

BRITISH SHIPS IN TUNISIAN WATERS.

Mr. H. BRAND, on behalf of Mr. OTWAY, asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether a British trading schooner with her colours flying was recently boarded from a French man-of-war in Tunisian waters, taken possession of, and overhauled, on the plea of searching for arms; whether arms formed any part of the cargo of the schooner; and, had such been the case, by what right the French authorities (their Government not being at war with the Government of Tunis or a belligerent Power) impeded a British ship when pursuing her lawful commerce; and whether, in consequence of this transaction, Her Majesty's Government contemplated taking any steps to secure for British seamen and their trade in Tunisian waters the protection to which they were entitled.

SIR C. DILKE.—On the 23d of May, Her Majesty's agent at Tunis reported by telegram that the French ship of war Leopard had overhauled the British schooner Nova Stella, on the 19th inst., and after searching her for gunpowder, had escorted her to Sfax, to be more closely inspected by the local authorities in the presence of a dragoon of the British Consulate. Lord Lyons was instructed to inquire into the matter, and was informed by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs that it was in consequence of a regrettable misunderstanding of his instructions that the commander of the Leopard had visited one or two foreign vessels. He had been instructed to watch suspected vessels, and to support the Tunisian authorities in repressing smuggling, but he was by no means authorized to visit foreign vessels on the high seas, and fresh instructions had been sent to him to prevent any misunderstanding in future. Communications on the subject have taken place between Captain Tryon and the commander of the Leopard. A report of these has not yet been received from the former, but M. St. Hilaire informed Lord Lyons that the two officers had come to a perfect understanding as to their respective obligations. In view of the explanation given by the French Government of the affair, Her Majesty's Government do not, as at present informed, contemplate taking any further steps in the matter.