

## THE UNITED STATES REVENUE-CUTTER SERVICE.

BY CAPTAIN H. D. SMITH. Commanding the Revenue Cutter Morrill.

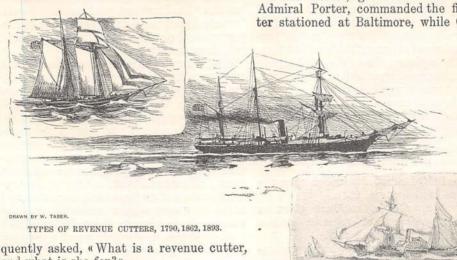
The President, through the Secretary of the Treasury, has designated seven revenue cutters to cruise on the coast during the winter months for the purpose of relieving vessels in distress.

THERE is little in the above newspaper I item to arrest the attention of the casual reader, but to the rank and file of the revenue-cutter service the paragraph means unceasing vigilance, hardships, encounters with gales, blinding snow-storms, braving breakers and lee shores.

Although there are thirty-three revenue cutters attached to the service, manned by over two hundred commissioned officers and one thousand seamen, the question is frehe proceeded to obtain all possible information with a view to creating a system by which the coast-line would be under surveillance, and illicit trading rendered perilous and uncertain.

President Washington, Secretary Hamilton, General Knox, Captain Barney, and the collectors of customs at Boston and New York conferred together, with the result that before the close of July, 1791, ten revenue cutters were built and officered, with stations extending from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Savannah, Georgia. The largest vessel did not exceed seventy tons, and the smallest thirty tons.

David Porter, grandfather of the late Admiral Porter, commanded the first cutter stationed at Baltimore, while Captains



and what is she for?»

This lack of knowledge on the part of the public is not to be wondered at, though the service in point of antiquity ranks next after the army.

Alexander Hamilton's commission as Secretary of the Treasury bore date of September 11, 1789; and on October 2 of the same year ter service. By far the larger proportion of

Hinman, Morris, and Campbell (the last two reached the rank of commodore in the navy) served as officers in the revenue-cutofficers elected to hold commissions were drawn from the scattered and disbanded forces that had made up the personnel of the Continental and the various State navies. Certain it is that, in founding the treasury nautical branch of the government, the appointing power of 1790 placed a high estimate upon the fighting records of the officers they selected, even though it was classed as a civil

arm of the government.

Captain Daniel McNeal, who had fought gallantly in the Continental navy, entered the revenue-cutter service, receiving command of the vessel stationed at Charleston, South Carolina. An anecdote is related of him when he had charge of the frigate Boston (No. 2), in 1801. He was under orders to proceed to France, having on board Chancellor Livingston, minister to France, and his wife. During the passage the frigate was weathering a lee shore. Mrs. Livingston asked the bluff old fire-eater if they were not in great danger. He replied: « You had better, madam, get down upon your knees, and pray to your God to forgive your numerous sins; for if we don't carry by this point we shall all be in - in five minutes!»

The officers of that period differed widely from the gentlemen who wear the uniform of to-day. The seafaring men of 1798 made but few pretensions to refinement of manner, and enjoyed few opportunities for educational advantages or accomplishments that would tend to grace a lady's drawing-room; but they were masters of their profession, possessing valor and judgment that enabled them to meet their adversaries boldly, yard-arm to yard-arm, overcoming odds fearfully against them, and wresting victory from men who scarcely knew the meaning of the word defeat, so far as their flag was concerned upon the sea, while their naval registers bore the legend,

The winds and seas are Britain's wide domain, And not a sail but by permission spreads,

which the British admiralty erased after the experience of the war of 1812.

The first specific instructions given to commanding officers of revenue cutters emanated from Hamilton's pen.

Thus the revenue-cutter service was organized one hundred years ago—a century of varying fortunes, that has brought increased duties and responsibilities, with a field of operations extending from Maine to the Rio Grande, and from California to Point Barrow in the Arctic Ocean.

The Continental frigate Alliance was sold at Philadelphia, June 3, 1785, leaving the

United States absolutely without a national vessel of any description. The ten little revenue cutters launched in the spring and summer of 1791 were the only armed vessels controlled by the government until the advent of the frigate United States, July 10, 1797, which event may be assumed as the foundation proper of the United States navy. For a period of six years and upward the revenue cutters were the sole dependence of the government upon the high seas, so far as their jurisdiction extended, -namely, four marine leagues, - and as a means of conveyance and communication along the extended coast-line proved themselves both active and valuable, increasing in importance and popularity with all classes, until the necessity of the establishment passed the experimental point, and its existence as a corps became an assured fact.

Traveling in those days by stage over rough roads was an undertaking to be dreaded, and Vice-President George Clinton, desiring to visit New York, ordered the cutter Active around to Washington, on which he embarked. When off Cape Henry, a British squadron, under the command of Commodore Douglas, was sighted, which fired a number of shots at the revenue cutter. The officers were anxious to reply in kind, especially when a large boat from one of the frigates came within fighting distance; but the Vice-President pocketed the insult, forbade a shot to be fired, and with a favoring breeze the cutter soon left her unpleasant

neighbors far astern.

The first great impetus experienced by the corps was during the quasi-French war. By orders of the President the cutters were placed upon the naval establishment, and they were well worthy and able to sustain their part in assisting to protect the country's honor. Eight revenue cutters, varying from one hundred and eighty-sevento one hundred tons burden, carrying from ten to sixteen guns, and manned by from fifty to seventyfive seamen and marines each, were attached to the various squadrons then cruising in the waters of the French West Indies. They were employed on blockading and convoying duty, cruising as well, and captured a large number of prizes, including both French privateers and merchant vessels. In point of effectiveness, discipline, guns, and proportion of crews and marines to each revenue cutter, never before or since has the service attained a position carrying with it so much military prestige and importance as an armed branch of the government.

tion made her maiden cruise, accompanied by four stanch, fleet revenue cutters.

The first revenue cutter transferred to the navy was the Thomas Pickering, the finest vessel at that time in the service. Lieutenant Edward Preble, who had been ordered to the frigate Constitution, managed to have his orders revoked on account of his dislike of Captain Nicholson, and was placed in command of the jaunty revenue cutter, the late commander of which, Captain Chapman, had been transferred to the list of captains on the naval establishment. The Pickering was lost at sea, with all on board, while under command of Lieutenant B. Hillar, having sailed in August, 1800, for the Guadeloupe station.

The revenue-cutter service had now attained an honorable and prominent position as a corps, with its best vessels sought after, and forming a part of the naval force of the country for the time being; while its officers, representing all grades of the cutter service, had been transferred to the rolls of the navy. where, in many instances, they took high rank and important commands.1 Old Ironsides was commanded by Hugh Campbell in 1800, he having been transferred from the deck of a revenue cruiser.

Up to the middle of the year 1799 the revenue cutters had been sailing under the national ensign and pennant, and in point of appearance the treasury cruisers could not be distinguished from vessels of the navy. On August 1, 1799, this was remedied by an order from Oliver Wolcott, then Secretary of the Treasury, who, in pursuance of authority from the President, prescribed that the ensign and pennant of revenue cutters should bear perpendicular stripes, with the coat of arms of the United States in the union, and should be carried by no other class of vessel.2

The dawn of the war of 1812 found the service but poorly prepared to meet a powerful foe; but the cutter Jefferson proceeded on a cruise the day after war was declared, and captured the schooner Patriot off the capes of Virginia. This was the first prize taken from the enemy. The commander of the cutter Surveyor defended his vessel so gallantly, when attacked by an overwhelming force, that he received from his captors a handsome letter acknowledging his bravery,

On August 14, 1798, the frigate Constitu- and his sword was returned to him. The cutter Eagle, when pursued by two British men-of-war, anchored under a bluff, landed her battery, hoisted the ensign of the service, and kept the attacking force at bay until the ammunition gave out.

Since its establishment, the service has participated in all the wars of the country. In the Seminole war the cutters cooperated with the army and the navy. The lives and property of settlers, lighthouses, etc., were protected, and operations of troops facilitated by the cutters and boats transporting them from point to point, covering encampments and stores with their light but effective broadside guns. The greater part of the duty was performed in boats, officers and men frequently being two weeks on expeditions, braving both the noxious vapors and the treacherous ambuscades that flourished in the almost impenetrable Everglades. In suppressing piracy the revenue cutters were particularly active, having many encounters with pirates. During the Nullification troubles at Charleston, four revenue cutters were ordered to that point. The Mexican war found seven revenue cruisers cooperating with the navy against the enemy; and in 1859 the celebrated revenue cutter Harriet Lane participated in the Paraguayan expedition under Commodore Shubrick.

The war of the rebellion found the service at low ebb in point of effectiveness, with but one cruiser—the Harriet Lane—adapted for fighting purposes. She was at once utilized by order of the President, and participated in the Fort Sumter relief expedition. From her deck was fired the first shot of the Civil War from the deck of a loyal ship. The gun was a thirty-two-pounder, in charge of Lieutenant W. D. Tompkins, and the incident occurred off Charleston Bar. The Lane was frequently under fire, and participated in the attack on Fort Hatteras. In convoying vessels, and cruising after armed vessels of the enemy, she was actively employed until permanently transferred to the navy, when she was used by Commodore (afterward Admiral) Porter as his flag-ship.

Like the Pickering, she was the finest vessel under the revenue flag, and, as a somewhat singular coincidence, foundered at sea. The various cutters patrolled the seaboard, acting as coast-guards, and assisted in blockading Chesapeake Bay, the commander of one vessel losing his life while on this duty. In 1863 the service was strengthened by the addition of six fine steamers, specially built for the purpose, capable of carrying

1 There was no training-vessel in the cutter service

at that period.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The national colors were ordered to be carried at the main-peak, with the revenue ensign displayed at the fore, by an order issued through Assistant Secretary Hamlin, June 27, 1895.

heavy batteries and large crews. The E. A. Stevens, otherwise known as the submerged floating battery Naugatuck, formed part of the revenue-cutter service, and exchanged shots with the Confederate ironclad Merrimac, and also participated in the attack on Fort Darling.

From 1790 to 1890 the civil functions of the revenue-cutter establishment had been increased to such an extent that the flag was familiar to seafaring men from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. In suppressing mutinies, examining ships' papers, sealing hatches, assisting in enforcing quarantine regulations, protecting timber reservations, supplying lighthouses, and keeping watch and ward along the coast and its numerous estuaries, the corps had won for itself a well-deserved reputation.

An act approved December 22, 1837, added to the revenue-cutter service the most important duty ever intrusted to the supervision of the corps. It was the issuing of winter cruising orders, authorizing the President to cause suitable government vessels to cruise on the coast during the inclement months for the purpose of aiding distressed seamen. From that date the duty has devolved annually upon the service, increasing its popularity, while the practical results touched a tender and responsive chord in hundreds of households by the sea, the sturdy occupants of which look upon the stanch treasury cruisers as their firm friends and protectors in the hour of danger and trouble.

The service annually saves from destruction and peril of the sea, on an average, property valued at three million dollars, or considerably more than three times the total cost of maintaining the corps. The Dominion of Canada, and Nova Scotia as well, testified their hearty appreciation of the "corps's winter work of relief » by handsome letters to the officers; while various State legislatures and mercantile bodies have expressed their approval in a similar manner, evidence of which may be found in the archives of the

Treasury Department.

To portray more vividly the hardship and danger involved in rendering assistance to a distressed vessel, an incident falling under

personal observation will be given.

A ship, partly dismantled, with the flag of England fluttering union down, had been sighted toward the close of a threatening winter's day. She was drifting toward an outlying ledge, over which the foam-flecked billows were churning and beating in thundering reverberations. Her tattered canvas

streamed from shattered spars, while along her sloping deck, heavily coated with ice, not a human being was visible, save a crouching figure clinging to the wheel, which had no command over the almost helpless wreck. The entire crew of the cruiser were at their posts, and as the shapely craft rounded to, breasting the surging seas with the lightness and grace of a swan, and with her bright bunting gleaming against the somber stormclouds, she must have appeared like a sweet harbinger of mercy to the despairing, tempest-tossed seamen of that straining hulk.

A sharp, stern order, the piercing trill of the boatswain's call, followed by the rapid lowering of a boat, occupied but a few seconds; and soon the hardy, disciplined crew, led by the cool-headed officer, were clambering over the splintered bulwarks

of the stranger.

Lying to leeward, as they had fallen, were the bodies of two seamen, their clothes enveloped in ice, their faces, blue, silent, and rigid in death, turned toward the angry sky. while their eyes, wide open, had an expression of terror and suffering. The man at the wheel, badly frost-bitten, and faint from long fasting, told a pitiful story of disaster attributable to a growing evil—a short-handed crew. Provisions had given out, matches become worthless, fires died. The remainder of the poor fellows were confined to the comfortless forecastle, frost-bitten, half starved. a despairing set of wretches.

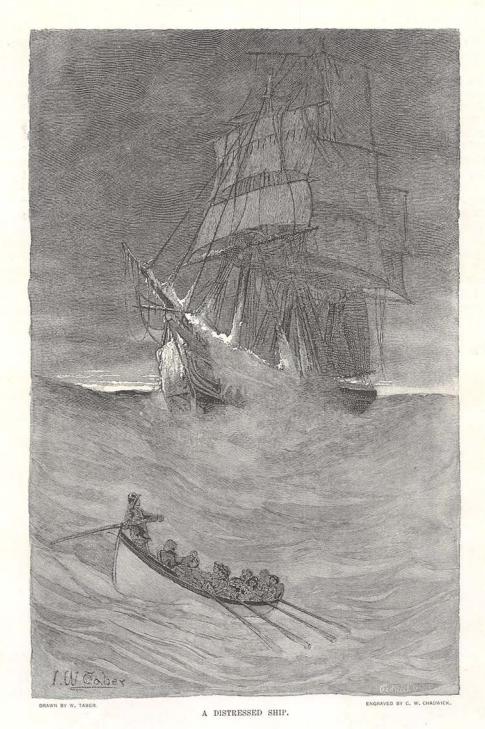
The vessel had sprung a leak; it was beyond their power to man the pumps. Hope had fled, and the boom of the breakers above the wail of the rising tempest warned them that a sailor's death was at hand.

The exhausted crew were tenderly cared for, fires started, and medical comforts administered, together with proper food. One party quickly ran a hawser to the cruiser, while others cut adrift broken spars and icv rigging. Flying canvas was secured, yards properly braced, and the signal of distress hauled down. The huge hawser cracked and strained as the cutter steamed ahead, bound for the nearest harbor. The breakers roared an angry protest as their victim swept seaward, safe from their merciless fury and the sharp fangs of the treacherous ledge.

The record achieved by the corps battling with the elements in the interest of humanity comprises the brightest laurels won by

the service.

On July 30, 1871, the ferry-boat Westfield blew up in New York harbor. The revenue cutter Chandler rescued seventeen persons



from drowning, and picked up a number of the dead.

The Metis disaster occurred August 31, 1872, and the revenue cutter Moccasin, Captain David Ritchie, rescued forty-two persons, besides recovering seventeen of the dead. officers for their services on that occasion. Vol. LV.-73.

W. A. Richardson, then Secretary of the Treasury, wrote a letter of commendation, which was ordered to be read on the quarter-deck at general quarters. The thanks of Congress were also accorded to Captain Ritchie and his

down the Confederate flag from the Mc-Clelland, that had been treacherously surrendered by her commander, and, together with the original and legitimate ensign, delivered it to General Butler. As a reward, Ritchie was commissioned third lieutenant in the revenue-cutter service. General Butler forwarded to General Dix the cutter's flag, which was the object of that celebrated order: «If any one attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot.»

When the shores of Lake Huron were swept by fierce fires, compelling the homeless refugees to rush for safety into the waters of the lake, it was the squadron of cutters that first came to the rescue, pushing their way through blinding smoke and fiery showers of burning debris, bearing on their decks provisions, medicines, blankets, and clothes for the sufferers. Twenty-five persons were saved from a terrible death by the exertions of the rank and file.

During the great fire that swept the city

It was Ritchie who at New Orleans tore with his command, towed powder-hulks to Long Wharf, landed a supply at the customhouse, guarded it for two days and nights, in addition to mining and blowing up a number of buildings. For this he received handsome acknowledgments from the city and its fire officials. In the fires that raged at Eastport, Pensacola, and Key West, the cutters stationed there rendered valuable services in saving and protecting property.

The collision of the ship Orpheus and the passenger steamer *Pacific*, with about three hundred souls on board, occurred off Cape Flattery on November 4, 1875. The revenue cutter Wolcott picked up one man floating on a portion of the wreck, and conveyed to Port Townsend the master of the Orpheus, his wife, and crew. For twelve days the cutter cruised incessantly, a gale blowing the greater portion of the period, and by the zeal and diligence displayed won for the service unqualified admiration and praise on the Pacific coast.

The wreck of the City of Columbus off Gay of Boston, Lieutenant (now Captain) Congdon, Head, the services of the Dexter's officers and



DRAWN BY W. TABER.



DRAWN BY W. TABER.

CHASING A SEAL-POACHER.

ENGRAVED BY E. H. DEL'ORME.

crew, the bravery of Lieutenant John Rhodes, and labors that resulted in saving nineteen lives, are events that are of comparatively recent occurrence. Both press and public honored the officers and crew of the revenue cutter *Dexter*, while their names were entered on the records as having received the thanks of the department.

In the great yellow-fever epidemics that

have at various periods ravaged the seaports of the South, the vessels of the service have remained at their posts, officers and men vying with one another in their efforts to assist the heavy-hearted people. The cutters coöperated in carrying to plague-stricken localities physicians, medicines, nurses, and supplies of all kinds.

The revenue cutter McCulloch gave shelter

and food to the terror-stricken earthquake fugitives of Charleston; and the cutter Penrose, surmounting all obstacles, conveyed to the starving survivors of the flood at Sabine Pass provisions and clothing.

Captain Joseph Irish, in recognition of assistance rendered to the officers and crew of the shipwrecked Spanish sloop of war Pizarro, received, by direction of King Alfonso, the decoration and order of the grand

cross of naval merit.

Captain D. F. Tozier has the cross of the Legion of Honor, presented by the President of the French Republic, for services extended to a French vessel that was in grave danger.

The revenue steamer Chandler, stationed at New York, on March 14, 1891, in the teeth of a driving gale, proceeded to the assistance of the Italian bark Umberto, which was ashore on the Dry Romer. The Chandler, no larger than an ordinary tug-boat, cooperated with the life-boats, and narrowly escaped serious

damage.

The revenue steamer Perry, in 1895, during its cruise around South America, was the only representative United States vessel at Callao, Peru, during a revolution. The treasury cruiser rendered important service at a critical period, when American interests and honor were involved, the officers and men standing in readiness to land at a moment's notice. should occasion demand. Happily, the crisis passed without intervention on the part of the foreign men-of-war in the harbor; and the *Perry's* action received the warm commendation of the United States minister and consul.

The report of the Smithsonian Institution makes honorable mention of large numbers of rare and valuable specimens and reports received from various officers of the service, relating more particularly to the natural history and ethnology of the Northwest coast.

The acquisition of Alaska brought increased duties and responsibilities upon the service. The treaty went into effect May 28, 1867, and in less than ten days from that date the revenue cutter Lincoln was under sailing orders for Sitka. From that date the treasury cruisers have been indefatigable in their explorations, both affoat and on shore. furnishing to Congress and the public authentic information regarding the value and importance of Secretary Seward's purchase.

A season's cruise usually covers twelve thousand miles in waters both difficult and dangerous to navigate; but notwithstanding the disadvantages under which the service

has operated in those desolate Northern seas. not a vessel has been lost nor has an accident

of any magnitude occurred.

The revenue cutter leaves San Francisco early in May, proceeding to the seal islands, then to the Arctic Ocean, where the great whaling-fleet of the country is cruising. She visits the native settlements, looking after their interests in preventing traffic in rum, to obtain which the natives will risk life itself. A bottle of whisky has been known to purchase from an eager native an otter-skin worth hundreds of dollars; and for a jug of rum one will readily barter the fruits of a season's hunting and fishing.

In scenes of desolation, amid biting gales, grinding ice-floes, treacherous currents, snows, and fogs, succor is given to unfortunate seamen whose vessels have succumbed to the numerous perils of arctic navigation. A large number of seamen have been conveyed to points of safety by revenue cutters, the Bear alone having transported over three hundred destitute whalemen to

San Francisco.

In protecting fur-seals, sea-otter, and other fur-bearing animals of the Aleutian Archipelago, revenue cutters have no pleasure-sailing on summer seas. From beginning to end it is a series of contests with all the dangers and obstacles known to navigation. Gales of wind, storms of sleet, days of fog and darkness on seas but imperfectly charted, confront and obstruct the cruiser as she moves from point to point, keeping a vigilant lookout for seal-poachers, whose enterprise keeps pace with their daring. The crews of illicit traders are largely composed of Indians ignorant of law and impatient of restraint. On one occasion, where an officer and two men were placed on a captured schooner as a prize crew, the Indians. numbering over thirty lawless and desperate men, determined to rid themselves of their captors, retake the vessel, and resume the object of their trip. A grand powwow was held. and a death-dance indulged in, every movement of which was watched by the young but undaunted officer. Reinforced by the master of the schooner, who was a white man, the swarthy, reckless horde was kept at bay until the prize reached her destination. But the danger and constant anxiety of that trip have never been forgotten.

Captain Healy, commanding the Bear, had one hundred and fifty shipwrecked seamen on his vessel at one time. In the great storm of August, 1888, the whale-fleet was in the vicinity of Point Barrow, and five vessels

ALASKAN INDIAN BOATS ALONGSIDE THE REVENUE CUTTER BEAR.

succumbed to the fury of the gale. The crews, after six hours of terrible exposure, were transferred to the Bear, and conveyed safely to San Francisco. The Thetis, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Emory, U. S. N., succeeded in saving the schooner Jane Grey. She was repaired, refitted, made as good as new, and restored to her owner at San Francisco, the officers and men of the Thetis waiving all claims, and refusing reward of any description. It was a graceful act, in keeping with the chivalrous and proverbially generous spirit of American naval officers.

Lieutenant Reynolds, of the Corwin, hoisted the stars and stripes over Wrangel Land, August 12, 1881, where it is believed that no white man ever trod before.

When news was received of the burning of the United States steamer Rodgers, the Corwin, twenty-four hours after the order was received, was steaming through the Golden Gate, bound for Cape Serdze Kamen (the «stone heart»), Arctic Ocean, where the survivors were supposed to be. From



DRAWN BY OTTO H. BACHER.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

«WAI-PU-CO» AND «RAINBOW,» GUIDE AND INTERPRETER ON THE UNITED STATES STEAMER REAR.

the deck of an American whaler the survivors were transferred to the revenue cutter, and the mission was successfully accomplished.

The late Captain Shepherd, formerly commanding the Rush, surpassed all other officers in the number and importance of his captures of seal-poachers. During one cruise he intercepted thirteen vessels.

Captain Tuttle has succeeded to the command of the revenue cutter Bear, ably maintaining the reputation acquired by that vessel for zealous and efficient work amid

scenes of savage desolation.

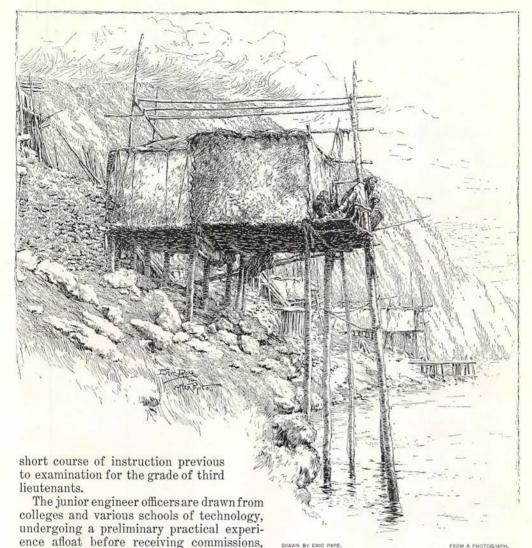
Volumes would be required to record the results of numerous expeditions organized for the purpose of discovering channels available for commerce, surveying harbors, shoals. and coast-lines, running soundings, determining positions of cod-fishing banks and coaling-stations, tracing rivers and penetrating into the interior, examining volcanic mountains and mineral resources, gathering data covering geography and physical and climatic characteristics, ascertaining the resources and productions of the country, and furnishing information generally relating to the character and condition of the inhabitants.

The duties of the revenue-cutter service have been increased from time to time, until at the present day they embrace the following: the security of the customs revenue; the assistance of vessels in distress; the protection of wrecked property; the enforcement of the neutrality laws; the suppression of traffic in firearms and intoxicating liquors in Alaskan waters; the prevention of invasion of the seal-fisheries by unauthorized persons: the enforcement of quarantine; the protection of vessels from piratical attack; the prevention of depredations by vessels upon the timber reserves; the enforcement of the laws governing merchant vessels, including the laws relating to name, hailing, port, etc., the laws with regard to licensed enrolment and registry of merchant vessels, and the laws which require that life-saving appliances shall be carried, that passenger vessels shall not be overloaded, that vessels shall show the proper lights at night, that merchant steamers shall carry the evidences that their hulls and machinery have been properly inspected, and that their officers are licensed.

The officers are also required to report any disarrangement of the aids to navigation on our coasts. They are frequently called upon to suppress mutinies, and special duties are assigned to them in connection with the life-saving service and the enforcement of

anchorage laws.

The service is entirely distinct from the navy, cooperating with it, however, when ordered by the President. The officers are commissioned in the same manner as those of the army and navy. At present a practiceship is maintained, where young men are received under the title of cadets, and given a



A KING ISLAND HOUSE, BERING SEA.

Grant to this faithful branch of the general service the rights and privileges enjoyed by the army and the navy; place it upon a solid and just foundation, to which its record and length of service squarely entitle it; stamp with official disapproval selfish, personal cravings for advancement and ease, while the service at large languishes in vain for a and effectually, all at the time-honored continuals. Let it remain a of the Treasury Deposition of the Treasury Deposition of Hamilton, the adjusting the service at large languishes in vain for a continuance of peace.

and represent a high and cultivated ele-

ment in the corps, second to none in point of scientific attainments and practical effi-

permanent retired list; and strangle, sternly and effectually, all attempts to fasten upon the time-honored corps useless rank with ancient titles, formerly known as post-captains. Let it remain as the strong right arm of the Treasury Department, on the broad lines drafted by Washington and the genius of Hamilton, the adjunct of the navy in time of war, the efficient coast-guard during the continuance of peace.

