. Brighton formed a notable exception, and this circumstance gave rise to an episode about which we shall have more to say presently.

To record in these pages the local of all the gangs that were stationed in this manner upon the seaboard of the kingdom would be as undesirable as it is foreign to the scope of this chapter. Enough to repeat that the land, always the sailor's objective in eluding the triple cordon of sea-borne gangs, was ringed in and surrounded by a circle of land-gangs in every respect identical with that described as hedging the southern coast, and in its continuity almost as unbroken as the shore itself. Both sea-gangs and coast-gangs were amphibious, using either land or sea at pleasure.

Inland the conditions were the same, yet materially different. What was on the coast an encircling line assumed here the form of a vast net, to which the principal towns, the great cross-roads and the arterial bridges of the country stood in the relation of reticular
knots, while the constant "ranging" of the gangs, now in this
direction, now in that, supplied the connecting filaments or threads.
The gangs composing this great inland net were not amphibious. Their
most desperate aquatic ventures were confined to rivers and canals.
Ability to do their twenty miles a day on foot counted for more with
them than a knowledge of how to handle an oar or distinguish the
"cheeks" of a gaff from its "jaw."

Just as the sea-gangs in their raids upon the land were the Danes and
"creekmen" of their time, so the land-gangsman was the true highwayman
of the century that begot him. He kept every strategic point of every
main thoroughfare, held all the bridges, watched all the ferries,
haunted all the fairs. No place where likely men were to be found
escaped his calculating eye.

He was an inveterate early riser, and sailors sauntering to the fair
for want of better employment ran grave risks. In this way a large
number were taken on the road to Croydon fair one morning in September
1743. For actual pressing the fair itself was unsafe because of the
great concourse of people; but it formed one of the best possible
hunting-grounds and was kept under close observation for that reason.
Here the gangsman marked his victim, whose steps he dogged into the
country when his business was done or his pleasure ended, never for a
moment losing sight of him until he walked into the trap all ready set
in some wayside spinny or beneath some sheltering bridge.
Bridges were the inland gangsman's favourite haunt. They not only afforded ready concealment, they had to be crossed. Thus Lodden Bridge, near Reading, accounted one of the "likeliest places in the country for straggling seamen," was seldom without its gang. Nor was the great bridge at Gloucester, since, as the first bridge over the Severn, it drew to itself all the highroads and their users from Wales and the north. To sailors making for the south coast from those parts it was a point of approach as dangerous as it was unavoidable. Great numbers were taken here in consequence. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 58l--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 14 April 1805.]

So of ferries. The passage boats at Queensferry on the Firth of Forth, watched by gangs from Inverkeithing, yielded almost as many men in the course of a year as the costly rendezvous at Leith. Greenock ferries proved scarcely less productive. But there was here an exception. The ferry between Glenfinart and Greenock plied only twice a week, and as both occasions coincided with market-days the boat was invariably crowded with women. Only once did it yield a man. Peter Weir, the hand in charge, one day overset the boat, drowning every soul on board except himself. Thereupon the gang pressed him, arguing that one who used the sea so effectively could not fail to make a valuable addition to the fleet.

Inland towns traversed by the great highroads leading from north to south, or from east to west, were much frequented by the gangs. Amongst these Stourbridge perhaps ranked first. Situated midway
between the great ports of Liverpool and Bristol, it easily and
effectually commanded Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Bridgnorth, Bewdley,
Kidderminster and other populous towns, while it was too small to
afford secure hiding within itself. The gangs operating from
Stourbridge brought in an endless procession of ragged and
tavel-stained seamen. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1500
--Letters of Capt. Beecher, 1780.]

From ports on the Bristol Channel to ports on the English Channel, and
the reverse, many seamen crossed the country by stage-coach or wagon,
and to intercept them gangs were stationed at Okehampton, Liskeard and
Exeter. Taunton and Salisbury also, as "great thoroughfares to and
from the west," had each its gang, and a sufficient number of sailors
escaped the press at the latter place to justify the presence of
another at Romsey. Andover had a gang as early as 1756, on the
recommendation of no less a man than Rodney.

Shore gangs were of necessity ambulatory. To sit down before the
rendezvous pipe in hand, and expect the evasive sailor to come of his
own accord and beg the favour of being pressed, would have been a
futile waste of time and tobacco. The very essence of the gangman's
duty lay in the leg-work he did. To that end he ate the king's
victuals and wore the king's shoe-leather. Consequently he was early
afoot and late to bed. Ten miles out and ten home made up his daily
constitutional, and if he saw fit to exceed that distance he did not
incur his captain's displeasure. The gang at Reading, a strategic
point of great importance on the Bath and Bristol road, traversed all
the country round about within a radius of twenty miles--double the regulation distance. That at King's Lynn, another centre of unmeasured possibilities, trudged as far afield as Boston, Ely, Peterborough and Wells-on-Sea. And the Isle of Wight gang, stationed at Cowes or Ryde, now and then co-operated with a gang from Portsmouth or Gosport and ranged the whole length and breadth of the island, which was a noted nest of deserters and skulkers. "Range," by the way, was a word much favoured by the officers who led such expeditions. Its use is happy. It suggests the object well in view, the nicely calculated distance, the steady aim that seldom missed its mark. The gang that "ranged" rarely returned empty-handed.

On these excursions the favourite resting-place was some secluded nook overlooking the point of crossing of two or more highroads; the favourite place of refreshment, some busy wayside alehouse. Both were good to rest or refresh in, for at both the chances of effecting a capture were far more numerous than on the open road.

The object of the gang in taking the road was not, however, so much what could be picked up by chance in the course of a day's march, as the execution of some preconcerted design upon a particular person or place. This brings us to the methods of pressing commonly adopted, which may be roughly summarised under the three heads of surprise, violence and the hunt. Frequently all three were combined; but as in the case of gangs operating on the waters of rivers or harbours, the essential element in all pre-arranged raids, attacks and predatory expeditions was the first-named element, surprise. In this respect the
gangsmen were genuine "Peep-o'-Day Boys." The siege of Brighton is a notable case in point.

The inhabitants of Brighton, better known in the days of the press-gang as Brighthelmstone, consisted largely of fisher-folk in respect to whom the Admiralty had been guilty of one of its rare oversights. For generations no call was made upon them to serve the king at sea. This accidental immunity in course of time came to be regarded by the Brighton fisherman as his birthright, and the misconception bred consequences. For one thing, it made him intolerably saucy. He boasted that no impress officer had power to take him, and he backed up the boast by openly insulting, and on more than one occasion violently assaulting the king's uniform. With all this he was a hardy, long-lived, lusty fellow, and as his numbers were never thinned by that active corrector of an excessive birth-rate, the press-gang, he speedily overstocked the town. An energetic worker while his two great harvests of herring and mackerel held out, he was at other times indolent, lazy and careless of the fact that his numerous progeny burdened the rates. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 31 Dec. 1804.] These unpleasing circumstances having been duly reported to the Admiralty, their Lordships decided that what the Brighton fisherman required to correct his lax principles and stiffen his backbone was a good hot press. They accordingly issued orders for an early raid to be made upon that promising nursery of man-o'-war's-men.

The orders, which were of course secret, bore date the 3rd of July
1779, and were directed to Capt. Alms, who, as regulating officer at Shoreham, was likewise in charge of the gang at Newhaven under Lieut. Bradley, and of the gang at Littlehampton under Lieut. Breedon. At Shoreham there was also a tender, manned by an able crew. With these three gangs and the tender’s crew at his back, Alms determined to lay siege to Brighton and teach the fishermen there a lesson they should not soon forget. But first, in order to render the success of the project doubly sure, he enlisted the aid of Major-General Sloper, Commandant at Lewes, who readily consented to lend a company of soldiers to assist in the execution of the design.

These preparations were some little time in the making, and it was not until the Thursday immediately preceding the 24th of July that all was in readiness. On the night of that day, by preconcerted arrangement, the allied forces took the road—for the Littlehampton gang, a matter of some twenty miles—and at the first flush of dawn united on the outskirts of the sleeping town, where the soldiers were without loss of time so disposed as to cut off every avenue of escape. This done, the gangs split up and by devious ways, but with all expedition, concentrated their strength upon the quay, expecting to find there a large number of men making ready for the day's fishing. To their intense chagrin the quay was deserted. The night had been a tempestuous one, with heavy rain, and though the unfortunate gangsmen were soaked to the skin, the fishermen all lay dry in bed. Hearing the wind and rain, not a man turned out.

By this time the few people who were abroad on necessary occasions had
raised the alarm, and on every hand were heard loud cries of
"Press-gang!" and the hurried barricading of doors. For ten hours
"every man kept himself locked up and bolted." For ten hours Alms
waited in vain upon the local Justice of the Peace for power to break
and enter the fishermen's cottages. His repeated requests being
refused, he was at length "under the necessity of quitting the town
with only one man." So ended the siege of Brighton; but Bradley, on
his way back to Newhaven, fell in with a gang of smugglers, of whom he
pressed five. Brighton did not soon forget the terrors of that
rain-swept morning. For many a long day her people were "very shy, and
cautious of appearing in public." The salutary effects of the raid,
however, did not extend to the fishermen it was intended to benefit.
They became more insolent than ever, and a few years later marked
their resentment of the attempt to press them by administering a sound
thrashing to Mr. Midshipman Sealy, of the Shoreham rendezvous, whom
they one day caught unawares. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
1445-46--Letters of Capt. Alms.]

The surprise tactics of the gang of course varied according to
circumstances, and the form they took was sometimes highly ingenious.
A not uncommon stratagem was the impersonation of a recruiting party
beating up for volunteers. With cockades in their hats, drums rolling
and fifes shrilling, the gangsmen, who of course had their arms
concealed, marched ostentatiously through the high-street of some
sizable country town and so into the market-place. Since nobody had
anything to fear from a harmless recruiting party, people turned out
in strength to see the sight and listen to the music. When they had in
this way drawn as many as they could into the open, the gangsmen
suddenly threw off their disguise and seized every pressable person
they could lay hands on. Market-day was ill-adapted to these tactics.
It brought too big a crowd together.

A similar ruse was once practised with great success upon the
inhabitants of Portsmouth by Capt. Bowen of the _Dreadnought_, in
connection with a general press which the Admiralty had secretly
ordered to be made in and about that town. Dockyard towns were not as
a rule considered good pressing-grounds because of the drain of men
set up by the ships of war fitting out there; but Bowen had certainly
no reason to subscribe to that opinion. Late on the night of the 8th
of March 1803, he landed a company of marines at Gosport for the
purpose, as it was given out, of suppressing a mutiny at Fort
Monckton. The news spread rapidly, drawing crowds of people from their
homes in anticipation of an exciting scrimmage. This gave Bowen the
opportunity he counted upon. When the throngs had crossed Haslar
Bridge he posted marines at the bridge-end, and as the disappointed
people came pouring back the "jollies" pressed every man in the crowd.
Five hundred are said to have been taken on this occasion, but as the
nature of the service forbade discrimination at the moment of
pressing, nearly one-half were next day discharged as unfit or exempt.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1057--Admiral Milbanke, 9 March
1803.]

Sometimes, though not often, it was the gang that was surprised. All
hands would perhaps be snug in bed after a long and trying day, when
suddenly a thunderous knocking at the rendezvous door, and stentorian
cries of: "Turn out! turn out there!" coupled with epithets here
unproducible, would bring every man of them into the street in the
turn of a handspike, half-dressed but fully armed and awake to the
fact that a party of belated seamen was coming down the road. The
sailors were perhaps more road-weary than the gangsmen, and provided
none of them succeeded in slipping away in the darkness, or made a
successful resistance, in half-an-hour's time or less the whole party
would be safe under lock and key, cursing luck for a scurvy trickster
in delivering them over to the gang.

The sailor's well-known partiality for drink was constantly turned to
account by the astute gangsman. If a sailor himself, he laid aside his
hanger or cudgel and played the game of "What ho! shipmate" at the
cost of a can or two of flip, gently guiding his boon companion to the
rendezvous when he had got him sufficiently corned. Failing these
tactics, he adopted others equally effective. At Liverpool, where the
seafaring element was always a large one, it was a common practice for
the gangs to lie low for a time, thus inducing the sailor to believe
himself safe from molestation. He immediately indulged in a desperate
drinking bout and so put himself entirely in their power. Whether
rolling about the town "very much in liquor," or "snugly moored in
Sot's Bay," he was an easy victim.

Another ineradicable weakness that often landed the sailor in the
press-room was his propensity to indulge in "swank." Two jolly tars,
who were fully protected and consequently believed themselves immune
from the press, once bought a four-wheeled post-chaise and hired a painter in Long Acre to ornament it with anchors, masts, cannon and a variety of other objects emblematic of the sea. In this ornate vehicle they set out, behind six horses, with the intention of posting down to Alnwick, where their sweethearts lived. So impatient were they to get over the road that they could not be prevailed upon, at any of the numerous inns where they pulled up for refreshment, to stop long enough to have the wheels properly greased, crying out at the delay: "Avast there! she's had tar enough," and so on again. Just as they were making a triumphal entry into Newcastle-upon-Tyne the wheels took fire, and the chaise, saturated with the liquor they had spilt in the course of their mad drive, burst into flames fore and aft. The sailors bellowed lustily for help, whereupon the spectators ran to their assistance and by swamping the ship with buckets of water succeeded in putting out the fire. Now it happened that in the crowd drawn together by such an unusual occurrence there was an impress officer who was greatly shocked by the exhibition. He considered that the sailors had been guilty of unseemly behaviour, and on that ground had them pressed. Notwithstanding their protections they were kept.

In his efforts to swell the returns of pressed men the gangsman was supposed—we may even go so far as to say enjoined—to use no more violence than was absolutely necessary to attain his end. The question of force thus resolved itself into one of the degree of resistance he encountered. Needless to say, he did not always knock a man down before bidding him stand in the king's name. Recourse to measures so extreme was not always necessary. Every sailor had not the pluck to
fight, and even when he had both the pluck and the good-will, hard
drinking, weary days of tramping, or long abstinence from food had
perhaps sapped his strength, leaving him in no fit condition to hold
his own in a scrap with the well-fed gangsman. The latter consequently
had it pretty much his own way. A firm hand on the shoulder, or at the
most a short, sharp tussle, and the man was his. But there were
exceptions to this easy rule, as we shall see in our next chapter.

Hunting the sailor was largely a matter of information, and
unfortunately for his chances of escape informers were seldom wanting.
Everywhere it was a game at hide-and-seek. Constables had orders to
report him. Chapmen, drovers and soldiers, persons who were much on
the road, kept a bright lookout for him. The crimp, habitually given
to underhand practices, turned informer when prices for seamen ruled
low in the service he usually catered for. His mistress loved him as
long as his money lasted; when he had no more to throw away upon her
she perfidiously betrayed him. And for all this there was a reason as
simple as casting up the number of shillings in the pound. No matter
how penniless the sailor himself might be, he was always worth that
sum at the rendezvous. Twenty shillings was the reward paid for
information leading to his apprehension as a straggler or a skulker,
and it was largely on the strength of such informations, and often
under the personal guidance of such detestable informers, that the
gang went a-hunting.

Apart from greed of gain, the motive most commonly underlying
informations was either jealousy or spite. Women were the greatest
siners in the first respect. Let the sailorman concealed by a woman only so much as look with favour upon another, and his fate was sealed. She gave him away, or, what was more profitable, sold him without regret. There were as good fish in the sea as ever came out. Perhaps better.

On the wings of spite and malice the escapades of youth often came home to roost after many years. Men who had run away to sea as lads, but had afterwards married and settled down, were informed on by evil-disposed persons who bore them some grudge, and torn from their families as having used the sea. Stephen Kemp, of Warbelton in Sussex, one of the many who suffered this fate, had indeed used the sea, but only for a single night on board a fishing-boat. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1445--Capt. Alms, 9 June 1777.]

In face of these infamies it is good to read of how they dealt with informers at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. There the role was one fraught with peculiar danger. Rewards were paid by the Collector of Customs, and when a Newcastle man went to the Customs-House to claim the price of some sailor's betrayal, the people set upon him and incontinently broke his head. One notorious receiver of such rewards was "nearly murther'd." Thereafter informers had to be paid in private places for fear of the mob, and so many persons fell under suspicion of playing the dastardly game that the regulating captain was besieged by applicants for "certificates of innocency." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1497--Letters of Capt. Bover, 1777.]
Informations not infrequently took the form of anonymous communications addressed by the same hand to two different gangs at one and the same time, and when this was the case, and both gangs sallied forth in quest of the skulker, a collision was pretty sure to follow. Sometimes the encounter resolved itself into a running fight, in the course of which the poor sailor, who formed the bone of contention, was pressed and re-pressed several times over between his hiding-place and one or other of the rendezvous.

Rivalry between gangs engaged in ordinary pressing led to many a stirring encounter and bloody fracas. A gang sent out by H.M.S. _Thetis_ was once attacked, while prowling about the waterside slums of Deptford, by "three or four different gangs, to the number of thirty men." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1502--Capt. Butcher, 29 Oct. 1782.] There was a greater demand for bandages than for sailors in Deptford during the rest of the night.

The most extraordinary affair of this description to be met with in the annals of pressing is perhaps one that occurred early in the reign of Queen Anne. Amongst the men-of-war then lying at Spithead were
the _Dorsetshire_, Capt. Butler commander, and the _Medway_.
Hearing that some sailors were in hiding at a place a little distance beyond Gosport, Capt. Butler dispatched his 1st and 2nd lieutenants, in charge of thirty of his best men, with instructions to take them and bring them on board. It so happened that a strong gang was at the same time on shore from the _Medway_, presumably on the same errand, and this party the Dorsetshires, returning to their ship with the seamen they had taken, found posted in the Gosport road for the avowed purpose of re-pressing the pressed men. By a timely detour, however, they reached the waterside "without any mischief done."

Meanwhile, a rumour had somehow reached the ears of Capt. Butler to the effect that a fight was in progress and his 1st lieutenant killed. He immediately took boat and hurried over to Gosport, where, to his relief, he found his people all safe in their boats, but on the Point, to use his own graphic words, "several hundred People, some with drawn Swords, some with Spitts, others with Clubbs, Staves & Stretchers. Some cry’d ‘One & All!’ others cry’d ‘Medways!’ and some again swearing, cursing & banning that they would knock my People’s Brains out. Off I went with my Barge to the Longboat," continues the gallant captain, "commanding them to weigh their grappling & goe with me aboard. In the meantime off came about twelve Boats full with the _Medway’s_ men to lay my Longboat aboard, who surrounded us with Swords, Clubbs, Staves & divers Instruments, & nothing would do but all our Brains must be Knock’t out. Finding how I defended the Longboat, they then undertook to attack myselfe and people, One of their Boats came upon the stern and made several Blows at my Coxwain,
and if it had not been for the Resolution I had taken to endure all
these Abuses, I had Kill'd all those men with my own Hand; but this
Boat in particular stuck close to me with only six men, and I kept a
very good Eye upon her. All this time we were rowing out of the
Harbour with these Boats about us as far as Portsmouth Point, my
Coxwain wounded, myselfe and People dangerously assaulted with Stones
which they brought from the Beech & threw at us, and as their Boats
drop'd off I took my opportunity & seized ye Boat with the Six Men
that had so attack'd me, and have secured them in Irons." With this
the incident practically ended; for although the Medways retaliated by
seizing and carrying off the _Dorsetshire's_ coxwain and a crew
who ventured ashore next day with letters, the latter were speedily
released; but for a week Capt. Butler--fiery old Trojan! who could
have slain a whole boat's-crew with his own hand--remained a close
prisoner on board his ship. "Should I but put my foot ashoo," we hear
him growl, "I am murther'd that minute." [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1467--Capt. Butler, 1 June 1705.]

With certain exceptions presently to be noted, every man's hand was
against the fugitive sailor, and this being so it followed as a matter
of course that in his inveterate pursuit of him the gangsman found
more honourable allies than that nefarious person, the man-selling
informer. The class whom the sailor himself, in his contempt of the
good feeding he never shared, nicknamed "big-bellied placemen"--the
pompous mayors, the portly aldermen and the county magistrate who knew
a good horse or hound but precious little law, were almost to a man
the gangsman's coadjutors. Lavishly wined and dined at Admiralty
expense, they urbanely "backed" the regulating captain's warrants, consistently winked at his glaring infractions of law and order, and with the most commendable loyalty imaginable did all in their power to forward His Majesty's service. Even the military, if rightly approached on their pinnacle of lofty superiority, now and then condescended to lend the gangsman a hand. Did not Sloper, Major-General and Commandant at Lewes, throw a whole company into the siege of Brighton?

These post-prandial concessions on the part of bigwigs desirous of currying favour in high places on the whole told heavily against the sorely harassed object of the gangsman's quest, rendering it, amongst other things, extremely unsafe for him to indulge in those unconventional outbursts which, under happier conditions, so uniformly marked his jovial moods. At the playhouse, for example, he could not heave empty bottles or similar tokens of appreciation upon the stage without grave risk of incurring the fate that overtook Steven David, Samuel Jenkins and Thomas Williams, three sailors of Falmouth town who, merely because they adopted so unusual a mode of applauding a favourite, were by magisterial order handed over to Lieut. Box of H.M.S. _Blonde_ with a peremptory request that they should be transferred forthwith to that floating stage where the only recognised "turns" were those of the cat and the capstan. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1537--Capt. Ballard, 13 Dec. 1806.]

Luckily for the sailor and those of other callings who shared his liability to the press, the civil authorities did not range themselves
on the gangsman's side with complete unanimity. Local considerations of trade, coupled with some faint conception of the hideous injustice the seafaring classes groaned under, and groaned in vain, here and there outweighed patriotism and dinners. Little by little a cantankerous spirit of opposition got abroad, and every now and then, at this point or at that, some mayor or alderman, obsessed by this spirit beyond his fellows and his time, seized such opportunities as office threw in his way to mark his disapproval of the wrongs the sailor suffered. Had this attitude been more general, or more consistent in itself, the press-gang would not have endured for a day.

The role of Richard Yea and Nay was, however, the favourite one with urban authorities. Towns at first not "inclined to allow a pressing," afterwards relented and took the gang to their bosom, or entertained it gladly for a time, only to cast it out with contumely.

A lieutenant who was sent to Newcastle to press in 1702 found "no manner of encouragement there"; yet seventy-five years later the Tyneside city, thanks to the loyal co-operation of a long succession of mayors, and of such men as George Stephenson, sometime Deputy-Master of the Trinity House, had become one of the riskiest in the kingdom for the seafaring man who was a stranger within her gates. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1498--Capt. Bover, 11 Aug. 1778.]

The attitude of Poole differed in some respects from that of other towns. Her mayors and magistrates, while they did not actually oppose the pressing of seamen within the borough, would neither back the
warrants nor lend the gangs their countenance. The reason advanced for this disloyal attitude was of the absurd nature. Poole held that in order to press twenty men you were not at liberty to kill the twenty-first. That, in fact, was what had happened on board the _Maria_ brig as she came into port there, deeply laden with fish from the Banks, and the corporation very foolishly never forgot the trivial incident.

It did not, of course, follow that the Poole sailor enjoyed freedom from the press. Far from it. What he did enjoy was a reputation that, if not all his own, was yet sufficiently so to be shared by few. Bred in that roughest of all schools, the Newfoundland cod fishery, he was an exceptionally tough nut to crack.

"If Poole were a fish pool
And the men of Poole fish,
There'd be a pool for the devil
And fish for his dish,"

was how the old jibe ran, and in this estimate of the Poole man's character the gangs fully concurred. They knew him well and liked him little, so when bent on pressing him they adopted no squeamish measures, but very wisely "trusted to the strength of their right arms for it." Some of their attempts to take him make strange reading.

About eight o'clock on a certain winter's evening, Regulating Captain
Walbeoff, accompanied by Lieut. Osmer, a midshipman and eight gangsmen, broke into the house of William Trim, a seafaring native of the place whom they knew to be at home and had resolved to press. Alarmed by the forcing of the door, and only too well aware of what it portended, Trim made for the stairs, where, turning upon his pursuers, he struck repeatedly and savagely at the midshipman, who headed them, with a red-hot poker which he had snatched out of the fire at the moment of his flight. He was, however, quickly overpowered, disarmed and dragged back into the lower room, where his captors threw him violently to the floor and with their hangers took effective measures to prevent his escape or further opposition. His sister happened to be in the house, and whilst this was going on the lieutenant brutally assaulted her, presumably because she wished to go to her brother's assistance. Meanwhile Trim's father, a man near seventy years of age, who lived only a stone's-throw away, hearing the uproar, and being told the gang had come for his son, ran to the house with the intention, as he afterwards declared, of persuading him to go quietly. Seeing him stretched upon the floor, he stooped to lift him to his feet, when one of the gang attacked him and stabbed him in the back. He fell bleeding beside the younger man, and was there beaten by a number of the gangsmen whilst the remainder dragged his son off to the press-room, whence he was in due course dispatched to the fleet at Spithead. The date of this brutal episode is 1804; the manner of it, "nothing more than what usually happened on such occasions" in the town of Poole. [Footnote _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Admiral Phillip, Inquiry into the Conduct of the Impress Officers at Poole, 13 Aug. 1804.]
For this deplorable state of things Poole had none but herself to thank. Had she, instead of merely refusing to back the warrants, taken effective measures to rid herself of the gang, that mischievous body would have soon left her in peace. Rochester wore the jewel of consistency in this respect. When Lieut. Brenton pressed a youth there who "appeared to be a seafaring man," but turned out to be an exempt city apprentice, he was promptly arrested and deprived of his sword, the mayor making no bones of telling him that his warrant was "useless in Rochester." With this broad hint he was discharged; but the people proved less lenient than the mayor, for they set about him and beat him unmercifully. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 301--Law Officers' Opinions, 1784-92, No. 42: Deposition of Lieut. Brenton.]

Save on a single occasion, already incidentally referred to, civic Liverpool treated the gang with uniform kindness. In 1745, at a time when the rebels were reported to be within only four miles of the city, the mayor refused to back warrants for the pressing of sailors to protect the shipping in the river. His reason was a cogent one. The captains of the _Southsea Castle_, the _Mercury_ and the _Loo_, three ships of war then in the Mersey, had just recently "manned their boats with marines and impressed from the shore near fifty men," and the seafaring element of the town, always a formidable one, was up in arms because of it. This so intimidated the mayor that he dared not sanction further raids "for fear of being murder'd."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1440--Letters of Capt. Amherst, Dec. 1745.] His dread of the armed sailor was not shared by Henry
Alcock, sometime mayor of Waterford. That gentleman "often headed the press-gangs" in person. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1500--Capt. Bennett, 13 Nov. 1780.]

Deal objected to the press for reasons extending back to the reign of King John. As a member of the Cinque Ports that town had constantly supplied the kings and queens of the realm, from the time of Magna Charta downwards, with great numbers of able and sufficient seamen who, according to the ancient custom of the Five Ports, had been impressed and raised by the mayor and magistrates of the town, acting under orders from the Lord Warden, and not by irresponsible gangs from without. It was to these, and not to the press as such, that Deal objected. The introduction of gangs in her opinion bred disorder. Great disturbances, breaches of the peace, riots, tumults and even bloodshed attended their steps and made their presence in any peaceably disposed community highly undesirable. Within the memory of living man even, Deal had obliged no less than four hundred seamen to go on board the ships of the fleet, and she desired no more of those strangers who recently, incited by Admiral the Marquis of Carmarthen, had gone a-pressing in her streets and grievously wounded divers persons. [Footnote: _State Papers Domestic_, Anne, xxxvi: No. 24: Petition of the Mayor, Jurats and Commonalty of the Free Town and Borough of Deal.]

In this commonsense view of the case Deal was ably supported by Dover, the premier Cinque Port. Dover, it is true, so far as we know never embodied her objections to the press in any humble petition to the
Queen's Majesty. She chose instead a directer method, for when the lieutenant of the _Devonshire_ impressed six men belonging to a brigantine from Carolina in her streets, and attempted to carry them beyond the limits of the borough, "many people of Dover, in company with the Mayor thereof, assembled themselves together and would not permit the lieutenant to bring them away." The action angered the Lords Commissioners, who resolved to teach Dover a lesson. Orders were accordingly sent down to Capt. Dent, whose ship the _Shrewsbury_ man-o'-war was then in the Downs, directing him to send a gang ashore and press the first six good seamen they should meet with, taking care, however, since their Lordships did not wish to be too hard upon the town, that the men so pressed were bachelors and not householders. Lieut. O'Brien was entrusted with this delicate punitive mission. He returned on board after a campaign of only a few hours' duration, triumphantly bearing with him the stipulated hostages for Dover's future good behaviour--"six very good seamen, natives and inhabitants, and five of them bachelors." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1696--Capt. Dent, 24 Aug. 1743.] The sixth was of course a householder, a circumstance that made the town's punishment all the severer.

Its effects were less salutary than the Admiralty had anticipated. True, both Dover and Deal thereafter withdrew their opposition to the press so far as to admit the gang within their borders; but they kept a watchful eye upon its doings, and every now and then the old spirit flamed out again at white heat, consuming the bonds of some poor devil who, like Alexander Hart, freeman of Dover, had been irregularly
taken. On this occasion the mayor, backed by a posse of constables, himself broke open the press-room door. A similar incident, occurring a little later in the same year, so incensed Capt. Ball, who aptly enough was at the time in command of the _Nemesis_, that he roundly swore "to impress every seafaring man in Dover and make them repent of their impudence." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 301--Law Officers' Opinions, 1784-92, No. 44; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1507--Capt. Ball, 15 April 1791.]

Where the magistrate had it most in his power to make or mar the fugitive sailor's chances was in connection with the familiar fiction that the Englishman's house is his castle. To hide a sailor was to steal the king's chattel--penalty, 5 Pounds forfeited to the parish; and if you were guilty of such a theft, or were with good reason suspected of being guilty, you found yourself in much the same case as the ordinary thief or the receiver of stolen goods. A search warrant could be sworn out before a magistrate, and your house ransacked from cellar to garret. Without such warrant, however, it could not be lawfully entered. In the heat of pressing forcible entry was nevertheless not unusual, and many an impress officer found himself involved in actions for trespass or damages in consequence of his own indiscretion or the excessive zeal of his gang. The defence set up by Lieut. Doyle, of Dublin, that the "Panel of the Door was Broke by Accident," would not go down in a court of law, however avidly it might be swallowed by the Board of Admiralty.

More than this. The magistrate was by law empowered to seize all
straggling seamen and landsmen and hand them over to the gangs for consignment to the fleet. The vagabond, as the unfortunate tramp of those days was commonly called, had thus a bad time of it. For him all roads led to Spithead. The same was true of persons who made themselves a public nuisance in other ways. By express magisterial order many answering to that description followed Francis Juniper of Cuckfield, "a very drunken, troublesome fellow, without a coat to his back," who was sent away lest he should become "chargeable to the parish." The magistrate in this way conferred a double benefit upon his country. He defended it against itself whilst helping it to defend itself against the French. Still, the latter benefit was not always above suspicion. The "ignorant zeal of simple justices," we are told, often impelled them to hand over to the gangs men whom "any old woman could see with half an eye to be properer objects of pity and charity than fit to serve His Majesty."

"Send your myrmidons," was a form of summons familiar to every gang officer. As its tone implies, its source was magisterial, and when the officer received it he hastened with his gang to the Petty Sessions, the Assizes or the prison, and there took over, as an unearned increment of His Majesty's fleet, the person of some misdemeanant willing to exchange bridewell for the briny, or the manacled body of some convicted felon who preferred to swing in a hammock at sea rather than on the gallows ashore.

A strangely assorted crew it was, this overflow of the jails that clanked slowly seawards, marshalled by the gang. Reprieves and
commutations, if by no means universal in a confirmed hanging age, were yet common enough to invest it with an appalling sameness that was nevertheless an appalling variety. Able seamen sentenced for horse-stealing or rioting, town dwellers raided out of night-houses, impostors who simulated fits or played the maimed soldier, fishermen in the illicit brandy and tobacco line, gentlemen of the road, makers of "flash" notes and false coin, stealers of sheep, assaulteders of women, pickpockets and murderers in one unmitigated throng went the way of the fleet and there sank their vices, their roguery, their crimes and their identity in the number of a mess.

Boys were in that flock of jail-birds too--youths barely in their teens, guilty of such heinous offences as throwing stones at people who passed in boats upon the river, or of "playing during divine service on Sunday" and remaining impenitent and obdurate when confronted with all the "terrific apparatus of fetters, chains and dark cells" pertaining to a well-equipped city jail. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1534, 1545--Capt. Barker, 1 March 1805, 20 Aug. 1809, and numerous instances.] The turning over of such young reprobates to the gang was one of the pleasing duties of the magistrate.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT GRIPS WITH THE GANG.
When all avenues of escape were cut off and the sailor found himself face to face with the gang and imminent capture, he either surrendered his liberty at the word of command or staked it on the issue of a fight.

His choice of the latter alternative was the proverbial turning of the worm, but of a worm that was no mean adversary. Fear of the gang, supposing him to entertain any, was thrown to the winds. Fear of the consequences--the clink, or maybe the gallows for a last land-fall--which had restrained him in less critical moments when he had both room to run and opportunity, sat lightly on him now. In red realism there flashed through his brain the example of some doughty sailor, the hero of many an anchor-watch and forecastle yarn, who had fought the gang to its last man and yet come off victor. The swift vision fired his blood and nerved his arm, and under its obsession he stood up to his would-be captors with all the dogged pluck for which he was famous when facing the enemy at sea.

In contests of this description the weapon perhaps counted for as much as the man who wielded it, and as its nature depended largely upon circumstances and surroundings, the range of choice was generally wide enough to please the most elective taste. Pressing consequently introduced the gangsman to some strange weapons.

Trim, the Poole sailor whose capture is narrated in the foregoing chapter, defended himself with a red-hot poker. In what may be termed
domestic as opposed to public pressing, the use of this homely utensil as an impromptu liberty-preserver was not at all uncommon. Hot or cold, it proved a formidable weapon in the hands of a determined man, more especially when, as was at that time very commonly the case, it belonged to the ponderous cobiron or knobbed variety.

Another weapon of recognised utility, particularly in the vicinity of docks, careening-stations and ship-yards, was the humble tar-mop. Consisting of a wooden handle some five or six feet in length, though of no great diameter, terminating in a ball of spun-yarn forming the actual mop, this implement, when new, was comparatively harmless. No serious blow could then be dealt with it; but once it had been used for "paying" a vessel's bottom and sides it underwent a change that rendered it truly formidable. The ball of ravellings forming the mop became then thoroughly, charged with tar or pitch and dried in a rough mass scarcely less heavy than lead. In this condition it was capable of inflicting a terrible blow, and many were the tussels decided by it. A remarkable instance of its effective use occurred at Ipswich in 1703, when a gang from the _Solebay_, rowing up the Orwell from Harwich, attempted to press the men engaged in re-paying a collier. They were immediately "struck down with Pitch-Mopps, to the great Peril of their Lives." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1436 --Capt. Aldred, 6 Jan. 1702-3.]

The weapon to which the sailor was most partial, however, was the familiar capstan-bar. In it, as in its fellow the handspike, he found a whole armament. Its availability, whether on shipboard or at the
waterside, its rough-and-ready nature, and above all its heft and
general capacity for dealing a knock-down blow without inflicting
necessarily fatal injuries, adapted it exactly to the sailor's
requirements, defensive or the reverse. It was with a capstan-bar that
Paul Jones, when hard pressed by a gang on board his ship at
Liverpool, was reputed to have stretched three of his assailants dead
on deck. Every sailor had heard of that glorious achievement and
applauded it, the killing perhaps grudgingly excepted.

So, too, did he applaud the hardihood of William Bingham, that
far-famed north-country sailor who, adopting pistols as his weapon,
negligently stuck a brace of them in his belt and walked the streets
of Newcastle in open defiance of the gangs, none of which durst lay a
hand on him till the unlucky day when, in a moment of criminal
carelessness that could never be forgiven, he left his weapons at home
and was haled to the press-room fighting, all too late, like a fiend
incarnate.

Not to enlarge on the endless variety of chance weapons, there
remained those good old-standers the musket, the cutlass and the
knife, each of which, in the sailor's grasp, played its part in the
rough-and-tumble of pressing, and played it well. A case in point,
familiar to every seaman, was the last fight put up by that famous
Plymouth sailor, Emanuel Herbert, another fatalist who, like Bingham,
believed in having two strings to his bow. He accordingly provided
himself with both fuzees and hangers, and with these comforting
bed-fellows retired to rest in an upper chamber of the public-house
where he lodged, easy in the knowledge that whatever happened the door
of his crib commanded the stairs. From this stronghold the gang
invited him to come down. He returned the compliment by inviting them
up, assuring them that he had a warm welcome in store for the first
who should favour him with a visit. The ambiguity of the invitation
appears to have been thrown away upon the gang, for "three of my
people," says the officer who led them, "rushed up, and the gun
missing fire, he immediately run one of them through the body with the
hanger"--a mode of welcoming his visitors which resulted in Herbert's
shifting his lodgings to Exeter jail, and in the wounded man's speedy
death. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1473--Capt. Brown, 4
July 1727.]

Here was a serious contingency indeed; but whatever deterrent effect
the fatal issue of this affair, as of many similar ones, may have had
upon the sailor's use of lethal weapons when attacked by the gang,
that effect was largely, if not altogether, neutralised by the upshot
of the famous Broadfoot case, which, occurring some sixteen years
later, gave the scales of justice a decided turn in the sailor's
favour and robbed the killing of a gangsman of its only terror, the
shadow of the gallows. The incident in question opened in Bristol
river, with the boarding of a merchant-man by a tender's gang. As they
came over the side Broadfoot met them, blunderbuss in hand. Being
there to guard the ship, he bade them begone, and upon their
disregarding the order, and closing in upon him with evident intent to
take him, he clapped the blunderbuss, which was heavily charged with
swanshot, to his shoulder and let fly into the midst of them. One of
their number, Calahan by name, fell mortally wounded, and Broadfoot was in due course indicted for wilful murder. [Footnote: _Westminster Journal_, 30 April 1743.] How he was found not guilty on the ground that a warrant directed to the lieutenant gave the gang no power to take him, and that he was therefore justified in defending himself, was well known to every sailor in the kingdom. No jury thereafter ever found him guilty of a capital felony if by chance he killed a gangsman in self-defence. The worst he had to fear was a verdict of manslaughter—a circumstance that proved highly inspiriting to him in his frequent scraps with the gang.

There was another aspect of the case, however, that came home to the sailor rather more intimately than the risk of being called upon to "do time" under conditions scarcely worse than those he habitually endured at sea. Suppose, instead of his killing the gangsman, the gangsman killed him? He recalled a case he had heard much palaver about. An able seaman, a perfect Tom Bowling of a fellow, brought to at an alehouse in the Borough—the old "Bull's Head" it was—having a mind to lie snug for a while, 'tween voyages. However, one day, being three sheets in the wind or thereabouts, he risked a run and was made a prize of, worse luck, by a press-gang that engaged him. Their boat lay at Battle Bridge in the Narrow Passage, and while they were bearing down upon her, with the sailor-chap in tow, what should Jack do but out with his knife and slip it into one of the gangers. 'Twas nothing much, a waistcoat wound at most, but the ganger resented the liberty, and swearing that no man should tap his claret for nix, he ups with his cudgel and fetches Jack a clip beside the head that lost
him the number of his mess, for soon after he was discharged dead
along of having his head broke. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
1486--Lieut. Slyford, 24 Nov. 1755. "Discharged dead," abbreviated to
"DD," the regulation entry in the muster books against the names of
persons deceased.]

Risks of this sort raised grave issues for the sailor--issues to be
well considered of in those serious moments that came to the most
reckless on the wings of the wind or the lift of the waves at sea,
what time drink and the gang were remote factors in the problem of
life. But ashore! Ah! that was another matter. Life ashore was far too
crowded, far too sweet for serious reflections. The absorbing business
of pleasure left little room for thought, and the thoughts that came
to the sailor later, when he had had his fling and was again afoot in
search of a ship, decidedly favoured the killing of a gangsman, if
need be, rather than the loss of his own life or of a berth. The
prevalence of these sentiments rendered the taking of the sailor a
dangerous business, particularly when he consorted in bands.

In that part of the west country traversed by the great roads from
Bristol to Liverpool, and having Stourbridge as its approximate
centre, ambulatory bands proved very formidable. The presence of the
rendezvous at Stourbridge accounted for this. Seamen travelled in
strength because they feared it. Two gangs were stationed there under
Capt. Beecher, and news of the approach of a large party of seamen
from the south having one day been brought in, he at once made
preparations for intercepting them. Lieut. Barnsley and his gang
marched direct to Hoobrook, a couple of miles south of Kidderminster, a point the seamen had perforce to pass. His instructions were to wait there, picking up in the meantime such of the sailor party as lagged behind from footsoreness or fatigue, till joined by Lieut. Birchall and the other gang, when the two were to unite forces and press the main body. Through unforeseen circumstances, however, the plan miscarried. Birchall, who had taken a circuitous route, arrived late, whilst the band of sailors arrived early. They numbered, moreover, forty-six as against eleven gangsmen and two officers. Four to one was a temptation the sailors could not resist. They attacked the gangs with such ferocity that out of the thirteen only one man returned to the rendezvous with a whole skin. Luckily, there were no casualties on this occasion; but a few days later, while two of Barnsley's gangsmen were out on duty some little distance from the town, they were suddenly attacked by a couple of sailors, presumably members of the same band, who left one of them dead in the road. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1501--Capt. Beecher, 12 July and 4 Aug. 1781.]

Owing to its close proximity to the Thames, that remote suburb of eighteenth century London known as Stepney Fields was much frequented by armed bands of the above description, who successfully resisted all attempts to take them. The master-at-arms of the _Chatham_ man-o'-war, chancing once to pass that way, came in for exceedingly rough usage at their hands, and when next day a lieutenant from the same ship appeared upon the scene with a gang at his back and tried to press the ringleaders in that affair, they "swore by God he should
not, and if he offered to lay hands on them, they would cut him down."
With this threat they drew their cutlasses, slashed savagely at the
lieutenant, and "made off through the Mobb which had gathered round
them." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2579--Capt. Townshend,
21 April 1743.]

A spot not many miles distant from Stepney Fields was the scene of a
singular fray many years later. His Majesty's ship _Squirrel_
happened at the time to be lying in Longreach, and her commander,
Capt. Brawn, one day received intelligence that a number of sailors
were to be met with in the town of Barking. He at once dispatched his
1st and 2nd lieutenants with a contingent of twenty-five men and
several petty officers, to rout them out and take them. They reached
Barking about nine o'clock in the evening, the month being July, and
were not long in securing several of the skulkers, who with many of
the male inhabitants of the place were at that hour congregated in
public-houses, unsuspicuous of danger. The sudden appearance in their
midst of so large an armed force, however, coupled with the outcry and
confusion inseparable from the pressing of a number of men, alarmed
the townsfolk, who poured into the streets, rescued the pressed men,
and would have inflicted summary punishment upon the intruders had not
the senior officer, seeing his party hopelessly outnumbered, tactfully
drawn off his force. This he did in good order and without serious
hurt; but just as he and his men were congratulating themselves upon
their escape, they were suddenly ambushed, at a point where their road
ran between high banks, by a "large concourse of Irish haymakers, to
the number of at least five hundred men, all armed with sabres
 Attacks on the gang, made with deliberate intent to rescue pressed men from its custody, were by no means confined to Barking. The informer throve in the land, but notwithstanding his hostile activity the sailor everywhere had friends who possessed at least one cardinal virtue. They seldom hung back when he was in danger, or hesitated to strike a blow in his defence.

There came into Limehouse Hole, on a certain day in the summer of 1709, a vessel called the _Martin_ galley. How many men were in her we do not learn; but whatever their number, there was amongst them one man who had either a special dread of the press or some more than usually urgent occasion for wishing to avoid it. Watching his opportunity, he slipped into one of the galley's boats, sculled her rapidly to land, and there leapt out--just as a press-gang hove in sight ahead! It was a dramatic moment. The sailor, tacking at sight of the enemy, ran swiftly along the river-bank, but was almost immediately overtaken, knocked down, and thrown into the press-boat, which lay near by. "This gather'd a Mob," says the narrator of the incident, "who Pelted the Boat and Gang by throwing Stones and Dirt from the Shoar, and being Pursued also by the Galley's men, who brought Cutlasses in the Boat with them to rescue their Prest Man, the
Gang was at last forc’d to betake themselves to a Corn-lighter, where they might stand upon their Defence. The Galley’s men could not get aboard, but lay with their Boat along the side of the Lighter, where they endeavouring to force in, and the Gang to keep them out, the Boat of a sudden oversett and some of the Men therein were Drown’d. Three of the Press-Gang were forc’d likewise into the Water, whereof ’tis said one is Drown’d and the other two in Irons in the New Prison. The remaining part of the Gang leapt into a Wherry, the Galley’s men pursuing them, but, not gaining upon them, they gave over the Pursuit.” The pressed man all this while was laughing in his sleeve.

“He lay on the other side of the Lighter, in the Tender’s boat, whence he made his escape.” [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1437 --Capt. Aston, 10 Aug. 1709.]

In their efforts to restore the freedom of the pressed man, the sailor’s friends did not confine their attention exclusively to the gang. When they turned out in vindication of those rights which the sailor did not possess, they not infrequently found their diversion in wrecking the gang’s headquarters or in making a determined, though generally futile, onslaught upon the tender. Respectable people, who had no particular reason to favour the sailor’s cause, viewed these ebullitions of mingled rage and mischief with dismay, stigmatising those who so lightheartedly participated in them as the "lower classes" and the "mob."

Few towns in the kingdom boasted--or reprobated, as the case might be--a more erratically festive mob than Leith. As far back as 1709
Bailie Cockburn had advised the inhabitants of that burgh to "oppose any impressor," and seizing the occasion of the "Impressure of an Apprentice Boy," had set them an example by arresting the pinnace of Her Majesty's ship _Rye_, together with her whole crew, thirteen in number, and keeping them in close confinement till the lad was given up. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2448--Capt. Shale, 4 Jan. 1708-9.] The worthy Bailie was in due time gathered unto his fathers, and with the growth of the century gangs came and went in endless succession, but neither the precept nor the example was ever forgotten in Leith. Much pressing was done there, but it was done almost entirely upon the water. To transfer the scene of action to the strand meant certain tumult, for there the whim of the mob was law. Now it pulled the gang-officer's house about his ears because he dared to press a shipwright; again, it stoned the gang viciously because they rescued some seamen from a wreck--and kept them. Between whiles it amused itself by cutting down the rendezvous flag-staff; and if nothing better offered, it split up into component parts, each of which became a greater terror than the whole. One night, when the watch had been set and all was quiet, a party of this description, only three in number, approached the rendezvous and respectfully requested leave to drink a last dram with some newly pressed men who were then in the cage, their quondam shipmates. Suspecting no ulterior design, the guard incautiously admitted them, whereupon they dashed a quantity of spirits on the fire, set the place in a blaze, and carried off the pressed men amid the hullabaloo that followed. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1516-9--Letters of Capt. Brenton, 1797-8; Lieut. Pierie, 2 Feb. 1798.]
If Leith did this sort of thing well, Greenock, her commercial rival on the Clyde, did it very much better; for where the Leith mob was but a sporadic thing, erupting from its slummy fastnesses only in response to rumour of chance amusement to be had or mischief to be done, Greenock held her mob always in hand, a perpetual menace to the gangsman did he dare to disregard the Clydeside ordinance in respect to pressing. That ordinance restricted pressing exclusively to the water; but it went further, for it laid it down as an inviolable rule that members of certain trades should not be pressed at all.

It was with the Trades that the ordinance originated. There was little or no Greenock apart from the Trades. The will of the Trades was supreme. The coopers, carpenters, riggers, caulkers and seamen of the town ruled the burgh. Assembled in public meeting, they resolved unanimously "to stand by and support each other" in the event of a press; and having come to this decision they indited a trite letter to the magistrates, intimating in unequivocal terms that "if they countenanced the press, they must abide by the consequences," for once the Trades took the matter in hand "they could not say where they would stop." With the worthy burgesses laying down the law in this fashion, it is little wonder that the gangs "seldom dared to press ashore," or that they should have been able to take "only two coopers in ten months."

For the Trades were as good as their word. The moment a case of prohibited pressing became known they took action. Alexander Weir,
member of the Shipwrights' Society, was taken whilst returning from his "lawful employ," and immediately his mates, to the number of between three and four hundred, downed tools and marched to the rendezvous, where they peremptorily demanded his release. Have him they would, and if the gang-officer did not see fit to comply with their demand, not only should he never press another man in Greenock, but they would seize one of the armed vessels in the river, lay her alongside the tender, where Weir was confined, and take him out of her by force. Brenton was regulating captain there at the time, and to pacify the mob he promised to release the man--and broke his word. Thereupon the people "became very riotous and proceeded to burn everything that came in their way. About twelve o'clock they hauled one of the boats belonging to the rendezvous upon the Square and put her into the fire, but by the timely assistance of the officers and gangs, supported by the magistrates and a body of the Fencibles, the boat was recovered, though much damaged, and several of the ringleaders taken up and sent to prison." The affair did not end without bloodshed. "Lieut. Harrison, in defending himself, was under the necessity of running one of the rioters through the ribs."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1508--Letters of Capt. Brenton, 1793.]

Though Bailie Cockburn once "arrested" the pinnace of a man-o'-war at Leith, the attempted burning of the Greenock press-boat is worthy of more than passing note as the only instance of that form of retaliation to be met with in the history of home pressing. In the American colonies, on the other hand, it was a common feature of
demonstrations against the gang. Boston was specially notorious for that form of reprisal, and Governor Shirley, in one of his masterly dispatches, narrates at length, and with no little humour, how the mob press-boat, only to discover, when it was reduced to ashes, that it belonged to one of their own ringleaders. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 3818--Shirley to the Admiralty, 1 Dec. 1747.]

The threat of the Greenock artificers to lay alongside the tender and take out their man by force of arms was one for which there existed abundant, if by no means encouraging precedent. Long before, as early, indeed, as 1742, the keelmen frequenting Sunderland had set them an example in that respect by endeavouring, some hundreds strong, to haul the tender ashore--an attempt coupled with threats so dire that the officer in command trembled in his shoes lest he and his men should all "be made sacrifices of." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. Allen, 13 March 1741-2.] Nothing so dreadful happened, however, for the attempt, like that made at Shoreham a few years later, when there "appear'd in Sight, from towards Brighthelmstone, about two or three Hundred Men arm'd with different Weapons, who came with an Intent to Attack the _Dispatch_ sloop," failed ignominiously, the attackers being routed on both occasions by a timely use of swivel guns and musketry. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1482--Lieut. Barnsley, 25 March 1746.]

Similar disaster overtook the organisers of the Tooley Street affair, of which one Taylor, lieutenant to Capt. William Boys of the _Royal
Sovereign, was the active cause. At the "Spread-Eagle" in Tooley Street he and his gang one evening pressed a privateersman--an insult keenly resented by the master of the ship. He accordingly sent off to the tender, whither the pressed man had been conveyed for security's sake, two wherries filled with armed seamen of the most piratical type. The fierce fight that ensued had a dramatic finish. "Two Pistols we took from them," says the narrator of the incident, in his quaint old style, "and three Cutlasses, and Six Men; but one of the Men took the Red Hott Poker out of the Fire, and our Men, having the Cutlasses, Cutt him and Kill'd him in Defence of themselves." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1488--Lieut. Taylor, 1 April 1757.]

In attacks of this nature the fact that the tender was afloat told heavily in her favour, for unless temporarily hung up upon a mud-bank by the fall of the tide, she could only be got at by means of boats. With the rendezvous ashore the case was altogether different. Here you had a building in a public street, flaunting its purpose provocatively in your very face, and having a rear to guard as well as a front. For these reasons attacks on the rendezvous were generally attended with a greater measure of success than similar attempts directed against the tenders. The face of a pressed man had only to show itself at one of the stoutly barred windows, and immediately a crowd gathered. To the prisoner behind the bars this crowd was friendly, commiserating or chaffing him by turns; but to the gangsmen responsible for his being there it was invariably and uncompromisingly hostile, so much so that it needed only a carelessly uttered threat, or a thoughtlessly lifted hand, to fan the smouldering fires of hatred into a blaze. When this
occurred, as it often did, things happened. Paving-stones hurtled
through the curse-laden air, the windows flew in fragments, the door,
assailed by overwhelming numbers, crashed in, and despite the stoutest
resistance the gang could offer the pressed man was hustled out and
carried off in triumph.

The year 1755 witnessed a remarkable attack of this description upon
the rendezvous at Deal, where a band of twenty-seven armed men made a
sudden descent upon that obnoxious centre of activity and cut up the
gang most grievously. As all wore masks and had their faces blackened,
identification was out of the question. A reward of 200 Pounds,
offered for proof of complicity in the outrage, elicited no
information, and as a matter of fact its perpetrators were never
discovered.

In Capt. McCleverty's time the gang at Waterford was once very roughly
handled whilst taking in a pressed man, and Mr. Mayor Alcock came
hurrying down to learn what was amiss. He found the rendezvous beset
by an angry and dangerous gathering. "Sir," said he to the captain,
"have you no powder or shot in the house?" McCleverty assured him that
he had. "Then, sir," cried the mayor, raising his voice so that all
might hear, "do you make use of it, and I will support you." The crowd
understood that argument and immediately dispersed. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1500--Deposition of Lieut. M Kellop,
1780.]
Had the Admiralty reasoned in similar terms with those who beat its
gangsmen, converted its rendezvous into match-wood and carried off its
pressed men, it would have quickly made itself as heartily feared as
it was already hated; but in seeking to shore up an odious cause by
pacific methods it laid its motives open to the gravest
misconstruction. Prudence was construed into timidity, and with every
abstention from lead the sailor's mobbish friends grew more daring and
outrageous.

One night in the winter of 1780, whilst Capt. Worth of the Liverpool
rendezvous sat lamenting the temporary dearth of seamen, Lieut.
Haygarth came rushing in with a rare piece of news. On the road from
Lancaster, it was reported, there was a whole coach-load of sailors.
The chance was too good to be lost, and instant steps were taken to
intercept the travellers. The gangs turned out, fully armed, and took
up their position at a strategic point, just outside the town,
commanding the road by which the sailors had to pass. By and by along
came the coach, the horses weary, the occupants nodding or asleep. In
a trice they were surrounded. Some of the gangsmen sprang at the
horses' heads, others threw themselves upon the drowsy passengers.
Shouts, curses and the thud of blows broke the silence of the night.
Then the coach rumbled on again, empty. Its late occupants, fifteen in
number, sulkily followed on foot, surrounded by their captors, who, as
soon as the town was reached, locked them into the press-room for the
rest of the night, it being the captain's intention to put them on
board the tender in the Mersey at break of day.
In this, however, he was frustrated by a remarkable development in the situation. Unknown to him, the coach-load of seamen had been designed for the _Stag_ privateer, a vessel just on the point of sailing.

News of their capture reaching the ship soon after their arrival in the town, Spence, her 1st lieutenant, at once roused out all his available men, armed them, to the number of eighty, with cutlass and pistol, and led them ashore. There all was quiet, favouring their design. The hour was still early, and the silent, swift march through the deserted streets attracted no attention and excited no alarm. At the rendezvous the opposition of the weary sentinels counted for little. It was quickly brushed aside, the strong-room door gave way beneath a few well-directed blows, and by the time Liverpool went to breakfast the _Stag_ privateer was standing out to sea, her crew not only complete, but ably supplemented by eight additional occupants of the press-room who had never, so far as is known, travelled in that commodious vehicle, the Lancaster coach. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7, 300--Law Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 19.]

The neighbouring city of Chester in 1803 matched this exploit by another of great audacity. Chester had long been noted for its hostility to the gang, and the fact that the local volunteer corps--the Royal Chester Artillery--was composed mainly of ropemakers, riggers, shipwrights and sailmakers who had enlisted for the sole purpose of evading the press, did not tend to allay existing friction.

Hence, when Capt. Birchall brought over a gang from Liverpool because he could not form one in Chester itself, and when he further signalised his arrival by pressing Daniel Jackson, a well-known
volunteer, matters at once came to an ugly head. The day happened to be a field-day, and as Birchall crossed the market square to wait upon the magistrates at the City Hall, he was "given to understand what might be expected in the evening," for one of the artillerymen, striking his piece, called out to his fellows: "Now for a running ball! There he goes!" with hissing, booing and execrations. At seven o'clock one of the gang rushed into the captain's lodgings with disquieting news. The volunteers were attacking the rendezvous. He hurried out, but by the time he arrived on the scene the mischief was already done. The enraged volunteers, after first driving the gang into the City Hall, had torn down the rendezvous colours and staff, and broken open the city jail and rescued their comrade, whom they were then in the act of carrying shoulder-high through the streets, the centre of a howling mob that even the magistrates feared to face. By request Birchall and his gang returned to Liverpool, counting themselves lucky to have escaped the "running ball" they had been threatened with earlier in the day. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1529--Capt. Birchall, 29 Dec. 1803.]

Another town that gave the gang a hot reception was Whitby. As in the case of Chester the gang there was an importation, having been brought in from Tyneside by Lieuts. Atkinson and Oakes. As at Chester, too, a place of rendezvous had been procured with difficulty, for at first no landlord could be found courageous enough to let a house for so dangerous a purpose. At length, however, one Cooper was prevailed upon to take the risk, and the flag was hung out. This would seem to have been the only provocative act of which the gang was guilty. It
sufficed. Anticipation did the rest; for just as in some individuals
gratitude consists in a lively sense of favours to come, so the
resentment of mobs sometimes avenges a wrong before it has been
inflicted.

On Saturday the 23rd of February 1793, at the hour of half-past seven
in the evening, a mob of a thousand persons, of whom many were women,
suddenly appeared before the rendezvous. The first intimation of what
was about to happen came in the shape of a furious volley of brickbats
and stones, which instantly demolished every window in the house, to
the utter consternation of its inmates. Worse, however, was in store
for them. An attempt to rush the place was temporarily frustrated by
the determined opposition of the gang, who, fearing that all in the
house would be murdered, succeeded in holding the mob at bay for an
hour and a half; but at nine o'clock, several of the gangsmen having
been in the meantime struck down and incapacitated by stones, which
were rained upon the devoted building without cessation, the door at
length gave way before an onslaught with capstan-bars, and the mob
swarmed in unchecked. A scene of indescribable confusion and fury
ensued. Savagely assaulted and mercilessly beaten, the gangsmen and
the unfortunate landlord were thrown into the street more dead than
alive, every article of furniture on the premises was reduced to
fragments, and when the mob at length drew off, hoarsely jubilant over
the destruction it had wrought, nothing remained of His Majesty's
rendezvous save bare walls and gaping windows. Even these were more
than the townsfolk could endure the sight of. Next evening they
reappeared upon the scene, intending to finish what they had begun by
pulling the house down or burning it to ashes; but the timely arrival of troops frustrating their design, they regretfully dispersed.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2739--Lieut. Atkinson, 26 Feb. and 27 June 1793.]

Out at sea the sailor, if he could not set the tune by running away from the gang, played up to it with great heartiness. To sink the press-boat was his first aim. With this end in view he held stolidly on his course, if under weigh, betraying his intention by no sign till the boat, manoeuvring to get alongside of him, was in the right position for him to strike. Then, all of a sudden, he showed his hand. Clapping his helm hard over, he dexterously ran the boat down, leaving the struggling gangsmen to make what shift they could for their lives. Many a knight of the hanger was sent to Davy Jones in this summary fashion, unloved in life and cursed in the article of death.

The attempt to best the gang by a master-stroke of this description was not, it need hardly be said, attended with uniform success. A miss of an inch or two, and the boat was safe astern, pulling like mad to recover lost ground. In these circumstances the sailor recalled how he had once seen a block fall from aloft and smash a shipmate's head, and from this he argued that if a suitable object such as a heavy round-shot, or, better still, the ship's grindstone, were deftly dropped over the side at the psychological moment, it must either have a somewhat similar effect upon the gangsmen below or sink the boat by knocking a hole in her bottom. The case of the _John and Elizabeth_ of Sunderland, that redoubtable Holland pink whose
people were "resolved sooner to dye than to be impressed," affords an admirable example of the successful application of this theory.

As the _John and Elizabeth_ was running into Sunderland harbour one afternoon in February 1742, three press-boats, hidden under cover of the pier-head, suddenly darted out as she surged past that point and attempted to board her. They met with a remarkable repulse. For ten minutes, according to the official account of the affair, the air was filled with grindstones, four-pound shot, iron crows, handspikes, capstan-bars, boat-hooks, billets of wood and imprecations, and when it cleared there was not in any of the boats a man who did not bear upon his person some bloody trace of that terrible fusillade. They sheered off, but in the excitement of the moment and the mortification of defeat Midshipmen Clapp and Danton drew their pistols and fired into the jeering crew ranged along the vessel's gunwhale, "not knowing," as they afterwards pleaded, "that there was any balls in the pistols." Evidence to the contrary was quickly forthcoming. A man fell dead on the pink's deck, and before morning the two middies were safe under lock and key in that "dismal hole," Durham jail. It was a notable victory for the sailor and applied mechanics. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. Allen, 13 March 1741-2, and enclosure.]

The affair of the _King William_ Indiaman, a ship whose people kept the united boats'-crews of two men-of-war at bay for nearly twenty-four hours, carried the sailor's resistance to the press an appreciable step further and developed some surprising tactics.
Between three and four o'clock in the afternoon of a day in September 1742, two ships came into the Downs in close order. They had been expected earlier in the day, and both the _Shrewsbury_ frigate and the _Shark_ sloop were on the lookout for them. A shot from the former brought the headmost to an anchor, but the second, the _King William_, hauled her wind and stood away close to the Goodwins, out of range of the frigate's guns. Here, the tide being spent and the wind veering ahead, she was obliged to anchor, and the warships' boats were at once manned and dispatched to press her men. Against this eventuality the latter appear to have been primed “with Dutch courage,” as the saying went, the manner of which was to broach a cask of rum and drink your fill. On the approach of the press-boats pandemonium broke loose. The maddened crew, brandishing their cutlasses and shouting defiance, assailed the on-coming boats with every description of missile they could lay hands on, not excepting that most dangerous of all casual ammunition, broken bottles. The _Shrewsbury's_ mate fell, seriously wounded, and finding themselves unable to face the terrible hail of missiles, the boats drew off. Night now came on, rendering further attempts temporarily impossible—a respite of which the Indiaman's crew availed themselves to confine the master and break open the arms-chest, which he had taken the precaution to nail down. With morning the boats returned to the attack. Three times they attempted to board, and as often were they repulsed by pistol and musketry fire. Upon this the _Shark_, acting under peremptory orders from the _Shrewsbury_, ran down to within half-gunshot of the Indiaman and fired a broadside into her, immediately afterwards repeating the dose on finding her still defiant. The ship then submitted and all her men were pressed save
two. They had been killed by the _Shark's_ gun-fire. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1829--Capt. Goddard, 22 Sept. and 16 Oct., and his Deposition, 19 Oct. 1742.]

With the appearance of the gang on the deck of his ship there was ushered in the last stage but one of the sailor's resistance to the press afloat. How, when this happened, all hands were mustered and the protected sheep separated from the unprotected goats, has been fully described in a previous chapter. These preliminaries at an end, "Now, my lads," said the gang officer, addressing the pressable contingent in the terms of his instructions, "I must tell you that you are at liberty, if you so choose, to enter His Majesty's service as volunteers. If you come in in that way, you will each receive the bounty now being paid, together with two months' advance wages before you go to sea. But if you don't choose to enter voluntarily, then I must take you against your wills"

It was a hard saying, and many an old shellback--ay! and young one too--spat viciously when he heard it. Conceive the situation! Here were these poor fellows returning from a voyage which perhaps had cut them off from home and kindred, from all the ordinary comforts and pleasures of life, for months or maybe years; here were they, with the familiar cliffs and downs under their hungry eyes, suddenly confronted with an alternative of the cruellest description, a Hobson's choice that left them no option but to submit or fight. It was a heartbreaking predicament for men, and more especially for sailor-men, to be placed in, and if they sometimes rose to the occasion like men
and did their best to heave the gang bodily into the sea, or to drive
them out of the ship with such weapons as their hard situation and the
sailor’s Providence threw in their way—if they did these things in
the gang’s despite, they must surely be judged as outraged husbands,
fathers and lovers rather than as disloyal subjects of an exacting
king. They would have made but sorry man-o’-war’s-men had they
entertained the gang in any other way.

Opposed to the service cutlass, the sailor’s emergency weapon was but
a poor tool to stake his liberty upon, and even though the numerical
odds chanced to be in his favour he often learnt, in the course of his
pitched battles with the gang, that the edge of a hanger is sharper
than the corresponding part of a handspike. Lucky for him if, with his
shipmates, he could then retreat to close quarters below or between
decks, there to make a final stand for his brief spell of liberty
ashore. This was his last ditch. Beyond it lay only surrender or
death.

The death of the sailor at the hands of the gang introduces us to a
phase of pressing technically known as the accidental, wherein the
accidents were of three kinds—casual, unavoidable, and
"disagreeable."

The casual accident was one that could be neither foreseen nor
averted, as when Capt. Argles, returning to England on the breaking up
of the Limerick rendezvous in 1814, was captured by an American
privateer "well up the Bristol Channel," a place where no one ever
dreamed of falling in with such an enemy. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1455--Capt. Argles, 17 Aug. 1814.]

To the unavoidable accident every impress officer and agent was liable
in the execution of his duty. It could thus be foreseen in the
abstract, though not in the instance. Hence it could not be avoided.
Wounds given and received in the heat and turmoil of pressing came
under this head, provided they did not prove fatal.

The accident "disagreeable" was peculiar to pressing. It consisted in
the killing of a man, by whatever means and in whatever manner, whilst
endeavouring to press him, and the immediate effect of the act, which
was common enough, was to set up a remarkable contradiction in terms.
The man killed was not the victim of the accident. The victim was the
officer or gangsman who was responsible for striking him off the roll
of His Majesty's pressable subjects, and who thus let himself in for
the consequences, more or less disagreeable, which inevitably
followed.

While it was naturally the ambition of every officer engaged in
pressing "to do the business without any disagreeable accident
ensuing," he preferred, did fate ordain it otherwise, that the
accident should happen at sea rather than on land, since it was on
land that the most disagreeable consequences accrued to the
unfortunate victim. These embraced flight and prolonged expatriation,
or, in the alternative, arrest, preliminary detention in one of His Majesty's prisons, and subsequent trial at the Assizes. What the ultimate punishment might be was a minor, though still ponderable consideration, since, where naval officers or agents were concerned, the law was singularly capricious. [Footnote: As in Lacie's case, 25 Elizabeth, where a mortal wound having been inflicted at sea, whereof the party died on land, the prisoner was acquitted because neither the Admiralty nor a jury could inquire of it.] At sea, on the other hand, the conditions which on land rendered accidents of this nature so uniformly disagreeable, were almost entirely reversed. How and why this was so can be best explained by stating a case.

The accident in point occurred in the year 1755, and is associated with the illustrious name of Rodney. The Seven Years War was at the time looming in the near future, and England's secret complicity in the causes of that tremendous struggle rendered necessary the placing of her Navy upon a footing adequate to the demands which it was foreseen would be very shortly made upon it. In common with a hundred other naval officers, Rodney, who was then in command of the _Prince George_ guardship at Portsmouth, had orders to proceed without loss of time to the raising of men. One of his lieutenants was accordingly sent to London, that happy hunting-ground of the impress officer, while two others, with picked crews at their backs, were put in charge of tenders to intercept homeward-bounds. This was near the end of May.

[Illustration: ANNE MILLS. Who served on board the _Maidstone_ in 1740.]
On the 1st of June, in the early morning, one of these tenders—the _Princess Augusta_, Lieut. Sax commander—fell in, off Portland Bill, with the _Britannia_, a Leghorn trader of considerable force. In response to a shot fired as an intimation that she was expected to lay-to and receive a gang on board, the master, hailing, desired permission to retain his crew intact till he should have passed that dangerous piece of navigation known as the Race. To this reasonable request Sax acceded and the ship held on her course, closely followed by the tender. By the time the Race was passed, however, the merchant-man's crew had come to a resolution. They should not be pressed by "such a pimping vessel" as the _Princess Augusta_. Accordingly, they first deprived the master of the command, and then, when again hailed by the tender, "swore they would lose their lives sooner than bring too." The Channel at this time swarmed with tenders, and to Sax's hint that they might just as well give in then and there as be pressed later on, they replied with defiant huzzas and the discharge of one of their maindeck guns. The tender was immediately laid alongside, but on the gang's attempting to board they encountered a resistance so fierce that Sax, thinking to bring the infuriated crew to their senses, ordered his people to fire upon them. Ralph Sturdy and John Debusk, armed with harpoons, and John Wilson, who had requisitioned the cook's spit as a weapon, fell dead before that volley. The rest, submitting without further ado, were at once confined below.

Now, three questions of moment are raised by this accident: What
became of the ship? what was done with the dead men? and what
punishment was meted out to the lieutenant and his gang? The crew once
secured under hatches, the safety of the ship became of course the
first consideration. It was assured by a simple expedient. The gang
remained on board and worked the vessel into Portsmouth harbour,
where, after her hands had been taken out--Rodney the receiver--"men
in lieu" were put on board, as explained in our chapter on pressing
afloat, and with this make-shift crew she was navigated to her
destination, in this instance the port of London.

As persons killed at sea, the three sailors who lay dead on the ship's
deck did not come within the jurisdiction of the coroner. That
official's cognisance of such matters extended only to high-water mark
when the tide was at flood, or to low-water mark when it was at ebb.
Beyond those limits, seawards, all acts of violence done in great
ships, and resulting in mayhem or the death of a man, fell within the
sole purview and jurisdiction of the Station Admiral, who on this
occasion happened to be Sir Edward Hawke, commander of the White
Squadron at Portsmouth. Now Sir Edward was not less keenly alive to
the importance of keeping such cases hidden from the public eye than
were the Lords Commissioners. Hence he immediately gave orders that
the bodies of the dead men should be taken "without St. Helens" and
there committed to the deep. Instead of going to feed the Navy, the
three sailors thus went to feed the fishes, and another stain on the
service was washed out with a commendable absence of publicity and
fuss.
There still remained the lieutenant and his gang to be dealt with and  
brought to what, by another singular perversion of terms, was called  
justice. On shore, notwithstanding the lenient view taken of such  
accidents, an indictment of manslaughter, if not of murder, would have  
assuredly followed the offence; and though in the circumstances it is  
doubtful whether any jury would have found the culprits guilty of the  
capital crime, yet the alternative verdict, with its consequent  
imprisonment and disgrace, held out anything but a rosy prospect to  
the young officer who had still his second "swab" to win. That was  
where the advantage of accidents at sea came in. On shore the  
judiciary, however kindly disposed to the naval service, were  
painfully disinterested. At sea the scales of justice were held, none  
too meticulously, by brother officers who had the service at heart.  
Under the judicious direction of Admiral Osborn, who in the meantime  
had succeeded Sir Edward Hawke in the Portsmouth command, Lieut. Sax  
and his gang were consequently called upon to face no ordeal more  
terrible than an "inquiry into their proceedings and behaviour."

Needless to say, they were unanimously exonerated, the court holding  
that the discharge of their duty fully justified them in the discharge  
of their muskets. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5925--Minutes  
at a Court-Martial held on board H.M.S. _Prince George_ at  
Portsmouth, 14 Nov. 1755. Precedent for the procedure in this case is  
found in _Admiralty Records_ 7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions,  
1733-56, No. 27.] When such disagreeable accidents had to be  
investigated, the disagreeable business was done--to purloin an apt  
phrase of Coke's--"without prying into them with eagles' eyes."
But it is time to leave the trail of blood and turn to a more agreeable phase of pressing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GANG AT PLAY.

The reasons assigned for the pressing of men who ought never to have made the acquaintance of the warrant or the hanger were often as far-fetched as they are amusing. "You have no right to press a person of my distinction!" warmly protested an individual of the superior type when pounced upon by the gang. "Lor love yer! that's the wery reason we're a-pressin' of your worship," replied the grinning minions of the service. "We've such a set of black-guards aboard the tender yonder, we wants a toff like you to learn 'em manners."

The quixotic idea of inculcating manners by means of the press infected others besides the gangsman. In a Navy whose officers not only plumed themselves on representing the __ne plus ultra__ of etiquette, but demanded that all who approached them should do so without sin either of omission or commission, the idea was universal. Pride of service and pride of self entered into its composition in about equal proportions; hence the sailing-master who neglected to salute the flag, or who through ignorance, crass stupidity, or malice aforethought flew prohibited colours, was no more liable to be taught
an exemplary lesson than the bum-boatman who sauced the officer of the watch when detected in the act of smuggling spirits or women into one of His Majesty's ships.

For all such offenders the autocracy of the quarter-deck, from the rigid commander down to the very young gentleman newly joined, kept a jealous lookout, and many are the instances of punishment, swift and implacable, following the offence. Insulted dignity could of course take it out of the disrespectful fore-mastman with the rattan, the cat or the irons; but for the ill-mannered outsider, whether pertaining to sea or land, the recognised corrective was His Majesty's press. A solitary exception is found in the case of Henry Crabb of Chatham, a boatman who rejoiced in incurable lameness; rejoiced because, although there were many cripples on board the Queen's ships in his day, his infirmity was such as to leave him at liberty to ply for hire "when other men durst not for feare of being Imprest." He was an impudent, over-reaching knave, and Capt. Balchen, of the _Adventure_ man-o'-war, whose wife had suffered much from the fellow's abusive tongue and extortionate propensities, finding himself unable to press him, brought him to the capstan and there gave him "eleven lashes with a Catt of Nine Tailes." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1466--Capt. Balchen, 10 March 1703-4.]

A letter written in the early forties—a letter as breezy as the sea from which it was penned—gives us a striking picture of the old-time naval officer as a teacher of deportment. Cruising far down-Channel, Capt. Brett, of the _Anglesea_ man-o'-war, there fell in with a
ship whose character puzzled him sorely. He consequently gave chase, but the wind falling light and night coming on, he lost her. Early next morning, as luck would have it, he picked her up again, and having now a "pretty breeze," he succeeded in drawing within range of her about two o'clock in the afternoon, when he fired a shot to bring her to. The strange sail doubtless feared that she was about to lose her hands, for instead of obeying the summons she trained her stern-chasers on the _Anglesea_ and for an hour and a half blazed away at her as fast as she could load. "They put a large marlinespike into one of their guns," the indignant captain tells us, "which struck the carriage of the chase gun upon our forecastle, dented it near two inches, then broke asunder and wounded one of the men in the leg, and had it come a yard higher, must infallibly have killed two or three. By all this behaviour I concluded she must be an English vessel taken by the Spaniards. However, when we came within a cable's length of him he brought to, so we run close under his stern in order to shoot a little berth to leeward of him, and at the same time bid them hoist their boats out. Our people, as is customary upon such occasions, were then all up upon the gunhill and in the shrouds, looking at him. Just as we came under his quarter he pointed a gun that was sticking out a little abaft his main-shrouds right at us, and put the match to it, but it happened very luckily that the gun blew. A fellow that was standing on the quarter-deck then took up a blunderbuss and presented it, which by its not going off must have missed fire. As it was almost impossible, they being stripp'd and bareheaded, besides having their faces besmeared with powder, for us to judge them by their looks, I concluded they must be a Parcell of Light-headed Frenchmen run mad, and thinking it by no means prudent to let them kill my men in such a
ridiculous manner, I ordered the marines, who were standing upon the quarter-deck with their musquets shoulder’d, to fire upon them. As soon as they saw the musquets presented they fell flat upon the decks and by that means saved themselves from being kill’d. Some of our people at the same time fired a 9-pounder right into his quarter, upon which they immediately submitted. I own I never was more surprised in all my life to find that she was an English vessel, tho’ my surprise was lessened a good deal when I came to see the master and all his fighting men so drunk as to be scarce capable of giving a rational answer to any question that was asked them. I was very glad to find that none of them were hurt; but I found out the man who presented the blunderbuss, and upon his behaving saucily when I taxed him with it, I took him out of the vessel._" [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1479--Capt. Brett, 17 April 1743. The captain's use of gender is philologically instructive. Not till later times, it seems, did ships lose the character of a "strong man armed" and take on, uniformly, the attributes of the skittish female.]

[ Illustration: SAILORS CAROUSING. From the mezzotint after J. Ibbetson.]

So abhorrent a condiment was "sauce" to the naval palate, whether of officer or impress agent, that its use invariably brought its own punishment with it. "You are no gentleman!" said Gangsman Dibell to one Hartnell, a currier who accidentally jostled him whilst he was drinking in a Poole taproom. "No, nor you neither!" replied Hartnell. The retort cost him a most disagreeable experience. Dibell and his comrades collared him and dragged him off to the rendezvous, where he
was locked up in the black-hole till the next day. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Inquiry into the Conduct of the Impress Officers at Poole, 13 Aug. 1804.]

At Waterford Capt. Price went one better than this, for a man who was totally unfit for the service having one day shown him some trifling disrespect, the choleric old martinet promptly set the gang upon him and had him conveyed on board the tender, "where," says Lieut. Collingwood, writing a month later, "he has been eating the king's victuals ever since." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1501--Lieut. Collingwood, 18 March 1781.] Punishment enough, surely!

One night at Londonderry, as Lieut. Watson was making his way down to the quay for the purpose of boarding the _Hope_ tender, of which he was commander, he accidentally ran against a couple of strangers.

"Hallo! my lads," cried he, "who and what are you?"

"I am what I am," replied one of them, insolently.

The lieutenant, who had been dining, fired up at this and demanded to know if language such as that was proper to be addressed to a king's officer.

"As you please," said he of the insolent tongue. "If you like it
better, I'll say I'm a piece of a man."

"So I see by your want of manners," retorted the lieutenant. "Come along with me, my brave piece! I know those who will make a whole man of you before they're done."

With that he seized the fellow, meaning to take him to his boat, which lay near by, but the pressed man, watching his chance, tripped him up and made off. Next day there was a sequel. The lieutenant "was taken possession of by the Civil Power" on a charge of assault. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1531--Lieut. Watson, 27 Oct. 1804.]

Another officer who met with base ingratitude from a pressed man whose manners he attempted to reform was Capt. Bethel of the _Phoenix_. At the Nore he was once grossly abused by the crew of a Customs-House boat, and in retaliation took one of their number and carried him to sea. Peremptory orders reaching him at one of the Scottish ports, however, he discharged the man and paid his passage south. He was immediately sued for false imprisonment and cast in heavy damages. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1493--Capt. Bethel, 29 Aug. 1762.]

Capt. Brereton, of the _Falmouth_, was "had" in similar fashion by the master of an East-Indiaman whom he pressed at Manilla because of his insolence, and who afterwards, by a successful suit at law, let him in for 400 Pounds damages and costs. [Footnote: _Admiralty
This was turning the tables of etiquette on its professors with a vengeance.

Such costly lessons in the art of politeness, however, did not in the least abash the naval officer or deter him from the continued inculcation of manners. Young fellows idly roystering on the river could not be permitted to miscall with impunity the gorgeous admiral passing in his twelve-oared barge, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 577--Admiral the Marquis of Carmarthen, 24 June 1710.] nor irate shipmasters who flouted the impress service of the Crown as a "pitiful" thing and its officers as "little scandalous creatures," be allowed to go scot-free. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2379--Capt. Robinson, 21 Feb. 1725-6.] At whatever cost, the dignity of the service must be maintained.

Nowhere did the use of invective attain such extraordinary perfection as amongst those who plied their vocations on the country's busy waterways. Here "sauce" was reduced to a science and vituperation to a fine art. Thames watermen and Tyne keelmen in particular acquired an astounding proficiency in the choice and application of abusive epithets, but of the two the keelman carried off the palm. The wherryman, it is true, possessed a ripe vocabulary, but the fact that it embraced only a single dialect seriously handicapped him in his race with the keelman, who had no less than three to draw upon, all
equally prolific. Between "keelish," "coblish" and "sheelish," the
respective dialects of the north-country keelman, pilot and tradesman,
he had at his command a source of supply unrivalled in vituperative
richness, abundance and variety. With these at his tongue's end none
could touch, much less outdo him in power and scope of abusive
description. He became in consequence of these superior advantages so
"insupportably impudent" that the only known cure for his complaint
was to follow the prescription of Capt. Atkins of the _Panther_,
and "take him as fast as you could ketch him"; [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1438--Capt. Atkins, 23 Dec. 1720.] but even this
drastic method of curbing his tongue was robbed of much of its
efficacy by the jealous care with which he was "protected."

Failure to amain, that is, to douse your topsail or dip your colours
when you meet with a ship of war--the marine equivalent for raising
one's hat--constituted a gross contempt of the king's service. The
custom was very ancient, King John having instituted it in the second
year of his reign. At that time, and indeed for long after, the salute
was obligatory, its omission entailing heavy penalties; [Footnote: A
copy of the original proclamation may be seen in Lansdowne MSS.,
clxxi, f. 218, where it is also summarised in the following terms:
"Anno 2 regni Johannis regis: Frends not amaining at the j sumons
but resisting the King his lieutenant, the L. Admirall or his
lieutenant, to lose the ship and goods, & theire bodies to be
imprisoned." ] but with the advent of the century of pressing
another means of inspiring respect for the flag, now exacted as a
courtesy rather than a right, came into vogue. The offending vessel
paid for its omission in men.

If you were anything but a king's ship, and flew a flag that only king's ships were entitled to fly, you were guilty, in the eyes of every right-seeing naval officer, of another piece of ill manners so gross as to be deserving of the severest punishment the press was capable of inflicting upon you. You might fly the "flag and Jack white, with a red cross (commonly called St. George's cross) passing quite through the same"; likewise the "ensign red, with the cross in a canton of white at the upper corner thereof, next to the staff"; but if you presumed to display His Majesty's Jack, commonly called the Union Jack, or any other of the various flags of command flown by ships of war or vessels employed in the naval service, swift retribution overtook you. Similarly, the inadvertent hoisting of your colours "wrong end uppermost," or in any other manner deemed inconsistent with the dignity of the service which permitted you to fly them, laid you open to reprisals of the most summary nature. Before you realised the heinousness of your offence, a gang boarded you and your best man or men were gone beyond recall. The joy of waterside weddings--occasions prolific in the display of wrong colours--was often turned into sorrow in this way.

Inability to do the things you professed to do involved grave risk of making intimate acquaintance with the gang. If, for example, you were a skipper and navigated your vessel more like a 'prentice than a master hand, some one belonging to you was bound, in waters swarming with ships of war, to pay the piper sooner or later. "A few days ago,"
writes Capt. Archer of the _Isis_, "a ship called the _Jane_,
Stewart master, ran on board of us in a most lubberly manner
--for which, as is customary on such occasions, I took four of
his people." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1448--Capt.
Archer, 17 May 1795.]

Ability to handle a musical instrument sometimes proved as fatal to
one's liberty as inability to handle a ship. Queen Anne was directly
responsible for this. Almost immediately after her accession she
signed a warrant authorising the pressing of "drummers, fife and haut
boys for sea and land." [Footnote: _Home Office Military Entry
Books_, clxviii, f. 406.] Though the authorisation was only
temporary, the practice thus set up continued long after its origin
had been relegated to the scrap-heap of memory, and not only
continued, but was interpreted in a sense much broader than its royal
originator ever intended it should be. This tendency to take an ell in
lieu of the stipulated inch was illustrated as early as 1705, when
Lieut. Thomson, belonging to the _Lickfield_, chancing to meet
one Richard Bullard, fiddler, "persuaded him to go as far as Woolwich
with him, to play a tune or two to him and some friends who had a mind
to dance, saying he would pay him for it"--which he did, when tired of
dancing, by handing him over to the press-gang. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1467--Capt. Byron, 13 July 1705.]

In 1781, again, a "stout lad of 17" was pressed at Waterford because,
as a piper, he was considered likely to be "useful in amusing the
new-raised men"; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1501--Lieut.
Collingwood, 18 March 1781.] and as late as 1807 a gang at Portsmouth, acting under orders from Capt. Sir Robert Bromley, took one Madden, a blind man, because of his "qualification of playing on the Irish bagpipes." His affliction saved him. He was discharged, and the amount of his pay and victualling was deducted from Sir Robert's wages as a caution to him to be more careful in future. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1544--Capt. Sir Robert Bromley, 1 Dec. 1808.]

Perhaps the oddest reasons ever adduced in justification of specific acts of pressing were those put forward in the cases of James Baily, a Gosport ferry-man who was pressed on account of his "great inactivity," and of John Conyear, exempt passenger on the packet-boat plying between Dartmouth and Poole, subjected to the same process because, as the officer responsible ingenuously put it when called to book for the act, if Conyear had not been on board, "another would, who might have been a proper person to serve His Majesty."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1451--Capt. Argles, 4 May 1807; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2485--Capt. Scott, 13 March 1780.]

An ironical interest attaches to the pressing of John Hagin, a youth of nineteen who cherished an ambition to go a-whaling. Tramping the riverside at Hull one day in search of a ship, he accidentally met one of the lieutenants employed in the local impress service, and mistaking him for the master of a Greenland ship, stepped up to him and asked him for a berth. "Berth?" said the obliging officer. "Come this way;" and he conducted the unsuspecting youth to the rendezvous.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1455--Capt. Ackton, 23 March
Before you took a voyage for the benefit of your health in those days it was always advisable to satisfy yourself as to the nature of the cargo the vessel carried or intended to carry, otherwise you were liable to be let in for a longer voyage than health demanded. Richard Gooding of Bawdsey, in the county of Suffolk, a twenty-one-year-old yeoman who knew nothing of the iniquities practised in ships, in an evil hour acted on the advice of his apothecary and ran across to Holland for the sake of his health, which the infirmities of youth appear to have undermined. All went well until, on the return trip, just before Bawdsey Ferry hove in sight, down swooped a revenue cutter's boat with an urgent request that the master should open up his hatches and disclose what his hold contained. He demurred, alleging that it held nothing of interest to revenue men; but on their going below to see for themselves they discovered an appreciable quantity of gin. Thereupon the master wickedly declared Gooding to be the culprit, and he was pressed on suspicion of attempting to run a cargo of spirits. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1530--Capt. Broughton, 20 April 1803, and enclosure.]

Into the operations of the gang this element of suspicion entered very largely, especially in the pressing of supposed sailors. To carry about on your person any of the well-known marks of the seafaring man was to invite certain disaster. When pressed, like so many others, because he was "in appearance very much like a sailor," John Teede protested vehemently that he had never been to sea in his life, and
that all who said he had were unmitigated liars. "Strip him," said the officer, who had a short way with such cases. In a twinkling Teede's shirt was over his head and the sailor stood revealed. Devices emblematic of love and the sea covered both arms from shoulder to wrist. "You and I will lovers die, eh?" said the officer, with a twinkle, as he spelt out one of the amatory inscriptions. "Just so, John! I'll see to that. Next man!" [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1522--Description of a Person calling himself John Teede, 28 Dec. 1799.]

Bow-legged men ran the gravest of risks in this respect, and the goose of many a tailor was effectually cooked because of the damning fact, which no protestations of innocence of the sea could mitigate, that long confinement to the board had warped his legs into a fatal resemblance to those of a typical Jack-tar. Harwich once had a mayor who, after vowing that he would "never be guilty of saying there was no law for pressing sailors," as a convincing proof that he knew what was what, and was willing to provide it to the best of his ability, straightway sent out and pressed--a tailor! [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1436--Capt. Allen, 26 March 1706.]

The itinerant Jewish peddler who hawked his wares about the country suffered grievously on this account. However indisputably Hebraic his name, his accent and his nose might be, those evidences of nationality were Anglicised, so to speak, by the fact that his legs were the legs of a sailor, and the bandy appendages so characteristic of his race sooner or later brought the gang down upon him in full cry and landed
him in the fleet.

In the year 1780 the fishing town of Cromer was thrown into a state of acute excitement by the behaviour of a casual stranger—a great, bearded man of foreign aspect who, taking a lodging in the place, resorted daily to the beach, where he walked the sands "at low water mark," now writing with great assiduity in a book, again gesticulating wildly to the sea and the cliffs, whence the suspicious townsfolk, then all unused to "visitors" and their eccentricities, watched his antics in wonder and consternation. The principal inhabitants of the place, alarmed by his vagaries, constituted themselves a committee of safety, and with the parson at their head went down to interview him; and when, in response to their none too polite inquiries, he flatly refused to give any account of himself, they by common consent voted him a spy and a public menace, telling each other that he was undoubtedly engaged in drawing plans of the coast in order to facilitate the landing of some enemy; for did not the legend run:—

"He who would Old England win,
Must at Weybourn Hope begin?"

and was not the "Hoop," as it was called locally, only a few miles to the northward? No time was to be lost. Post-haste they dispatched a messenger to Lieut. Brace at Yarmouth, begging him, if he would save his country from imminent danger, to lose not a moment in sending his gang to seize the suspect and nip his fell design in the bud. With
this alarming request Brace promptly complied, and the stranger was
dragged away to Yarmouth. Arraigned before the mayor, he with
difficulty succeeded in convincing that functionary that he was
nothing more dangerous than a stray agriculturist whom the Empress
Catherine had sent over from Russia to study the English method of
growing-turnips! [Footnote: _State Papers_, Russia, cv.--Lieut.
Brace, 18 Aug. 1780.]

The unhandsome treatment meted out to the inoffensive Russian is of a
piece with the whole aspect of pressing by instigation, of which it is
at once a specimen and a phase. The incentive here was suspicion; but
in the fertile field of instigation motives flourished in forms as
varied as the weaknesses of human nature.

Thomas Onions, respectable burgess of Bridgnorth, engaged in working a
trow from that place to Bristol, fell under suspicion owing to the
mysterious disappearance of a portion of the cargo, which consisted of
china. The rest of the crew being metaphorically as well as literally
in the same boat, the consignee's agent, on the trow's arrival at
Bristol, hinted at a more than alliterative connection between china
and chests, which he was proceeding to search when Onions objected,
very rightly urging that he had no warrant. "Is it a warrant you're
wanting?" demanded the baffled agent. "Very well, we'll see if we
cannot find one." With that he stepped ashore and hurried to the
rendezvous, where he knew the officers, and within the hour the gang
added Onions to the impress stock-pot. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_- 1. 1542--Memorial of the Inhabitants and Burgesses of
Much the same motive led to the pressing of Charles M'Donald, a north-country youth of education and property. His mother wished him to enter the army, but his guardians, piqued by her insistence, "had him kidnapped on board the impress tender at Shields, under pretence of sending him on a visit." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1537--Capt. Bland, 29 Nov. 1806, and enclosure.]

An "independent fortune of fourteen hundred pounds," bequeathed to him by his "Aunt Elizabeth," was instrumental in launching John Stillwell of Clerkenwell upon a similar career. His step-mother and uncle desired to retain possession of the money, of which they were trustees; so they suborned the gang and the young man disappeared. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1539--Capt. Burton, 25 April 1806, and enclosure.]

A more legitimate pastime of the gang was the pressing of incorrigible sons. George Clark of Birmingham and William Barnicle of Margate, the one a notorious thief, the other the despair of his family because of his drunken habits, were two out of many shipped abroad by this cheap but effectual means, the instigator of the gang being in each case the lad's own father. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1537--Jeremiah Clark, 30 July 1806; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1547--Lieut. Dawe, 4 Sept. 1809.] The distracting problem, "What to do with our sons?" was in this way amazingly simplified.
In thus utilising the gang as a means of retaliating upon those who incurred their displeasure, both naval officers and private individuals, had they been arraigned for the offence, could have pleaded in justification of their conduct the example of no less exalted a body than the Admiralty itself. The case of the bachelor seamen of Dover, pressed because of an official animus against that town, was as notorious as their Lordships' futile attempt to teach the Brighton fishermen respect for their betters, or their later orders to Capt. Culverhouse, of the Liverpool rendezvous, instructing him "to take all opportunities of impressing seafaring men belonging to the Isle of Man," as a punishment for the "extreme ill-conduct of the people of that Island to His Majesty's Officers on the Impress Service." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 3. 148--Admiralty Minutes, 11 Oct. 1803.] The Admiralty method of paying out anyone against whom you cherished a grudge possessed advantages which strongly commended it to the splenetic and the vindictive. For suppose you lay in wait for your enemy and beat or otherwise maltreated him: the chances were that he would either punish you himself or invoke the law to do it for him; while if you removed him by means of the garrot, the knife or the poisoned glass, no matter how discreetly the deed was done the hangman was pretty sure to get you sooner or later. But the gang—it was as safe as an epidemic! The fact was not lost upon the community. People in almost every station of life appreciated it at its true worth, and, encouraged by the example of the Admiralty, availed themselves of the gang as the handiest, speediest and safest of mediums for wiping out old scores.
On shipboard, where life was more cramped and men consequently came
into sharper contact than on shore, resentments were struck from daily
intercourse like sparks from steel. Like sparks some died, impotent to
harm their object; but others, cherished in bitterness of spirit
through many a lonely watch, flashed into malicious action with that
hoped-for opportunity, the coming of the gang. John Gray, carpenter of
a merchant ship, in a moment of anger threatened to cut the skipper
down with an axe. This happened under a West-Indian sun. Months
afterwards, as the ship swung lazily into Bristol river and the gang
came aboard, the skipper found his opportunity. Beckoning to the
impress officer, he pointed to John Gray and said: “Take that man!”

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1542--Capt. Barker, 22 June
1808, and enclosure.] Gray never again lifted an axe on board a
merchant vessel.

Certain amenities which once passed between the master and the mate of
the _Lady Shore_ serve to throw an even broader light upon the
origin of quarrels at sea and the methods of settling them then in
vogue. The _Lady Shore_ was on the passage home from Quebec when
the master one day gave certain sailing directions which the mate, who
was a sober, careful seaman, thought fit to disregard on the ground
that the safety of the ship would be endangered if he followed them.
The master, an irascible, drunken brute, at this flew into a passion
and sought to ingraft his ideas of seamanship upon the mate through
the medium of a handspike, with which he caught him a savage blow
"just above the eye, cutting him about three inches in length." It was
in mid-ocean that this lesson in navigation was administered. By the
time Scilly shoved its nose above the horizon the skipper's "down" on
the mate had reached an acute stage. His resentment of the latter's
being the better seaman had now deepened into hatred, and to this, as
the voyage neared its end, was added growing fear of prosecution. At
this juncture a man-o'-war hove in sight and signalled an inspection
of hands. "Get your chest on deck, Mr. Mate," cried the exultant
skipper. "You are too much master here. It is time for us to part."

Taken out of the ship as a pressed man, the mate was ultimately
discharged by order of the Admiralty; but the skipper had his revenge.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 583--Matthew Gill to Admiral
Moorsom, 15 Jan. 1813.]

A riot that occurred at King's Lynn in the year '55 affords a striking
instance of the retaliatory use of the gang on shore. In the course of
the disturbance mud and stones were thrown at the magistrates, who had
come out to do what they could to quell it. Angered by so gross an
indignity, they supplied the gang with information that led to the
pressing of some sixty persons concerned in the tumult, but as these
consisted mainly of "vagrants, gipsies, parish charges, maimed, halt
and idiots," the magisterial resentment caused greater rejoicings at
Lynn than it did at Spithead, where the sweepings of the borough were
eventually deposited. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 920
--Admiral Sir Edward Hawke, 8 June 1755.]

There is a decided smack of the modern about the use the gang was put
to by the journeymen coopers of Bristol. Considering themselves
underpaid, they threatened to go on strike unless the masters raised
their wages. In this they were not entirely unanimous, however. One of
their number stood out, refusing to join the combine; whereupon the
rest summoned the gang and had the "blackleg" pressed for his
contumacy. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1542--Capt. Barker,
20 Aug. 1808, and enclosure.]

In pressing William Taylor of Broadstairs the gang nipped in the bud
as tender a romance as ever flourished in the shelter of the Kentish
cliffs, which is saying not a little. Taylor was only a poor
fisherman, and when he dared to make love to the pretty daughter of
the Ramsgate Harbour-Master, that exalted individual, who entertained
for the girl social ambitions in which fishermen's shacks had no
place, resented his advances as insufferable impertinence. A word to
Lieut. Leary, his friend at the local rendezvous, did the rest. Taylor
disappeared, and though he was afterwards discharged from His
Majesty's ship Utrecht on the score of his holding a Sea-Fencible's
ticket, the remedy had worked its cure and the Harbour-Master was
thenceforth free to marry his daughter where he would. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1450--Capt. Austen, 23 Sept. 1803.]

So natural is the transition from love to hate that no apology is
needed for introducing here the story of Sam Burrows, the ex-beadle of
Chester who fell a victim to the harsher in much the same manner as
Taylor did to the gentler passion. Burrows' evil genius was one Rev.
Lucius Carey, an Irish clergyman--whether Anglican or Roman we know
not, nor does it matter--who had contracted the unclerical habit of
carrying pistols and too much liquor. In this condition he was found late one night knocking in a very violent manner at the door of the "Pied Bull," and swearing that, while none should keep him out, any who refused to assist him in breaking in should be shot down forthwith. Burrows, the ex-beadle, happened to be passing at the moment. He seized the drunken cleric and with the assistance of James Howell, one of the city watchmen, forcibly removed him to the watch-house, whence he was next day taken before the mayor and bound over to appear at the Sessions. Now it happened that certain members of the local press-gang were Carey's boon companions, so no sooner did he leave the presence of the mayor than he looked them up. That same evening Burrows was missing. Carey had found him a "hard bed," otherwise a berth on board a man-o'-war. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1532--Capt Birchall, 17 July 1804, and enclosures.]

In the columns of the _Westminster Journal_, under date of both May 1743, we read of a sailor who, dying at Ringsend, was brought to Irishtown church-yard, near Dublin, for burial. "When they laid him on the ground," the narrative continues, "the coffin was observed to stir, on which he was taken up, and by giving him some nourishment he came to himself, and is likely to do well." Whether this sailor was ever pressed, either before or after his abortive decease, we are not informed; but there is on record at least one well-authenticated instance of that calamity overtaking a person who had passed the bourne whence none is supposed to return.

In the year 1723 a young lad whose name has not been preserved, but
who was at the time apprentice to a master sailmaker in London, set out from that city to visit his people, living at Sandwich. He appears to have travelled afoot, for, getting a "lift" on the road, he was carried into Deal, where he arrived late at night, and having no money was glad to share a bed with a seafaring man, the boatswain of an Indiaman then in the Downs. From this circumstance sprang the events which here follow. Along in the small hours of the night the lad awoke, and finding the room stuffy and day on the point of breaking, he rose and dressed, purposing to see the town in the cool of the morning. The catch of the door, however, refused to yield under his hand, and while he was endeavouring to undo it the noise he made awakened the boatswain, who told him that if he looked in his breeches pocket he would find a knife there with which he could lift the latch. Acting on this hint, the lad succeeded in opening the door, and thereupon went downstairs in accordance with his original intention. When he returned some half-hour later, as he did for the purpose of restoring the knife, which he had thoughtlessly slipped into his pocket, the bed was empty and the boatswain gone. Of this he thought nothing. The boatswain had talked, he remembered, of going off to his ship at an early hour, in order, as he had said, to call the hands for the washing down of the decks. The lad accordingly left the house and went his way to Sandwich, where, as already stated, his people lived.

Meantime the old inn at Deal, and indeed the whole town, was thrown into a state of violent commotion by a most shocking discovery. Going about their morning duties at the inn, the maids had come to the bed in which the boatswain and the apprentice had slept, and to their
horror found it saturated with blood. Drops of blood, together with marks of blood-stained hands and feet, were further discovered on the floor and the door of the chamber, down the stairs, and along the passage leading to the street, whence they could be distinctly traced to the waterside, not so very far away. Imagination, working upon these ghastly survivals of the hours of darkness, quickly reconstructed the crime which it was evident had been committed. The boatswain was known to have had money on him; but the youth, it was recalled, had begged his bed. It was therefore plain to the meanest understanding that the youth had murdered the boatswain for his money and thrown the body into the sea.

At once that terrible precursor of judgment to come, the hue and cry was raised, and that night the footsore apprentice lay in Sandwich jail, a more than suspected felon, for his speedy capture had supplied what was taken to be conclusive evidence of his guilt. In his pocket they discovered the boatswain's knife, and both it and the lad's clothing were stained with blood. Asked whose blood it was, and how it came there, he made no answer. Asked was it the boatswain's knife, he answered, "Yes, it was," and therewith held his peace. In face of such evidence, and such an admission, he stood prejudged. His trial at the Assizes was a mere formality. The jury quickly found him guilty, and sentence of death was passed upon him.

The day of execution came. Up to this point Fate had set her face steadfastly against our apprentice lad; but now, in the very hour and article of death, she suddenly relented and smiled upon him. The
dislocating "drop" was in those days unknown. When you were hanged, you were hanged from a cart, which was suddenly whisked from under you, leaving you dangling in mid-air like a kind of death-fruit nearly, but not quite, ready to fall. Much depended on the executioner, and that grim functionary was in this case a raw hand, unused to his work, who bungled the job. The knot was ill-adjusted, the rope too long, the convict tall and lank. This last circumstance was no fault of the executioner's, but it helped. When they turned him off, the lad's feet swept the ground, and his friends, gathering round him like guardian angels, bore him up. Cut down at the end of a tense half-hour, he was hurried away to a surgeon's and there copiously bled. And being young and virile, he revived.

Trudging to Portsmouth some little time after, with the intention of for ever leaving a country to which he was legally dead, he fell in with one of the numerous press-gangs frequenting that road, and was sent on board a man-o'-war. There, in course of time, he rose to be master's mate, and in that capacity, whilst on the West-India station, was transferred to another ship. On this ship he met the surprise of his life--if life can be said to hold further surprises for one who has died and lived again. As he stepped on deck the first person he met was his old bed-fellow, the boatswain.

The explanation of the amazing series of events which led up to this amazing meeting is very simple. On the evening of that fateful night at Deal the boatswain, who had been ailing, was let blood. In his sleep the bandage slipped and the wound reopened. Discovering his
condition when awakened by the apprentice, he rose and left the house, intending to have the wound re-dressed by the barber-surgeon who had inflicted it, with more effect than discretion, some hours earlier. At the very door of the inn, however, he ran into the arms of a press-gang, by whom he was instantly seized and hurried on board ship.

[Footnote: Watts, _Remarkable Events in the History of Man_, 1825.]

CHAPTER X.

WOMEN AND THE PRESS-GANG.

The medieval writer who declared women to be “capable of disturbing the air and exciting tempests” was not indulging a mere quip at the expense of that limited storm area, his own domestic circle. He expressed what in his day, and indeed for long after, was a cardinal article of belief—that if you were so ill-advised as to take a woman to sea, she would surely upset the weather and play the mischief with the ship.

To this un gallant superstition none subscribed more heartily than the sailor, though always, be it understood, with a mental reservation. Unlike many landsmen who held a similar belief, he limited the malign influence of the sex strictly to the high-seas, where, for that reason, he vastly preferred woman’s room to her company; but once he was safe in port, woman in his opinion ceased to be dangerous, and he
then vastly preferred her company to her room.

For her companionship he had neither far to seek nor long to wait. It was a case of

"Deal, Dover and Harwich,
The devil gave his daughter in marriage."

All naval seaports were full of women, and to prevent the supply from running short thoughtful parish officials--church-wardens and other well-meaning but sadly misguided people--added constantly to the number by consigning to such doubtful reformatories the undesirable females of their respective petty jurisdictions. The practice of admitting women on board the ships of the fleet, too--a practice as old as the Navy itself--though always forbidden, was universally connived at and tacitly sanctioned. Before the anchor of the returning man-of-war was let go a flotilla of boats surrounded her, deeply laden with pitiful creatures ready to sell themselves for a song and the chance of robbing their sailor lovers. No sooner did the boats lay alongside than the last vestige of Jack's superstitious dread of the malevolent sex went by the board, and discipline with it. Like monkeys the sailors swarmed into the boats, where each selected a mate, redeemed her from the grasping boatman's hands with money or blows according to the state of his finances or temper, and so brought his prize, save the mark! in triumph to the gangway. It was a point of honour, not to say of policy, with these poor creatures to supply
their respective "husbands," as they termed them, with a drop of
good-cheer; so at the gangway they were searched for concealed liquor.

This was the only formality observed on such occasions, and as it was
enforced in the most perfunctory manner imaginable, there was always
plenty of drink going. Decency there was none. The couples passed
below and the hell of the besotted broke loose between decks, where
the orgies indulged in would have beggared the pen of a Balzac.

[Footnote: Statement of Certain Immoral Practices, 1822.]

During the earlier decades of the century these conditions, monstrous
though they were, passed almost unchallenged, but as time wore on and
their pernicious effects upon the _morale_ of the fleet became
more and more appalling, the service produced men who contended
strenuously, and in the end successfully, with a custom that, to say
the least of it, did violence to every notion of decency and clean
living. In 1746 the ship's company of the _Sunderland_ complained
bitterly because not even their wives were "suffer'd to come aboard to
see them." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1482--Capt. Brett,
22 Feb. 1745-6.] It was a sign of the times. By the year '78 the
practice had been fined down to a point where, if a wherry with a
woman in it were seen hovering in a suspicious manner about a ship of
war, the boatman was immediately pressed and the woman turned on
shore. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1498--Capt. Boteler, 18
April 1778.] Another twenty years, and the example of such men as
Jervis, Nelson and Collingwood laid the evil for good and all. The
seamen of the fleet themselves pronounced its requiescat when, drawing
up certain "Rules and Orders" for their own guidance during the mutiny
of '97, they ordained that "no woman shall be permitted to go on shore from any ship, but as many come in as pleases." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5125--A Detail of the Proceedings on Board the _Queen Charlotte_ in the Year 1797.]

An unforeseen consequence of thus suppressing the sailor's impromptu liaisons was an alarming increase in the number of desertions. On shore love laughs at locksmiths; on shipboard it derided the boatswain's mate. To run and get caught meant at the worst "only a whipping bout," and, the sailor's hide being as tough as his heart was tender, he ran and took the consequences with all a sailor's stoicism. In this respect he was perhaps not singular. The woman in the case so often counts for more than the punishment she brings.

Few of those who deserted their ships for amatory reasons had the luck--viewing the escapade from the sailor's standpoint--that attended the schoolmaster of the _Princess Louisa_. Going ashore at Plymouth to fetch his chest from the London wagon, he succumbed to the blandishments of an itinerant fiddler's wife, whom he chanced to meet in the husband's temporary absence, and was in consequence "no more heard of." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1478--Capt. Boys, 5 April 1742.]

Had it always been a case of the travelling woman, the sailor's flight in response to the voice of the charmer would seldom have landed him in the cells or exposed his back to the caress of the ship's cat.
Where he was handicapped in his love flights was this. The haunt or home of his seducer was generally known to one or other of his officers, and when this was not the case there were often other women who gladly gave him away. "Captain Barrington, Sir," writes "Nancy of Deptford" to the commander of a man-o'-war in the Thames, "there is a Desarter of yours at the upper water Gate. Lives at the sine of the mansion house. He is an Irishman, gose by the name of Youe (Hugh) MackMullins, and is trying to Ruing a Wido and three Children, for he has Insennuated into the Old Woman's favor so far that she must Sartingly come to poverty, and you by Sarching the Cook's will find what I have related to be true and much oblidge the hole parrish of St. Pickles Deptford." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1495 --Capt. Barrington, 22 Oct. 1771, enclosure.]

A favourite resort of the amatory tar was that extra-parochial spot known as the Liberty of the Fleet, where the nuptial knot could be tied without the irksome formalities of banns or licence. The fact strongly commended it to the sailor and brought him to the precinct in great numbers.

"I remember once on a time," says Keith, the notorious Fleet parson, "I was at a public-house at Ratcliffe, which was then full of Sailors and their Girls. There was fiddling, piping, jigging and eating. At length one of the Tars starts up and says: 'Damn ye, Jack! I'll be married just now; I will have my partner.' The joke took, and in less than two hours Ten Couples set out for the Flete. They returned in Coaches, five Women in each Coach; the Tars, some running before, some
riding on the Coach Box, and others behind. The Cavalcade being over, the Couples went up into an upper Room, where they concluded the evening with great Jollity. The landlord said it was a common thing, when a Fleet comes in, to have 2 or 3 Hundred Marriages in a week's time among the Sailors." [Footnote: Keith, Observations on the Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages, 1753.]

In the "Press-Gang, or Love in Low Life," a play produced at Covent Garden Theatre in 1755, Trueblue is pressed, not in, but out of the arms of his tearful Nancy. The situation is distressingly typical. The sailor's happiness was the gangsman's opportunity, however Nancy might suffer in consequence.

For the average gangsman was as void of sentiment as an Admiralty warrant, pressing you with equal avidity and absence of feeling whether he caught you returning from a festival or a funeral. To this callosity of nature it was due that William Castle, a foreign denizen of Bristol who had the hardihood to incur the marital tie there, was called upon, as related elsewhere, to serve at sea in the very heyday of his honeymoon. Similarly, if four seamen belonging to the _Dundee_ Greenland whaler had not stolen ashore one night at Shields "to see some women," they would probably have gone down to their graves, seawards or landwards, under the pleasing illusion that the ganger was a man of like indulgent passions with themselves. The negation of love, as exemplified in that unsentimental individual, was thus brought home to many a seafaring man, long debarréd from the society of the gentler sex, with startling abruptness and force. The
pitiful case of the "Maidens Pressed," whose names are enrolled in the pages of Camden Hotten, [Footnote: Hotten, List of Persons of Quality, etc., who Went from England to the American Plantations.] is in no way connected with pressing for naval purposes. Those unfortunates were not victims of the gangsman's notorious hardness of heart, but of their own misdeeds. Like the female disciples of the "diving hand" stated by Lutterell [Footnote: Lutterell, Historical Relation of State Affairs, 12 March 1706.] to have been "sent away to follow the army," they were one and all criminals of the Moll Flanders type who "left their country for their country's good" under compulsion that differed widely, both in form and purpose, from that described in these pages.

To assert, however, that women were never pressed, in the enigmatic sense of their being taken by the gang for the manning of the fleet, would be to do violence to the truth as we find it in naval and other records. As a matter of fact, the direct contrary was the case, and there were in the kingdom few gangs of which, at one time or another in their career, it could not be said, as Southey said of the gang at Bristol, that "they pressed a woman."

The incident alluded to will be familiar to all who know the poet as distinguished from the Bard of Avon. It is found in the second "English Eclogue," under the caption of the "Grandmother's Tale," and has to do with the escapade, long famous in the more humorous annals of Southey's native city, of blear-eyed Moll, a collier's wife, a great, ugly creature whose voice was as gruff as a mastiff's bark, and who wore habitually a man's hat and coat, so that at a few yards'
distance you were at a loss to know whether she was man or woman.

"There was a merry story told of her,
How when the press-gang came to take her husband
As they were both in bed, she heard them coming,
Drest John up in her nightcap, and herself
Put on his clothes and went before the captain."

A case of pressing on all-fours with this is said to have once
occurred at Portsmouth. A number of sailors, alarmed by the rumoured
approach of a gang while they were a-fairing, took it into their
heads, so the story goes, to effect a partial exchange of clothing
with their sweethearts, in the hope that the hasty shifting of
garments would deceive the gang and so protect them from the press. It
did. In their parti-garb make-up the women looked more sailorly than
the sailors themselves. The gang consequently pressed them, and there
were hilarious scenes at the rendezvous when the fair recruits were
"regulated" and the ludicrous mistake brought to light.

It was not only on shore, however, or on special occasions such as
this, that women played the sailor. A naval commander, accounting to
the Admiralty for his shortness of complement, attributes it mainly to
sickness, partly to desertion, and incidentally to the discharge of
one of the ship's company, "who was discovered to be a woman."
1782.]
His experience is capped by that of the master of the _Edmund and Mary_, a vessel engaged in carrying coals to Ipswich. Shrewdly suspecting one of his apprentices, a clever, active lad, to be other than what he seemed, he taxed him with the deception. Taken unawares, the lad burst into womanly tears and confessed himself to be the runaway daughter of a north-country widow. Disgrace had driven her to sea. [Footnote: _Naval Chronicle_, vol. xxx. 1813, p. 184.]

These instances are far from being unique, for both in the navy and the mercantile marine the masquerading of women in male attire was a not uncommon occurrence. The incentives to the adoption of a mode of life so foreign to all the gentler traditions of the sex were various, though not inadequate to so surprising a change. Amongst them unhappiness at home, blighted virtue, the secret love of a sailor and an abnormal craving for adventure and the romantic life were perhaps the most common and the most powerful. The question of clothing presented little difficulty. Sailors’ slops could be procured almost anywhere, and no questions asked. The effectual concealment of sex was not so easy, and when we consider the necessarily intimate relations subsisting between the members of a ship’s crew, the narrowness of their environment, the danger of unconscious betrayal and the risks of accidental discovery, the wonder is that any woman, however masculine in appearance or skilled in the arts of deception, could ever have played so unnatural a part for any length of time without detection. The secret of her success perhaps lay mainly in two assisting circumstances. In theory there were no women at sea, and despite his
occasional vices the sailor was of all men the most unsophisticated
and simple-minded.

Conspicuous among women who threw the dust of successful deception in
the eyes of masters and shipmates is Mary Anne Talbot. Taking to the
sea as a girl in order to “follow the fortunes” of a young naval
officer for whom she had conceived a violent but unrequited affection,
she was known afloat as John Taylor. In stature tall, angular and
singularly lacking in the physical graces so characteristic of the
average woman, she passed for years as a true shellback, her sex
unsuspected and unquestioned. Accident at length revealed her secret.
Wounded in an engagement, she was admitted to hospital in consequence
of a shattered knee, and under the operating knife the identity of
John Taylor merged into that of Mary Anne Talbot. [Footnote: Times, 4
Nov. 1799.]

It is said, perhaps none too kindly or truthfully, that the lady
doctor of the present day no sooner sets up in practice than she
incontinently marries the medical man around the corner, and in many
instances the sailor-girl of former days brought her career on the
ocean wave to an equally romantic conclusion. However skilled in the
art of navigation she might become, she experienced a constitutional
difficulty in steering clear of matrimony. Maybe she steered for it.

A romance of this description that occasioned no little stir in its
day is associated with a name at one time famous in the West-India
trade. Through bankruptcy the name suffered eclipse, and the 
unfortunate possessor of it retired to a remote neighbourhood, taking 
with him his two daughters, his sole remaining family. There he 
presently sank under his misfortunes. Left alone in the world, with 
scarce a penny-piece to call their own, the daughters resolved on a 
daring departure from the conventional paths of poverty.

Making their way to Portsmouth, they there dressed themselves as 
sailors and in that capacity entered on board a man-o'-war bound for 
subsequent naval engagements, both acquitted themselves like men. No 
suspicion of the part they were playing, and playing with such 
success, appears to have been aroused till a year or two later, when 
one of them, in a brush with the enemy, was wounded in the side. The 
surgeon's report terminated her career as a seaman.

[Illustration: MARY ANNE TALBOT.]

Meanwhile the other sister contracted tropical fever, and whilst 
lying ill was visited by one of the junior officers of the ship. 
Believing herself to be dying, she told him her secret, doubtless with 
a view to averting its discovery after death. He confessed that the 
news was no surprise to him. In fact, not only had he suspected her 
sex, he had so far persuaded himself of the truth of his suspicions as 
to fall in love with one of his own crew. The tonic effect of such 
avowals is well known. The fever-stricken patient recovered, and on 
the return of the ship to home waters the officer in question made his
Of all the veracious yarns that are told of girl-sailors, there is perhaps none more remarkable than the story of Rebecca Anne Johnson, the girl-sailor of Whitby. One night a hundred and some odd years ago a Mrs. Lesley, who kept the “Bull” inn in Halfmoon Alley, Bishopsgate Street, found at her door a handsome sailor-lad begging for food. He had eaten nothing for four and twenty hours, he declared, and when plied with supper and questions by the kind-hearted but inquisitive old lady, he explained that he was an apprentice to the sea, and had run from his ship at Woolwich because of the mate’s unduly basting him with a rope’s-end. “What! you a ‘prentice?” cried the landlady; and turning his face to the light, she subjected him to a scrutiny that read him through and through.

Next day, at his own request, he was taken before the Lord Mayor, to whom he told his story. That he was a girl he freely admitted, and he accounted for his appearing in sailor rig by asserting that a brutal father had apprenticed him to the sea in his thirteenth year. More astounding still, the same unnatural parent had actually bound her, the sailor-girl’s, mother, apprentice to the sea, and in that capacity she was not only pressed into the navy, but killed at the battle of Copenhagen, up to which time, though she had followed the sea for many years and borne this child in the meantime, her sex had never once been called in question. [Footnote: _Naval Chronicle_, vol. xx. 1808, p. 293.]
While woman was thus invading man's province at sea, that universal feeder of the Navy, the pressgang, made little or no appeal to her as a sphere of activity. On Portland Island, it is true, Lieut. McKey, who commanded both the Sea-Fencibles and the press-gang there, rated his daughter as a midshipman; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous, 15 April 1805] but with this exception no woman is known to have added the hanger to her adornment. The three merry maids of Taunton, who as gangsmen put the Denny Bowl quarrymen to rout, were of course impostors.

But if the ganger's life was not for woman, there was ample compensation for its loss in the wider activities the gang opened up for her. The gangsman was nothing if not practical. He took the poetic dictum that "men must work and women must weep"--a conception in his opinion too sentimentally onesided to be tolerated as one of the eternal verities of human existence--and improved upon it. By virtue of the rough-and-ready authority vested in him he abolished the distinction between toil and tears, decreeing instead that women should suffer both.

"M'Gugan's wife?" growled Capt. Brenton, gang-master at Greenock, when the corporation of that town ventured to point out to him that M'Gugan's wife and children must inevitably come to want unless their bread-winner, recently pressed, were forthwith restored to them,--"_M'Gugan's wife is as able to get her bread as any woman in
For two hundred and fifty years, off and on--ever since, in fact, the press-masters of bluff King Hal denuded the Dorset coast of fishermen and drove the starving women of that region to sea in quest of food--the press-gang had been laboriously teaching English housewives this very lesson, the simple economic truth that if they wanted bread for themselves and their families while their husbands were fagging for their country at sea, they must turn to and work for it. Yet in face of this fact here was M'Gugan's wife trying to shirk the common lot. It was monstrous!

M'Gugan's wife ought really to have known better. The simplest calculation, had she cared to make it, would have shown her the utter futility of hoping to live on the munificent wage which a grateful country allowed to M'Gugan, less certain deductions for M'Gugan's slops and contingent sick-benefit, in return for his aid in protecting it from its enemies; and almost any parish official could have told her, what she ought in reason to have known already, that she was no longer merely M'Gugan's wife, dependent upon his exertions for the bread she ate, but a Daughter of the State and own sister to thousands of women to whom the gang in its passage brought toil and poverty, tears and shame--not, mark you, the shame of labour, if there be such a thing, but the bedraggled, gin-sodden shame of the street, or, in the scarce less dreadful alternative, the shame of the goodwife of the town!" [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1511--Capt. Brenton, 15 Jan. 1795.]

[Footnote: _State Papers Domestic, Henry VIII_: Lord Russell to the Privy Council, 22 Aug. 1545.]--the press-gang had been laboriously teaching English housewives this very lesson, the simple economic truth that if they wanted bread for themselves and their families while their husbands were fagging for their country at sea, they must turn to and work for it. Yet in face of this fact here was M'Gugan's wife trying to shirk the common lot. It was monstrous!
ballad who lamented her husband's absence because, worse luck, sundry of her bairns "were gotten quhan he was awa'."

Lamentable as this state of things undoubtedly was, it was nevertheless one of the inevitables of pressing. You could not take forcibly one hundred husbands and fathers out of a community of five hundred souls, and pay that hundred husbands and fathers the barest pittance instead of a living wage, without condemning one hundred wives and mothers to hard labour on behalf of the three hundred children who hungered. Out of this hundred wives and mothers a certain percentage, again, lacked the ability to work, while a certain other percentage lacked the will. These recruited the ranks of the outcast, or with their families burdened the parish. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5125--Memorial of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Portsmouth, 3 Dec 1793, and numerous instances.] The direct social and economic outcome of this mode of manning the Navy, coupled with the payment of a starvation wage, was thus threefold. It reversed the natural sex-incidence of labour; it fostered vice; it bred paupers. The first was a calamity personal to those who suffered it. The other two were national in their calamitous effects.

In that great diurnal of the eighteenth-century navy, the Captains' Letters and Admirals' Dispatches, no volume can be opened without striking the broad trail of destitution, misery and heart-break, to mention no worse consequences, left by the gang. At nearly every turn of the page, indeed, we come upon recitals or petitions recalling
vividly the exclamation involuntarily let fall by Pepys the
tender-hearted when, standing over against the Tower late one summer's
night, he watched by moonlight the pressed men sent away: "Lord! how
some poor women did cry."

A hundred years later and their heritors in sorrow are crying still.
Now it is a bedridden mother bewailing her only son, "the principal
prop and stay of her old age"; again a wife, left destitute "with
three hopeful babes, and pregnant." And here, bringing up the rear of
the sad procession--lending to it, moreover, a touch of humour in
itself not far removed from tears--comes Lachlan M'Quarry. The gang
have him, and amid the Stirling hills, where he was late an indweller,
a motley gathering of kinsfolk mourn his loss--"me, his wife, two
Small helpless Children, an Aged Mother who is Blind, an Aged Man who
is lame and unfit for work, his father in Law, and a sister Insane,
with his Mother in Law who is Infirm." [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1454--The Humble Petition of Jullions Thomson, Spouse
to Lachlan M'Quarry, 2 May 1812.] The fact is attested by the minister
and elders of the parish, being otherwise unbelievable; and Lachlan is
doubtless proportionately grieved to find himself at sea. Men whose
wives "divorced" them through the medium of the gang--a not uncommon
practice--experienced a similar grief.

Besides the regular employment it so generously provided for wives
bereft of their lawful support, the press-gang found for the women of
the land many an odd job that bore no direct relation to the earning
of their bread. When the mob demolished the Whitby rendezvous in '93,
it was the industrious fishwives of the town who collected the stones
used as ammunition on that occasion; and when, again, Lieut. M'Kenzie
unwisely impressed an able seaman in the house of Joseph Hook,
inn-keeper at Pill, it was none other than "Mrs. Hook, her daughter
and female servant" who fell upon him and tore his uniform in shreds,
thus facilitating the pressed man's escape "through a back way."
1805.]

The good people of Sunderland at one time indulged themselves in the
use of a peculiar catch-phrase. Whenever any feat of more than
ordinary daring came under their observation, they spoke of it as "a
case of Dryden's sister." The saying originated in this way. The
Sunderland gang pressed the mate of a vessel, one Michael Dryden, and
confined him in the tender's hold. One night Dryden's sister, having
in vain bribed the lieutenant in command to let him go, at the risk of
her life smuggled some carpenter's tools on board under the very
muzzles of the sentinel's muskets, and with these her brother and
fifteen other men cut their way to freedom. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 2740--Lieut. Atkinson, 24 June and 10 July 1798.]

A tender lying in King Road, at the entrance to Bristol River, was the
scene of another episode of the "Dryden's sister" type. Going ashore
one morning, the lieutenant in command fell from the bank and broke
his sword. It was an ill omen, for in his absence the hard fate of the
twenty pressed men who lay in the tender's hold, "all handcuff to each
other," made an irresistible appeal to two women, pressed men's wives,
who had been with singular lack of caution admitted on board. Whilst the younger and prettier of the two cajoled the sentinel from his post, the elder and uglier secured an axe and a hatchet and passed them unobserved through the scuttle to the prisoners below, who on their part made such good use of them that when at length the lieutenant returned he found the cage empty and the birds flown. The shackles strewing the press-room bore eloquent testimony to the manner of their flight. The irons had been hacked asunder, some of them with as many as "six or seven Cutts." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1490--Capt. Brown, 12 May 1759.]

Never, surely, did the gang provide an odder job for any woman than the one it threw in the way of Richard Parker's wife. The story of his part in the historic mutiny at the Nore is common knowledge. Her's, being less familiar, will bear retelling. But first certain incidents in the life of the man himself, some of them hitherto unknown, call for brief narration.

Born at Exeter in or about the year 1764, it is not till some nineteen years later, or, to be precise, the 5th of May 1783, that Richard Parker makes his debut in naval records. On that date he appears on board the _Mediator_ tender at Plymouth, in the capacity of a pressed man. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ Ships' Musters, 1. 9307--Muster Book of H.M. Tender the _Mediator_.]

The tender carried him to London, where in due course he was delivered
up to the regulating officers, and by them turned over to the
_Ganges_, Captain the Honourable James Lutterell. This was prior
to the 30th of June 1783, the date of his official "appearance" on
board that ship. On the _Ganges_ he served as a midshipman—a
noteworthy fact [Footnote: Though one of rare occurrence, Parker's
case was not altogether unique; for now and then a pressed man by some
lucky chance "got his foot on the ladder," as Nelson put it, and
succeeded in bettering himself. Admiral Sir David Mitchell, pressed as
the master of a merchantman, is a notable example. Admiral Campbell,
"Hawke's right hand at Quiberon," who entered the service as a
substitute for a pressed man, is another; and James Clephen, pressed
as a sea-going apprentice, became master's-mate of the Doris, and
taking part in the cutting out of the Chevrette, a corvette of twenty
guns, from Cameret Bay, in 1801, was for his gallantry on that
occasion made a lieutenant, fought at Trafalgar and died a captain. On
the other hand, John Norris, pressed at Gallions Reach out of a
collier and "ordered to walk the quarter-deck as a midshipman," proved
such a "laisie, sculking, idle fellow," and so "filled the sloop and
men with vermin," that his promoter had serious thoughts of "turning
him ashore."--Admiralty Records_ 1. 1477--Capt. Bruce, undated
letter, 1741.]--till the 4th of September following, when he was
discharged to the _Bull-Dog_ sloop by order of Admiral Montagu.
[Footnote:_Admiralty Records_ Ships' Musters, 1. 10614--Muster
Book of H.M.S. _Ganges_.]

His transfer from the _Bull-Dog_ banished him from the
quarter-deck and sowed within him the seeds of that discontent which
fourteen years later made of him, as he himself expressed it, "a
scape-goat for the sins of many." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_
1. 5339--Dying Declaration of the Late Unfortunate Richard Parker, 28
June 1797.] He was now, for what reason we do not learn, rated as an
ordinary seaman, and in that capacity he served till the 15th of June
1784, when he was discharged sick to Haslar Hospital. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ Ships' Musters, 1. 10420, 10421--Muster Books
of H.M. Sloop _Bull-Dog_.]

At this point we lose track of him for a matter of nearly fourteen
years, but on the 31st of March 1797, the year which brought his
period of service to so tragic a conclusion, he suddenly reappears at
the Leith rendezvous as a Quota Man for the county of Perth.

Questioned as to his past, he told Brenton, then in charge of that
rendezvous, "that he had been a petty officer or acting lieutenant on
board the _Mediator_, Capt. James Lutterell, at the taking of
dfive prizes in 1783, when he received a very large proportion of
prize-money." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1517--Capt.
Brenton, 10 June 1797.] The inaccuracies evident on the face of this
statement are unquestionably due to Brenton's defective recollection
rather than to Parker's untruthfulness. Brenton wrote his report
nearly two and a half months after the event.

After a period of detention on board the tender at Leith, Parker, in
company with other Quota and pressed men, was conveyed to the Nore in
one of the revenue vessels occasionally utilised for that purpose, and
there put on board the _Sandwich_, the flag-ship for that
division of the fleet. At half-past nine on the morning of the 12th of
May, upon the 2nd lieutenant's giving orders to "clear hawse," the
ship's company got on the booms and gave three cheers, which were at
once answered from the _Director_. They then reeved yard-ropes as
a menace to those of the crew who would not join them, and trained the
forecastle guns on the quarter-deck as a hint to the officers. The
latter were presently put on shore, and that same day the mutineers
unanimously chose Parker to be their "President" or leader. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 5339--Court-Martial on Richard Parker:
Deposition of Lieut. Justice.] The fact that he had been pressed in
the first instance, and that after having served for a time in the
capacity of a "quarter-deck young gentleman" he had been
unceremoniously derated, singled him out for this distinction. There
was amongst the mutineers, moreover, no other so eligible; for
whatever Parker's faults, he was unquestionably a man of superior
ability and far from inferior attainments.

The reeving of yard-ropes was his idea, though he disclaimed it. An
extraordinary mixture of tenderness and savagery, he wept when it was
proposed to fire upon a runaway ship, the _Repulse_, but the next
moment drove a crowbar into the muzzle of the already heavily shotted
gun and bade the gunner "send her to hell where she belonged." "I'll
make a beefsteak of you at the yard-arm" was his favourite threat.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5339--Court-Martial on Richard
Parker: Depositions of Capt. John Wood, of H.M. Sloop _Hound_,
William Livingston, boat-swain of the _Director_, and Thomas
Barry, seaman on board the _Monmouth_.] It was prophetic, for
that way, as events quickly proved, lay the finish of his own career.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 30th of June Parker, convicted and sentenced to death after a fair trial, stood on the scaffold awaiting his now imminent end. The halter, greased to facilitate his passing, was already about his neck, and in one of his hands, which had been freed at his own request, he held a handkerchief borrowed for the occasion from one of the officers of the ship. This he suddenly dropped. It was the preconcerted signal, and as the fatal gun boomed out in response to it he thrust his hands into his pockets with great rapidity and jumped into mid-air, meeting his death without a tremor and with scarce a convulsion. Thanks to the clearness of the atmosphere and the facility with which the semaphores did their work that morning, the Admiralty learnt the news within seven minutes.

[Footnote: Trial and Life of Richard Parker, Manchester, 1797.] Now comes the woman's part in the drama on which the curtain rose with the pressing of Parker in '83, and fell, not with his execution at the yard-arm of the _Sandwich_, as one would suppose, but four days after that event.

In one of his spells of idleness ashore Parker had married a Scotch girl, the daughter of an Aberdeenshire farmer--a tragic figure of a woman whose fate it was to be always too late. Hearing that her husband had taken the bounty, she set out with all speed for Leith, only to learn, upon her arrival there, that he was already on his way to the fleet. At Leith she tarried till rumours of his pending trial reached the north country. The magistrates would then have put her
under arrest, designing to examine her, but the Admiralty, to whom
Brenton reported their intention, vetoed the proceeding as
superfluous. The case against Parker was already complete. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1517--Capt. Brenton, 15 June 1797, and
endorsement.] Left free to follow the dictates of her tortured heart,
the distracted woman posted south.

Eating his last breakfast in the gun-room of the _Sandwich_,
Parker talked affectionately of his wife, saying that he had made his
will and left her a small estate he was heir to. Little did he dream
that she was then within a few miles of him.

The _Sandwich_ lay that morning above Blackstakes, the headmost
ship of the fleet, and at the moment when Parker leapt from her
cathead scaffold a boat containing his wife shot out into the stream.
He was run up to the yard-arm before her very eyes. She was again too
late.

He hung there for an hour. Meantime, with a tenacity of purpose as
touching as her devotion, the unhappy woman applied to the Admiral for
the body of her husband. She was denied, and Parker's remains were
committed to the new naval burial ground, beyond the Red-Barrier Gate
leading to Minster. The burial took place at noon. By nightfall the
grief-stricken woman had come to an amazing resolution. _She would
steal the body._
Ten o'clock that night found her at the place of interment. Save for
the presence of the sentinel at the adjoining Barrier Gate, the
loneliness of the spot favoured her design, but a ten-foot palisade
surrounded the grounds, and she had neither tools nor helpers.
Unexpectedly three women came that way. To them she disclosed her
purpose, praying them for the love of God to help her. Perhaps they
were sailors' wives. Anyhow, they assented, and the four
body-snatchers scaled the fence.

[Illustration: MARY ANNE TALBOT. Dressed as a sailor.]

The absence of tools, as it happened, presented no serious impediment
to the execution of their design. The grave was a shallow one, the
freshly turned mould loose and friable. Digging with their hands, they
soon uncovered the coffin, which they then contrived to raise and
hoist over the cemetery gates into the roadway, where they sat upon it
to conceal it from chance passers-by till four o'clock in the morning.
It was then daylight. The neighbouring drawbridge was let down, and, a
fish-cart opportunely passing on its way to Rochester, the driver was
prevailed upon to carry the "lady's box" into that town. A guinea
served to allay his suspicions.

Three days later a caravan drew up before the "Hoop and Horseshoe"
tavern, in Queen Street, Little Tower Hill. A woman alighted
--furtively, for it was now broad daylight, whereas she had
planned to arrive while it was still dark. A watchman chanced to pass
at the moment, and the woman's strange behaviour aroused his
suspicions. Pulling aside the covering of the van, he looked in and
saw there the rough coffin containing the body of Parker, which the
driver of the caravan had carried up from Rochester for the sum of six
guineas. Later in the day the magistrates sitting at Lambeth Street
Police Court ordered its removal, and it was deposited in the vaults
of Whitechapel church. [Footnote: Trial and Life of Richard Parker,
Manchester, 1797.]

Full confirmation of this extraordinary story, should any doubt it,
may be found in the registers of the church in question. Amongst the
burials there we read this entry: "_July, 1797, Richard Parker,
Sheerness, Kent, age 33. Cause of death, execution. This was Parker,
the President of the Mutinous Delegates on board the fleet at the
Nore. He was hanged on board H.M.S._ Sandwich _on the 30th day of
June_." [Footnote: Burial Registers of St. Mary Matfellon,
Whitechapel, 1797.]

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CLUTCH OF THE GANG.

Once the gang had a man in its power, his immediate destination was
either the rendezvous press-room or the tender employed as a
substitute for that indispensable place of detention.
The press-room, lock-up or "shut-up house," as it was variously
termed, must not be confounded with the press-room at Newgate, where
persons indicted for felony, and perversely refusing to plead, were
pressed beneath weights till they complied with that necessary legal
formality. From that historic cell the rendezvous press-room differed
widely, both in nature and in use. Here the pressed men were confined
pending their dispatch to His Majesty's ships. As a matter of course
the place was strongly built, heavily barred and massively bolted,
being in these respects merely a commonplace replica of the average
bridewell. Where it differed from the bridewell was in its walls.
Theoretically these were elastic. No matter how many they held, there
was always room within them for more. As late as 1806 the press-room
at Bristol consisted of a cell only eight feet square, and into this
confined space sixteen men were frequently packed. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, Report on Rendezvous,
14 March 1806.]

Nearly everywhere it was the same gruesome story. The sufferings of
the pressed man went for nothing so long as the pressed man was kept.
Provided only the bars were dependable and the bolts staunch, anything
would do to "clap him up in." The town "cage" came in handy for the
purpose; and when no other means of securing him could be found, he
was thrust into the local prison like a common felon, often amidst
surroundings unspeakably awful.

According to the elder Wesley, no "seat of woe" on this side of the
Bottomless Pit outrivalled Newgate except one. [Footnote: London Chronicle, 6 Jan. 1761.] The exception was Bristol jail. A filthy, evil-smelling hole, crowded with distempered prisoners without medical care, it was deservedly held in such dread as to "make all seamen fly the river" for fear of being pressed and committed to it. For when the eight-foot cell at the rendezvous would hold no more, Bristol pressed men were turned in here--to come out, if they survived the pestilential atmosphere of the place, either fever-stricken or pitiful, vermin-covered objects from whom even the hardened gangsman shrank with fear and loathing. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1490--Capt. Brown, 4 Aug. 1759.] Putting humane considerations entirely aside, it is well-nigh inconceivable that so costly an asset as the pressed man should ever have been exposed to such sanitary risks. The explanation doubtless lies in the enormous amount of pressing that was done. The number of men taken was in the aggregate so great that a life more or less was hardly worth considering.

Of ancient use as a county jail, Gloucester Castle stood far higher in the pressed man's esteem as a place of detention than did its sister prison on the Avon. The reason is noteworthy. Richard Evans, for many years keeper there, possessed a magic palm. Rub it with silver in sufficient quantity, and the "street door of the gaol" opened before you at noonday, or, when at night all was as quiet as the keeper's conscience, a plank vanished from the roof of your cell, and as you stood lost in wonder at its disappearance there came snaking down through the hole thus providentially formed a rope by the aid of which, if you were a sailor or possessed of a sailor's agility and
daring, it was feasible to make your escape over the ramparts of the
castle, though they towered "most as high as the Monument." [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1490--Capt. Brown, 28 April and 26 May
1759.]

In the absence of the gang on road or other extraneous duty the
precautions taken for the safety of pressed men were often very
inadequate, and this circumstance gave rise to many an impromptu
rescue. Sometimes the local constable was commandeered as a temporary
guard, and a story is told of how, the gang having once locked three
pressed men into the cage at Isleworth and stationed the borough
watchman over them, one Thomas Purser raised a mob, demolished the
doors of the cage, and set its delighted occupants free amid frenzied
shouts of: "Pay away within, my lads! and we'll pay away without. Damn
the constable! He has no warrant." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_
7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions, 1733-56, No. 99.]

In strict accordance with the regulations governing, or supposed to
govern, the keeping of rendezvous, the duration of the pressed man's
confinement ought never to have exceeded four-and-twenty hours from
the time of his capture; but as a matter of fact it often extended far
beyond that limit. Everything depended on the gang. If men were
brought in quickly, they were as quickly got rid of; but when they
dribbled in in one's and two's, with perhaps intervals of days when
nothing at all was doing, weeks sometimes elapsed before a batch of
suitable size could be made ready and started on its journey to the
ships.
All this time the pressed man had to be fed, or, as they said in the
service, subsisted or victualled, and for this purpose a sum varying
from sixpence to ninepence a day, according to the cost of provisions,
was allowed him. On this generous basis he was nourished for a hundred
years or more, till one day early in the nineteenth century some
half-score of gaunt, hungry wretches, cooped up for eight weary weeks
in an East-coast press-room during the rigours of a severe winter,
made the startling discovery that the time-honoured allowance was
insufficient to keep soul and body together. They accordingly
addressed a petition to the Admiralty, setting forth the cause and
nature of their sufferings, and asking for a "rise." A dozen years
earlier the petition would have been tossed aside as insolent and
unworthy of consideration; but the sharp lesson of the Nore mutiny
happened to be still fresh in their Lordships' memories, so with
unprecedented generosity and haste they at once augmented the
allowance, and that too for the whole kingdom, to fifteen-pence a day.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1546--Petition of the Pressed
Men at King's Lynn, 27 Jan. 1809, and endorsement.]

It was a red-letter day for the pressed man. A single stroke of the
official pen had raised him from starvation to opulence, and
thenceforward, when food was cheap and the purchasing power of the
penny high, he regaled himself daily, as at Limerick in 1814, on such
abundant fare as a pound of beef, seven and a half pounds of potatoes,
a pint of milk, a quart of porter, a boiling of greens and a mess of
oatmeal; or, if he happened to be a Catholic, on fish and butter twice
a week instead of beef. The quantity of potatoes is worthy of remark.

It was peculiar to Ireland, where the lower classes never used bread.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1455--Capt. Argles, 1 March
1814.]

Though faring thus sumptuously at his country's expense, the pressed man did not always pass the days of his detention in unprofitable idleness. There were certain eventualities to be thought of and provided against. Sooner or later he must go before the "gent with the swabs" and be "regulated," that is to say, stripped to the waist, or further if that exacting officer deemed it advisable, and be critically examined for physical ailments and bodily defects. In this examination the local "saw-bones" would doubtless lend a hand, and to outwit the combined skill of both captain and surgeon was a point of honour with the pressed man if by any possibility it could be done. With this laudable end in view he devoted much of his enforced leisure to the rehearsal of such symptoms and the fabrication of such defects as were best calculated to make him a free man.

For the sailor to deny his vocation was worse than useless. The ganger's shrewd code--"All as says they be land-lubbers when I says they baint, be liars, and all liars be seamen"--effectually shut that door in his face. There were other openings, it is true, whereby a knowing chap might wriggle free, but officers and medicoes were extremely "fly." He had not practised his many deceptions upon them through long years for nothing. They well knew that on principle he "endeavoured by every stratagem in his power to impose"--that he was,
in short, a cunning cheat whose most serious ailments were to be regarded with the least sympathy and the utmost suspicion. Yet in spite of this disquieting fact the old hand, whom long practice had made an adept at deception, and who, when he was so inclined, could simulate "complaints of a nature to baffle the skill of any professional man," [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1540--Capt. Barker, 5 Nov. 1807.] rarely if ever faced the ordeal of regulating without "trying it on." Often, indeed, he anticipated it. There was nothing like keeping his hand in.

Fits were his great stand-by, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1534--Capt. Barker, 11 Jan. 1805, and many instances.] and the time he chose for these convulsive turns was generally night, when he could count upon a full house and nothing to detract from the impressiveness of the show. Suddenly, at night, then, a weird, horribly inarticulate cry is heard issuing from the press-room, and at once all is uproar and confusion. Unable to make himself heard, much less to restore order, and fearing that murder is being done amongst the pressed men, the sentry hastily summons the officer, who rushes down, half-dressed, and hails the press-room.

"Hullo! within there. What's wrong?"

Swift silence. Then, "Man in a fit, sir," replies a quavering voice.

"Out with him!" cries the officer.
Immediately, the door being hurriedly unbarred, the “case” is handed out by his terrified companions, who are only too glad to be rid of him. To all appearances he is in a true epileptic state. In the light of the lantern, held conveniently near by one of the gangsmen, who have by this time turned out in various stages of undress, his features are seen to be strongly convulsed. His breathing is laboured and noisy, his head rolls incessantly from side to side. Foam tinged with blood oozes from between his gnashing teeth, flecking his lips and beard, and when his limbs are raised they fall back as rigid as iron. [Footnote: Almost the only symptom of _le grand mal_ which the sailor could not successfully counterfeit was the abnormal dilation of the pupils so characteristic of that complaint, and this difficulty he overcame by rolling his eyes up till the pupils were invisible.]

After surveying him critically for a moment the officer, if he too is an old hand, quietly removes the candle from the lantern and with a deft turn of his wrist tips the boiling-hot contents of the tallow cup surrounding the flaming wick out upon the bare arm or exposed chest of the “case.” When the fit was genuine, as of course it sometimes was, the test had no particular reviving effect; but if the man were shamming, as he probably was in spite of the great consistency of his symptoms, the chances were that, with all his nerve and foreknowledge of what was in store for him, the sudden biting of the fiery liquid into his naked flesh would bring him to his feet dancing with pain and cursing and banning to the utmost extent of his elastic vocabulary.
When this happened, "Put him back," said the officer. "He'll do, alow or aloft."

Going aloft at sea was the true epileptic's chief dread. And with good reason, for sooner or later it meant a fall, and death.

In the meantime other enterprising members of the press-room community made ready for the scrutiny of the official eye in various ways, practising many devices for procuring a temporary disability and a permanent discharge. Some, horrible thought! "rubbed themselves with Cow Itch and Whipped themselves with Nettles to appear in Scabbs"; others "burnt themselves with oil of vitriol" to induce symptoms with difficulty distinguishable from those of scurvy, that disease of such dread omen to the fleet; whilst others emulated the passing of the poor consumptive of the canting epitaph, whose "legs it was that carried her off." Bad legs, indeed, ran a close race with fits in the pressed man's sprint for liberty. They were so easily induced, and so cheaply. The industrious application of the smallest copper coin procurable, the humble farthing or the halfpenny, speedily converted the most insignificant abrasion of the skin into a festering sore.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. Ambrose, 20 June 1741; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1544--Capt. Bowyer, 18 Dec. 1808; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1451--A. Clarke, Examining Surgeon at Dublin, 18 May 1807; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1517--Letters of Capt. Brenton, March and April 1797, and many instances.]
Here and there a man of iron nerve, acting on the common belief that if you had lost a finger the Navy would have none of you, adopted a more heroic method of shaking off the clutch of the gang. Such a man was Samuel Caradine, some time inhabitant of Kendal. Committed to the House of Correction there as a preliminary to his being turned over to the fleet for crimes that he had done, he expressed a desire to bid farewell to his wife. She was sent for, and came, apparently not unprepared; for after she had greeted her man through the iron door of his cell, "he put his hand underneath, and she, with a mallet and chisel concealed for the purpose, struck off a finger and thumb to render him unfit for His Majesty's service." [Footnote: _Times_, 3 Nov. 1795.]

A stout-hearted fellow named Browne, who hailed from Chester, would have made Caradine a fitting mate. "Being impressed into the sea service, he very violently determined, in order to extricate himself therefrom, to mutilate the thumb and a finger of his left hand; which he accomplished by repeatedly maiming them with an old hatchet that he had obtained for that purpose. He was immediately discharged." [Footnote: _Liverpool Advertiser_, 6 June 1777.] Such men as these were a substantial loss to the service. Fighting a gun shoulder to shoulder, what fearful execution would they not have wrought upon the "hereditary enemy"!

It did not always do, however, to presume upon the loss of a forefinger, particularly if it were missing from the left hand. Capt. Barker, while he was regulating the press at Bristol, once had
occasion to send into Ilchester for a couple of brace of convicts who had received the royal pardon on condition of their serving at sea.

Near Shepton Mallet, on the return tramp, his gangsmen fell in with a party armed with sticks and knives, who "beat and cut them in a very cruel manner." They succeeded, however, in taking the ringleader, one Charles Biggen, and brought him in; but when Barker would have discharged the fellow because his left forefinger was wanting, the Admiralty brushed the customary rule aside and ordered him to be kept. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1528--Capt. Barker, 28 July 1803, and endorsement.]

The main considerations entering into the dispatch of pressed men to the fleet, when at length their period of detention at headquarters came to an end, were economy, speed and safety. Transport was necessarily either by land or water, and in the case of seaport, river or canal towns, both modes were of course available. Gangs operating at a distance from the sea, or remote from a navigable river or canal, were from their very situation obliged to send their catch to market either wholly by land, or by land and water successively. Land transport, though always healthier, and in many instances speedier and cheaper than transport by water, was nevertheless much more risky. Pressed men therefore preferred it. The risks--rescue and desertion--were all in their favour. Hence, when they "offered cheerfully to walk up," or down, as the case might be, the seeming magnanimity of the offer was never permitted to blind those in charge of them to the need for a strong attendant guard. [Footnote: In the spring of 1795 a body of Quota Men, some 130 strong, voluntarily
marched from Liverpool to London, a distance of 182 miles, instead of travelling by coach as at first proposed. Though all had received the bounty and squandered it in debauchery, not a man deserted; and in their case the danger of rescue was of course absent. _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1511--Capt. Bowen, 21 April 1795.] The men would have had to walk in any case, for transport by coach, though occasionally sanctioned, was an event of rare occurrence. A number procured in Berkshire were in 1756 forwarded to London "by the Reading machines," but this was an exceptional indulgence due to the state of their feet, which were already "blistered with travelling."

Even with the precaution of a strong guard, there were parts of the country through which it was highly imprudent, if not altogether impracticable, to venture a party on foot. Of these the thirty-mile stretch of road between Kilkenny and Waterford, the nearest seaport, perhaps enjoyed the most unenviable reputation. No gang durst traverse it; and no body of pressed men, and more particularly of pressed Catholics, could ever have been conveyed even for so short a distance through a country inhabited by a fanatical and strongly disaffected people without courting certain bloodshed. The naval authorities in consequence left Kilkenny severely alone. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1529--Capt. Bowen, 12 Oct. 1803.]

The sending of men overland from Appledore to Plymouth, a course frequently adopted to avoid the circuitous sea-route, was attended with similar risks. The hardy miners and quarrymen of the intervening moorlands loved nothing so much as knocking the gangsman on the head.
The attenuated neck of land between the Mersey and the Dee had an evil reputation for affairs of this description. Men pressed at Chester, and sent across the neck to the tenders or ships of war in the Mersey, seldom reached their destination unless attended by an exceptionally strong escort. The reason is briefly but graphically set forth by Capt. Ayscough, who dispatched three such men from Chester, under convoy of his entire gang, in 1780. "On the road thither," says he, "about seven miles from hence, at a village called Sutton, they were met by upwards of one Hundred Arm'd Seamen from Parkgate, belonging to different privateers at Liverpool. An Affray ensued, and the three Impress'd men were rescued by the Mobb, who Shot one of my Gang through the Body and wounded two others." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1446--Capt. Ayscough, 17 Nov. 1780.] Parkgate, it will be recalled, was a notorious "nest of seamen." The alternative route to Liverpool, by passage-boat down the Dee, was both safer and cheaper. To send a pressed man that way, accompanied by two of the gang, cost only twelve-and-six. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Admiral Phillip, 14 Sept. 1804.]

Mr. Midshipman Goodave and party, conveying pressed men from Lymington to Southampton, once met with an adventure in traversing the New Forest which, notwithstanding its tragic sequel, is not without its humorous side. They had left the little fishing village of Lepe some miles behind, and were just getting well into the Forest, when a
cavalcade of mounted men, some thirty strong, all muffled in
greatgoats and armed to the teeth, unexpectedly emerged from the wood
and opened fire upon them. Believing it to be an attempt at rescue,
the gang closed in about their prisoners, but when one of these was
the first to fall, his arm shattered and an ear shot off, the
gangsmen, perceiving their mistake, broke and fled in all directions.
Not far, however. The smugglers, for such they were, quickly rounded
them up and proceeded, not to shoot them, as the would-be fugitives
anticipated, but to administer to them the "smugglers' oath." This
they did by forcing them on their knees and compelling them, at the
point of the pistol and with horrible execrations, to "wish their eyes
might drop out if they told their officers which way they, the
smugglers, were gone." Having extorted this unique pledge of secrecy
as to their movements, they rode away into the Forest, unaware that
Mr. Midshipman Goodave, snugly ensconced in the neighbouring ditch,
had seen and heard all that passed--a piece of discretion on his part
that later on brought at least one of the smugglers into distressing
contact with the law. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 300--Law
Officers' Opinions, 1778-83, No. 18: Informations of Shepherd Goodave,
1 Oct. 1779.]

Just as the dangers of the sea sometimes rendered it safer to dispatch
pressed men from seaport towns by land--as at Exmouth, where the
entrance to the port was in certain weathers so hazardous as to bottle
all shipping up, or shut it out, for days together--so the dangers
peculiar to the land rendered it as often expedient to dispatch them
from inland towns by water. This was the case at Stourbridge. Handed
over to contractors responsible for their safe-keeping, the numerous
seamen taken by the gangs in that town and vicinity were delivered on
board the tenders in King Road, below Bristol--conveyed thither by
water, at a cost of half a guinea per head. This sum included
subsistence, which would appear to have been mainly by water also. To
Liverpool, the alternative port of delivery, carriage could only be
had by land, and the risks of land transit in that direction were so
great as to be considered insuperable, to say nothing of the cost.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1500--Letters of Capt. Beecher,
1780.]

At ports such as Liverpool, Dublin and Hull, where His Majesty's ships
made frequent calls, the readiest means of disposing of pressed men
was of course to put them immediately on ship-board; but when no ship
was thus available, or when, though available, she was bound foreign
or on other prohibitive service, there was nothing for it, in the case
of rendezvous lying so far afield as to render land transport
impracticable, but to forward the harvest of the gangs by water. In
this way there grew up a system of sea transport that centred from
many distant and widely separated points of the kingdom upon those

Now and then, for reasons of economy or expediency, men were shipped
to these destinations as "passengers" on colliers and merchant
vessels, their escort consisting of a petty officer and one or more
gangsmen, according to the number to be safeguarded. Occasionally they
had no escort at all, the masters being simply bound over to make good
all losses arising from any cause save death, capture by an enemy's
ship or the act of God. From King's Lynn to the Nore the rate per
head, by this means of transport, was 2 Pounds, 15s., including
victualling; from Hull, 2 Pounds 12s. 6d.; from Newcastle, 10s. 6d.
The lower rates for the longer runs are explained by the fact that,
shipping facilities being so much more numerous on the Humber and the
Tyne, competition reduced the cost of carriage in proportion to its
activity. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral Phillip,
3 and 11 Aug. 1801; Admiral Pringle, 2 April 1795.]

In spite of every precaution, such serious loss attended the shipping
of men in this manner as to force the Admiralty back upon its own
resources. Recourse was accordingly had, in the great majority of
cases, to that handy auxiliary of the fleet, the hired tender. Tenders
fell into two categories--cruising tenders, employed exclusively, or
almost exclusively, in pressing afloat after the manner described in
an earlier chapter, and tenders used for the double purpose of
"keeping" men pressed on land and of conveying them to the fleet when
their numbers grew to such proportions as to make a full and
consequently dangerous ship. In theory, "any old unmasted hulk, unfit
to send to sea, would answer to keep pressed men in." [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral Pringle, 2 April 1795.] In
practice, the contrary was the case. Fitness for sea, combined with
readiness to slip at short notice, was more essential than mere cubic
capacity, since transhipment was thus avoided and the pressed man
deprived of another chance of taking French leave.
One all-important consideration, in the case of tenders employed for
the storing and detention of pressed men prior to their dispatch to
the fleet, was that the vessel should be able to lie afloat at low
water; for if the fall of the tide left her high and dry, the risk of
desertion, as well as of attack from the shore, was enormously
increased. Whitehaven could make no use of man-storing tenders for
this reason; and at the important centre of King's Lynn, which was
really a receiving station for three counties, it was found "requisite
to have always a vessel below the Deeps to keep pressed men aboard;"
since their escape or rescue by way of the flats was in any anchorage
nearer the town a foregone conclusion. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1486--Capt. Baird, 27 Feb. 1755.]

On board the tenders the comfort and health of the pressed man were no
more studied than in the strong-rooms and prisons ashore. A part of
the hold was required to be roughly but substantially partitioned off
for his security, and on rare occasions this space was fitted with
bunks; but as the men usually arrived "all very bare of
necessaries"--except when pressed afloat, a case we are not now
considering--any provision for the slinging of hammocks, or the
spreading of bedding they did not possess, came to be looked upon as a
superfluous and uncalled-for proceeding. Even the press-room was a
rarity, save in tenders that had been long in the service. Down in the
hold of the vessel, whither the men were turned like so many sheep as
soon as they arrived on board, they perhaps found a rough platform of
deal planks provided for them to lie on, and from this they were at
liberty to extract such sorry comfort as they could during the weary
days and nights of their incarceration. Other conveniences they had none. When this too was absent, as not infrequently happened, they were reduced to the necessity of "laying about on the Cables and Cask," suffering in consequence "more than can well be expressed."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. A'Court, 22 April 1741; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1497--Capt. Bover, 11 Feb. 1777, and Captains' Letters, _passim_.] It is not too much to say that transported convicts had better treatment.

Cooped up for weeks at a stretch in a space invariably crowded to excess, deprived almost entirely of light, exercise and fresh air, and poisoned with bad water and what Roderick Random so truthfully called the "noisome stench of the place," it is hardly surprising that on protracted voyages from such distant ports as Limerick or Leith the men should have "fallen sick very fast." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1444--Capt. Allen, 4 March 1771, and Captains' Letters, _passim_.] Officers were, indeed, charged "to be very careful of the healths of the seamen" entrusted to their keeping; yet in spite of this most salutary regulation, so hopelessly bad were the conditions under which the men were habitually carried, and so slight was the effort made to ameliorate them, that few tenders reached their destination without a more or less serious outbreak of fever, small-pox or some other equally malignant distemper. Upon the fleet the effect was appalling. Sickly tenders could not but make sickly ships.

If the material atmosphere of the tender's hold was bad, its moral
atmosphere was unquestionably worse. Dark deeds were done here at
times, and no man "peached" upon his fellows. Out of this deplorable
state of things a remarkable legal proceeding once grew. Murder having
been committed in the night, and none coming forward to implicate the
offender, the coroner's jury, instead of returning their verdict
against some person or persons unknown, found the entire occupants of
the tender's hold, seventy-two in number, guilty of that crime. A
warrant was actually issued for their apprehension, though never
executed. To put the men on their trial was a useless step, since, in
the circumstances, they would have been most assuredly acquitted.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 300--Law Officers' Opinions,
1778-83, No. 20.] Just as assuredly any informer in their midst would
have been murdered.

The scale of victualling on board the tenders was supposed to be the
same as on shore. "Full allowance daily" was the rule; and if the
copper proved too small to serve all at one boiling, there were to be
as many boilings as should be required to go round. Unhappily for the
pressed man, there was a weevil in his daily bread. While it was the
bounden duty of the master of the vessel to feed him properly, and of
the officers to see that he was properly fed, "officers and masters
generally understood each other too well in the pursery line."
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral M'Bride, 19 March
1795.] Rations were consequently short, boilings deficient, and though
the cabin went well content, the hold was the scene of bitter
grumblings.
Nor were these the only disabilities the pressed man laboured under.

His officers proved a sore trial to him. The Earl of Pembroke, Lord High Admiral, foreseeing that this would be the case, directed that he should be "used with all possible tenderness and humanity." The order was little regarded. The callosity of Smollett's midshipman, who spat in the pressed man's face when he dared to complain of his sufferings, and roughly bade him die for aught he cared, was characteristic of the service. Hence a later regulation, with grim irony, gave directions for his burial. He was to be put out of the way, as soon as might be after the fatal conditions prevailing on board His Majesty's tenders had done their work, with as great a show of decency as could be extracted from the sum of ten shillings.

Strictly speaking, it was not in the power of the tender's officers to mitigate the hardships of the pressed man's lot to any appreciable extent, let them be as humane as they might. For this the pressed man himself was largely to blame. An ungrateful rogue, his hide was as impervious to kindness as a duck's back to water. Supply him with slops [Footnote: The regulations stipulated that slops should be served out to all who needed them; but as their acceptance was held to set up a contract between the recipient and the Crown, the pressed man was not unnaturally averse from drawing upon such a source of supply as long as any chance of escape remained to him.] wherewith to cover his nakedness or shield him from the cold, and before the Sunday muster came round the garments had vanished--not into thin air, indeed, but in tobacco and rum, for which forbidden luxuries he invariably bartered them with the bumboat women who had the run of the
vessel while she remained in harbour. Or allow him on deck to take the
air and such exercise as could be got there, and the moment your back
as considerate as that Scotch humorist, William Ramsay, who was
pressed at Leith for beating an informer and there put on board the
tender. Seizing the first opportunity of absconding, "Sir," he wrote
to the lieutenant in command, "I am so much attached to you for the
good usage I have received at your hands, that I cannot think of
venturing on board your ship again in the present state of affairs. I
therefore leave this letter at my father's to inform you that I intend
to slip out of the way." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
1524.--Capt. Brenton, 20 Oct. 1800.]

When that clever adventuress, Moll Flanders, found herself booked for
transportation beyond the seas, her one desire, it will be recalled,
was "to come back before she went." So it was with the pressed man.
The idea of escape obsessed him--escape before he should be rated on
shipboard and sent away to heaven only knew what remote quarter of the
globe. It was for this reason that irons were so frequently added to
his comforts. "Safe bind, safe find" was the golden rule on board His
Majesty's tenders.

How difficult it was for him to carry his cherished design into
execution, and yet how easy, is brought home to us with surprising
force by the catastrophe that befell the _Tasker_ tender. On the
23rd of May 1755 the _Tasker_ sailed out of the Mersey with a
full cargo of pressed men designed for Spithead. She possessed no
press-room, and as the men for that reason had the run of the hold, all hatches were securely battened down with the exception of the maindeck scuttle, an opening so small as to admit of the passage of but one man at a time. Her crew numbered thirty-eight, and elaborate precautions were taken for the safe-keeping of her restless human freight. So much is evident from the disposition of her guard, which was as follows:--

_(a)_ At the open scuttle two sentries, armed with pistol and cutlass. Orders, not to let too many men up at once.

_(b)_ On the forecastle two sentries, armed with musket and bayonet. Orders, to fire on any pressed man who should attempt to swim away.

_(c)_ On the poop one sentry, similarly armed, and having similar orders.

_(d)_ On the quarter-deck, at the entrance to the great cabin, where the remaining arms were kept, one sentry, armed with cutlass and pistol. Orders, to let no pressed man come upon the quarter-deck.

There were thus six armed sentinels stationed about the ship--ample to have nipped in the bud any attempt to seize the vessel, but for two serious errors of judgment on the part of the officer responsible for
their disposition. These were, first, the discretionary power vested in the sentries at the scuttle; and, second, the inadequate guard, a solitary man, set for the defence of the great cabin and the arms it contained. Now let us see how these errors of judgment affected the situation.

Either through stupidity, bribery or because they were rapidly making an offing, the sentries at the scuttle, as the day wore on, admitted a larger number of pressed men to the comparative freedom of the deck than was consistent with prudence. The number eventually swelled to fourteen--sturdy, determined fellows, the pick of the hold. One of them, having a fiddle, struck up a merry tune, the rest fell to dancing, the tender's crew who were off duty caught the infection and joined in, while the officers stood looking on, tolerantly amused and wholly unsuspicous of danger. Suddenly, just when the fun was at its height, a splash was heard, a cry of "Man overboard!" ran from lip to lip, and officers and crew rushed to the vessel's side. They were there, gazing into the sea, for only a minute or two, but by the time they turned their faces inboard again the fourteen determined men were masters of the ship. In the brief disciplinary interval they had overpowered the guard and looted the cabin of its store of arms. That night they carried the tender into Redwharf Bay and there bade her adieu. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 920--Admiral Sir Edward Hawke, 3 June 1755, and enclosures.] To pursue them in so mountainous a country would have been useless; to punish them, even had they been retaken, impossible. As unrated men they were neither mutineers nor deserters, [Footnote: By 4 & 5 Anne, cap. 6, pressed men could be
apprehended and tried for desertion by virtue of the Queen's shilling having been forced upon them at the time they were pressed, but as the use of that coin fell into abeyance, so the Act in question became gradually a dead-letter. Hay, Murray, Lloyd, Pinfold and Jervis, Law Officers of the Crown, giving an opinion on this important point in 1756, held that "pressed men are not subject to the Articles (of War) until they are actually rated on board some of His Majesty's ships."—_Admiralty Records_ 7. 299—Law Officers' Opinions, 1756-77, No. 3, Case 2.] and the seizure of the tender was at the worst a bloodless crime in which no one was hurt save an obdurate sentry, who was slashed over the head with a cutlass.

The boldness of its inception and the anticlimaxical nature of its finish invest another exploit of this description with an interest all its own. This was the cutting out of the _Union_ tender from the river Tyne on the 12th April 1777. The commander, Lieut. Colville, having that day gone on shore for the "benefit of the air," and young Barker, the midshipman who was left in charge in his absence, having surreptitiously followed suit, the pressed men and volunteers, to the number of about forty, taking advantage of the opportunity thus presented, rose and seized the vessel, loaded the great guns, and by dint of threatening to sink any boat that should attempt to board them kept all comers, including the commander himself, at bay till nine o'clock in the evening. By that time night had fallen, so, with the wind blowing strong off-shore and an ebb-tide running, they cut the cables and stood out to sea. For three days nothing was heard of them, and North Shields, the scene of the exploit and the home of most of
the runaways, was just on the point of giving the vessel up for lost
when news came that she was safe. Influenced by one Benjamin Lamb, a
pressed man of more than ordinary character, the rest had relinquished
their original purpose of either crossing over to Holland or running
the vessel ashore on some unfrequented part of the coast, and had
instead carried her into Scarborough Bay, doubtless hoping to land
there without interference and so make their way to Whitby or Hull. In
this design, however, they were partly frustrated, for, a force having
been hastily organised for their apprehension, they were waylaid as
they came ashore and retaken to the number of twenty-two, the rest
escaping. Lamb, discharged for his good offices in saving the tender,
was offered a boatswain's place if he would re-enter; but for poor
Colville the affair proved disastrous. Becoming demented, he attempted
to shoot himself and had to be superseded. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1497--Capt. Bover, 13 April 1777, and enclosures.]

All down through the century similar incidents, crowding thick and
fast one upon another, relieved the humdrum routine of the pressed
man's passage to the fleet, and either made his miserable life in a
measure worth living or brought it to a summary conclusion. Of minor
incidents, all tending to the same happy or unhappy end, there was no
lack. Now he sweltered beneath a sun so hot as to cause the pitch to
boil in the seams of the deck above his head; again, as when the
_Boneta_ sloop, conveying pressed men from Liverpool to the
Hamoaze in 1740, encountered "Bedds of two or three Acres bigg of Ice
& of five or Six foot thickness, which struck her with such force
'twas enough to drive her bows well out," he "almost perished" from
cold. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2732--Capt. Young, 8 Feb. 1739-40.] To-day it was broad farce. He held his sides with laughter to see the lieutenant of the tender he was in, mad with rage and drink, chase the steward round and round the mainmast with a loaded pistol, whilst the terrified hands, fearing for their lives, fled for refuge to the coalhole, the roundtops and the shore. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1498--Complaint of the Master and Company of H. M. Hired Tender _Speedwell_, 21 Dec. 1778.] To-morrow it was tragedy. Some "little dirty privateer" swooped down upon him, as in the case of the _Admiral Spry_ tender from Waterford to Plymouth, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1500--Dickson, Surveyor of Customs at the Cove of Cork, April 1780.] and consigned him to what he dreaded infinitely more than any man-o'-war--a French prison; or contrary winds, swelling into a sudden gale, drove him a helpless wreck on to some treacherous coast, as they drove the _Rich Charlotte_ upon the Formby Sands in 1745, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1440--Capt. Amherst, 4 Oct. 1745.] and there remorselessly drowned him.

Provided he escaped such untoward accidents as death or capture by the enemy, sooner or later the pressed man arrived at the receiving station. Here another ordeal awaited him, and here also he made his last bid for freedom.

Taking the form of a final survey or regulating, the ordeal the pressed man had now to face was no less thoroughgoing than its precursor at the rendezvous had in all probability been superficial and ineffective. Eyes saw deeper here, wits were sharper, and in this
lay at once the pressed man's bane and salvation. For if genuinely
unfit, the fact was speedily demonstrated; whereas if merely shamming,
discovery overtook him with a certainty that wrote "finis" to his last
hope. Nevertheless, for this ordeal, as for his earlier regulating at
the rendezvous, the sailor who knew his book prepared himself with
exacting care during the tedium of his voyage.

No sooner was he mustered for survey, then, than the most
extraordinary, impudent and in many instances transparent impostures
were sprung upon his examiners. Deafness prevailed to an alarming
extent, dumbness was by no means unknown. Men who fought desperately
when the gang took them, or who played cards with great assiduity in
the tender's hold, developed sudden paralysis of the arms. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1464--Capt. Bloyes, Jan. 1702-3; _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1470--Capt. Bennett, 26 Sept. 1711. An extraordinary
instance of this form of malingering is cited in the "Naval
Sketch-Book," 1826.] Legs which had been soundness itself at
the rendezvous were now a putrefying mass of sores. The itch broke out
again, virulent and from all accounts incurable. Fits returned with
redoubled frequency and violence, the sane became demented or idiotic,
and the most obviously British, losing the use of their mother tongue,

as indeed they had none for naval purposes. Looking at the miserable,
disease-ridden crew, the uninitiated spectator was moved to tears of
pity. Not so the naval officer. In France, when a prisoner of war,
learning French there without a master, he had heard a saying that he
now recalled to some purpose: _Vin de grain est plus doux que n'est
pas vin de presse_--"Willing duties are sweeter than those that are
extorted. The punning allusion to the press had tickled his fancy and fixed the significant truism in his memory. From it he now took his cue and proceeded to man his ship.

So at length the pressed man, in spite of all his ruses and protestations, was rated and absorbed into that vast agglomeration of men and ships known as the fleet. Here he underwent a speedy metamorphosis. It was not that he lost his individuality and became a mere unit amongst thousands. Quite the contrary. Friends, creditors or next-of-kin, concocting petitions on his behalf, set forth in heart-rending terms the many disabilities he suffered from, together with many he did not, and prayed, with a fervour often reaching no deeper than their pockets, that he might be restored without delay to his bereaved and destitute family. Across the bottom right-hand corner of these petitions, conveniently upturned for that purpose, the Admiralty scrawled its initial order: "Let his case be stated." The immediate effect of this expenditure of Admiralty ink was magical. It promoted the subject of the petition from the ranks, so to speak, and raised him to the dignity of a "State the Case Man."

He now became a person of consequence. The kindliest inquiries were made after his health. The state of his eyes, the state of his limbs, the state of his digestion were all stated with the utmost minuteness and prolixity. Reams of gilt-edged paper were squandered upon him; and by the time his case had been duly stated, restated, considered, reconsidered and finally decided, the poor fellow had perhaps voyaged round the world or by some mischance gone to the next.
In the matter of exacting their pound of flesh the Lords Commissioners were veritable Shylocks. Neither supplications nor tears had power to move them, and though they sometimes relented, it was invariably for reasons of policy and in the best interests of the service. Men clearly shown to be protected they released. They could not go back upon their word unless some lucky quibble rendered it possible to traverse the obligation with honour. Unprotected subjects who were clearly unfit to eat the king's victuals they discharged--for substitutes.

The principle underlying their Lordships' gracious acceptance of substitutes for pressed men was beautifully simple. If as a pressed man you were fit to serve, but unwilling, you were worth at least two able-bodied men; if you were unfit, and hence unable to serve, you were worth at least one. This simple rule proved a source of great encouragement to the gangs, for however bad a man might be he was always worth a better.

The extortions to which the Lords Commissioners lent themselves in this connection--three, and, as in the case of Joseph Sanders of Bristol, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1534--Capt. Barker, 4 Jan. 1805, and endorsement.] even four able-bodied men being exacted as substitutes--could only be termed iniquitous did we not know the
duplicity, roguery and deep cunning with which they had to cope. Upon
the poor, indeed, the practice entailed great hardship, particularly
when the home had to be sacrificed in order to obtain the discharge of
the bread-winner who had been instrumental in getting it together; but
to the unscrupulous crimp and the shady attorney the sailor’s
misfortune brought only gain. Buying up "raw boys," or Irishmen who
"came over for reasons they did not wish known"—rascally persons who
could be had for a song—they substituted these for seasoned men who
had been pressed, and immediately, having got the latter in their
power, turned them over to merchant ships at a handsome profit. At
Hull, on the other hand, substitutes were sought in open market. The
bell-man there cried a reward for men to go in that capacity.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--George Crowle, Esq., M.P.
for Hull, 28 Dec. 1739.]

Even when the pressed man had procured his substitutes and obtained
his coveted discharge, his liberty was far from assured. In theory
exempt from the press for a period of at least twelve months, he was
in reality not only liable to be re-pressed at any moment, but to be
subjected to that process as often as he chose to free himself and the
gang to take him. A Liverpool youth named William Crick a lad with
expectations to the amount of "near 4000 Pounds," was in this way
pressed and discharged by substitute three times in quick succession.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Rear-Admiral Child, 8 Aug.
1799.] Intending substitutes themselves not infrequently suffered the
same fate ere they could carry out their intention. [Footnote: _
Admiralty Records_ 1. 1439--Lieut. Leaver, 5 Jan. 1739-40, and
numerous instances.]

The discharging of a pressed man whose petition finally succeeded did not always prove to be the eminently simple matter it would seem. Time and tide waited for no man, least of all for the man who had the misfortune to be pressed, and in the interval between his appeal and the order for his release his ship, as already hinted, had perhaps put half the circumference of the globe between him and home; or when the crucial moment arrived, and he was summoned before his commander to learn the gratifying Admiralty decision, he made his salute in batches of two, three or even four men, each of whom protested vehemently that he was the original and only person to whom the order applied. An amusing attempt at "coming Cripplegate" in this manner occurred on board the _Lennox_ in 1711. A woman, who gave her name as Alice Williams, having petitioned for the release of her "brother," one John Williams, a pressed man then on board that ship, succeeded in her petition, and orders were sent down to the commander, Capt. Bennett, to give the man his discharge. He proceeded to do so, but to his amazement discovered, first, that he had no less than four John Williamses on board, all pressed men; second, that while each of the four claimed to be the man in question, three of the number had no sister, while the fourth confessed to one whose name was not Alice but "Percilly"; and, after long and patient investigation, third, that one of them had a wife named Alice, who, he being a foreigner domiciled by marriage, had "tould him she would gett him cleare" should he chance to fall into the hands of the press-gang. In this she failed, for he was kept. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1470--Capt. Bennett,
Of the pressed man's smiling arrest for debts which he did not owe, and of his jocular seizure by sheriffs armed with writs of Habeas Corpus, the annals of his incorporation in the fleet furnish many instances. Arrest for fictitious debt was specially common. In every seaport town attorneys were to be found who made it their regular practice. Particularly was this true of Bristol. Good seamen were rarely pressed there for whom writs were not immediately issued on the score of debts of which they had never heard. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Admiral Philip, 5 Dec. 1801.] To warrant such arrest the debt had to exceed twenty pounds, and service, when the pressed man was already on shipboard, was by the hands of the Water Bailiff.

The writ of Habeas Corpus was, in effect, the only legal check it was possible to oppose to the impudent pretensions and high-handed proceedings of the gang. While H.M.S. _Amaranth_ lay in dock in 1804 and her company were temporarily quartered on a hulk in Long Reach, two sheriff's officers, accompanied by a man named Cumberland, a tailor of Deptford, boarded the latter and served a writ on a seaman for debt. The first lieutenant, who was in charge at the time, refused to let the man go, saying he would first send to his captain, then at the dock, for orders, which he accordingly did. The intruders thereupon went over the side, Cumberland "speaking very insultingly." Just as the messenger returned with the captain's answer, however, they again put in an appearance, and the lieutenant hailed them and
bade them come aboard. Cumberland complied. "I have orders from my
captain," said the lieutenant, stepping up to him, "to press you." He
did so, and had it not been that a writ of Habeas Corpus was
immediately sworn out, the Deptford tailor would most certainly have
exchanged his needle for a marlinespike. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1532--Lieut. Collett, 13 Feb. 1804.]

Provocative as such redemptive measures were, and designedly so, they
were as a rule allowed to pass unchallenged. The Lords Commissioners
regretted the loss of the men, but thought "perhaps it would be as
well to let them go." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 7. 302--Law
Officers' Opinions, 1783-95, No. 24.] For this complacent attitude on
the part of his captors the pressed man had reason to hold the Law
Officers of the Crown in grateful remembrance. As early as 1755 they
gave it as their opinion--too little heeded--that to bring any matter
connected with pressing to judicial trial would be "very imprudent."
Later, with the lesson of twenty-two years' hard pressing before their
eyes, they went still further, for they then advised that a subject so
contentious, not to say so ill-defined in law, should be kept, if not
altogether, at least as much as possible out of court. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 7. 298--Law Officers' Opinions, 1733-56, No.
99; _Admiralty Records_ 7. 299--Law Officers' Opinions, 1756-77,
No. 70.]

CHAPTER XII.
HOW THE GANG WENT OUT.

Not until the year 1833 did belated Nemesis overtake the press-gang. It died the unmourned victim of its own enormities, and the manner of its passing forms the by no means least interesting chapter in its extraordinary career.

Summarising the causes, direct and indirect, which led to the final scrapping of an engine that had been mainly instrumental in manning the fleet for a hundred years and more, and without which, whatever its imperfections, that fleet could in all human probability never have been manned at all, we find them to be substantially these:--

(a) The demoralising effects of long-continued, violent and indiscriminate pressing upon the Fleet;

(b) Its injurious and exasperating effects upon Trade;

(c) Its antagonising effect upon the Nation; and

(d) Its enormous cost as compared with recruiting by the good-will of the People.

Frederick the Great, it is related, being in one of his grim humours
after the dearly bought victory of Czaslaw, invited the neighbouring peasantry to come and share the spoil of the carcases on the field of battle. They responded in great numbers; whereupon he, surrounding them, pressed three hundred of the most promising and "cloathed them immediately from the dead." [Footnote: _State Papers Foreign, Germany,_ vol. cccxl.--Robinson to Hyndford, 31 May 1742.] In this way, Ezekiel-like, he retrieved his losses; but to the regiments so completed the addition of these resurrection recruits proved demoralising to a degree, notwithstanding the Draconic nature of the Prussian discipline. In like manner the discipline used in the British fleet, while not less drastic, failed conspicuously to counteract the dry-rot introduced and fostered by the press-gang. In its efforts to maintain the Navy, indeed, that agency came near to proving its ruin.

On the most lenient survey of the recruits it furnished, it cannot be denied that they were in the aggregate a desperately poor lot, unfitted both physically and morally for the tremendous task of protecting an island people from the attacks of powerful sea-going rivals. How bad they were, the epithets spontaneously applied to them by the outraged commanders upon whom they were foisted abundantly prove. Witness the following, taken at random from naval captains’ letters extending over a hundred years:--

"Blackguards."

"Sorry poor creatures that don't earn half the victuals they eat."
"Sad, thievish creatures."

"Not a rag left but what was of such a nature as had to be destroyed."

"150 on board, the greatest part of them sorry fellows."

"Poor ragged souls, and very small."

"Miserable poor creatures, not a seaman amongst them, and the fleet in the same condition."

"Unfit for service, and a nuisance to the ship."

"Never so ill-manned a ship since I have been at sea. The worst set I ever saw."

"Twenty-six poor souls, but three of them seamen. Ragged and half dead."

"Landsmen, boys, incurables and cripples. Sad wretches great part of them are."
"More fit for an hospital than the sea."

"All the ragg-tagg that can be picked up."

In this last phrase, "All the rag-tag that can be picked up," we have the key to the situation; for though orders to press "no aged, diseased or infirm persons, nor boys," were sufficiently explicit, yet in order to swell the returns, and to appease in some degree the fleet's insatiable greed for men, the gangs raked in recruits with a lack of discrimination that for the better part of a century made that fleet the most gigantic collection of human freaks and derelicts under the sun.

Billingsley, commander of the _Ferme_, receiving seventy pressed men to complete his complement in 1708, discovers to his chagrin that thirteen are lame in the legs, five lame in the hands, and three almost blind. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1469--Capt. Billingsley, 5 May 1708.] Latham, commanding the _Bristol_, on the eve of sailing for the West Indies can muster only eighteen seamen amongst sixty-eight pressed men that day put on board of him. As for the rest, they are either sick, or too old or too young to be of service--"ragged wretches, bad of the itch, who have not the least pretensions to eat His Majesty's bread." Forty of the number had to be put ashore. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 161--Admiral Watson, 26 Feb. 1754.] Admiral Mostyn, boarding his flagship, the _Monarch_, "never in his life saw such a crew," though the
Monarch had an already sufficiently evil reputation in that respect, insomuch that whenever a scarecrow man-o'-war's man was seen ashore the derisive cry instantly went up: "There goes a Monarch!" So hopelessly bad was the company in this instance, it was found impossible to carry the ship to sea. "I don't know where they come from," observes the Admiral, hot with indignation, "but whoever was the officer who received them, he ought to be ashamed, for I never saw such except in the condemned hole at Newgate. I was three hours and a half mustering this scabby crew, and I should have imagined that the Scum of the Earth had been picked up for this ship."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 480--Admiral Mostyn, 1 and 6 April 1755.] The vigorous protest prepares us for what Capt. Baird found on board the Duke a few years later. The pressed men there exhibited such qualifications for sea duty as "fractured thigh-bone, idiocy, strained back and sickly, a discharged soldier, gout and sixty years old, rupture, deaf and foolish, fits, lame, rheumatic and incontinence of urine." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1490--Capt. Baird, 22 May 1759.]

That most reprehensible practice, the pressing of cripples for naval purposes, would appear to have had its origin in the unauthorised extension of an order issued by the Lord High Admiral, in 1704, to the effect that in the appointment of cooks to the Navy the Board should give preference to persons so afflicted. For the pressing of boys there existed even less warrant. Yet the practice was common, so much so that when, during the great famine of 1800, large numbers of youths flocked into Poole in search of the bread they could not obtain in the
country, the gangs waylaid them and reaped a rich harvest. Two hundred was the toll on this occasion. As all were in a "very starving, ragged, filthy condition," the gangsmen stripped them, washed them thoroughly in the sea, clad them in second-hand clothing from the quay-side shops, and giving each one a knife, a spoon, a comb and a bit of soap, sent them on board the tenders contented and happy.

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Capt. Boyle, 2 June 1801.]

These lads were of course a cut above the "scum of the earth" so vigorously denounced by Admiral Mostyn. Beginning their career as powder-monkeys, a few years' licking into shape transformed them, as a rule, into splendid fighting material.

The utter incapacity of the human refuse dumped into the fleet is justly stigmatised by one indignant commander, himself a patient long-sufferer in that respect, as a "scandalous abuse of the service."

Six of these poor wretches had not the strength of one man. They could not be got upon deck in the night, or if by dint of the rope's-end they were at length routed out of their hammocks, they immediately developed the worst symptoms of the "waister"--seasickness and fear of that which is high. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1471--Capt. Billop, 26 Oct. 1712.] Bruce, encountering dirty weather on the Irish coast, when in command of the _Hawke_, out of thirty-two pressed men "could not get above seven to go upon a yard to reef his courses;" but was obliged to order his warrant officers and master aloft on that duty. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1477--Capt. Bruce, 6 Oct. 1741.] Belitha, of the _Scipio_, had but one man aboard him, out of a crew of forty-one, who was competent to stand his trick at the
wheel; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1482--Capt. Belitha, 15 July 1746.] Bethell, of the _Phoenix_, had many who had "never seen a gun fired in their lives"; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1490--Capt. Bethell, 21 Aug. 1759.] and Adams, of the _Bird-in-hand_, learnt the fallacy of the assertion that that _rara avis_ is worth two in the bush. Mustered for drill in small-arms, his men "knew no more how to handle them than a child."

[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1440--Capt. Adams, 7 Oct. 1744.] For all their knowledge of that useful exercise they might have been Sea-Fencibles.

Yet while ships were again and again prevented from putting to sea because, though their complements were numerically complete, they had only one or no seaman on board, and hence were unable to get their anchors or make sail; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1478--Capt. Boys, 14 April 1742; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1512--Capt. Bayly, 21 July 1796, and Captains' Letters, _passim_] while Bennett, of the _Lennox_, when applied to by the masters of eight outward-bound East-India ships for the loan of two hundred and fifty men to enable them to engage the French privateers by whom they were held up in the river of Shannon, dared not lend a single hand lest the pressed men, who formed the greater part of his crew, should rise and run away with the ship; [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1499--Capt. Bennett, 22 Sept. 1779.] Ambrose, of the _Rupert_, cruising off Cape Machichaco with a crew of "miserable poor wretches" whom he feared could be of "no manner of use or service" to him, after a short but sharp engagement
of only an hour's duration captured, with the loss of but a single
man, the largest privateer sailing out of San Sebastian—the _Duke
of Vandome_, of twenty-six carriage guns and two hundred and two
men, of whom twenty-nine were killed; [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1439--Capt. Ambrose, 7 July and 26 Sept. 1741.] and
Capt. Amherst, encountering a heavy gale in Barnstable Pool, off
Appledore, would have lost his ship, the low-waisted, over-masted
_Mortar_ sloop, had it not been for the nine men he was so lucky
as to impress shortly before the gale. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 1440--Capt. Amherst, 12 Dec. 1744.] Anson regarded
pressed men with suspicion. When he sailed on his famous voyage round
the world his ships contained only sixty-seven; but with his
complement of five hundred reduced by sickness to two hundred and one,
he was glad to add forty of those undesirables to their number out of
the India-men at Wampoo. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
1439--Capt. Anson, 18 Sept. 1740, and 7 Dec. 1742.] These, however,
were seamen such as the gangs did not often pick up in England, where,
as we have seen, the able seaman who was not fully protected avoided
the press as he would a lee shore.

In addition to the sweepings of the roads and slums, there were in His
Majesty's ships many who trod the decks "wide betwixt the legs, as if
they had the gyves on." Peculiar to the seafaring man, the tailor and
the huckstering Jew, the gait of these individuals, who belonged
mostly to the sailor class, was strongly accentuated by an
adventitious circumstance having no necessary connection with
Israelitish descent, the sartorial board or the rolling deep. They
were in fact convicts who had but recently shed their irons, and who
walked wide from force of habit. Reasons of policy rather than of
mercy explained their presence in the fleet. The prisons of the
country, numerous and insanitary though they were, could neither hold
them all nor kill them; America would have no more of them; and penal
settlements, those later garden cities of a harassed government, were
as yet undreamt of. In these circumstances reprieved and pardoned
convicts were bestowed in about equal proportions, according to their
calling and election, upon the army and the navy.

The practice was one of very respectable antiquity and antecedents. By
a certain provision of the Feudal System a freeman who had committed a
felony, or become hopelessly involved in debt, might purge himself of
either by becoming a serf. So, at a later date, persons in the like
predicament were permitted to exchange their fetters, whether of debt
or iron, for the dear privilege of "spilling every drop of blood in
their bodies" [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5125--Petition of
the Convicts on board the _Stanislaus_ hulk, Woolwich, 18 May
1797.] on behalf of the sovereign whose clemency they enjoyed. Broken
on the wheel of naval discipline, they "did very well in deep water."
Nearer land they were given, like the jailbirds they were, to "hopping
the twig." [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 2733--Capt. Young,
21 March 1776.]

The insolvent debtor, who in the majority of cases had studied his
pleasures more than his constitution, was perhaps an even less
desirable recruit than his cousin the emancipated convict. In his
letters to the Navy Board, Capt. Aston, R.N., relates how, immediately
after the passing of the later Act [Footnote: 4 & 5 Anne, cap. 6.] for
the freeing of such persons from their financial fetters, he "gave
constant attendance for almost two years at the sittings of the Courts
of Sessions in London and Surrey," lying in wait there for such
debtors as should choose the sea. From the Queen's Bench Prison, the
Clink, Marshalsea, Borough Compter, Poultry Compter, Wood Street
Compter, Ludgate Prison and the Fleet, he obtained in that time a
total of one hundred and thirty-two, to whom in every case the
prest-shilling was paid. They were dear at the price. Bankrupt in
pocket, stamina and health, they cumbered the ships to the despair of
commanders and were never so welcome as when they ran away. [Footnote:
_Admiralty Records_ 1. 1436--Letters of Capt. Aston, 1704-5.]

The responsibility for jail-bird recruiting did not of course rest
with the gangs. They saw the shady crew safe on board ship, that was
all. Yet the odium of the thing was theirs. For not only did
association with criminals lower the standard of pressing as the gangs
practised it, it heightened the general disrepute in which they were
held. For an institution whose hold upon the affections of the people
was at the best positively negative, this was a serious matter. Every
convict whom the gang safeguarded consequently drove another nail in
the coffin preparing for it. The first and most lasting effect of the
wholesale pumping of sewage into the fleet was to taint the ships with
a taint far more deadly than mere ineptitude. A spirit of ominous
restlessness prevailed. Slackness was everywhere observable, coupled
with incipient insubordination which no discipline, however severe,
could eradicate or correct. At critical moments the men could with
difficulty be held to their duty. To hold them to quarters in '97,
when engaging the enemy off Brest, the rattan and the rope's-end had
to be unsparingly used. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1.
5125--Petition of the Company of H.M.S. _Nymph_, 1797.] In no
circumstances were they to be trusted. Given the slightest opening,
they "ran" like water from a sieve. To counteract these dangerous
tendencies the Marines were instituted. Drafted into the ships in
thousands, they checked in a measure the surface symptoms of
disaffection, but left the disease itself untouched. The fact was
generally recognised, and it was no uncommon circumstance, when the
number of pressed men present in a ship was large in proportion to the
unpressed element, for both officers and marines to walk the deck day
and night armed, fearful lest worse things should come upon them.
[Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 1499--Capt. Bennett, 22 Sept.
1799, and Captains' Letters, _passim_.] What they anticipated was
the mutiny of individual crews. But a greater calamity than this was
in store for them.

In the wholesale mutinies at Spithead and the Nore the blow fell with
appalling suddenness, notwithstanding the fact that in one form or
another it had been long foreseen. Fifty-five years had elapsed since
Vernon, scenting danger from the existing mode of manning the fleet,
had first sounded the alarm. He dreaded, he told the Lords
Commissioners in so many words, the consequences that must sooner or
later ensue from adherence to the press. [Footnote: _Admiralty
Records_ 1. 578--Vice-Admiral Vernon, 27 Jan. 1742-3.] Though the
utterance of one gifted with singularly clear prevision, the warning passed unheeded. Had it been made public, it would doubtless have met with the derision with which the voice of the national prophet is always hailed. Veiled as it was in service privacy, it moved their Lordships to neither comment nor action. Action, indeed, was out of the question. The Commissioners were helpless in the grip of a system from which, so far as human sagacity could then perceive, there was no way of escape. Let its issue be what it might, they could no more replace or reconstruct it than they could build ships of tinsel.

Other warnings were not wanting. For some years before the catastrophic happenings of '97 there flowed in upon the Admiralty a thin but steady stream of petitions from the seamen of the fleet, each of them a rude echo of Vernon's sapient warning. To these, coming as they did from an unconsidered source, little if any significance was attached. Beyond the most perfunctory inquiry, in no case to be made public, they received scant attention. The sailor, it was thought, must have his grievances if he would be happy; and petitions were the recognised line for him to air them on. They were accordingly relegated to that limbo of distasteful and quickly forgotten things, their Lordships' pigeon-holes.

Yet there was amongst these documents at least one which should have given the Heads of the Navy pause for serious thought. It was the petition of the seamen of H.M.S. _Shannon_, [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 5125--Petition of the Ship's Company of the _Shannon_, 16 June 1796.] in which there was conveyed a threat that afterwards, when
the mutiny at the Nore was at its height, under the leadership of a
pressed man whose coadjutors were mainly pressed men, came within an
ace of resolving itself in action. That threat concerned the desperate
expedient of carrying the revolted ships into an enemy's port, and of
there delivering them up. Had this been done—and only the Providence
that watches over the destinies of nations prevented it—the act would
have brought England to her knees.

At a time like this, when England's worst enemies were emphatically
the press-gangs which manned her fleet with the riff-raff of the
nation and thus made national disaster not only possible but hourly
imminent, the "old stander" and the volunteer were to her Navy what
salt is to the sea, its perpetual salvation. Such men inculcated an
example, created an _esprit de corps_, that infected even the
vagrant and the jail-bird, to say nothing of the better-class seaman,
taken mainly by gangs operating on the water, who was often content,
when brought into contact with loyal men, to settle down and do his
best for king and country. Amongst the pressed men, again, desertion
and death made for the survival of the fittest, and in this residuum
there was not wanting a certain savour. Subdued and quickened by
man-o'-war discipline, they developed a dogged resolution, a
super-capacity not altogether incompatible with degeneracy; and to
crown all, the men who officered the resolute if disreputable crew
were men in whose blood the salt of centuries tingled, men unrivalled
for sea-sagacity, initiative and pluck. If they could not uphold the
honour of the flag with the pressed man's unqualified aid, they did
what was immeasurably greater. They upheld it in spite of him.
Upon the trade of the nation the injury inflicted by the press-gang is rightly summed up in littles. Every able seaman, every callow apprentice taken out of or forcibly detained from a merchant vessel was, _ipso facto,_ a minute yet irretrievably substantial loss to commerce of one kind or another. Trade, it is true, did not succumb in consequence. Possessed of marvellous recuperative powers, she did not even languish to any perceptible degree. Nevertheless, the detriment was there, a steadily cumulative factor, and at the end of any given period of pressing the commerce of the nation, emasculated by these continuous if infinitesimal abstractions from its vitality, was substantially less in bulk, substantially less in pounds sterling, than if it had been allowed to run its course unhindered.

British in name, but Teutonic in its resentments, trade came to regard these continual "pin-pricks" as an intolerable nuisance. It was not so much the loss that aroused her anger as the constant irritation she was subjected to. This she keenly resented, and the stream of her resentment, joining forces with its confluents the demoralisation of the Navy through pressing, the excessive cost of pressing and the antagonising effects of pressing upon the nation at large, contributed in no small degree to that final supersession of the press-gang which was in essence, if not in name, the beginning of Free Trade.

To the people the impress was as an axe laid at the root of the tree. There was here no question, as with trade, of the mere loss of hands
who could be replaced. Attacking the family in the person of its
natural supporter and protector, the octopus system of which the gangs
were the tentacles struck at the very foundations of domestic life and
brought to thousands of households a poverty as bitter and a grief as
poignant as death.

If the people were slow to anger under the infliction it was because,
in the first place, the gang had its advocates who, though they could
not extol its virtues, since it had none, were yet able, and that with
no small measure of success, to demonstrate to a people as insular in
their prejudices as in their habitat that, but for the invincible Navy
which the gang maintained for their protection, the hereditary enemy,
the detested French, would most surely come and compel them one and
all to subsist upon a diet of frogs. What could be seriously urged
against the gang in face of an argument such as that?

Patriotism, moreover, glowed with ardent flame. Fanned to twofold heat
by natural hatred of the foreigner and his insolent challenge of
insular superiority, it blinded the people to the truth that liberty
of the subject is in reality nothing more than freedom from
oppression. So, with the gang at their very doors, waiting to snatch
away their husbands, their fathers and their sons, they carolled "Rule
Britannia" and congratulated themselves on being a free people. The
situation was unparalleled in its sardonic humour; and, as if this
were not enough, the "Noodle of Newcastle," perceiving vacuously that
something was still wanting, supplied the bathetic touch by giving out
that the king, God bless him! could never prevail upon himself to
break through the sacred liberties of his people save on the most urgent occasions. [Footnote: _Newcastle Papers_--Newcastle to Yorke, 27 Feb. 1749-50.]

The process of correcting the defective vision of the nation was as gradual as the acquisition of the sea-power the nation had set as its goal, and as painful. In both processes the gang participated largely. To the fleet it acted as a rude feeder; to the people as a ruder specialist. Wielding the cutlass as its instrument, it slowly and painfully hewed away the scales from their eyes until it stood visualised for what it really was--the most atrocious agent of oppression the world has ever seen. For the operation the people should have been grateful. The nature of the thing they had cherished so blindly filled them with rage and incited them to violence.

Two events now occurred to seal the fate of the gang and render its final supersession a mere matter of time rather than of debate or uncertainty. The mutiny at the Nore brought the people face to face with the appalling risks attendant on wholesale pressing, while the war with America, incurred for the sole purpose of upholding the right to press, taught them the lengths to which their rulers were still prepared to go in order to enslave them. In the former case their sympathies, though with the mutineers, were frozen at the fountain-head by fear of invasion and that supposititious diet of frogs. In the latter, as in the ancient quarrel between Admiralty and Trade, they went out to the party who not only abstained from pressing but paid the higher wages.
While the average cost of ‘listing a man “volunteerly” rarely exceeded the modest sum of 30s., the expense entailed through recruiting him by means of the press-gang ranged from 3s. 9d. per head in 1570

[Footnote: _State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth_, vol. lxxiii. f.
38: Estimate of Charge for Pressing 400 Mariners, 1570.] to 114 Pounds in 1756. Between these extremes his cost fluctuated in the most extraordinary manner. At Weymouth, in 1762, it was at least 100 Pounds; at Deal, in 1805, 32 Pounds odd; at Poole, in the same year, 80 Pounds. [Footnote: _London Chronicle_, 16-18 March, 1762; _Admiralty Records_ 1. 581--Admiral Berkeley, 14 Feb. and 5 Aug. 1805.] From 1756 the average steadily declined until in 1795 it touched its eighteenth century minimum of about 6 Pounds. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 579--Average based on Admirals' Reports on Rendezvous, 1791-5.] A sharp upward tendency then developed, and in the short space of eight years it soared again to 20 Pounds. It was at this figure that Nelson, perhaps the greatest naval authority of his time, put it in 1803. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803.]

Up to this point we have considered only the prime cost of the pressed man. A secondary factor must now be introduced, for when you had got your man at an initial cost of 20 Pounds--a cost in itself out of all proportion to his value--you could never be sure of keeping him.

Nelson calculated that during the war immediately preceding 1803 forty-two thousand seamen deserted from the fleet. [Footnote: _Admiralty Records_ 1. 580--Memorandum on the State of the Fleet,
1803.] Assuming, with him, that every man of this enormous total was either a pressed man or had been procured at the cost of a pressed man, the loss entailed upon the nation by their desertion represented an outlay of 840,000 Pounds for raising them in the first instance, and, in the second, a further outlay of 840,000 Pounds for replacing them.

In this estimate there is, however, a substantial error; for, approaching the question from another point of view, let us suppose, as we may safely do without overstraining the probabilities of the case, that out of every three men pressed at least one ran from his rating. Now the primary cost of pressing three men on the 20 Pound basis being 60 Pounds, it follows that in order to obtain their ultimate cost to the country we must add to that sum the outlay incurred in pressing another man in lieu of the one who ran. The total cost of the three men who ultimately remain to the fleet consequently works out at 80 Pounds; the cost of each at 26 Pounds, 13s. 4d. Hence Nelson's forty-two thousand deserters entailed upon the nation an actual expenditure, not of 1,680,000 Pounds, but of nearly two and a quarter millions.

Another fact that emerges from a scrutiny of these remarkable figures is this. Whenever the number of volunteer additions to the fleet increased, the cost of pressing increased in like ratio; whenever the number of volunteers declined, the pressed man became proportionally cheaper. Periods in which the pressed man was scarce and dear thus synchronise with periods when the volunteer was plentiful; but
scarcity of volunteers, reacting upon the gangs, and conduction to
their greater activity, brought in pressed men in greater numbers in
proportion to expenditure and so reduced the cost per head. In this
logical though at first sight bewildering interrelation of the laws of
supply and demand, we have in a nutshell the whole case for the cost
of pressing as against the gang. Taking one year with another the
century through, the impress service, on a moderate estimate, employed
enough able-bodied men to man a first-rate ship of the line, and
absorbed at least enough money to maintain her, while the average
number of men raised, taking again one year with another, rarely if
ever exceeded the number of men engaged in obtaining them. With
tranquillity at length assured to the country, with trade in a state
of high prosperity, the shipping tonnage of the nation rising by leaps
and bounds and the fleet reduced to an inexigent peace footing, why
incur the ruinous expense of pressing the seaman when, as was now the
case, he could be had for the asking or the making?

For Peace brought in her train both change and opportunity. The
frantic dumping of all sorts and conditions of men into the fleet
ceased. Necessity no longer called for it. No enemy hovered in the
offing, to be perpetually outmanoeuvred or instantly engaged. Until
that enemy could renew its strength, or time should call another into
being, the mastery of the seas, the dear prize of a hundred years of
strenuous struggle, remained secure. Our ships, maintained
nevertheless as efficient fighting-machines, became schools of leisure
wherein—a thing impossible amid the perpetual storm and stress of
war—the young blood of the nation could be more gradually inured to
the sea and tuned to fighting-pitch. Science had not yet linked hands
with warfare. Steam, steel, the ironclad, the super-Dreadnought and
the devastating cordite gun were still in the womb of the future; but
the keels of a newer fleet were nevertheless already on the slips, and
with the old order the press-gang, now for ever obsolete, went the way
of all things useless.

Its memory still survives. Those who despair of our military system,
or of our lack of it, talk of conscription. They alone forget. A
people who for a hundred years patiently endured conscription in its
most cruel form will never again suffer it to be lightly inflicted
upon them.

APPENDIX

ADMIRAL YOUNG’S TORPEDO

DEAR NEPEAN,—I enclose a little project for destroying the Enemy’s
Flatboats if they venture over to our Coast, which you may shew, if
you please, to your Sea Lords as coming from some anonymous
correspondent. If they can improve upon it so as to make it useful, I
shall be glad of it; and if they think it good for nothing, and throw
it in the fire, there is no harm done. As the conveying an Army must
require a very great number of Boats, which must be very near each
other, if many such vessels as I propose should get among them, they
must necessarily commit great havoc. I cannot ascertain whether the
blocks or logs of wood would be strong enough to throw the shot without bursting, or whether they would not throw the shot though they should burst. I think they would not burst, and so do some Officers of Artillery here; but that might be ascertained by experiment at any time. This sort of Fire-vessel will have the advantage of costing very little; and of being of no service to the Enemy should it fall into their hands.

W. YOUNG. LEWES, 14 _Aug_. 1803.

[Illustration: Admiral Young's Torpedo. From the Original Drawing at the Public Record Office.]

_Secret_

"The success of an attempt to land an Army on an Enemy's Coast, whose Army is prepared to prevent it, will depend in a great degree on the regularity of the order in which the Boats, or Vessels, are arranged, that carry the Troops on Shore; everything therefore which contributes to the breaking of that order will so far contribute to render success more doubtful; especially if, in breaking the order, some of the Boats or Vessels are destroyed. For this purpose Fireships well managed will be found very useful; I should therefore think that, at all the King's Ports, and at all places where the Enemy may be expected to attempt a landing with Ships of War or other large Vessels, considerable quantities of materials for fitting Fireships according to the latest
method should be kept ready to be put on board any small Vessels on the Enemy's approach; but, as such Vessels would have little or no effect on Gunboats or Flatboats, machines might be made for the purpose of destroying them, by shot, and by explosion. The Shot should be large, but as they will require to be thrown but a short distance, and will have only thin-sided Vessels to penetrate, Machines strong enough to resist the effort of the small quantity of Powder necessary to throw them may probably be made of wood; either by making several chambers in one thick Block, as No. 1, or one chamber at each end of a log as No. 2, which may be used either separately, or fastened together. The Vents should communicate with each other by means of quick Match, which should be very carefully covered to prevent its sustaining damage, or being moved by things carried about. Such Machines, properly loaded, may be kept in Fishing boats or other small vessels near the parts of the Coast where the Enemy may be expected to land; or in secure places, ready to be put on board when the Enemy are expected. The Chambers should be cut horizontally, and the Machine should be so placed in the Vessel as to have them about level with the surface of the water; under the Machine should be placed a considerable quantity of Gunpowder; and over it, large Stones, and bags of heavy shingle, and the whole may be covered with fishing nets, or any articles that may happen to be on board. Several fuses, or trains of Match, should communicate with the Machine, and with the powder under it, so managed as to ensure those which communicate with the Machine taking effect upon the others, that the shot may be thrown before the Vessel is blown up. The Match, or Fuses, should be carefully concealed to prevent their being seen if the Vessel should be boarded.... If these Vessels are placed in the front of the Enemy's
Line, and not near the extremities of it, it would be scarcely possible for them to avoid the effects of the explosion unless, from some of them exploding too soon, the whole armament should stop. Every Machine would probably sink the Boat on each side of it, and so do considerable damage to others with the shot; and would kill and wound many men by the explosion and the fall of the stones. As the success of these Vessels will depend entirely upon their not being suspected by the Enemy, the utmost secrecy must be observed in preparing the Machines and sending them to the places where they are to be kept. A few confidential men only should be employed to make them, and they should be so covered as to prevent any suspicion of their use, or of what they contain.”

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the keeper's magic palm,

Godalming, the press-gang at,

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Goodave, Midshipman,

Gooding, Richard,

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Gravesend, the press-gang at,

Gray, John,

Great Yarmouth, press-gang at,

Greenock, crimpage at,
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Lewis, Edward, chaplain,

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Parker, Richard, president of the mutineers at the Nore,

Parkgate, a resort of seamen,

Paying off discharged entire crews,
Paying the shot,

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Pembroke, Earl of, Lord High Admiral,

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Peter the Great, Czar of Russia,

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Pill, a favourite haunt of sailors, and shunned by gangmen,

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for civil occupations,
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the classes from which drawn,
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it services not needed by some captains,
what it was,
the official and the popular views,
the class of men it was composed of,
it quarters, landsmen joining the land force not to be pressed
for sea service,
ship-gangs entirely seamen, varying numbers in gang,
the officers,
the shore service the grave of promotion,
general character of officers ashore,
duties of the Regulating Captain,
pay and road money, etc.,
perquisites, peculation, and bribery in the service,
sham-gangs,
the rendezvous,
boat's arms,
press warrant,
whom the gang might take,
primarily those who used the sea,
later on trade suffers from the gang,
exemption granted as an indulgence,
the foreigner first exempted,
but not if he had an English wife, and was soon assumed to have
one,
negroes not exempt, landsmen theoretically only,
harvesters were exempt if holding a certificate,
gentlemen exempt if dressed as such,
only those proved to be between eighteen and fifty-five,
the position of apprentices was uncertain,
to press merchant seamen was resented by trade,
masters, mates, boatswains, and carpenters were exempt,
colliers were exempt up to a certain proportion,
ship protections did not count on shore,
mate was not entitled to liberty unless registered at the
rendezvous,
harpooners were protected out of season on land or on colliers,
the press-gang preyed upon its fellows,
watermen, bargemen, and canal boat-dwellers were considered to use
the see,
Thames watermen and some others exempt if certain quota of men
supplied,
large numbers pressed from Ireland,
fishermen indifferently protected, but fisheries fostered,
all protected persons bound to carry their protection on them,
an error in protection invalidated it,
protections often disregarded,
special protections,
its activities afloat,
the merchant seamen the principal quest,
the chain of sea-gangs,
the outer rings, frigates pressing for their own crews and armed
sloops as tenders to ships of the line, and the vessels employed
by regulating captains at the large ports,
the inner ring of boat-gangs in harbour or on rivers;
their methods,
methods of pressing at sea,
complications arising from pressing at sea,
their varied success,
and the right to search foreign vessels for English seamen,
and convoys,
and privateers,
and smugglers,
smuggling by,
and ships in quarantine,
and transports,
and cartel ships,
and pilots,
how it was evaded,
in the ship, with her or from her,
or a combination,
hiding on board from,
evasions assisted by the skipper,
and men in lieu and foreigners in emergency crews,
pilots and fisherman taken by, when acting as emergency men,
evaded by desertion from the ship,
evaded by hiding on land and changing quarters,
Cornwall dangerous for,
safe retreats from,
empowered to take Severn and Wye trow-men,
unsuccessful efforts of,
evaded by borrowed, forged, and American protections and by
disguises,
what it did ashore,
the sailor betrayed by marked characteristics;
sailors outnumbered on shore by the gang,
its object the pressing of sailors who escaped the seagangs,
its London rendezvous and taverns used.
the inland distribution of,
the class of places selected for operations of,
the land-gangs necessarily ambulatory,
its resting and refreshment places chosen for purposes of capture,
the methods adopted,
a hot press at Brighton,
a ruse at Portsmouth,
how the sailors' liking for drink was turned to account,
the amount of violence used,
outside assistance to,
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assisted by mayors and county magistrates,
assisted by the military,
townsmen who sided with the sailors against,
brutal behaviour of, at Poole,
resisted at Deal and Dover,
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magistrates consign vagabonds and disorderly persons to,
how it was resisted,
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gangs-men killed by sailors resisting them,
sailors killed by gangsmen,
by armed bands of seamen,
by the populace in attempting to impress,
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tenders attacked,
rendezvous attacked,
press-boats attacked and sunk,
resistance when the press-gang had come abroad,
the hardship of impressment on arrival from long voyage,
the only means of resistance,
a sailor's death in such case "accidental," casual, unavoidable,
or disagreeable,
a case in point,
at play,
humorous reason given for impressing a person,
inculcating manners by means of the press,
the respect due to naval officers,
the outsider liable to be pressed for breach of naval etiquette,

rudeness to the press-gang treated the same way,

damages from officers for wrongful impressment, failure to dip the
flag, or flying an unauthorised flag, might lead to pressing

from that crew,

unseamanlike management of a ship laid the crew open to pressing,

pipers and fiddlers, etc., impressed,

ridiculous reasons given for impressing,

unsuspecting passenger in a smuggler declared owner of contraband

and pressed,

tattoo marks and bandy legs lead to pressing,

any eccentricity sufficient to ensure the attention of the

press-gang,

used by trustees to keep heirs from their money, and by parents to

rid them of incorrigible sons,

used for purposes of retaliation,

used by strikers to get rid of a "blackleg."

used by stern parent to part his daughter and her lover,

a drunken cleric's revenge by means of,

by pressing a sailor, causes his late bedfellow to be hanged as

his murderer,

and women,

of women and sailors in general,

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women impressed by,

women masquerading as men to go to sea,

women in the gang,

the hardship brought on women by the gang,
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women who released sailors from the press-gang,

the devotion of Richard Parker's wife,

In the clutch of,

the press-room, what it was; strongly built and small as it might be, could hold any number,

Bristol gaol and Gloucester Castle used as press-rooms,

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regulations for rendezvous,

victualling in the press-room,

regulating or examining for fitness for service,

fabricated ailments and defects,

dispatching pressed men to the fleet,

tenders hired for transport of pressed men,

comfort and health of pressed men on tenders,

the victualling of pressed men on tenders,

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an attempt to escape—with the Tasker tender escapes from,

The Union tender cut out from the Tyne by the pressed men,

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the spirit of restlessness and mutiny engendered,

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Princess Augusta tender,

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Profane abuse of crews by officers,

Protections, for masters, mates, boatswains, and carpenters,

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bound to be always carried,

slightest error in description invalidated,

were often disregarded,

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for men in lieu,

for crews of convoys and privateers expired on arrival in home waters,

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Tassell, William, a protected mate, pressed ashore,

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Whitefoot, James, impressed at Bristol,

Whitworth, Charles, Envoy to Russia,

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Wilson, John, shot by the press-gang on the _Britannia_.

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