NAVAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE SUPPLY OF SPIRITS TO SEAMEN.

A committee of flag officers and captains, with Admiral Sir Byam Martin in the chair, is now sitting at the Admiralty to pronounce on the expediency of reducing the present allowance of grog which is daily served out to the seamen of Her Majesty's navy, a fair compensation being made to them by a proportionate increase in the amount of their pay. That the object which it is thus proposed to arrive at is a great and important desideratum there can be no doubt, as it is a notorious fact that the majority of punishments which take place in the British navy are either directly or indirectly the result of drunkenness; and the transition from "the cheerful can" to the cat-o'-nine-tails is but too frequently a consequence of the inevitable laws of cause and effect. The intended reform is, however, not entirely a new scheme, the result of modern temperance preaching. As early as in 1824, when teetotalism was a thing not dreamed of in our philosophy, and the daily allowance of rum per man was no less than half a pint, a committee of flag officers was assembled, with Lord Exmouth at its head, who reported it as their unanimous opinion that the discipline of the fleet and the health of the seamen would be materially benefitted by a reduction in the allowance of spirits, and they reported to the Board of Admiralty that the allowance of rum should be reduced nearly one-half, a just equivalent for the reduction being paid to the seamen in money. The decision of the committee was adopted, and there was every expectation that the new regulation would be of advantage to the service.
that the most favourable results would ere long spring from the new system. These hopes were, however, destined to be crushed in the bud—a bill being passed two years after, in 1826, for the equalisation of liquid measures, by which the present Imperial measure was established; and the seaman’s allowance of grog was miraculously restored, or nearly so, to the fair proportions of which it had just been curtailed, and which it has retained up to the present day. There is something so natural, so familiar to British ears, in the association of seamen with grog, that it would perhaps be a hopeless task to endeavour to prove that one is not a necessary adjunct to the other. Yet in the American navy grog is unknown, or at least the exception and not the rule—the coffee or tea-pot is the sober substitute to the grog-can; and a solemn evidence that there is no disadvantage in the system—that the case in fact is the reverse—is the fact that in a service requiring all the energy, hardihood, and skill that a seaman can possess—namely, the whale fishery—the ships of the United States have confessedly driven the English out of the South Seas and Pacific, and have monopolised that once flourishing and profitable branch of our commerce.

Evident, however, as are the advantages with which a temperance movement in our navy would be attended, and greatly as its efficiency and character would be enhanced by it, there are certain considerations which render it a delicate question to approach, and which should dictate caution as to the mode in which the reform is to be introduced. It will be necessary for the committee in proposing their measures to assume a guardianship of what the seaman would consider his rights, and whilst the advancement of better discipline is held in view it should be made evident that the best interests, as well as the true well-being, of the seaman are being attended to.
The officers who compose the committee, with one so distinguished not only in his professional, but in his administrative character as the Admiral of the Fleet for their president, form a sufficient guarantee that these considerations will be held in due regard, and that the fullest evidence as well as the weight of their own experience will be brought to bear upon the question.