

EUROPE.

Imperial Parliament.

House of Commons, March 4.

IMPRESSMENT OF SEAMEN.

Mr. Buckingham moved for "a select committee to take into consideration the practicability of devising some plan by which a regular and voluntary supply of seamen may be procured for his Majesty's Navy, without recourse to the practice of forcible impressment." Mr. Buckingham made a long and able speech in support of his motion. He enlarged upon the cruelty of the practice—on its illegality—its inefficiency, and on the violent means of resistance to pressgangs, which were justified by the verdicts of Juries. He maintained that it was an extremely expensive mode of manning the Navy. One of its worst consequences was the immense number of desertions which it occasioned. Every pressed sailor cost the country twenty pounds; and there were 40,000 desertions during the last war. The sailors escaped by thousands to foreign shores, and manned the fleets of our enemies. The American Commodore Decatur had told him, that America scarcely possessed a single seaman who had not served in British vessels, and been driven away by the fear of impressment. The British vessels were left to be manned by foreigners; and now it was no uncommon thing for foreigners of eight or ten different nations to be on board of the same ship. The seamen had not petitioned for the abolition of impressment in any great numbers, because, from the nature of their calling, they could not, like landmen, meet and consult together. There could not be a public meeting on board ship; and when on land, it was well known that thoughtless creatures sailors were. They did not need the less need protection; which the House of Commons should extend to them. He would not deny the expediency of impressment on certain occasions. Circumstances did occasionally arise which warranted the suspension of certain laws—the Habeas Corpus, for example. But such cases were only exceptions to the general rule. He wished to give the sailor the same protection, to put him on the same footing as other Englishmen. Now, in time of peace, was the fitting opportunity for devising some measure by which this would be effected. The sailor should be made to feel an interest in the service. His time of service should be limited; a bounty should be given him; a good system of registration should be established. It by no means followed, that because bad systems had failed, a good one could not be framed.

The motion was seconded by Mr. G. F. Young.

Sir James Graham admitted the great importance of the question, and that its early decision was most desirable. He asserted the absolute necessity of the power of impressment being sometimes exercised. It was a necessary evil. Its legality could not be questioned. It was an undoubted part of the King's prerogative which had been recognized by repeated decisions of the Courts and by acts of Parliament. Still it was, he admitted, highly desirable that recourse should never be had to impressment except in cases of emergency, and that it was the duty of those at the head of the Naval Administration of the country to do all in their power to find a supply of men for the fleet, without having recourse to it. With this view, he had prepared a measure which would effect in reality much more towards accomplishing Mr. Buckingham's object, than a reference of the subject to a committee of inquiry, according to that gentleman's proposal. Sir James then stated that he intended, that the merchant seamen should be registered, and that a certain number for the Navy should be chosen by ballot. Their prize money would be increased, at the expense of the shares of Captains and Admirals, from £5 to £15 each in every £10,000. As he had before mentioned, a thousand lads had been taken into the Navy in order to be brought up as sailors. The King's ships would no longer be converted into prisons—Facilities would be afforded to parol sailors for apprenticing boys to the service. He would also, with a view of improving the condition of the merchant seamen, provide them means of recovering arrears of wages from their masters with increased facility. He complimented Mr. Buckingham on the calm and discreet tone in which he had brought forward his motion, very different from that which he had adopted when speaking at some public meetings during the recess: his present demeanour atoned for his former indiscretion. Sir James concluded by moving, as an amendment, for "leave to bring in a bill to consolidate and amend the laws relating to merchant seamen, and for keeping up a register of all the men engaged in that service."

This amendment was opposed by Mr. Robinson. Sir Edward Codrington, who spoke very earnestly on the question, and by Mr. Hume. It was defended by Captain Elliot; who was decidedly in favor of flogging and impressment, and denied their injurious consequences. He gave several statements in proof of his assertion that impressed sailors were not so disposed to desert as those who were not. It was utterly untrue that flogging or impressment were subjects of complaint to the Navy. The sailors preferred flogging to any other mode of punishment.

Several Members, among whom were Colonel Torrens, Mr. Warren, Admiral Fleming, Mr. Lyall, and Lord Althorp, thought that the amendment of Sir James Graham should be adopted; and that till his plan for supplying seamen had been tried, it would be incorrect to abolish the practice of impressment. Mr. Buckingham, in reply, said, that if impressment were not abolished, he was certain that the sailors would consider the resignation plan a mere trick to catch them more securely, and that not a hundred seamen would be registered. The House then divided: for the Committee, 130; against it, 210; Ministerial majority, 80.

Mr. Buckingham's appears to have been the best speech delivered in this debate. Some passages are worth extracting. He compared an impressed sailor to a slave—

"The four principal characteristics of slavery were—that the individual made a slave was torn by force from his family and home; that he was kept in servitude which he loathed and abhorred; that he was coerced in that servitude by the lash, or the fear of the lash; and that if he deserted or ran away, he was liable to be put to death, or to be visited by such other punishment as should seem good to his masters. Now, if these were the characteristics of slavery, so were they also of impressment: for the sailor, when impressed, was as much torn away by force from his family and home as the Negro himself was; he was kept in a service which he detected as much as the Negro detected the service of the White; he was as much coerced by the lash in that service as was the slave in any of our plantations;

and in the event of his desertion, he was as liable to be shot or hung for it as any slave in the West Indies. It was true—and he challenged the Noble Lord opposite to deny it if he could—where was the mighty difference between slavery in our colonies and coerced labour on board our ships? There was one difference, indeed, which made impressment the more galling condition of the two; to one who was accustomed to consider himself as a free-born Englishman, the treatment he received when impressed, so different from that experienced by the rest of his fellow subjects, must be infinitely more painful than a servile life was to the Negro, who underwent a less change in his destiny from being familiarized to it from his early years by the slavery and suffering which he saw around him."

British juries considered resistance to a pressgang justifiable. "One case of this kind occurred at Hull. A whaler coming from the North Sea, was on the point of entering the Humber, when she was descried by one of his Majesty's ships, the Aurora, which immediately gave chase to her. The crew of the whaler, well knowing the object for which the Aurora was chasing their vessel, and being inflamed to madness at the prospect of being severed, they were on the point of repining after a perilous voyage, determined to stand on their own defence. To keep the captain of their vessel harmless, they confined him in his own cabin, and arming themselves with the harpoons and lances which they had used in the whale fishery, they made a stout resistance against their invaders, and absolutely killed two men before they were mastered. For this offence they were indicted and tried at York Assizes. Though the Judge appealed to the loyalty of the Grand Jury, and the counsel for the prosecution, to that of the Petty Jury, a verdict of acquittal was recorded for the prisoners; a verdict which gave great satisfaction to the county of York generally, and was followed by a general rejoicing at Hull, which lasted three or four days."

Impressment would not answer the purpose for which it was designed. "Suppose a war to break out suddenly, a certain number of ships would be put in commission at Portsmouth and Plymouth, and each captain would be naturally anxious to get his complement of men filled up as soon as possible. The boats would accordingly be sent to be manned, and at evening would be observed, on shore, for the pressgang, be it observed, never went to work by day light, on account of the facilities which daylight afforded to escape. Supposing that 20,000 men were in a port; 1,000 of them would probably be caught by the pressgang on the first night; by sweeping out the taverns, the brothels, and the other places to which sailors generally resorted. But 19,000 would escape; and would either go into the country, or disguise themselves by throwing aside their straw hats and black ribands, and arraying themselves as carpenters, farmers, mechanics, &c. Those who could not escape, would be protected and sheltered by the inhabitants of the town where the press took place; for there never yet was an instance in which a sailor claiming protection from the attack of a pressgang found a British door shut against him, or opened to his pursuers."

Sir E. Codrington, in the course of a very manly speech, gave instances of the hardships occasioned by impressment to good seamen. "A man who had been originally pressed served with him for eight or nine years; he discharged his duty during that time in the most reputable manner possible; and at the expiration of that period, from motives that would do honour to human nature—namely, from a desire to support an aged father—he applied for his discharge, and offered eighty guineas to obtain it. It was refused."

It was a matter of just complaint that sailors in proportion to the merits of the service, were not as well paid and rewarded as soldiers. His conviction was, that if the men were not in consequence of the existence of impressment, treated with a certain degree of harshness on board men-of-war, they would much rather enter the navy than the merchant service. "At the battle of Trafalgar, the prime seaman which he had on board his ship was an impressed American. He had been taken out of an American ship, on the pretence that he was a British subject, brought to England, and thence transmitted to him amongst other impressed seamen. On account of his admirable conduct in the battle, he made him a warrant officer. He afterwards told him that he would be glad to remain in the English service, but that he had a wife and family in America, whom he had not seen for many years. This seaman, like many others, had been kept in ships stationed abroad in order to prevent them, having been originally impressed, from getting their discharge. That was but an instance of the odium which the maintenance of this system got us into with foreigners."

A class of men known by the name of "civil persons" were forced on board the King's ships. "Such persons were, in other words, the rogues and vagabonds of the country; and while they were utterly useless as effective men, they did much to contaminate the rest of the crew. He recollected having twenty-seven such men forced on him. He went to the Admiralty to remonstrate on the subject; but he was there told that he must take them to make up his ship's complement. He was not ashamed to own it, that in proceeding to sea, he took the first opportunity that offered to man the boats with these fellows, and let them run away, thus getting rid of a parcel of vagabonds."

Captain Elliot stated, in justification of impressment, that it was practised in every European country.

"Certainly he admitted that in America they would find quite a different state of things in this respect. But in Europe such was the practice, in Spain, for instance; and especially in Holland, where, though there was no power to press a man for the Navy, the Government had power to press for soldiers, and then give the pressed men the choice to go on board ship or as a sailor in preference to serving in a military capacity. In Russia, also, the power was retained of pressing whole hordes, and by these means alone was the naval service of that nation filled."

CLAIMS OF THE DISSENTERS.

A number of petitions from the Protestant Dissenters were presented on the 3rd of March in the House of Lords, by Lords Daer, Polimore, Lyttleton, Grey and Durham. Lord Durham said, that he could not concur with those who prayed for a separation of Church and State; but with respect to every other object mentioned in the petitions, he expressed his most hearty assent to the views taken by those who signed them; and he could not avoid deeply lamenting that the Bill then in progress through the other House for the relief of the Dissenters did not go further. Earl Grey said, that the measure alluded to by Lord Durham

only embraced one object, and it was a mistake to suppose that no other measures of relief were intended. Ministers had turned their serious attention to this subject, with the hope and intention of giving extensive relief to the Dissenters, if not entirely removing the objects of complaint. He should, however, in common with Lord Durham, keep steadfastly in view the necessity of supporting the Established Church. Lord Durham expressed his satisfaction at hearing that other measures of relief for the Dissenters were in preparation.

In the evening, Lord Althorp gave notice in the House of Commons, that on Thursday the 7th of April he should call the attention of the House to the subject of Church-rates.

COMMUTATION OF TITHES.

A long discussion arose in the House of Commons on the 4th, on the presentation, by Lord Ebrington, of the Devonshire petition for the commutation of tithes, by substituting a tenth part of the value of the land as an equivalent for the tithes now collected. Lord Althorp, Lord John Russell, and Mr. Lyttleton were in the places; and there was a much fuller attendance of Members generally than related to the proposed equivalent of two shillings in the pound, was opposed by Lord Ebrington (who acknowledged, however, that it was supported by a majority of the landowners of the country,) by Lord John Russell, and Mr. Bulcel, Sir H. Willoughby, Mr. Wilbraham, Mr. Di-vett, Mr. Bennett, Sir Robert Peel, and Mr. Harvey. Mr. Harvey insisted that the tithes belonged to the State; Sir Robert Peel that they belonged to the Church; both agreed that the landowner had no right to pocket them. Mr. Parrott supported the prayer of the petition; and explained a point in which the views of the petitioners had been misunderstood.

"What they wished was, that the land should be valued as tithefree in the first instance, and also as being free of rates and taxes; the value having been ascertained, that a tenth part of that value was to go to the titheowner, subject to the same rates and taxes as the other nine parts. This was a different thing from the tenth part of the rent, which might be very low, as a portion of the net produce, for the use and occupation of the land."

Colonel Seale also supported the petition. "Twenty years ago, in Devonshire, the tithe was only 2s 6d in the pound; within the last nine years, it had been raised to 3s; he did not see why it could not now be reduced to 2s, on the same principle on which it had been raised to 3s."

After some remarks from Mr. O'Connell, Mr. Sheil, and Mr. Sandford, the petition was laid on the table.

PREVENTION OF BRIBERY.

Mr. Hardy obtained leave, on the 4th, to bring in a Bill to consolidate and amend the several acts relating to bribery and the expense of elections. He proposed that treating, or money given after as well as before an election in reference to the votes of electors, should be illegal—that the payments for the conveyance of voters to the Poll should be illegal; that the time for presenting petitions against a return should be extended to twenty-eight days after the last act of bribery; and that an oath should be taken by each candidate, that neither directly nor indirectly he had attempted or would he attempt, to procure votes by bribery. Lord John Russell and Mr. Wynn spoke in favour of the measure, without promising support of all the details. Mr. Hume observed that the bill was unquestionably the best mode of extirpating bribery and corruption.

CORRUPT BOROUGHES.

Disfranchisement of Carrickfergus and Stafford.—The bills for the disfranchisement of these boroughs both passed their second reading on the 5th of March: the first without a division, the second by 167 to 5. It remains, however, to be decided in Committee, whether there shall be a total disfranchisement of Carrickfergus, or whether a new constituency shall be formed out of the ten pound householders only amount to 105 in number. The number of freemen is 885; of whom 240 received bribes at the last election.

Borough of Warwick Bill. The bill for extending the constituency of Warwick to Leamington next came under discussion, on the motion of Sir Ronald Ferguson, that the House should resolve itself into a Committee upon the bill. Mr. Halcomb moved as an amendment, that a select Committee should be appointed to inquire into a breach of privilege, which he asserted had been committed in affixing the names of several persons to a petition from Leamington to that House, praying for incorporation with Warwick.—The petition purported to be signed by 410 rate-payers of Leamington; but it could not be proved, that of those persons, 230 could not be found in the town, or upon the rate. The petitions were set on foot by the members of the Birmingham Political Union. The report of the Committee had been drawn up by Mr. Joseph Parkes; he would ask Sir Ronald Ferguson if it were not so? Sir Ronald, not hearing distinctly, said—"I am totally ignorant of the getting up of this petition." Mr. Halcomb said—"I perceive the gallant General, owing to his deafness did not hear what I said; he supposes I referred to the petition." Sir Ronald, again misunderstanding the question, said that "he knew nothing of it." Mr. Halcomb resumed. He said that the individual at the bottom of all this was Mr. Joseph Parkes, who, unfortunately, had the ear of a very high personage in this country.

A desultory debate then ensued. Mr. Halcomb, having been repeatedly interrupted by groans and cries of oh, oh I complained of this, and particularly of Mr. E. J. Stanley; who, he said, treated him with personal insolence. Mr. Stanley assured Mr. Halcomb that he only meant to testify, in the usual Parliamentary way, his admiration of the eloquence and perseverance with which he advocated the cause of the distressed Boroughs. Mr. Goulburn interceded more than once for Mr. Halcomb, but with little effect.

The bill finally went through the Committee, and the report was received.

A Select Committee was then appointed to inquire into the circumstances attending the alleged breach of privilege regarding the signatures to the Leamington petition.

Record Commissioners.—Mr. Hume asked Lord Althorp, on Monday, whether any new arrangement had been made respecting the Record Commission? Most of the appointments were due, and they cost the country £10,000 a year. Had the office of Chief Keeper been filled up? Lord Althorp could not tell.

General Registry Bill.—Mr. William Brougham has obtained leave to bring in a bill to establish a general registry of all deeds and instruments relating to real property in England and Wales.

Registration Bill.—Last night Mr. W. Brougham gave notice, that on the 22nd of April he would move for leave to bring in a bill to establish a Registry of all births, deaths, and marriages in England and Wales.

Foreign Enlistment Act.—Leave was given on Tuesday to Mr. J. Murray to bring in a bill for a repeal of this Act. The bill, Mr. Murray stated, was the same as the one which was carried through the House of Commons last Session. It was read a first time on Wednesday, and will be read a second time on the 31st March.

Irish Jury Law.—A motion on the 4th of March by Mr. O'Connell, for leave to bring in a bill to regulate the forming of Petty Juries in Ireland, was opposed by Mr. Lyttleton and Lord Althorp; who wished the bill of last session, for the choosing of special juries to have a fair trial. The motion was withdrawn reluctantly by Mr. O'Connell.

House Tax.—On the motion of Lord Althorp, on the 6th March, a bill to repeal the House tax was brought in, read a first time, and ordered to be read a second time on Monday. Lord Althorp stated, that this bill would afford relief to the amount of £1,170,000; and he preferred repealing this tax rather than the Window tax, because it would give relief to the occupiers of 62,000 houses, who did not pay a Window tax.

Dungarvon Election.—The Speaker informed the House, that he had received a petition against the return of Mr. Jacob for Dungarvon. It was ordered to be taken into consideration on the 16th of March.

Case of the Brighton Guardian.—Mr. Wigney moved on the 4th of March, that an Address be presented to the King, praying him to remit the two remaining months of imprisonment in Chelmsford Gaol, out of the six to which Mr. Cohen, the editor of the *Brighton Guardian*, had been sentenced. The motion was opposed by Lord Howick, Lords G. and A. Lennox, Sir C. Burrell, and Mr. Goring. It was supported earnestly by Lord V. Lennox, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. C. Buller, Sir C. Blunt, and Mr. Curteis. On a division, it was rejected 68 to 21.

Mr. E. Lytton Bulwer has renewed his notice for resolutions to repeal the stamp duty on newspapers, and to give all printed works under a certain weight the privilege of transmission through the post at a low rate.

DANGERS OF THE MINISTERS FROM THE DEBATE ON THE PENSION LIST.

(From Bell's Messenger.)

We have availed ourselves already of a recent occasion, which enabled us to enter largely upon this subject, and to unfold, as clearly as we were able, the just and constitutional principles of a pension list; how far it belonged to the Crown, and how far to the public; how far it was a gift, and therefore fettered by no responsibility in the use, and at what point it became a trust, and therefore was a proper subject for control and inquiry. We have now only briefly to observe, that the constitutional nature and object of a pension, under a monarchy like our own, is to provide the King with a fund of personal beneficence, and public policy and gratitude. In its character of a fund of personal beneficence to the reigning monarch, the King has a right, and has always exercised it, of rewarding the faithful and attached services of the domestics of himself and family, and of helping out the narrow incomes of decayed nobles. As a fund of public gratitude, the pension list is obviously intended by the constitution to reward all such services rendered to the state by the army, navy, and civil department, as, though not of sufficient magnitude to require a direct appeal to parliament, are yet sufficiently unquestionable, clear and distinct, to constitute a claim to public remuneration.

It will be seen in another part of our paper, that, in an imagined pursuance of these principles, Mr. Harvey, the Member for Colchester, brought forward a motion on Tuesday last for a select Committee to inquire into the merits of each grant in the pension list, and to report it to the House. Lord Althorp opposed this motion, and, as an amendment, moved certain resolutions, the substance of which is:—that upon the settlement of the civil list, under the authority of two acts of parliament, a sum of £75,000 was fixed as the pension fund for his present Majesty; that the right of granting pensions to this extent was thus established by the act of the Legislature, and could not be withdrawn or modified without infringing upon the contract between the King and parliament. But that it was certainly the bounden duty of the responsible advisers of the crown to recommend such persons only as pensioners, who should have just claims on the royal beneficence, or who, by their personal service to the crown, by the performance of duties to the public, or by their useful discoveries or high attainments in arts, science, or literature, merited such a reward. Upon his amendment a long discussion ensued, the issue of which was, that Lord Althorp's resolutions were carried by a majority of eight only; the opposition amounting to 182, whilst the conjoint members of the Tories and the friends of the ministers amounted to 190 only.

The first point of interest in this unexpected issue, for the number and force of the opposition took the ministers entirely by surprise, is, what would have been the immediate consequence if the motion had been carried, and the committee appointed. First, we think the ministers would have resigned, or rather menaced their resignation, as the only mode by which they could have escaped from the mischief, vexation, and embarrassment into which such an investigation must have brought them. Whilst the present gentlemen have been in office, they are certainly tolerably clear of having themselves made any improper use of this fund, and therefore, so far as personally regards themselves, had no cause to elude the inquiry. To borrow an image from Cobbett, Wigs and Tories are in this respect all tarred with the same brush: they are all alike interested and

influenced by every daily habit, and every acquired feeling, to make common cause with each other. Whig and Tory pensioners are here married and intermarried with each other through an interminable chain; they daily meet at the same dinners, and join in the same opera box, they are all members, more or less remote, of each others' families, and have all alike a family feeling and interest for what in its turn has fed and almost bred them all. All the companions of Ulysses, from the pilot to the boatswain, were turned into swine upon their entrance into the cave of Circe, and Whig and Tory no sooner enter and make sure of their footing in the Circæan stalls of office, than they are all converted into pensioners. Homer makes mention of a stream, the effect of which was, that it caused all who drank it to forget their family, friends, relations, and connexions, and hereafter to live as if they were alone in the world. The streams of office, the ever flowing flood of royal bounty, is totally of a contrary character, for Whig or Tory minister no sooner tastes of these waters, and obtains the power of distributing them, than he remembers with a surprising readiness all the minutest divisions of his own family and connexions, and with a liberality not to be exceeded by the most clannish Scotchman, hands the full cup through the long line of his brothers-in-law, cousins, and kinsmen.

It is not difficult to imagine what an extraordinary scene would have followed the success of this motion. We can fancy Mr. Cobbett taking his seat at the committee table, having all this bevy of fair pensioners before him.

Castigat audique, dolos, subigitque fateri.

We can fancy Mr. Hume, like the Chairman of the magdalen Hospital, inquiring into the actual conduct of the charity, calling severally all these old and young ladies before him and demanding each in her turn, how and when she was qualified to enter the house, what were the circumstances of her qualification, and whether she was not now in a condition to relieve the charity. We can fancy Cobbett, like a fox among a flock of geese, running in turn between the legs of each, and throwing each in turn on its back; making the feathers of each fly, pulling another, and scattering and frightening all. We can imagine the poor girls, old and young, like Diana's nymphs, when Acton appeared *de trop*, all sadly puzzled to find a prompt and decent veil; we can imagine the elegance of tears, the application of hartsbhorn, and the at length extended confession, that the crowned Jupiter of the day descended into her lap in the shape of a pension, and that she had accepted it. We can imagine that Cobbett here gives a view halo; that the committee make their notes, and that Mr. Hume makes his appeal to them, "why, did I not say so?"

To come, however, to the real point and common sense of the question—why did not Lord Althorp say, we, the ministers, have no earthly objection to this motion, as we are entirely free from all blame? But the house will do well to consider, whether, in times like these, it is wise to rip up old grievances, and by a certain consequence disgust the people with a power and authority which in past times have been so abused; and whether, considering the age and circumstances of some of these parties, and the cruelty of summing what perhaps ought not to have been granted, is it not kinder and more generous to pay the mistress the annuity which the old "squire" has left her, and to leave her in her cottage at the end of the park, than to turn her out in her old days into the wide world, whom we all remember, and with whom perhaps we have dined and danced and taken wine, in her brighter days of youth and beauty, at the great mansion.

The committee for erecting a monument to the memory of the Rev. Edward Stanley, late Rector of Worthington, and Plumland, have adopted a design, submitted to their inspection by Mr. D. Dunbar, consisting of two emblematic statues, in all-relievo, and other appropriate devices.

On Thursday evening last, a public meeting of the Temperance Society of Carlisle was held in Mr. Wilmot's Auction Mart, Market Place. The principal business of the meeting consisted in the appointment of an agent to the society, whose business it will be to travel through the country, disseminating the tracts of the society, and otherwise furthering its objects.

APPLEBY BELLS.—These bells, cast at Messrs Bell Foundry, London, have lately arrived, and have been long under the superintendence of a person from London. They are a pair of fine sweet toned bells, according to their size, the tenor weighing between 10 and 11 cwt.

Last week the Rev. Edward Jackson, of Bolton, was instituted to the Rectory of Dufton, near Appleby, by the Bishop of Carlisle.

Mr. John Wharton, classical assistant at Appleby School, was last week examined by the Bishop of Carlisle, and received Descon's orders.

The Earl of Durham has, this winter, distributed 2,000 tons of coals amongst the poor people of Sunderland, Bishopwearmouth and the neighbourhood.

We have great pleasure in announcing a public meeting of the members of the Established Church, and of other denominations disposed to co-operate with them in the formation of a society to urge a more correct observance of the Christian Sabbath.—*Mercury.*

A story is going the round of the papers, giving an account of the escape of a lion and a tigress from Wombell's menagerie, and that four lives were sacrificed by the