

I have observed with satisfaction, that in some of the counties, the permissions granted to free negroes to bear, or keep arms, has been revoked by the Judge of the Circuit Court; and I again call the attention of the General Assembly to the necessity, now greater than ever, for further legislation in regard to the free negro population in many of the counties. In the large city and towns, and in the counties in the Northern portion of the State, this evil is not felt as it is in the lower counties, on both shores, where the community is taxed to support their idleness and vagrancy, and is subject to their pilfering, and the ill effects of their evil example on the servile population. A law which should require every free negro to be engaged in some employment or business; or be bound out, under proper safeguards, protection and wages, just treatment, and the liberty of change and choice that is theirs, is among the wants of the people of this State.

The people of the counties upon the Bay have had great reason to complain of the infringement of their rights, and invasions of their property, by adventurers from other States, who openly violate the statutes, which protect the privileges of our citizens, in the waters and tributaries of the Chesapeake. The fisheries have always been important; and as a great portion of the labor of securing and curing fish had to be done on the shore, rights there were early settled, and are rarely now disturbed. But the trade in oysters is one which is comparatively recent; and which has, since the means of rapid conveyance to the West are perfected, grown to an extent and importance, hardly credible to those who have not seen the proofs. Large numbers of families now depend upon it, and the successful prosecution of this traffic has opened a new source of wealth and employment to whole communities.

The General Assembly has, at various times, passed laws prohibiting the use of improper instruments and modes of taking them, by which as many more are destroyed in the beds; and has inhibited, under severe penalties, of confiscation of the offending boats, the taking of oysters within the waters under Maryland jurisdiction, by non-residents and persons not thereto licensed or authorized. The validity of these enactments has been upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States, (18 Howard Rep.,) which has declared the competency of the State authority in this matter. But these enactments fail to render the protection needed for this interest, by reason of the easy escape of offending vessels, and the difficulty of detection. The few captures that have been made, have been secured by the sudden appearance of an officer, on board a steam-vessel, which cut off the hopes of escape; and this has suggested to me, that a most efficient and complete protection to our citizens and their rights, could be given by the purchase or building of a small steamboat, fitted for this service; which,