

THAMES—YESTERDAY.

**OBSTINATE LASCARS.**—Thirteen Lascars, belonging to the ship *Limehouse*, lying in the London Dock, were brought before Mr. Selfe, charged with deserting the vessel and refusing to proceed to sea.

Captain John Chester, the master of the *Limehouse* stated that the prisoners formed part of his crew, and came from Calcutta, and they were bound by the agreement to return to that place. He had done all in his power to make the Lascars comfortable. There were no wages due to them until the voyage terminated. He had provided them with shoes, and advanced them a few shillings each, and he had also directed them to select any clothing they thought proper at a sloop-seller's, and send the goods on board with the bill and he would discharge it. He had also given them tobacco, and provided a stock for the voyage. Notwithstanding all this, they declared they would not proceed on the voyage unless they had money, which he refused to give them, because he knew if he gave them more than a few shillings each they would either be speedily robbed of the money, or else they would spend the whole of it in the indulgence of sensual gratification, and he should not see them again for several days.

Mr. Selfe: It is quite out of the question to give them money here which is not due to them.

Captain Chester said the men had been absent from the ship since Wednesday morning, and said they would rather go to prison than return to their work unless money was given to them.

Mr. Selfe said he would not indulge the Lascars in their wishes by sending them to prison. They must go back to the ship and work. If he sent them to prison he was afraid that when they came out they would be perishing with cold or dying of hunger in the streets. Their wilfulness must not have its way. He inquired when the ship would sail.

Captain Chester: To-morrow or Saturday.

Mr. Selfe: I don't want to send these Asiatic seamen to prison if I can help it, but if they won't return to their ship I have no other alternative.

Mr. Levy, an Hindostanee interpreter, explained to the prisoners the nature of the charge, and they all said they would not return to the ship unless their demands were satisfied.

Mr. Selfe asked if the men had any reason to be discontented, and the captain replied in the negative. They were very contented and subordinate on board ship.

Mr. Selfe observed that one man, a Malay, who could speak English, and who stood first, appeared to be the ringleader.

Captain Chester said that was so. The other Lascars were acting under the direction of the Malay, who was what was called a sea cunny, and could steer the vessel.

Mr. Selfe said the Malay was misleading the other men, and he must make an example of him. He sentenced him to one month's imprisonment and hard labour. If there was any other ringleader who could be pointed out, he should be punished in a similar manner.

The other Lascars were then asked if they would go on board, and

Mr. Levy said they all answered "No," and would have money.

Mr. Selfe: No, they will not. I shall make them go on board.

Mr. Levy: They all positively say they will not go on board.

Mr. Selfe, after frequent remonstrances with the Lascars through the medium of the interpreter, said the men must be sent on board by force, on which Captain Chester and Mr. Levy said the Lascars were as obstinate as mules; indeed, such was the obstinacy of their nature, that when once they had got a thing in their head, nothing on earth could shake their resolution.

Captain Chester said he could not do without a crew. If the Lascars would not proceed on the voyage, he must engage another crew immediately. The magistrate would have to use tremendous force to compel the men to go on board ship if they had formed a resolution not to do so.

Roche, the gaoler of the court, suggested that the Lascars should be locked up in separate cells until the afternoon, and he did not think he should have any further trouble with them afterwards.

Mr. Selfe: I will make another attempt. Tell them I shall send them to prison at once if they do not return to the ship directly.

Mr. Levy: They say they will sooner have their throats cut.

Mr. Selfe made several attempts to shake the resolution of the Lascars, and they said money they wanted and money they would have. At length Mr. Selfe ordered them to be locked up in separate cells.

Sometime afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel R. Marsh Hughes, the secretary of the Strangers' Home, in course of erection at Limehouse, for Asiatics, South Sea Islanders, and Africans, waited upon the magistrate, and said he was happy to say that the whole of the Asiatic crew of the ship *Kenilworth*, abandoned by their late owner, a bankrupt, had been paid their wages in full, and he had shipped the last batch of them that morning.

Mr. Selfe said the public was much indebted to Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes for the interest he had taken in the Lascars of the *Kenilworth*, and there was no doubt he had saved them from becoming vagrants in our streets, and falling victims to the rigours of an English winter, so unsuitable to Asiatic constitutions. The Magistrate then gave Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes the history of the Lascars belonging to the *Limehouse*, and said he should be obliged if the gallant officer, who had so much experience in these matters, would see the Lascars and use his influence with them. He thought that persuasion was better than force.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes willingly undertook the task assigned to him, and said that nothing could be more injurious than to give money to the men.

The Lascars were then brought out of their cells into the gaoler's room, and Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes conversed with them in their own language for half an hour, and remonstrated and argued with them with considerable ability, but all to no purpose.

On the return of Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes to the justice room, he said the Lascars would not listen to reason, and had evidently been misled. They wanted three months' pay in advance. It was in vain he told them there were no wages due to them until the voyage terminated at Calcutta, and that everything they wanted was provided. He had also offered to give his own personal security for the payment of their wages at Calcutta. He had recently shipped some Lascars on board another ship. The magistrate could form no conception of the trouble he had with them, and after he had succeeded in persuading a crew to join their ship they ran away again and proceeded to Liverpool. It would really be an act of mercy towards Lascars, if an act of Parliament was passed to compel masters of ships to keep them on board ship while they were in English ports. If they came on shore they were either robbed or made the dupes of designing persons, who induced them to demand money of the captains or persuaded them to desert.

Mr. Selfe said the object of punishment was example, and it would be useless to punish the twelve Lascars by way of example. Their companion and ringleader had left the court with an air of a martyr, and the rest would do the same if he sent them to prison. He scarcely knew what to do. There was no reason to suppose the men were badly treated, and the captain appeared to be a humane, considerate man, and was willing to disburse money for them.

After a long discussion the twelve Lascars were locked up. At six o'clock in the evening, when the other business was disposed of, they were again brought before the magistrate, when Roche stated that ten of them had repented, and were ready to return to the ship.

Mr. Selfe was glad the ten Lascars were behaving like wise men, and hoped they would have a prosperous voyage, and the captain would be kind to them. He then endeavoured to persuade the other two to follow the example of their shipmates, but could only succeed with one. The other was remanded to prison till Saturday, but previous to his leaving the court said if the captain advanced him two sovereigns he would go back to the ship.

Captain Chester: I cannot make an exception with him at all. If I did the other men would not return to the ship without £2 each.

Mr. Selfe said the captain was quite right, and after sending the 11 Lascars to the ship in the charge of Police-constable Mills, No. 306 K, remanded the 12th man to prison until Saturday, hoping by that time he would be in a better frame of mind.