

Statement respecting the prevalence of certain immoral practices in His Majesty's Navy : Addressed to the right honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

Contributors

Great Britain. Admiralty.

Publication/Creation

London : Printed by Ellerton and Henderson, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, 1821.

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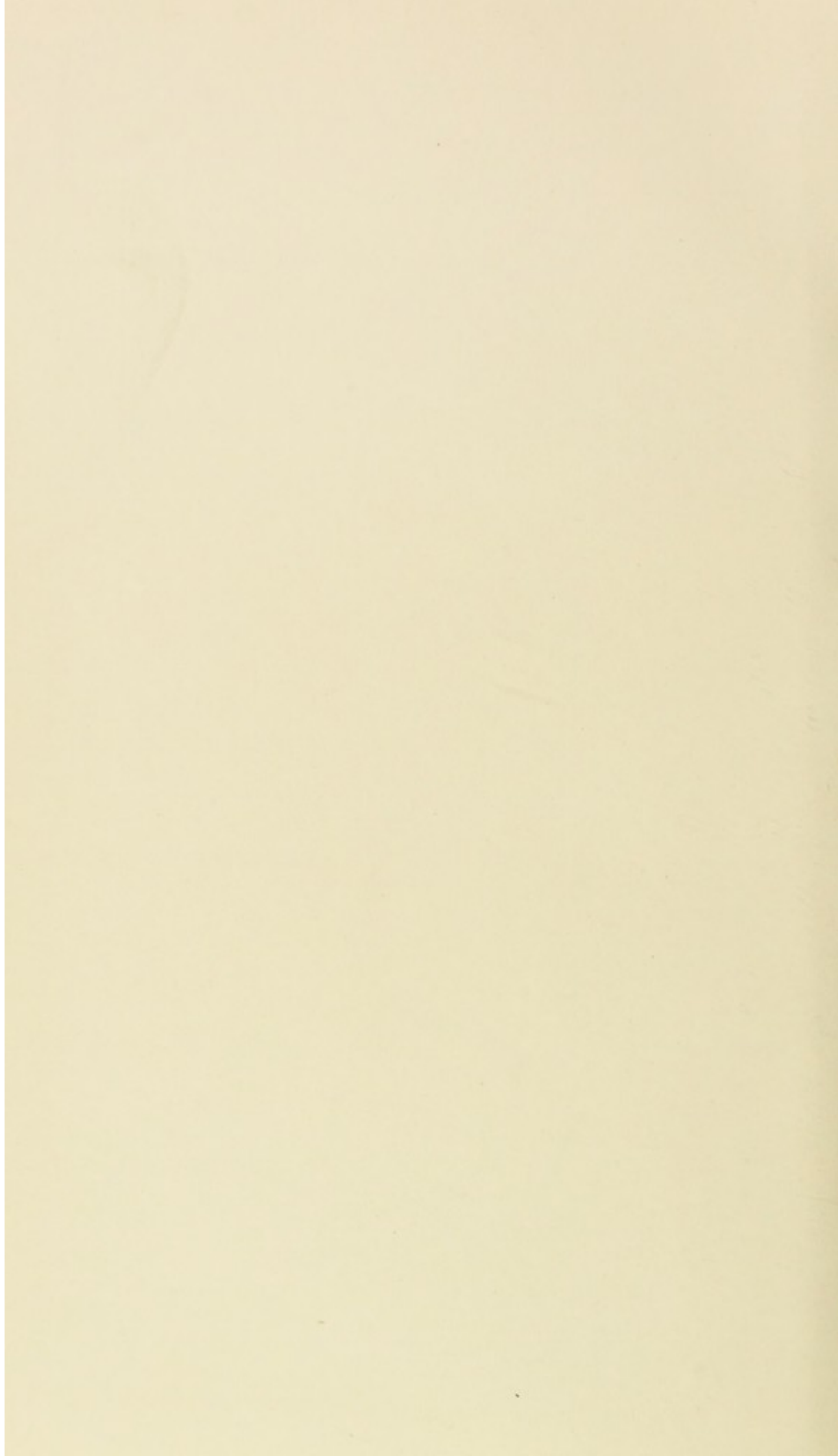
STATEMENT ON IMMORAL
PRACTICES IN
HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY



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STATEMENT

RESPECTING THE

PREVALENCE OF CERTAIN IMMORAL
PRACTICES

IN

HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY:

ADDRESSED TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

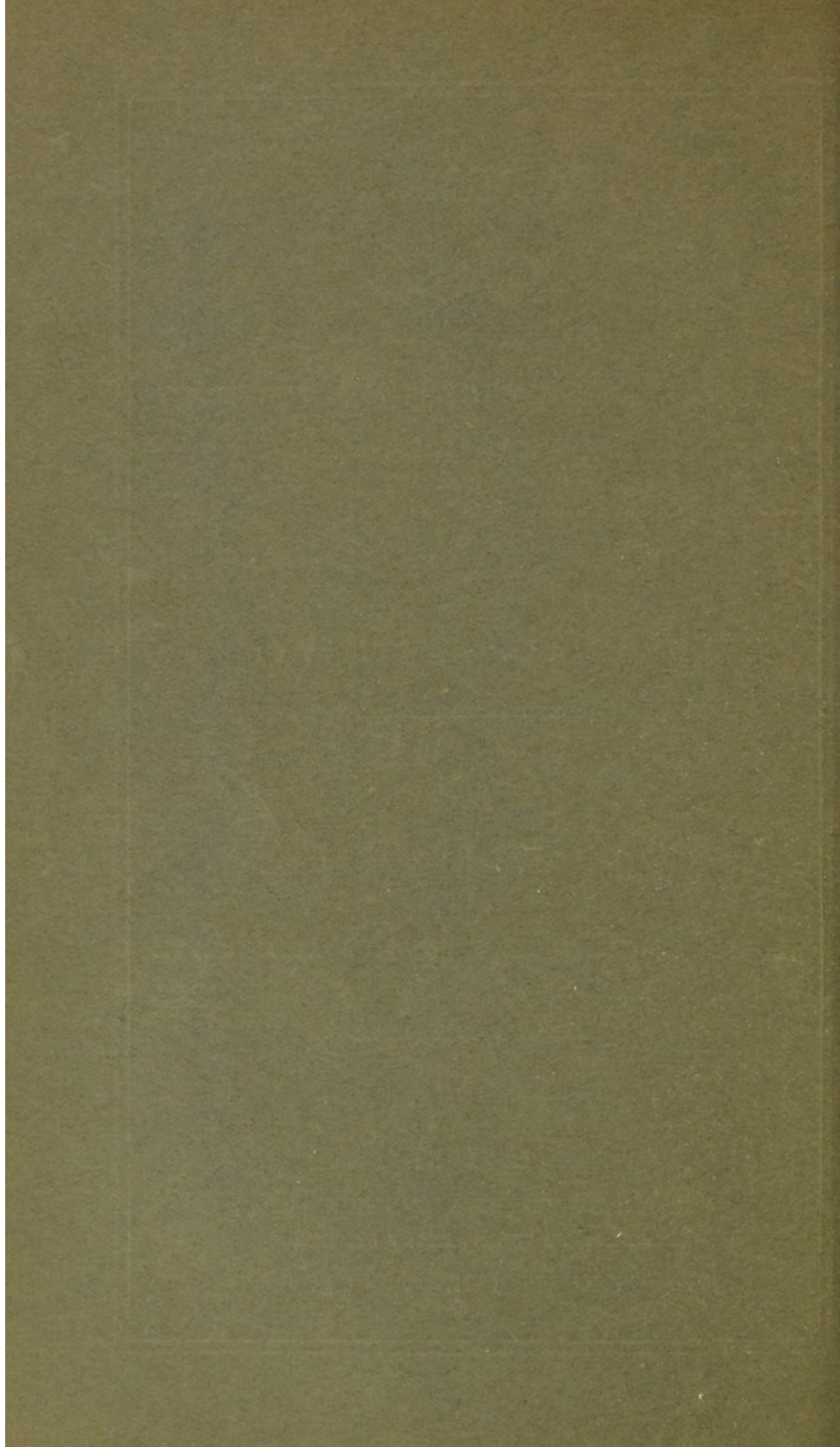
THE

LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF THE ADMIRALTY.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY ELLERTON AND HENDERSON,
JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET.

1821.



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Limited to 150 copies for private circulation.

TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS
OF THE
ADMIRALTY.

THE Authors of the following Statement have the honour to inform the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that it was originally prepared for general circulation, by some individuals not belonging to the Navy, who, having become acquainted with the evils which it exposes, had intended, with a view to their removal, to lay it before the public. Before, however, this step should be taken, it appeared to them to be their duty to submit it to the consideration of their Lordships. The subject of which it treats, their Lordships will perceive, is one of deep and solemn importance, even in a national point of view; and it is not only closely linked with the temporal and eternal interests of our gallant seamen, but it affects in no remote degree the comfort and well-being of almost every family in the land. How far their Lordships may be fully apprized of all the facts of the case, the Authors have no adequate means of ascertaining. They are, however, led to presume that the knowledge of them must be imperfect; otherwise, they are persuaded, that practices so inconsistent with the principles laid down for the

administration of our Navy, especially in what relates to its moral discipline, would not so long have been tolerated. It is on this presumption that they have ventured, in the first instance, to make an appeal to their Lordships; and they do so the more readily, because their Lordships possess ample means of applying an effectual remedy to the evils which the Statement discloses. The application of such a remedy being the sole object in drawing it up, its Authors will regard their labours as having happily and successfully terminated, should they understand that their Lordships have resolved on adopting the measures necessary to that end.

London, August 15th, 1821.

STATEMENT

RESPECTING THE

PREVALENCE OF CERTAIN IMMORAL PRACTICES

IN

HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY.

IT has become an established practice in the British Navy to admit, and even to invite, on board our ships of war, immediately on their arrival in port, as many prostitutes as the men, and, in many cases, the officers may choose to entertain, to the number, in the larger ships, of several hundred at a time ; all of whom remain on board, domesticated with the ship's company, men and boys, until they again put to sea. The tendency of this practice is to render a ship of war, while in port, a continual scene of riot and disorder, of obscenity and blasphemy, of drunkenness, lewdness, and debauchery. During this time, the married seamen are frequently joined by their wives and families (sometimes comprising daughters from ten to fifteen years of age), who are forced to submit to the alternative of mixing with these abandoned women, whose language and behaviour are usually of the most polluting description ; or of foregoing altogether the society of their husbands and parents. These all inhabit the same deck, where, whatever be their age or sex or character, they are huddled promiscuously together, eating, drinking, and sleeping, without any adequate means of separation or privacy, for the most part even without the slightest screen between their births ; and where, in the sight and hearing of all around them, they

live in the unrestrained indulgence of every licentious propensity which may be supposed to actuate inmates of this description.

Such is a too faithful picture of the general state of society exhibited on board our men of war when lying in port. In order to establish its accurate resemblance of the original, we proceed to give in detail the statements which we have received on the subject from persons of the first respectability.

One naval officer of large experience asserts, that from the time he entered the navy, about twenty-eight years ago, he had served in no ship in which, while in port, the custom of permitting women of the very worst description to come and remain on board was not tolerated, and even encouraged, by the commanding officer. The lieutenants and grown midshipmen were allowed to have women in their respective mess-rooms ; where the younger midshipmen were obliged to sit at table and associate with them, and to be witnesses of the debauchery and indecency which took place, not only there, but among the men also. It was even common for the women to employ all their arts to debauch these youths, who generally were caught in their snares, and became their prey. 'It is well known,' he goes on to observe, 'that immediately upon the arrival of a ship of war in port, crowds of boats flock off with cargoes of prostitutes. Having no money to pay for their conveyance, the waterman takes as many as his boat will hold, upon speculation, and hovers round the ship until she is secured at her anchors and the necessary work done ; when he, with others, is permitted to come alongside. The men then go into the boats, and pick out each a woman (as one would choose cattle), paying a shilling or two to the boatman for her passage off. These women are examined at the gangway for liquor, which they are constantly in the habit of

' smuggling on board. They then descend to the lower
 ' deck with their husbands, as they call them. Hundreds
 ' come off to a large ship. The whole of the shocking, dis-
 ' graceful transactions of the lower deck it is impossible to
 ' describe :—the dirt, filth, and stench ; the disgusting con-
 ' versation ; the indecent, beastly conduct, and horrible
 ' scenes ; the blasphemy and swearing ; the riots, quarrels,
 ' and fightings, which often take place, where hundreds of
 ' men and women are huddled together in one room, as it
 ' were ; and where, in bed (each man being allowed only
 ' sixteen inches breadth for his hammock) they are squeezed
 ' between the next hammocks, and must be witnesses of
 ' each other's actions ; can only be imagined by those who
 ' have seen all this. A ship in this state is often, and justly,
 ' termed by the more decent seamen, "a hell afloat." Let
 ' those who have never seen a ship of war, picture to them-
 ' selves a very large and low room (hardly capable of hold-
 ' ing the men) with 500 men, and probably 300 or 400
 ' women of the vilest description, shut up in it, and giving
 ' way to every excess of debauchery that the grossest pas-
 ' sions of human nature can lead them to ; and they see the
 ' deck of a 74-gun ship upon the night of her arrival in
 ' port. Add to this, that many of these poor wretches have
 ' dreadful diseases, which they communicate to the men.
 ' Let it also be imagined what must be the situation of the
 ' decent married women, who are either forced to come
 ' into the midst of such brutality, or remain still separated
 ' from their husbands, after probably a long absence. I
 ' believe there is not a single good officer, who, upon reflec-
 ' tion, would not rejoice at the Admiralty prohibiting the
 ' admission of prostitutes on board his ship. Among other
 ' things, much benefit would accrue from it when she is
 ' hastily required for service. They impede the duty
 ' materially, and are a continual plague to a first lieutenant,

‘who often entreats the captain to send them out of the ship that he may expedite the equipment.

‘It is a great evil that the morals of our seamen have been so little attended to. Their superiors, on the contrary, have hitherto tacitly encouraged them in vice. The infamous practice of allowing prostitutes to come on board our ships, is neither more nor less than making them brothels on a large scale. While this system is suffered to exist, the seamen will continue to be robbed and plundered by these vehicles of infidelity and disaffection, these tutoresses of discontent and mutiny, by whom they are taught every thing bad, and are kept in a sort of slavery.’

Another officer thus states his own experience with respect to the above practice. After detailing many of the same facts which are contained in the foregoing communication, he thus proceeds :

‘The next step which, in many ships, is insisted upon, before the seaman is allowed to take his prostitute on the lower deck, is to get her examined by the assistant surgeon, to ascertain whether she is infected with the venereal disease, in which case she is sent out of the ship. It must, however, be mentioned, to the honour of the assistant surgeons in the navy, that some of them have resisted this order of their captains, and have rather chosen to brave all consequences, than to submit to actions so degrading.*

* We understand that a letter was addressed some time since by a surgeon, to the Victualling Board, under whose superintendence the medical officers of the Navy are placed, complaining of this degradation in strong terms, and begging to know whether it is the duty of any medical officer in his Majesty’s Navy to examine prostitutes, in order to ascertain if they have the venereal disease or not, that the ship’s company may safely gratify their passions. To this request we believe that no answer has yet been returned.

‘It is frequently the case that men take two prostitutes
 ‘on board at a time; so that it sometimes happens that
 ‘there are more women than men on board. And if it be
 ‘kept in mind that a frigate’s lower deck (I speak only of
 ‘frigates) is already much crowded by her own company,
 ‘you may figure to yourself its state when an addition of as
 ‘many more women as there are already men, is made to
 ‘this crowd, all of the most abandoned and infamous
 ‘description, giving way to every species of debauchery
 ‘and abomination.

‘Little do the parents of the poor boys, who go on board
 ‘as midshipmen, know into what a furnace they plunge
 ‘their sons, and to what certain profligacy they expose
 ‘them, when they send them into the naval service; for the
 ‘same indecencies, the same abominations, are going on in
 ‘the midshipmen’s birth, and in the gun-room of the
 ‘lieutenants, as among the men.*

‘And now, Sir, I would mention a few particular facts,
 ‘brought forward out of this mass of iniquity, not because
 ‘they are uncommon, but merely in order that you may
 ‘form a clearer idea of the real state of things.

‘I served three years of my time as a midshipman on
 ‘board the ——. On my going on board to join her, I
 ‘heard my messmates frequently relate, as a good joke, the
 ‘following circumstance, which had occurred in their last
 ‘ship, on her being paid off: A woman, who supplied the
 ‘ship with vegetables, &c., had come on board with her two
 ‘daughters, and they, along with the midshipmen, and the
 ‘prostitutes who were in their birth, all got drunk together;
 ‘in which state they never thought of going to bed, but
 ‘lay all night like brutes on the deck, while every kind of

* In one instance, a youth of about fourteen or fifteen years of age, who had come on board only the day before as a midshipman, was thrust into bed with a prostitute, by one of the lieutenants.

‘abomination was going forward—mother, daughters, prostitutes, old midshipmen, and young boys, all mixed together.

‘I remember the assistant surgeon, whose name was —, when the ship’s company were on board of a hulk, lying for two days on the floor of one of the cabins on a mattress with a common prostitute, both of them in a state of intoxication the greater part of the time. The door was not fastened in any way, and the young midshipmen were constantly in the cabin, laughing and joking with this miserable couple, when they were sober enough to speak.— A prostitute, who was on board the same ship, used to amuse the ship’s company, by standing at a given distance from a mark, and endeavouring to make water against it.

‘When I was on board another ship, the captain, the lieutenants, and midshipmen, had prostitutes constantly on board.

‘Not to mention any further particulars, for I might have given you a volume of infamy, I would observe, that this fearful evil exists to perhaps as great an extent as ever in our navy at this present moment, in proportion to its extent; and I can declare from sad experience, that persons uninfluenced by religion, when thus brought daily into contact with vice, lose all ideas of moral distinction so completely as even to count those mean and despicable who do not engage in the same gross and licentious conduct as themselves, and to regard the vice and profligacy which surround them as things of course. But it is impossible not to perceive that the practice in question is at the same time destructive to our navy in which it is fostered, most deleterious in its effects upon society at large, and highly disgraceful to the country which permits it; and I trust it will ere long fall before the influence of religion and of sound policy.’

A third officer thus expresses himself :

‘The admission of abandoned females on board our ships of war, is a practice so general, that any officer deviating from it would by so doing become remarkable amongst his brother officers, and, strange as it may appear, would be considered as an enemy to humanity ! While I served on board the ships ——— and ——— it was an invariable custom to permit the seamen to take on board such abandoned prostitutes as came off to the ships in crowded boats, immediately on our arrival in port. The scenes which I have witnessed on these occasions amongst the seamen and midshipmen, would cause the most insensible heart to shudder ; for, in truth, they were such as the most sensual imagination can scarcely form an idea of. And if amongst the younger midshipmen there were any feelings of delicacy or morality, they soon were exchanged for a hardihood in criminal sensuality not surpassed by their more vicious elders. I conceive that the removal of this evil is a matter in which not only the Christian and moral officer is interested, but in which there is not a family in our country that should not feel an equal degree of interest, since there are few families who either are not actually, or may not soon be, connected with the naval service.’

The following memorandum of a fourth officer will serve to confirm, in their worst features, the details already given.

‘His Majesty’s ship ——— was refitting in ——— harbour in the months of ——— and ———, 1809 ; and, according to custom, prostitutes were admitted on board. The writer of this well remembers it to have been currently stated, that there was a woman for each man and boy in the ship ; nay, that there were three women over and above the number of men. That this should have

' been permitted, is at first view rather unaccountable ; but
 ' two circumstances ought to be considered—first, that the
 ' practice of admitting women on board in harbour, is be-
 ' come a matter of course ; second, that whenever a ship's
 ' company is turned over into a hulk, as was the case then,
 ' a relaxation of discipline is almost unavoidable. Thus, a
 ' man would take in one woman one day, and, probably for
 ' the joke's sake, would take in a second the next, until the
 ' number increased as above stated. The writer has even
 ' seen a commissioned officer lying in his cot with a woman
 ' on either side of him. The effect of this licentiousness
 ' was of the most pernicious tendency, particularly on the
 ' minds of the young midshipmen and boys of the ship ;
 ' and the writer can well bring to mind that it was the
 ' practice of some two or three of the younger midshipmen
 ' and boys to "row guard" between the decks, as it is
 ' termed, after dark, seeking a connection with the super-
 ' numerary women. The consequence was, that two of the
 ' midshipmen contracted a foul disease, as well as many of
 ' the boys ; and thus were they early initiated into scenes
 ' of vile and degrading sensuality. Nor can it be supposed
 ' that any could escape contamination, with these scenes
 ' always before their eyes in harbour, and forming at sea
 ' the most prominent subject of conversation. Added to
 ' this, the ridicule which invariably fastened on him who
 ' had not yet entered what the word of God emphatically
 ' calls the "paths of hell," entirely dispelled the remaining
 ' principles of morality, virtue, and religion. One instance
 ' is fresh in the writer's memory, of a fine youth, of honour-
 ' able connexions, who died a victim to lust and drinking.
 ' His last illness was brought on by reeling out of a stew
 ' into the street at midnight, where he remained until the
 ' morning, was carried thence to his bed, never again to
 ' rise from it alive.

‘Such, is what has passed under the writer’s own observation ; and such, with very little difference, continued to be presented to him during the term of his naval service.’

A fifth officer states his own experience of this evil in the following detail.

‘In 1807 I joined the —, captain —. The men had their prostitutes on board ; the midshipmen had two, who messed in the birth with the young gentlemen, and generally sat with them during the day. The conversation at times was blasphemous, and their conduct indecent to an extreme. They remained in the ship until we sailed for —, and on our return they were again admitted.

‘In 1808 captain — joined us. He granted the same indulgence, and even allowed about nine women to go to sea in the ship. They were mustered on the fore-castle on Sundays, and inspected by the captain and first lieutenant. Their conduct was so infamous, that after our arrival in the — two or three were turned out of the ship into a brig, for a passage to England ; and most of those that remained were common to the ship’s company. Of one, I recollect its being stated that she admitted nineteen men to her embraces in one night. The matter was regarded with the utmost indifference, or made the occasion of obscene jests. It was common for the midshipmen to have these women. Indeed, the captain himself did not hesitate to take a foreign girl to live with him for some time, while we remained in those seas ; and during that time the ship was in a continual state of discord, from their blasphemy and drunkenness. On our return to England she was filled as before.

‘In 1809 I sailed again, with other women on board of the same sort, whose conduct, while I remained, was such as I have already described ; but I was for some time

'absent from her on duty. I left her finally as full as ever
'in port.

'I then joined another vessel. There also the midship-
'men had their women on board. It was customary for
'the officers to dance with these women under the half-
'deck ; and when the dance was over, they went to drink-
'ing with the officers and midshipmen in the gun-room, or
'with the latter in the cock-pit. The men had their women
'also. Some of them went to sea in the ship, and behaved
'in their accustomed manner, being almost continually
'drunk, spirits being given them by the officers, mates,
'and midshipmen, in payment for their occasional visits.
'They were on Sundays inspected by the captain and first
'lieutenant. On our return, orders were given to examine
'the women who came on board before they were allowed
'to remain, with a view to prevent disease ; but after every
'precaution was taken, one of these poor creatures died on
'board from the venereal disease, with which she was eaten
'up. Others also became so ill that they could not move.
'At ——— the scene was truly horrible, there being
'more women than men on board ; the boys having free
'course among them likewise ; and the midshipmen
'having four or five girls on board, who lived in the mess,
'and who, I have reason to believe, enticed the younger
'midshipmen on shore to their haunts. I do not recollect
'any women going to sea in this ship.

'In 1816 I joined the ———, captain ———, in the
'———. The ship was full of prostitutes, whose conduct
'was worse, if possible, than in the war. About twelve
'went to sea in the ship, but behaved much better than
'they usually do, until we arrived at ———, when they
'were drunk nearly every night.'

The following communication is from a person not a sea-
man, and refers to a recent period. The writer had gone to

Portsmouth, to place a near relation on board a ship which was then fitting out; and having discovered that dreadful immoralities were almost universally practised, and even countenanced, in the Navy, felt it to be a binding duty to communicate the particulars. Much of the letter would be only a repetition of the details which have already been exhibited; but what follows serves to shew the evil in a new light.

‘I will now state a fact, which I have from the most unquestionable authority, and which appears to me of great political, as well as moral, importance. Some of the women, who inhabited a ship during the six weeks she was lately repairing in this harbour, sung openly the most grossly indecent parodies on the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed: they were of too coarse a nature to bear repetition. The tendency of such compositions to promote disloyalty is well known. And surely it is wisdom to be jealous over that department where the success of these emissaries of evil in producing disaffection would be attended with the greatest danger. Nor is such a union of objects in these engines of mischief either unnatural or new in the history of our Navy. The same complicated seduction was discovered in a striking instance, during that darkest period of our naval annals, the mutiny of the Nore. When an admiral, then commanding a fleet on a foreign station, interrupted and examined the letters addressed to the sailors on that station, it was found that the greater portion of them were written by women with whom they had cohabited in British ports, urging them in the strongest manner to join the mutineers.’

Again: ‘In the ships of war which are not of the line these awful iniquities take place on the same deck which the midshipmen occupy, the hammocks of those youths being hung up close to those of the men, in general without any intervening partitions or curtains to prevent their

‘witnessing the abominations that take place. The effect
‘may easily be conceived.’

Similar statements might be multiplied without end. These will suffice to shew the nature, extent, and enormity of the evils complained of ; evils which, in practice, exist without check or controul, although the Rules of the Naval Service are directly opposed to them, as we mean now to shew.

In the Book of Regulations for the Naval Service, printed in 1790, at page 200, is contained an order which stands numbered the Eleventh Article of the Additional Instructions, and which is to the following effect: ‘All commanders of his Majesty’s ships and vessels are strictly
‘required to cause the following rules to be punctually
‘complied with:’ among others, ‘that no women be *ever*
‘permitted to be on board but such as are *really the wives*
‘of the men they come to ; and the ship not to be too much
‘pestered even with them. But this indulgence is only
‘tolerated while the ship is in port, and not under sailing
‘orders.’

In 1808 a new edition of the Book of Regulations was published, which contains the following orders.

Section I. Chapter I. Article 5.

‘Every flag-officer, captain and commander, and every
‘other officer, is’ ‘so to conduct himself, in every situation,
‘as to be an example of *morality*, regularity, and good
‘order, to all who may be subject to his command.’ p. 3.

Section V. Chapter IV. Article 12.

‘The lieutenants’ are to see that the men of their divisions ‘keep themselves as clean as the duty of the ship will
‘admit of ; to prevent swearing, drunkenness, and *every*
‘other immorality:’ ‘they are to report to the captain what-
‘ever men they find ignorant, idle, dirty, or *profligate*, that

‘they may be instructed, exercised, or punished, as circumstances may require.’ p. 144.

Section V. Chapter IV. Article 37.

‘No ship is to go to sea without a chaplain, if a clergyman properly recommended and of good moral character be found desirous of being appointed to her. In every ship in which there is a chaplain, the captain is to be particularly careful in seeing that every proper attention and respect due to his sacred office be shewn him by all the officers and men under his command. He is to give directions that Divine Service be performed, and a sermon preached, every Sunday, if the duties of the ship, or the state of the weather, do not absolutely prevent it ; at which he and all the officers and ship’s company are to attend. He is not to employ the ship’s company on Sunday in any other works than those which the public service shall absolutely require. He is, *to the utmost of his power*, to prevent all profane cursing and swearing ; all drunkenness, gaming, rioting, and quarrelling ; and, *in general, every thing which may tend to the disparagement of religion, or to the promoting of vice and immorality.*’ p. 160.

Section VI. Chapter I. Articles 21 and 22.

The lieutenant ‘is to be attentive to the conduct of all the ship’s company ; to prevent all profane swearing and abusive language ;’ ‘and to see that they are orderly, quiet, and obedient.’ p. 178.

In addition to the above orders on the subject of moral conduct, contained in the Regulations and Instructions for the Navy, the Act of Parliament which is at this very moment the basis of the discipline and government of his Majesty’s ships contains the following clause :

‘All flag-officers, and all persons in or belonging to his Majesty’s ships or vessels of war, being guilty of profane

‘oaths, cursing, execrations, drunkenness, *uncleanness*, or
‘other scandalous actions, in derogation of God’s honour
‘and corruption of good manners, shall incur such punish-
‘ment as a court-martial shall think fit to impose, and as
‘the nature and degree of their offence shall deserve.’
22 Geo. II. § 2.

In every edition, even the latest, of the Regulations and Instructions for the Naval Service, this Act of Parliament is still referred to as the binding rule for the government of the navy. But lest any commander of a ship, or any superior functionary, should take leave, from its date, to suppose that it had become obsolete, and that its authority might be disregarded, without any violation of the duty of a good subject, his Majesty, on his accession to the throne, issued a Proclamation which recognizes in the most distinct manner, and enforces with peculiar solemnity, the principles and the practice which that Act has enjoined. This Proclamation, issued from Carlton-house on the 12th day of February, 1820, pronounces it to be ‘an indispensable duty’ of his Majesty ‘to be careful, above all other things, to pre-
‘serve and advance the honour and service of Almighty
‘God, and to discourage and suppress all *vice*, profane-
‘ness, *debauchery*, and *immorality*, which are so highly
‘displeasing to God, so great a reproach to our religion
‘and government, and, *by means of the frequent ill examples*
‘*of the practices thereof*, have so fatal a tendency to the
‘corruption of many of our loving subjects, otherwise re-
‘ligiously and virtuously disposed, and which, if not timely
‘remedied, may justly draw down the Divine vengeance on
‘us and our kingdom.’ And it therefore declares, that it is ‘our Royal purpose and resolution to discountenance and
‘punish *all manner of vice*, profaneness, and *immorality*, in
‘all persons, of whatsoever degree or quality, within this our
‘realm’... ‘and we do expect and require that *all persons of*

‘honour, or *in place of authority*, will give good example by
 ‘their own virtue and piety, and to their utmost contribute
 ‘to the discountenancing persons of dissolute and debauched
 ‘lives; that they, being reduced by that means to shame
 ‘and contempt for their loose and evil actions and behaviour,
 ‘may be thereby also enforced the sooner to reform their
 ‘ill habits and practices, and that the visible displeasure
 ‘of good men towards them may, as far as it is possible,
 ‘supply what the laws, probably, cannot altogether pre-
 ‘vent.’ And in order to effect these objects, his Majesty
 not only calls on all magistrates and clergymen, as well as
 all persons of influence, whether in public or private stations,
 to labour to prevent and restrain such evils; but he adds,
 that, ‘to the end that all *vice and debauchery* may be pre-
 ‘vented, and religion and virtue practised by all *officers*, pri-
 ‘vate soldiers, *mariners*, and others, *who are employed in our*
 ‘*service by sea and land*, we do hereby strictly charge and
 ‘*command all our commanders and officers whatsoever, that*
 ‘*they do take care to avoid all profaneness, debauchery, and*
 ‘*other immoralities*, and that, by their own good and vir-
 ‘tuous lives and conversations, they do set good examples
 ‘to all such as are under their care and authority; and
 ‘likewise *take care of, and inspect, the behaviour of all such*
 ‘*as are under them, and punish all those who shall be*
 ‘*guilty of any of the offences aforesaid, as they will be*
 ‘*answerable for the ill consequences of their neglect herein.*’

Having now exhibited, both what is the actual state of things, in practice, on board of his Majesty’s ships of war; and what is the uniform and consistent tenor of all the laws, regulations, and injunctions on the subject; is it necessary to point out, not merely the discrepancy, but the direct contrariety, which exists between them? The actual economy of the navy, with respect to morality, seems contrived not

merely to elude, but to contravene, to nullify, and to outrage the orders of the governing board, the requisitions of the law, and the command of the sovereign.

We are aware that the very circumstance that such practices exist and are tolerated, will, to many well-meaning persons, afford a strong presumption that there must be good and sufficient reasons to be given for their existence ; as, otherwise, it would be impossible that any man of feeling or conscience, much less the respectable individuals in whose power it is to apply a remedy, could sanction them, or, after they are known, endure them for a single day. We have been at great pains to investigate this point, and we trust to be able to produce, in their full force, all the reasons that have ever been alleged in defence, or even in extenuation, of the practices in question, in order that their validity may be fully and fairly appreciated. We have understood that those reasons have appeared satisfactory to the minds of many whose opinions will perhaps be deemed of considerable weight in the present discussion ; but they certainly have not satisfied us, and we are persuaded, when examined, will not satisfy either parliament or the public. We do not affirm that the reasons we are about to state are those which have led persons in authority to neglect applying any remedial measure to this great moral evil, but they are all which we have ever heard produced in its vindication. Our aim will be to state them in the most advantageous manner we can for the defence of those, if any such there be, who, with a full knowledge of the practices which have been described, can still persuade themselves that they act consistently with their duty as Christians, as loyal subjects, and as public functionaries, in tolerating their continuance.

1. It is pleaded, in the first place, that there is no such harm in the practice as some too rigid moralists allege ; and that, therefore, there exists no adequate ground for denying

to seamen, who are exposed to such variety of hardships, this venial indulgence.

In reply to this argument, may we not be allowed to ask, whether the Bible be indeed a fable; or whether any meaning is to be attached to the following and many similar declarations of the word of God? "Be not deceived; neither fornicators nor adulterers...shall inherit the kingdom of God.*" "But fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you...for this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person...hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ †."—"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness...for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ‡." "For this is the will of God...that ye should abstain from fornication §." "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge ||." "Whoremongers...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death **." And besides this, let us also consider with what crimes the word of God has associated these very offences, of which some are apt to think so lightly: "Murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies ††," are classed together by our Saviour himself; and St. John enumerates among those who are shut out from the kingdom of God, "whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie ‡‡."

One would have thought that these declarations would have been decisive, with all who acknowledge the truth and authority of Christianity, and would have at least deterred them from either countenancing such practices, or pleading for them as harmless and venial: or if not, that respect for the laws of their country, and the solemn and affecting call

* 1 Cor. vi. 9.

† Eph. v. 3 & 5.

‡ Colos. iii. 5, 6.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 3.

|| Heb. xiii. 4.

** Rev. xxi. 8.

†† Matt. xv. 19.

‡‡ Rev. xxii. 15.

of their sovereign, would operate to the same end. Still, however, we are aware, that, notwithstanding these powerful considerations, there are persons who will argue against the repression of these practices on the ground of its inexpediency. And yet what says Dr. Paley on this subject, the very writer who is the great advocate for regarding expediency as the rule of our moral conduct?

"Fornication," he says, "supposes prostitution; and prostitution brings and leaves the victim of it to almost certain misery. It is no small quantity of misery in the aggregate, which, between want, disease, and insult, is suffered by those outcasts of human society who infest populous cities; the whole of which is a *general consequence* of fornication, and to the increase and continuance of which every act and instance of fornication contributes. *Fornication produces habits of ungovernable lewdness, which introduce the more aggravated crimes of seduction, adultery, violation, &c.* Likewise, however it be accounted for, *the criminal commerce of the sexes corrupts and depraves the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatsoever.* That ready perception of guilt, that prompt and decisive resolution against it, which constitutes a virtuous character, is seldom found in persons addicted to those indulgences. They prepare an easy admission for every sin that seeks it; *are in low life usually the first stage in men's progress to the most desperate villanies;* and in high life to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a profligacy of public conduct, and a contempt of the obligations of religion and of moral probity. Add to this, that habits of libertinism incapacitate and indispose the mind of all intellectual, moral, and religious pleasures. *Fornication perpetuates a disease which may be accounted one of the severest maladies of human nature, and the effects of which are said to visit the con-*

stitution of even distant generations." And he adds, quoting from Dr. Ogden, "Of this passion it may be truly said that *irregularity has no limits; that one excess draws on another; that the most easy, therefore, as well as the most excellent way of being virtuous, is to be so entirely.*" —Paley's Philosophy, book iii. part iii. chapter ii.

Such reasoning as this it appears not very easy to overthrow; and yet there are men bold enough to make the attempt. We will proceed to consider their arguments.

2. It is argued, then, in the second place, that disaffection and insubordination would be produced among our seamen by abolishing a practice which has come to be considered as a privilege.

But when was it ever known before, that the permission to violate one law makes men more obedient to the rest? The regulations of the service prohibit the practice; but the fear of disaffection, it is said, induces those in authority to connive at the infraction of their own rules. But may not the same fear, which procures for the seaman this unlawful indulgence, be employed to extort farther compliances? But is it true, in point of fact, that the licentiousness which has grown out of this relaxation of discipline has tended to cherish in our sailors attachment to the service of their country, and habits of increased order? Is it not, on the contrary, indisputable, that the attachment has of late been greatly weakened; and that the hostile fleets of America were crowded, during the recent contests with that country, by British seamen? Is it not also notorious, that the annals of our navy have been stained, in the course of the last twenty-five years, with fearful instances of insubordination, to which there is no parallel in former times? It is impossible indeed to deny, that we hold out a direct encouragement to mutiny whenever we make an *unlawful* concession through the fear of exciting it. But this is not all. We

take it upon us to affirm, without danger of contradiction, that a disorderly spirit has ever shewn itself most strongly in those ships where moral discipline has been most relaxed ; and that the very wretches who are introduced on the pretence of securing the fidelity of our seamen, have proved, on many occasions, the readiest and fittest instruments of exciting insubordination and disaffection among them*. But, independently of this circumstance, it cannot be denied by any captain, that the persons on whom he can most securely rely, in any cases of internal disorder, are those who are restrained by principle from vicious indulgence ; and that the most mutinous and refractory individuals are to be found among such as are the most licentious. And all this is natural : common sense will teach men, and passion will act upon the lesson, that the toleration which is granted to one evil may as reasonably be demanded for every other. Disengage them from any known moral obligation, and they will seek to push their freedom farther. Shew them by your conduct, that in any one point you consider the prohibitions of the word of God and of the rules of the service as of no value, and their sanctions as armed with no real terror, and you prepare them for violating, without remorse, every other duty.

But if such a practice is necessary to secure the fidelity of our seamen ; if, in order to this, our ships of war must be converted into brothels, superintended by the officers of the navy—(a description perfectly agreeing with the facts of the case) ; then how is it that our barracks are not conducted on the same plan ? Why are not the same means resorted to in order to secure the fidelity of our soldiers ?

Again : in the merchant service no such practice is tolerated ; and yet it will be allowed that our sailors give a

* See above, p. 11.

decided preference to that over the King's service; nor have we ever heard that the merchant seamen have complained of this restriction as a hardship.

But a reply, which to some may appear still more conclusive, may be given to this objection, drawn from actual experiment. Several officers, who have conceived that their duty to God and to the King rendered it incumbent on them to exclude prostitutes from their ships, have done so without producing any disorder. In three recent instances we have occasion to know that the evil was put an end to without exciting a single murmur, or causing a single desertion. In one of them, the ship's company was paid two years' wages; and though they had free liberty to go on shore, when the duty of the ship permitted it, not one deserted.

Groundless, indeed, are the fears of those who anticipate disaffection rather from the suppression, than from the continuance and encouragement, of vice and profligacy. If those who are entrusted with the government of the navy really desire to secure the loyalty and attachment of our brave seamen, let them cease to act on such a debasing principle; let them remove such a foul blot from the character of seamen, as that they are to be attached only by vicious indulgences to the service of their country. Let them be treated by their superiors as men and as Christians; and let regulations be established which may be enforced, not merely by the application of corporal punishment, but by an appeal to their consciences—regulations which shall restrain the disorderly, encourage the virtuous, and protect the young from temptation, or, at least, prevent them from being forced into vice. Our seamen would then be persuaded (to use the words of an experienced naval officer) that the government of the country really intended their good; and then, in their gratitude, and in their improved moral principles, would that country find the best security for their loyalty and obedience.

3. A third reason alleged is closely connected with that last mentioned ; namely, the danger of desertion.

Much that has been said in reply to the preceding allegation, will apply also to this. Besides which, it may further be observed, that when seamen desert because the practice in question is disallowed, it must be for the purpose either of entering into some other man of war, where the practice forbidden in his own ship is permitted, or into the merchant service. But no such practice is allowed in the merchant service ; and we are now supposing the case of a general prohibition of the practice in the navy also. There could then be no adequate motive for desertion on this account.

The real causes of desertion in the navy have been of a very different description from that which, for the purpose of vindicating this practice, is here assumed. They have been, the higher wages given during war in the merchants' service, and perhaps the occasionally undue severity of our naval discipline. These causes, however, could derive no alleviation, although, on the contrary, they might gain additional force, from the tendency of the practice in question to foster general habits of licence and disorder.

But, whatever may have been the temptations to desertion in time of war, they must be considered as lessened, if not wholly obviated, by a return of peace, during which they may have more frequent leave to be on shore. And if reasonable permission were given them to go on shore when circumstances would admit of it, the sailors, grateful for the indulgence, would be more disposed to return to their ships than they are at present. And indeed, even in time of war, the system of confining men on board (to which this vicious indulgence probably owes its origin) is considered of such questionable policy, by the best naval authorities, that it is likely, we trust, never to be again resorted to.

But what a view does it give of the character of our seamen, that they can be bribed to order and fidelity only by

vicious indulgences? And what a view does it give of the policy which regulates our naval affairs, that those in authority can discover no other expedient for securing the allegiance of our seamen, than that of giving a licence to the unrestrained indulgence of their worst passions; than that of permitting, or even sanctioning, such open violations, not only of the express commands of God, and of all the ordinary decencies of social life, but of the clear and unambiguous rules of the service itself.

An anecdote may with propriety be here related, which will serve to illustrate the amount of benefit to be derived from this flagitious practice, in preventing desertions, and securing the attachment of the seamen to his Majesty's service. It is given on the authority of a naval officer, himself cognisant of the fact.

"When the —— was lately preparing to sail for —— she was so crowded with women that the confusion and filth were intolerable. No business could be done, and the men were deserting daily. At length the first lieutenant, from mere necessity, turned them all out of the ship, and sent them on shore. The captain met them there as they landed. They addressed him, saying, they were sure he was too much of a gentleman not to allow them their privileges; and he ordered them on board again. The lieutenant, of course, received them. The next day, however, nothing could be effected towards putting the ship in order. On the following morning she was paid off. The Jews and other slop-dealers came on board to sell their wares. Their boxes were broken open and pillaged. The women, on this, were sent on shore a second time, and the ship ordered to drop down to ——. I mention this as a proof of what all good officers will admit; that the practice of receiving prostitutes on board our ships is as injurious to the discipline of the service, and the cleanliness and comfort of the

men, as it is contrary to religion and morality. This case furnishes also a strong argument against the assertion that sailors are conciliated, and prevented from desertion, by this indulgence of their vices. This very ship sailed with a deficiency of nearly *fifty* in her complement of men, while the vessels mentioned above* (from which prostitutes were excluded) did not want one."

4. A fourth reason, however, is thus stated :—If seamen are allowed to go on shore in pursuit of sensual gratifications, instead of being furnished with the means of such gratification on ship-board, they will be exposed to much greater evils. Instead of dividing their rations with these women, as they do on board, they will have to pay them in some other way ; they will thus be pillaged of their clothes and money, and be also more exposed to drunkenness and disease ; besides, it would be an unkind and barbarous thing to put them to any expense for a lodging on shore, when this expense may be saved to them.

But would not this be as good an argument for admitting prostitutes into our barracks, as into our ships of war? We should thus spare the soldier's pay, for he also might divide his meal and his bed with his concubine, as the sailor does. It would be also a good argument for admitting them on board our merchantmen ; but our ship-owners, who are sufficiently sharp eyed to discover their own interests, will scarcely be persuaded that they should thus promote either their own advantage or that of their mariners. Nay, if there were any soundness in the argument, it ought to be carried much farther. Our noblemen and gentlemen, who have in their houses a retinue of men servants, perhaps on board wages, acting in the same spirit of tender consideration for their vicious propensities, and of solicitude to spare their money, ought either to chose their female servants

* See page 21.

from the haunts of prostitution, or at least to permit under their own roofs the free ingress and egress of women of that description. Would any man of common feeling or common decency endure thus to convert his house into a brothel, even if the reasoning on which he was urged to do so were ten times more solid and convincing than it is? And yet such, we know, is one main reason which is urged for converting his Majesty's ships into brothels. It is astonishing that any men, still more that men of honourable feeling on other points, should have their understanding and conscience so perverted by prejudice, or so blunted by habit, as to imagine that by these or similar arguments they can palliate the profligacy of such proceedings. For our own part, we can perceive no difference, in point of principle, between the practice which prevails in our navy, of receiving, and even inviting, on board his Majesty's ships, the number of prostitutes required for the use of the seamen, and that which we have supposed, of admitting into the places of his Majesty, or into the houses of our noblemen—of the First Lord of the Admiralty for instance—the number of prostitutes required for the use of the male servants. The same pleas of indulgence, of convenience, of economy, or what ever else may be the plea, may be urged in the one case as in the other. And if in the one case we should regard such a house as no better than a brothel, and its owner as degraded to the moral level of the keeper of a brothel, why should we judge differently in the case of a ship of war? There is indeed, this material difference in the two cases, that in the latter the practice, as we have seen, is attended with such brutalities, such outrageous violations of the decencies of life, as to sink his Majesty's ships even below the level of the lowest brothels.

But, admitting that there were any real weight in this wretched argument, there would still remain another con-

sideration which must prove fatal to it. We ought not to suppose that every individual on board a man of war is so vicious, that, if left to himself, he would resort to the haunts of debauchery and prostitution. Some persons at least, we might charitably hope, if the ships in which they serve were kept free from such scenes of pollution, might escape the snares and temptations to which youth is always more or less exposed, and might return again to the bosom of the domestic circle with their modesty unimpaired and their health untainted, and at least in comparative ignorance of those abominations, a familiarity with which, on the present system, they cannot by any possibility escape. At present, vice is obtruded on their view, and actually solicits their embrace; and those know little of human nature, who calculate that there will be the same abstinence under such circumstances, as if the vicious indulgence must be sought at a distance.

The fatal tendency of evil example to "corrupt many of our loving subjects, otherwise religiously and virtuously disposed," is forcibly set forth in the Royal Proclamation. In the present case, however, the pernicious and overwhelming force of example is systematically applied to the corruption of morals, and the extinction of every feeling, not merely of religious and virtuous reserve, but of natural shame and common decency; and that by the very persons who are bound by the highest obligations of duty both to God and man, who are solemnly enjoined in this very proclamation, to prevent such *fatal examples* from being exhibited to those who "are under their care and authority."

In what other imaginable situation of life would such a state of things as has been shewn to exist on board his Majesty's ships, be endured for a moment? And why should it be endured here? Are our seamen, then, formed of different materials from other men? Are they not also moral

agents, endowed with a capacity of receiving right impressions, of being swayed by persuasion, of being influenced by motives addressed both to their temporal and eternal interests? If, indeed, it were sought to divest them of every valuable attribute of humanity, to say nothing of religion—to divest them of reason, forethought, regard to character, natural modesty and sobriety, and to reduce them to the very level of the brute creation—what more effectual course could be pursued, than that of turning them by hundreds, men and women promiscuously, into one large compartment, there, in the sight and hearing of each other, shamelessly and unblushingly to couple like dogs? Even the natural feeling, which would have led them at least to throw a veil over their vices, if thus wholly extinguished. This of itself is too bad to be borne. But when we think of them as beings responsible to God for their conduct—as men who have immortal souls, which must be happy or miserable for ever—the guilt and enormity of the existing practice are increased beyond all possibility of description.

5. A fifth reason may be thus stated: If the licence complained of be not given, we must lay our account with the growth of unnatural crimes.

But to this we boldly and confidently reply, that if there really exists a danger of this kind in the navy, it arises more from the very practice which we have been reprobating than from any other cause. What can be more *unnatural*, more contrary to all the feelings of our common nature, than the open, undisguised, unblushing, promiscuous concubinage, which now takes place on board his Majesty's ships of war? Is not the person who has been tutored in this school of impurity and licentiousness, and who must there have bid adieu to those feelings which operate the most powerfully as a restraint on new modes of criminal indulgence, less likely than others to shrink from any abomination which may be

suggested to his mind? Suppose a ship, fixed for months on a blockading station, or sent on a tedious cruize, who are the men who would be most likely to be guilty of unnatural practices;—those who had for weeks inhabited the lower deck of a man of war, and been witnesses and actors in the brutalizing scenes we have described; who had had their imaginations contaminated by all sorts of obscenity, and their consciences scared by the sight and participation of all sorts of polluting exhibitions;—or the men who, whatever may be supposed the force of their natural passions, had never passed through so debasing and demoralizing an ordeal? It is either when the appetite is palled or sated with enjoyment; or when a familiarity with gross pollution has prepared the mind for further grossnesses, that such enormities are to be apprehended. Indeed, all crimes are progressive; they are proved to be so by individual observation and experience, as well as by the whole course of history and the whole tenor of Scripture. And it may farther be observed, that all nations, whether ancient or modern, in which the apprehended crimes have prevailed, have been remarkable for the immorality of their women and the shameless licentiousness of both sexes.*

If the practice we complain of has the effect of preventing unnatural crimes, it can only be while it is allowed; and it ought to be especially allowed, therefore, where there is no other opportunity of vicious indulgence. It is wholly inconsistent with this principle, to withhold the indulgence

* Dr. Paley, observing on the avowed toleration which is given in some countries to receptacles of prostitution, says, with great truth, "As to the usual apology for this relaxed discipline, the danger of great enormities—it will be time enough to look to that, after the laws and the magistrates have done their utmost. *And, after all, these pretended fears are without foundation in experience. The men are in all respects the most virtuous, when the women are most chaste.*"—Moral Philosophy, book iii. part iii. chap. 2.

while a ship is at sea, or on a blockading station, and the seamen are shut out from all intercourse with women ; and yet to permit it in port, where there is less necessity for it. Unless, therefore, our ships continue to be brothels at sea, as well as in port, the danger of unnatural crimes, which is made the plea for this licence, will be increased instead of diminished ; for, by occasional indulgence, passion only acquires strength. Such, also, is the social character of vice, that it is vain to expect that by permitting one mode of vicious indulgence we can exclude others ; on the contrary, we only prepare the way for the admission of other vices of the same stock and family. Nay, it has been ascertained,—and some unhappy instances of recent occurrence, if accurately examined, will prove it—that, as far as unnatural practices have existed in our navy, they have been introduced into it by those abandoned wretches, the very women who were vainly and impiously employed to prevent them. Thus it ever is, when men pursue, from motives of short-sighted policy, a course of proceeding directly opposed to the word and will of God. Prostitutes are introduced on board our ships to prevent disaffection, and they prove the emissaries of sedition and treason : they are employed to prevent unnatural crimes, and they become the instructors of our seamen in the very crimes from which it was hoped they would thus have been preserved. When will men learn that their duty and their true interests are always coincident ?

But the alternative in this case is by no means fairly given by those with whom we are arguing : for we are here called to choose between a vice which is licensed, established, regulated, and even enforced ; and one which is proscribed, detested, and punished. We are also called to choose between a certain and a very uncertain evil. To prevent the possibility of one vice in a few individuals (and we believe, that, without the schooling now administered in a man of war, the

risk of that vice would be exceedingly small), we expose the whole crews of every ship of the whole navy of England to almost inevitable and overwhelming depravity. And, considering that there are few even of our merchant seamen who at some period of their lives have not served on board his Majesty's ships, and therefore that many families in Great Britain must have one or more of their members exposed to the contaminating influence of this discipline ; what must be the propagation of licentiousness arising from this source, amongst every class of society ? But this is a topic which will call for a more distinct notice hereafter.

Such are the main arguments by which we have understood that this practice is vindicated. How perfectly futile they are, to say nothing of the unchristian principle on which they all rest, the reader will be at no loss to perceive. There remain, however, some minor arguments, which though it is not alleged that they would of themselves avail to justify the existing practice, have been thought to palliate its enormity. These, that we may omit no part of the defence in this case, shall now be enumerated.

1. The grossness of the scene which has been exhibited, it is alleged, must disgust rather than corrupt young persons of good family, and must rather deter them from, than allure them to, any participation in its abominations.

But what an argument is this to be employed by the vindicators of the practice ! What is it, in fact, but to say that so gross and disgusting, so beastly and brutalizing, are the scenes exhibited in these floating brothels belonging to his Majesty and maintained by the Nation, as to operate rather as a preventive than an incitement of vicious propensities in the case of youths who have been unused to such spectacles ! Even, however, if we were to admit that three or fourth young midshipmen of gentle, or perhaps noble

blood, should thus be fortified against the seductions of vice, at what a price is this benefit gained ! At no less a price than the general degradation of our seamen below the level of humanity, and the general extinction among them of every principle of morality, and every feeling of religion. We cannot, however, flatter ourselves with attaining even this petty and fractional benefit by so costly a sacrifice. The case, in point of fact, proves far otherwise. The hitherto modest and uninitiated youth finds himself plunged at once into associations, and exposed to conversation, and to exhibitions, which, however disgusting, and even terrifying, they may be in the first moment of his introduction to them, soon become familiar, nay, attractive to him, from the mere force of example, aided by the natural desire of sensual gratification. His feelings of shame and modesty gradually disappear: or rather they are enlisted on the side of licentiousness, for here the disgrace is to be pure and virtuous, and not to be as knowing and as bold in evil as those around him. Thus the natural desire which men feel to appear well in the eyes of their associates, and to avoid their scoffs and sneers, aids his downward progress ; and in a few days he finds himself as gross and vicious as his companions. To such a case may be applied, with some slight modification, the words of the poet. Vice, such gross vice as this at least,

———“ is a monster of so frightful mien,
That, to be hated, needs but to be seen ;
But, seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

But, even if the scenes they are called to witness should be slow in producing this their natural effect, there will be found in their own births, or in those of the lieutenants, practised instruments of seduction, who will take a fiendish delight in degrading them to their own level. The fact recorded in the note at page 5, is only an exemplification of

the too common fate of many an ingenuous youth, transported from the purity and piety of the domestic circle to one of these floating brothels.

2. But the young midshipman, it is affirmed, need not see or have any thing to do with these women, or even know that they are on board.

Even if all we have said under the last head could be controverted, yet the present argument could not be maintained. It is quite impossible that the midshipmen should not see these women come on board. They must see them, in their necessary communication with every habitable part of the ship ; and they must see them when they are paraded and inspected on Sundays, as is the usual practice. In every ship also, not of the line, the women live on the same floor with the midshipmen ; and nine-tenths of the vessels in commission are of this description. In point of fact, no midshipman can pass from his birth to the quarter-deck or main-deck, or return thence to his birth, nor can he go to his chest for books, or clothes, or any thing else, without seeing them. He even dresses and undresses in their presence ; and they must do the same in his presence. It is perfectly absurd, therefore, to suppose that the young midshipmen will pertinaciously shut their eyes to what is passing around them.

3. But it has been further argued, that the midshipmen *need not* look ; and if they do, that they will see nothing indecent.

The first supposition is absurd, and the second is false. Everything is permitted to be done at all hours and seasons (with a single reservation, not always attended to) during the day. And during the night, some of the midshipmen's beds come into immediate contact with those of the sailors, so that not a whisper could escape the unhappy youths. And when boys from thirteen to eighteen years of age, as is

frequently the case, are thus situated, the sad effects on their mind and morals may easily be anticipated.

4. As a farther palliation, it has been asserted, That the young midshipmen are generally sent home to their friends when a ship comes into port, and that they thus escape the contamination of such scenes.

But no such custom exists, or can exist. The nature of the service ; the distance of their families ; the time which it would take to communicate with those families as to their going and returning ; the uncertainty, and frequently the shortness, of their stay in port ; render such a system totally impracticable. The custom is, that if the ship goes into harbour for repair, or is certain of remaining any considerable time in port, the captain informs the midshipmen how many of them must remain on duty, giving the rest leave of absence for a certain period, which they apportion by lot, or otherwise, amongst themselves.

But it is wasting time to reply to such arguments, which would probably never have been used, but to quiet the alarms of persons of weight and influence, whose sons had either entered the navy or were about to do so, and who had been led to suspect the moral dangers of the profession to which they had destined them. And, after all, what is the sum of these palliating representations, supposing them to be true ? It is this, That our seamen generally are doomed, by the connivance, and even by the encouragement, of their superiors, to a state of life so immoral and debasing that the very chance of witnessing it is admitted to be likely to produce the most mischievous effects on the minds of the young midshipmen. Indeed, the very nature of the reasoning employed to shew that those midshipmen are debarred from seeing and participating in these enormities, is itself an admission of their existence. But it is the object

of the present exposition to rescue, not only our young midshipmen, for whom alone the solitudes of certain persons appear to have been awakened, but all our officers, and all our seamen, and our country at large, from the cruel consequences of so wicked and flagitious a system. In speaking of these we will not dwell on the miseries produced by the propagation of disease, nor on the various evils affecting character, fortune, and comfort, flowing from the same source, which, in a multitude of cases, abridge life, or embitter it—Of the wretched women who are the chief actors in these scenes of wickedness, it is well known that almost all become the early victims of their vices.* Many affecting instances might also be produced, in the case not of the men only, but of young officers of high promise, whose lives were cut short, or whose health was ruined, or whose prospects were blasted, in consequence of the vicious habits thus in a manner forced upon them. Leaving these points, however, untouched for the present, we will avert to some other effects of this pernicious system.

And here we would observe, that if it be defilement to describe these scenes, or even to think upon them, what must be their effect on the minds of those unfortunate beings who are daily compelled to witness them? And let us not suppose that their grossness affords any protection against their contaminating influence; the remarkable apathy often visible even in officers who have long been familiar with them, proves the contrary. Their moral perceptions become blunted; they cease to consider such practices as disgraceful; they at length become their apologists, and even their advocates.† It is, however, the effect of this,

* The parish officers of a parish bordering on Hampshire, being questioned on the subject, observed, that they always provided for the young women who were likely to become burdensome, by sending them to Portsmouth, from whence they never returned.

† In a case which has lately occurred, the captain and his wife

system as it respects the seamen, on which we mean now chiefly to dwell. Sailors, before they enter the navy, and even while occupied in the merchant service, must be pretty much like the rest of that community from which they have been drawn; with the same natural propensities to evil, but kept in check by those various restraints which, even where religious motives have little or no influence, contribute to preserve decency and good order in society. On entering a ship of war, however, all these restrictions are removed, and the corrupt propensities of our nature are permitted, nay, encouraged, to expand into a full and fearful magnitude. When a man is introduced into this Circean den, the brutalizing process commences. He is tempted to throw off the reserve and modesty which may have accompanied him thither, and to revel in unrestrained and undisguised licentiousness. Can we wonder, under these circumstances, that all feeling of reverence for the commands of God should vanish; and that the influence of those motives to good conduct—inferior, doubtless, in their force, but still of a generous and ennobling kind—drawn from the love of country, and from domestic attachment, should also be weakened, if not extinguished? Let the sailor be once fairly plunged into this life of beastly indulgence, and the desire of forming domestic ties, or of maintaining those already formed, begins to cease; his connection through these with his country, begins to be dissolved; he becomes less capable of enjoying the quiet comforts of home, and pants for the criminal indulgence to which he has been habituated; he has no inducement to economise; but, on the contrary, every temptation to wanton and profuse expense is presented to him, on the part of those with whom, by a mistaken

were actually on the quarter-deck, on a Sunday morning, while seventy-eight prostitutes were undergoing an inspection of the first lieutenant, to ascertain that their dress was clean.

and cruel policy, he is brought into temporary alliance. He thus stands as it were alone in the world. Without a future, either temporal or eternal, to look to with hope, and to elevate him above the mire of sensuality in which he is taught to wallow ; friendless, cheerless, and unattached ; can we wonder that he should become, in too many instances, a desperate and reckless being, indifferent whom he serves and for whom he fights, and influenced only by the fear of the present moment ?

While such a state of things is suffered to exist, what rational hope can be entertained of any moral reform among our seamen ? It would be impossible to induce persons of respectable character to undertake the office of chaplain, or even of schoolmaster, under such circumstances. And if such persons could be procured, yet does it not seem like a mockery of every thing sacred, to appoint chaplains to perform Divine service and to preach to the men, while surrounded by these emissaries of evil ? Is it less a mockery, for those to profess any concern for the morals and religion of our seamen, who can knowingly tolerate such practices—who, with one hand, can send among them bands of prostitutes, fraught with profaneness and blasphemy, and pollution ; and with the other provide them with Bibles and Testaments, and Prayer-books ? And if it should chance that any of the individuals who not only tolerate these evils, but whose influence may possibly be employed to prevent their removal, should be found in the lists of contributors, or even of presidents and vice-presidents, of societies for supplying either our navy or our merchant ships with the Scriptures, or with other means of religious improvement, let them consider, whether, amidst all the fearful consequences of the system for which they are in no small degree responsible, they are not also chargeable with the guilt of exposing religion to contempt, and of

making the Holy Scriptures a jest and a by-word. Our seamen have, happily, become objects of the attention of several religious institutions ; but what real and permanent utility is likely to attend the benevolent exertions of those societies, while this lamentable counteraction is permitted to exist ? The whole effect that may have been produced on the mind of a seaman, by the quiet reading of the word of God, or by the labours of a chaplain, during a lengthened voyage, is destroyed, perhaps, in an hour, on returning to his native shores. In this case he is plunged into the midst of temptations and snares which the resolutions he may have been led to form may prove too feeble to resist ; every hopeful prospect of moral improvement may thus be blasted ; and he may become only the more hardened in iniquity for having had to stifle the convictions of an awakened conscience, and the remonstrances of a more enlightened judgment.

Nor is the extent of this evil to be estimated merely by the number of men who may at any one time be employed in our navy. The whole of our merchant seamen may be considered as having already passed some period of their lives in the King's service, or at least as being liable so to do. And even at the present moment, there is a constant and considerable interchange of men between our ships of war and our merchantmen. The contagious influence, therefore, of the immoralities practised in our navy, may be regarded as extending itself to the whole body of our mariners.

But the evil, it is obvious, is by no means confined to seamen ; it flows back on the community at large, through a variety of channels. Is it possible, after reading the foregoing statement, to contemplate, without dismay, the tide of impurity which must have visited every corner of the land, and penetrated the domestic circle in every rank of life, when, on the termination of the war, thousands, who had been

engaged in the scenes and practices that have been described, returned to their native homes, to poison their moral atmosphere, and to spread the deadly contagion of vice and profligacy in many a hitherto uncontaminated vicinity? We may figure to ourselves the effect, on some peaceful hamlet, of the importation of one or more individuals trained in this hot-bed of licentiousness, habituated to practise without a blush the most shameless violations of modesty and decorum, and to utter without scruple every species of obscenity and profaneness; and taught rather to glory in such language, and in such practices, than to regard them in their true light, as beastly and degrading, as destructive of every estimable feeling and of every heavenly hope.

If we would appreciate the full effect of such a state of things on society, let us consider the testimony borne on this subject by that unexceptionable witness whom we have already quoted, we mean the late Dr. Paley, and weigh well his judgment as it is given in that quotation.* And yet, tremendous as are the calamities which he shews to connect themselves with this species of profligacy, they all sink into comparative insignificance when we view it in its influence on the future, and eternal well-being of those who are addicted to it.

Without intending to enlarge on this most affecting view of the subject, we would only remark, that, among the many evils which cannot fail to flow from the encouragement or toleration of the practices complained of, there is one which at this moment is peculiarly worthy of the attention of our statesmen; we mean the impression which it is calculated to produce on the minds of the unthinking, that Christianity itself is a mere engine of state policy, to be used solely for state purposes, and for the sake of its effect on public

* See above, p. 18.

opinion ; but that the very men who thus employ it regard it as a fable—at least have no serious persuasion of its truth, and still less of the obligations which its truth involves. We have heard much of late of the progress of infidelity, and of the success with which Carlile and his associates have extended its demoralising influence among the lower classes of society. We greatly question, however, whether all their pernicious writings are calculated to do one-tenth part of the mischief, in loosening the hold which Christianity has on the minds of our population, as would be produced by facts which should justify the suspicion, that our rulers, who had ample means of investigating the subject, in their hearts judged the whole to be an imposture. There is something in the idea of being *humbugged*, to use a vulgar but significant expression, against which the mind of every man revolts. And, yet, what can more wear the air of an attempt of this revolting description, than to publish Rules and Regulations, and to issue Royal Proclamations for restraining vice and immorality, and to issue sums of money and institute societies for the distribution of Bibles and Prayer-books among our seamen, and even to appoint chaplains to preach to them ; and yet, after having done all this, to permit, and even sanction, the practices which we have described, and which do, in point of fact, convert our ships of war into brothels of the very worst description ?

Let us suppose the case of a father who *professed* to be a religious man himself, and to take the Bible for the rule of his own conduct, and who, at the very time when he was pressing upon his sons an attention to its truths and injunctions as the sure road to happiness, should permit or invite women of the town to become their associates, and to share their bed and board ; what should we say of the professions of such a father ? Or what would his sons, and his sons' companions, think of them ? Would it be possible to persuade

them that the father was sincere? Would they not rather conclude, that however, in order to serve some worldly purpose, or to impose on persons who had no means of knowing his domestic arrangements, he might wear the semblance of religion, yet it was most evident from his conduct that this semblance was a palpable cheat, a base imposture? And would such a conclusion recommend to them their father's *professed* principles, however just and correct such principles might be in themselves. The application is obvious.

We are aware that it lies immediately within the province of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to apply a remedy to this evil; and we have no reason to doubt, that, when they shall have been led to consider it in all its bearings, they will feel it incumbent upon them to take the necessary measures to that end. But, still, the obligation to see that a remedy is applied, does not rest with them exclusively. It is the common and imperative duty of every member of his Majesty's Government, nay, of his Majesty himself; of the Parliament also, and even of the public at large, to rescue those gallant defenders of all that is dear to us as Britons, and as Christians, the men who have so unsparingly toiled and bled in our cause, from the influence of so degrading and brutalizing a system.

In the Proclamation which his Majesty issued on his accession to the throne, and in the recent engagements into which he has so solemnly entered at the altar of God, and in the presence of his assembled liegemen, we have a pledge that no practices so contrary to all sound religious and moral principle, and so hostile to the best interests of his subjects, can be countenanced, or even endured, by him. The known character of many of the individuals composing his Majesty's Government, affords a farther pledge to the same effect. And if, in Parliament, such a strong sensation should have been produced by a statement of certain profligate pro-

ceedings which had been permitted on board a female convict ship, we cannot suppose that they would there tolerate for a moment the continuance of the far greater enormities which have been shewn, not only to exist in the British Navy, but even to form a part of its regular economy.

We have said that the public at large have a deep interest in this question. If, however, there be any part of that public who are more peculiarly interested in it than the rest, it is those parents whose sons are now employed in the naval service, or whose future destination is to that profession. It becomes *them* especially to combine their efforts to put an end to these abominations; and should they fail in this object, we do not see how they can possibly, as Christian parents, reconcile it to their consciences to place their sons in situations which expose them, almost inevitably, to vice of the most polluting and debasing kind, and to the consequent destruction of all right religious feeling; and which expose their families also to the contamination of principles and practices acquired in such a school. We have heard of Hindoo parents, who, under the influence of a dark superstition, will expose their offspring to be drowned in the Ganges, or to be devoured by crocodiles; but does that parent act a kinder or a more Christian part, who is induced, by any considerations of worldly advantage, to expose his child to the ordeal of such an education as a British man of war at present affords?

There are, it is true, a few officers, who, feeling all the degradation of being thus reduced to the base office of superintendants of brothels, of being, in fact, procurers and panders to the vilest passions of those under their command, seem resolved to set their faces as much as possible against the existing practice. It is not, however, in their power to alleviate its pernicious effects, except slightly and

temporarily ; and as for such partial and occasional prohibitions as an individual officer may apply, they can produce but little if any benefit. It is only by rules which shall apply uniformly and universally, that it can be effectually repressed, or that the character and consistency of our naval administration can be vindicated. Still, in the absence of general rules, it is impossible to honour too highly the officers who, unmoved by the difficulties of the task, unaffected by the sneers and the censures of their brother-officers, actuated by a supreme regard to the will of God and the best interests of the men placed beneath their care, and fearless of all personal consequences, persist in refusing to lend themselves to such proceedings. The number of such men, we doubt not, will daily increase, as the evil, with all its opprobrious circumstances, comes to be more fully discussed and better understood. But, in the meantime, we trust that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty will not shrink from fulfilling their obvious duty, and that they will stamp with their decided disapprobation, and strictly prohibit in future, practices at once so profligate, disgraceful, and destructive.



