

FROM THE BOSTON CENTINEL.
NEUTRAL COMMERCE.

MR. RUSSELL,

A pamphlet, under the title of "War in disguise, or the frauds of Neutral flags," has been published in London under the date of the 18th October last, supposed to have been written with the concurrence, if not under the directions, of the English government. The subject is in the highest degree interesting to the people of all countries, and peculiarly so to the people of the United States, in their neutral condition; I presume, therefore, the following sketch will be read with avidity by those who have not an opportunity to see the whole piece:

The author begins by stating that the restoration of the marine, and the increase of the confederated navies, have been since the renewal of hostilities, the means of War contemplated by Buonaparte; in providing which, he has expended incalculable sums, and devoted indefatigable labor. That in the retrospect of the last war, and of the progress we have made in the present, one singular fact immediately arrests the attention, viz.—That the finances of France appear scarcely to be impaired, much less exhausted, by her enormous military establishments, and extensive enterprises, notwithstanding the ruin so long apparently imposed on her commerce. That "in our former contests with France and Spain, their impoverishment was a sure effect of our hostilities, and the extent of this impoverishment was always in proportion to that of its grand instrument, our naval superiority." That "we distressed their trade, we intercepted the produce of their colonies, and thus exhausted their treasuries, by cutting off the chief sources of their revenue; and by the same means these expenditures were immensely increased and wasted in defensive purposes. They were obliged to maintain fleets in distant parts of the world, and to furnish strong convoys for the protection of their intercourse with the colonies both on the outward and homeward voyages." That "the frequent capture of these convoys, while it enriched our seamen, aided our revenue by the increase of import duties, and compelled the enemy to dispatch duplicate supplies, at the risk of new disasters, or to leave their colonies in distress, and forfeit the benefits of their corps for the year." In short, that "their transmarine possessions became expensive incumbrances, rather than sources of revenue, and that by such losses, rather than by our victories, the house of Bourbon was vanquished." "Have we then lost," he asks, "the triumphant means of warfare? No, the true solution of these seeming difficulties is this—the commercial and colonial interests of our enemies, are now ruined in appearance only, not in reality. They seem to have retreated from the ocean, and to have abandoned their colonies; but it is a mere ruse de guerre. They have in effect, only changed their flags. Their transmarine sources of revenue have not been for a moment destroyed by our hostilities, and at present are scarcely impaired."

In the hope of contributing to the correction of this evil, he proposes to consider,

- 1st. Its origin, nature and extent,
- 2d. The remedy, and the right of applying it.
- 3d. The prudence of the resort."

On the first division, he states, that the colonizing powers of Europe have always monopolized the trade of their colonies—that such has been the (almost) universal system in time of peace, and that on a close adherence to this system, the value of colonies has been supposed wholly to depend; that in the war, which commenced in the year 1756, France being hard pressed by the maritime superiority of England, resorted to the expedient of relaxing her colonial monopoly, and admitted neutral vessels, under certain restrictions, to carry the produce of her islands to French or foreign ports in Europe; but that the prize courts of England considering as a substantial principle of the law of nations—"that a neutral has no right to deliver a belligerent from the pressure of his enemy's hostilities, by trading with his colonies, in time of war, in a manner prohibited in time of peace"—condemned such vessels as were captured while engaged in this commerce, together with their cargoes; and, in vindication of the justice of this manner, he quotes the words of Sir William Scott, in the case of the *Immanuel*, 1799—"The general rule is; that the neutral has a right to carry on in time of war his accustomed trade to the utmost extent to which that trade is capable.—Very different is the case of a trade which the neutral has never possessed, which he holds by no title and use of habit in time of peace, and which in fact he can obtain in war by no other title than by the success of one belligerent against another; and at the expense of that very bellige-

rent, under whose success he sets up his title. It cannot be contended to be a right of neutrals to intrude into a commerce which has been uniformly shut against them, and which is now forced open merely by the pressure of war; for when the enemy, under an entire inability to supply his colonies, and export their products, affects to open them to neutrals, it is not his will but his necessity, that changes the system—"the change of system is a measure, not of French councils, but British force."—After proving that "the principle of the rule of the war of 1756," has been adhered to, though with some practical indulgence, on the part of Great-Britain towards neutrals, he proceeds to state the mischief to which the "rule of 1756" was first applied, was of a partial and limited kind. In that war neutral ships, though admitted into some of the colonial ports of France, were by no means the sole carriers of their produce or supplies. The enemy continued to employ his own commercial flag, as far as his power of protecting it extended; and neutrals were rather partners in, than assignees of, the national monopoly.

But now, France and Holland have totally ceased to trade under their own flags, and have apparently assigned the whole of their commerce to the merchants of the neutral states; and Spain, though with more hesitation, has nearly made as entire a transfer. "But why (says he) should I proceed to state particulars, when it may be truly affirmed, in a few words, that not a single merchant ship, under a flag inimical to Great-Britain, now crosses the equator, or traverses the Atlantic. Yet this forms only part of a more comprehensive and singular truth, that, with the exception of a very small portion of the coasting trade of our enemies, not a mercantile sail of any description now enters, or clears from their ports, in any part of the globe, but under neutral colors. And yet notwithstanding this, Buonaparte has recently boasted, that Martinique and Gaudaloupe are flourishing, in despite of our hostilities, so much beyond all former experience, that since 1789 they have actually doubled their population. He might have said, with the same truth, the same of their produce—but he ought to have added, that since the first notice of the war, the French flag has not brought them a barrel of flour, nor exported a hhd. of their sugar. To the Spanish colonies also war has changed its nature, and has become the handmaid of commerce and the parent of plenty.—In short, all the hostile colonies, whether Spanish, French, or Batavian, derive from the enmity of Great-Britain, their antient scourge and terror, not inconvenience but advantage. They may say, to each other, as Themistocles said to his children, when enriched during his exile, by the Persian monarch, "we should have been ruined if we had not been undone."

After endeavouring to prove at some length, and with plausibility, that the produce of the enemy's colonies, arrives at the mother country, by the aid of neutrals, with less expence of freight and insurance, than is paid by the British merchant; that exclusive of duties, (sugars are (August) cheaper in France than in England) and that the English planter is undersold in every market in Europe—he says, that "though the preceding statements and calculations naturally lead to this result, it will perhaps be regarded with some astonishment. We defend our colonies at a vast expence; we maintain at a still greater expence, an irresistible navy, we chase the flag of every enemy from every sea, and, at the same moment, the hostile colonies are able, from the superior safety and cheapness of their new-found neutral navigation to undersell us in the continental markets of Europe. Where is the partial compensation now that our planters used to find for the heavy burthens and dangers of wars? If the cost of their supplies was erroneously enhanced, if war taxes pressed them hard, if freight and insurance was doubled and trebled; if their interior defence became expensive and laborious, and if they were sometimes invaded or plundered by the foe—still the superior pressure of the war upon the hostile colonies insured to our own the benefits of markets more than commonly advantageous. But by the present unprecedented and artificial state of things, this compensation has been narrowed and almost totally lost; and much of that silently progressive ruin of our old colonies may be traced to this singular source. It appears then, on the whole, that our enemy carries on his colonial commerce under the neutral flag, cheaply as well as safely; that, without the charge of defending his colonies, or their trade, by a single squadron or convoy, he receives nearly all the tribute from them that they would yield under the most extensive protection. The mischief, however, by no means terminates in sustaining the French exchequer; it strikes, in various directions at

the very vitals of our national security; it tends to the depression of our maritime power, and to the exaltation of the navy of France. By this licentious use of the neutral flag, the enemy is enabled to employ his whole military marine in purposes of offensive war. He is not obliged to maintain a squadron or a ship, for the defence of his colonial ports; and by avoiding the dispersion of his maritime force, and the consequent risk of its defeat and capture, he obtains, by its concentration near the seat of empire, a most formidable advantage. After enlarging upon the advantages accruing to the belligerent from their commerce being conducted entirely by neutrals, in the direction of their whole marine to purposes purely offensive—in preserving their vessels from destruction of battle or of weather, and their seamen from capture, he proceeds to the consideration "of the remedy for these evils, and the right of applying it;" and this remedy he considers as sufficiently obvious:—"If neutrals have no right," he says, "but through our own gratuitous concession, to carry on the colonial trade of our enemies, we may, after a reasonable notice, withdraw that ruinous indulgence. If, after the revocation of the licence, the commerce shall be still continued, we may justifiably punish the violators of our belligerent rights, by the seizure and confiscation of such ships, as shall be found engaged in the offence, together with their cargoes. But is this a case in which we have a right to any remedy at all?—This, if attended with doubt, would be indeed a most important question. If it cannot be satisfactorily answered on the part of our country, there should be an end to every thought of resistance, if not to complaint. Nothing can be more advantageous for us than the suppression of this commerce, but if, like the advice censured by Aristides, it requires a breach of justice, let us inflexibly abstain." He proceeds to assert, that in this case, moral right and visible expediency harmonize—that it should first be observed that the neutral powers have all assented to the rule of the war of 1756, in point of principle, by submitting to its partial application—that whatever indulgence Great-Britain may have since that time granted to neutrals—self preservation now demands the revocation.—That the trade in question has been shown to be ruinous to her present hopes in the war, and her future prospects—that it would be a most extraordinary situation for two friendly powers to stand in if the one had a right to do any thing which is destructive to the other, and yet that the continuance of this trade, by states at present in amity with Great-Britain, will, in its natural consequence, draw down destruction upon her.—That she is engaged in a contest, the adverse issue of which may be fatal to her safety, and that, if the cutting off the colonial resources of her enemies be a necessary means of preventing such an issue, to dispute her right is to dispute her right of self defence. But waving the argument of necessity he proceeds to consider, and to deny the right of the neutral flags to avail themselves of their admission into the ports of the hostile colonies, and, after several pages devoted to this enquiry, he proceeds, "After all that has been said or can be said on this important subject, one plain question will probably be felt to be decisive by every equitable mind.

"*Quis animus?* With what intention did the enemy open the ports of his colonies to foreign flags?"

"If it was with commercial views, or for the mere sake of imparting a benefit to friendly powers, their acceptance of the boon may perhaps be justifiable, but if the single, undissembled manifest object, was to obtain protection and advantage in the war, to preserve his colonial interests, without the risk of defending them, and to shield himself, in this most vulnerable part, against the naval hostilities of England, I say, if such was the manifest and known purpose of the measure, I see not how any dispassionate mind can doubt for a moment, that a co-operation in such an expedient, by powers in amity with England, was a violation of the duties of neutrality." That this was the sole intention of the belligerents, he proves from their conduct after the peace of Amiens. So far was the change of colonial system from being permanent, as was argued on behalf of the neutral claimants, in the last war, that orders were sent to reverse it the moment the sword was sheathed, and, on the other hand, the first advices of a new war with Great-Britain were accompanied, in all the colonies, with orders to open their ports again to their former extent. He concludes the second division by asserting, that as in its motives & purposes, the whole transaction is of a hostile character, so are the effects actually produced of a kind most directly hostile and injurious;—that the illegality of this commerce, is as certain as its mischievous tendency; and to engage in it is to interpose in the war, for the purpose of

rescuing the enemy from the superior naval force of Great-Britain, or, in the terms of an expressive metaphor sometimes applied to it, "*hosti imminenti eripere periculum*;" and that the merchants who thus violate the duties, have no claim to the rights of neutrality.

In considering the third division of his subject, viz. "of the prudence of applying the proposed remedy in regard to the colonial trade," the author contemplates some degree of complaint and remonstrance on the part of the neutral powers. "But would they," says he, "if firmly and temperately resisted, push the controversy into a quarrel? Would they maintain their pretensions to the trade in question at the expence of a war with Great-Britain? I firmly believe they would not, because I am sure they ought not, whether they regard their honor, their duty, or their interest. But it is not my purpose to recommend a total and unqualified prohibition of even the colonial trade. We might perhaps, without any very serious mischief, extend to all the ports of the French colonies, and to every neutral nation the privileges enjoyed by Americans at some of those ports in time of peace. Nay, we may perhaps allow an intercourse of the same species, and subject to similar restrictions with the colonies of Spain and Holland. If permitted to retain such a portion of the trade in question, together with all the rest of such existing commerce, as is the fair fruit of their neutrality, in every quarter of the globe, what motives could these nations find for their further and unjust pretensions by arms? To suppose that commercial interest would excite them to do so is to suppose that for the sake of a part, they would wilfully sacrifice the whole."

The remainder of this pamphlet is occupied by his suppositions on the possible evils which might result from a state of hostility with the neutral powers (an event which however he appears earnestly to deprecate) compared with the evils, under which he considers Great-Britain laboring, in consequence of the present extent of the neutral trade; and this latter he does not hesitate to consider as the most alarming.

Sugar & Molasses.

Just received by the Brig Neptune, Capt. Story, from Trinidad,

101 hhd. Sugar,
3 barrels do.

8 hhd. Molasses,

Which will be sold low for Cash or approved Notes.

A. LAZARUS.

13th Jan. 1806.

A great Bargain.

FOR SALE,

A VALUABLE Tract of Land in the county of Bladen, containing 640 acres, on the north-east side of the North-west of Cape-Fear, twenty miles below Fayetteville and eighteen above Elizabeth, on which is a new dwelling House nearly finished, 30 by 38 feet including Shed and Piazza, a Store and an half high; a Kitchen, Smoke House, &c. &c. It is well situated and equal in fertility to any Tract on the River.

ALSO,

Four hundred acres back Land nearly joining the above described Tract, which abounds with Lightwood for Tar and Pines for Turpentine. Range for cattle and hogs at this place, is nearly if not quite as good as any in the State.

A further description is unnecessary, as any person inclined to purchase would previously wish to see it. The price may be known by applying to the subscriber on the premises. Cash or Negroes will be taken in payment, and possession given any time previous to the first day of April ensuing.

M. MOLTON.

January 17, 1806.

Fresh Garden Seeds,

Just received and for sale by

JOHN WILLKINGS & CO.

Wilmington, Jan. 20, 1806.

THE Subscribers, as Executors of William Hallmar, deceased, request all creditors to deliver their accounts properly attested, at the deceased's late store, as soon as possible, or within the time limited by law, otherwise they will be barred of recovery. Those who may be indebted and have open accounts will respectively be called upon for settlement during the course of this month.

The Refuse of the Goods unsold will be put up to Public Auction on Friday the 31st inst. in three separate Lots, payable by an approved Note at 6 months, negotiable at the Bank of Cape-Fear.

W. J. BEATTY, } Extra
A. MELLAN, }
Wilmington, January 21, 1806.