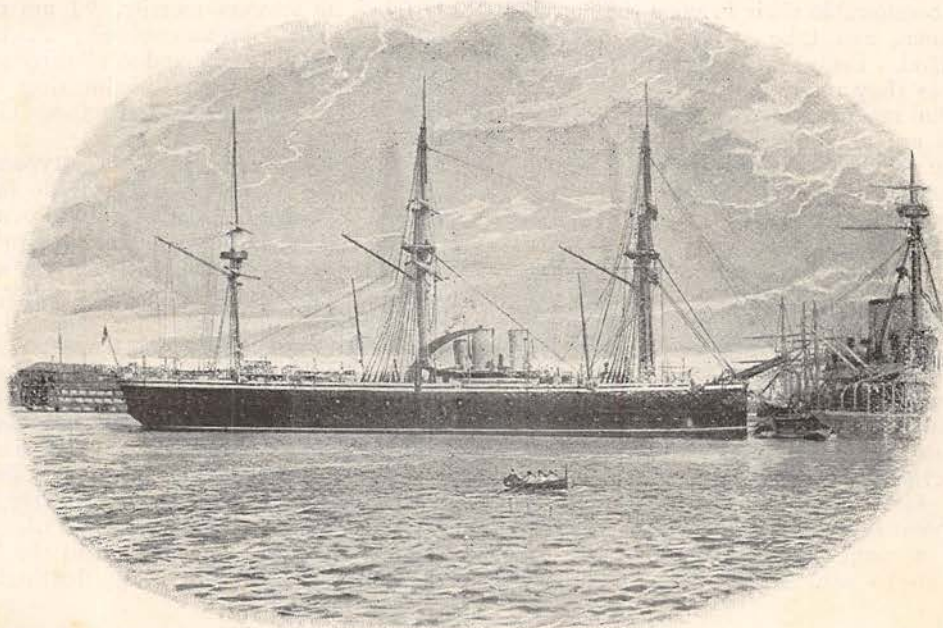


## DO BOYS GO TO SEA?

AN INQUIRY. BY F. M. HOLMES.



H. M. S. NORTHAMPTON.

(From a photograph by Gregory &amp; Co., Strand, W.C.)



If you were to enter any elementary school and, obtaining the headmaster's permission, were to ask the elder lads if they thought of becoming sailors, what answer would you receive?

In all probability the reply from each one would be, "No."

If, pursuing your inquiries, you were to ask if they knew of any other boy who was thinking of going to sea, what response would be forthcoming?

Again, most likely, the answer would be, "No."

If, going down to the docks, and observing all that is to be seen in that interesting region and conversing with captains and chief officers, you were to inquire if they had boys on board, what statement would they make?

Once more, with but trifling exceptions, they would answer you in the negative.

Is this an exaggerated view? Then consult an important Return of the School Board for London, showing the occupations upon which

the children enter immediately on leaving their schools. What does this document declare?

During the year ending May 31st, 1894, no fewer than 51,393 boys left the Board Schools of London, and of these only forty-five—not one per thousand—became sailors. True, fourteen entered training-ships and may become sailors; twelve also became barge boys, and possibly may find their way to the Mercantile Marine, or even to the Royal Navy. But, if all these be added together, we obtain a total of only seventy-one lads becoming sailors on leaving the Board Schools of London in one year. They become mouse-trap-makers, minstrels, newsboys, printers, publicans, call-boys, cooks—and one is even down as a *chef*—every conceivable thing, but very few find their way to sea.

It is only right to add that a large number are accounted for under the head of "Removed," and some of these may eventually become sailors; but, so far as the London School Board can trace, only forty-five of its pupils in one year went to sea, and twelve only entered training-ships.

Is there, then, any truth in the Cassandra-

like cries that our Navy and our Mercantile Marine are going to the dogs for want of able seamen? And if so—as the interrogating members say in Parliament—if so, why?

To seek an answer, you must again leave your comfortable chair in your club or drawing-room, and take a pilgrimage down to dockland. Let us endeavour to look at the facts as they really exist.

What magnificent ships are here! If the crews are decaying, there seems no sign of failure in these superb specimens of British engineering and constructive effort. Surely the world never saw better vessels than some of these splendid liners!

Yes, and therein we may find partly an answer to our question. For of what use would be a raw, untrained lad in the engine-rooms of these fine steamers? And though sailing-ships are not swept off the sea by steam-vessels—as witness the mammoth sailing-ships with their thousands of square feet of canvas that may be seen in the docks—yet it is evident that boys are not wanted in the large staffs at work in the engine and fire-rooms of large steamers. And yet these staffs account for large numbers of men who go to sea. Thus a great proportion

of the steamship crews are not required to be seamen. They are engineers and firemen.

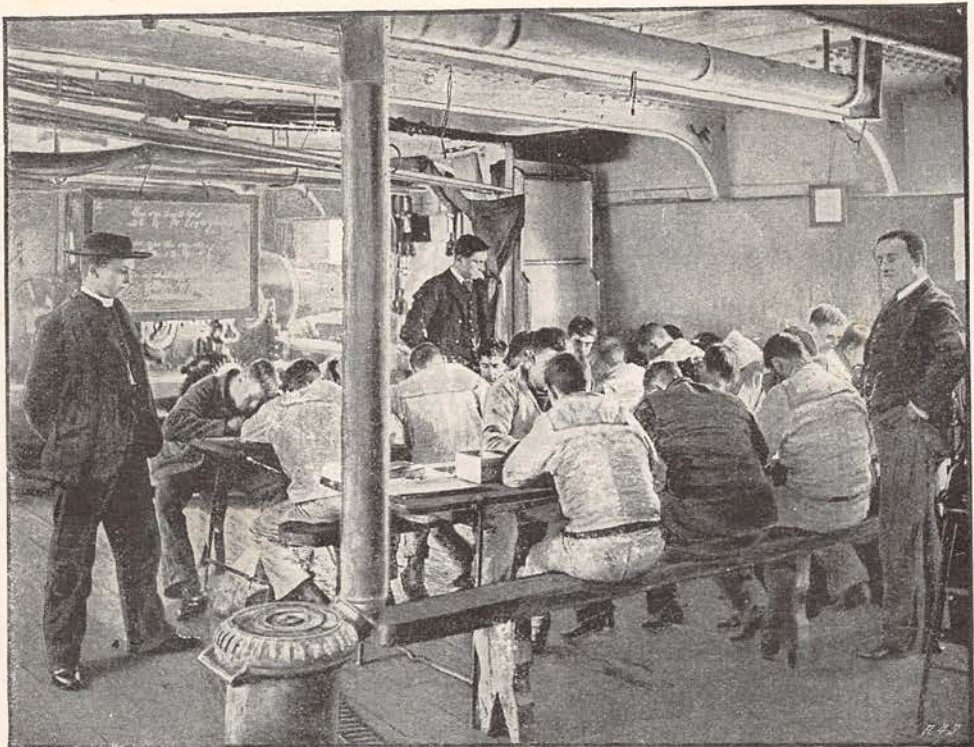
"How came you to be a sailor?" we ask an active, energetic man on board a superb steamer.

"Oh," he answers merrily, "I am not a seaman at all. I am an engineer. As a boy I was brought up at So-and-so's" (giving the name of a well-known engineering firm), "and I am now the third engineer of this vessel."

Now here we have, I take it, a typical instance. The boy learned his trade in the "shops" of an engineering establishment on shore, and then in the course of a few years he entered the engine-room of a big steamer at sea. But he is not a sailor, and does not pretend to be.

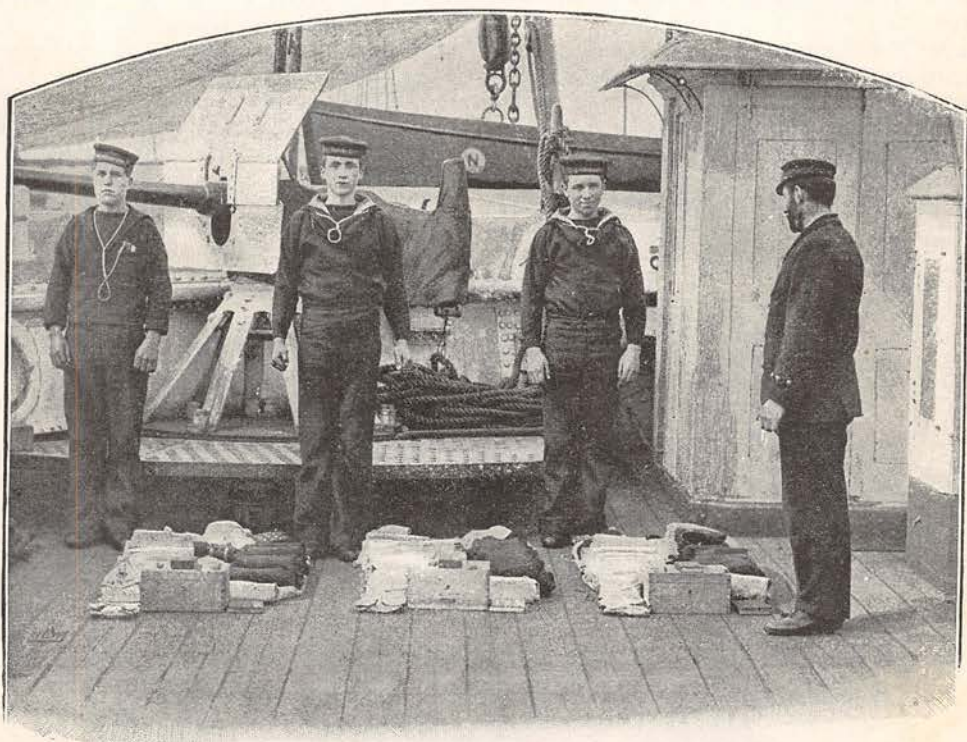
Indeed, owners could not place untrained boys in the engine-rooms of their steamers any more than railway directors could place lads on the foot-plates of their locomotives. Among half a steamer's crew then there seems no room for boys, but the more skilled of the men in this department presumably learn their business in engineering shops ashore.

The same causes are at work in the Navy itself. Come aboard this huge battle-ship—



BOYS AT SCHOOL, H.M.S. NORTHAMPTON.

(From a photograph by Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.)



KIT INSPECTION, H.M.S. NORTHAMPTON.  
 (From a photograph by Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.)

this shapely monster of steel and steam. One of the first considerations that will strike you is the immense amount of machinery on every side. The ship is one mammoth machine, fitted with a number of other machines. Of what use is an untrained boy amid this maze of machinery? The powder-monkey of a past day is not wanted here. There is nothing for him to do; hydraulic, or other power has taken his place.

In short, machinery of various kinds—steam, electric, hydraulic—has made its mark as deeply in the world of ships as in any department of human activity; and untrained lads are not only not wanted, but in some cases might prove a positive nuisance amidst the intricate machinery of a modern steam-vessel. And owners and directors declare: "Lads must now learn something of their business before they come to us. We will not carry them."

So much, then, for half the crew. What of the others—the deck hands? Do boys go to sea in this department of ship life?

Let us enter this building down by the docks. It is a place where men sign articles—in other words, append their names to

agreements for the voyage. Here are half a dozen boys waiting on a bench, and presently their eyes brighten and they look up as a captain enters.

"Want a boy, sir?"

"No, my lad—not this voyage."

"Find me very handy, sir!"

"Owners won't take boys. No room for them—nothing for them to do."

"Couldn't you take me in the cook's galley, sir?"

"No, no room for boys. Boys eat as much as men, and cannot do so much work."

"Don't want much wages, sir."

"What do you want—a pound a month? I doubt if we could give you five shillings. We have no room for boys, I say; owners won't take them."

With another captain one of the lads may perhaps be more fortunate—that is, he obtains a post to help the cook in the galley at five shillings a month, with, of course, his board and lodging on the ship. But, of that half dozen boys, he is most likely the only one who obtains a berth.

The captain, however, wants one or two more deck hands, and how does he obtain

them? Time is short; he must sail to-morrow.

As he is walking to his ship he sees a man lounging on the quays, and on the look-out for officers.

"Want a man, captain?" says he.

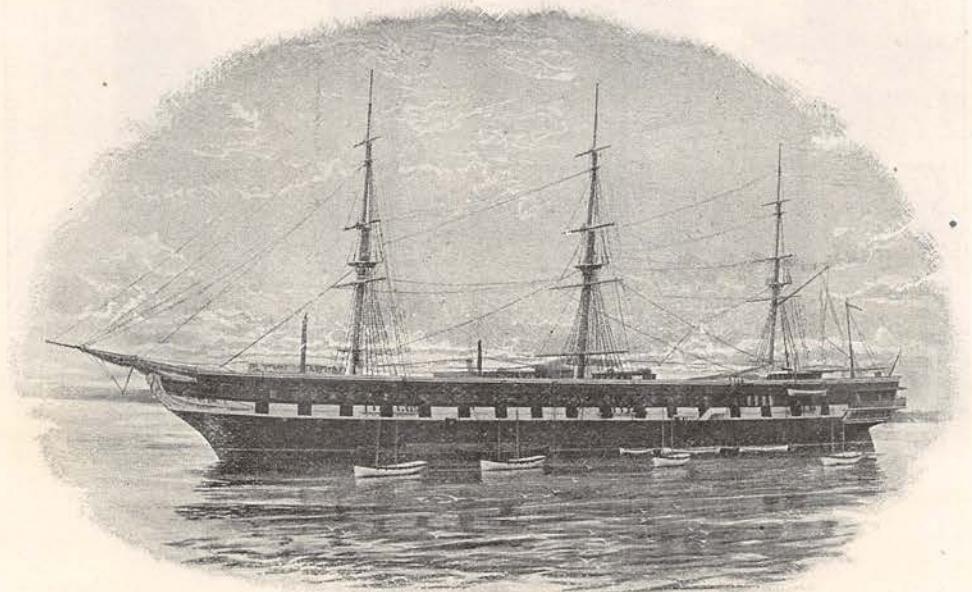
"Have you been to sea before?"

"Yes, sir!"

And he produces a dirty piece of paper,

fact is, they prefer a little more drunkenness to the discipline of a voyage.

So the captain permits them to depart at once; but he must fill their places, and he must sail at the appointed time. Thus pressed, he hastens to engage the first man he meets who, like the cattle hand of the previous day, has had any experience whatever of life on board ship. And at length,



THE TRAINING SHIP *SHAFTESBURY*.  
(From a photograph by T. Jessop, Grays.)

which proves to be his discharge from a former voyage.

"Umph!—in a cattle-boat."

"Yes, sir! I looked after the cattle outward; but I never get sea-sick, sir. And my discharge is marked G. (good)."

"But you are not a seaman."

"Aye, sir; but I can pull and haul, and my eyesight is good, so I can keep a smart look-out. And I can take a turn at the wheel; I know what's port and what's starboard, captain."

"Well, we can do with another man, so we will give you a trial."

Next day, within an hour of sailing, half the men are lying drunk on the decks, and two or three others lurching up to the sorely-tried captain—who remains a monument of calm bravery under the most trying circumstances—blurt out the annoying declaration that they are not going in this ship; they do not consider it well found or seaworthy. The

with his scratch crew, he clears out of the decks.

The crack liners are, no doubt, better off—a modicum of high-class seamen are attracted to the best ships; for that there still remains a contingent of first-class able seamen, we suppose not even the most inveterate croaker would deny—but that the supply of such thoroughly able men is very inadequate appears abundantly clear.

And why is this? Let us ask Captain McKirdy, R.N.R., the Marine Superintendent of the Shaw, Savill and Albion, and of the White Star Lines in London, and a gentleman of wide experience.

"Do boys go to sea?" says he. "No, they do not."

"And why not?"

"Because they cannot get the opportunity. Owners will not carry boys, for three untrained boys cannot do the work of one man, and yet a boy costs almost as much as a man."

The abolition of the Apprenticeship Laws, Captain McKirdy thinks, is the root of the whole terrible difficulty, and the Board of Trade figures are certainly startling, if not absolutely conclusive. Thus, in 1845, no fewer than 15,704 apprentices were enrolled in the service of the sea; in 1893, according to a Parliamentary return, there were but 2,154, including 402 in fishing-boats!

These figures are significant enough, and bear out in a striking manner the testimony of Captain McKirdy and the results of personal observations at the docks. You rarely find a boy there either on ships or quays. You may in certain quarters see numbers of Lascars, but a British boy very seldom.

"Then you do not consider that the School Board teaching at the present day accounts for the paucity of boys going to sea? It does not tame the spirit of adventure out of the lads?"

"Not a bit of it," says the Captain. "We need as good boys for seamen as any other industry; but what is required is the resumption of the apprenticeship system, by which boys can obtain the opportunity of seeing the bright lands over the water and learning the sailor's trade."

"But I notice advertisements often for sea-apprentices."

"Oh, yes; and sixty guineas premium to

be paid, I dare say. Those are for junior officers. But excluding the training-ships, what is being done to train boys for able seamen? Nothing, or next to nothing."

"Do not the training-ships yield a fair supply?"

"Very inadequate. You must remember that many of the lads on board the reformatory and industrial school ships do not intend to go to sea, and have no aptitude for it. The facts about the training-ships are briefly these:—

"We have twenty in Great Britain professing to train boys for the Merchant Service. Two receive only those lads who can afford to pay some fifty or sixty guineas a year, and who, like the apprentices of whom I just spoke, become officers; the remainder are for fore-castle hands. Some are destitute boys, some unruly lads, some the orphans of seamen; for some the parents make a payment, and three are reformatory ships. One of these twenty vessels is the Industrial School ship *Shaftesbury*, belonging to the London School Board. But the point is, that in the nature of things, these ships, excellent as they may be, cannot be relied upon to supply all our requirements."

"Yes, you want opportunities for lads to learn the seaman's trade, who happily need



THE CREW OF H.M.S. NORTHAMPTON.  
(From a photograph by Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.)

not go to reformatory or industrial school ships, and whose parents are honest, hard-working folk?"

"Exactly. I would have every ship under 200 tons carry an apprentice; under 1,000 tons, two lads, and so on, at wages commencing at ten shillings per month, with an increase during four years of apprenticeship; and as a boy cannot learn the rudiments of his craft in a modern steamer, let his first year be spent aboard a training-ship, his wages for that year being paid toward his maintenance, his parents supplying any balance. But these ships might be made to some extent self-supporting if they competed for rigging and sail outfits from the building yards. At all events, what we require is the resumption of the Apprenticeship Laws, either voluntarily, or by Act of Parliament. If it were not for the supply of sailors that trickles in from the fishing fleets we should be *in extremis*."

Such is Captain McKirdy's testimony, and it is obvious that the pith of it is that decent boys who would like to go to sea should have a fair opportunity of doing so, and of learning something of their trade before they sail aboard a big steamer.

And now as regards the Royal Navy. Do boys enter her Majesty's ships more readily than the Mercantile Marine? Apparently they do, for the Parliamentary Estimates for 1894-5 provided for 4,494 boys, and for 4,200 under training, while the Estimates for 1895-6 provide for 1,100 more boys altogether. Whether these be sufficient to supply the demand will no doubt prove a hotly-debated question among experts.

Then the training-ships furnish a substantial contingent for the Navy. Since the Marine Society commenced its work, 138 years since, no fewer than 62,436 lads have been trained for the sea, and out of these, 25,593 entered the Navy—an average of about 185 per year. And the Government have commissioned a cruising training ship—*Northampton*—to receive older boys than of the age required for entering the permanent training-ships, a scheme which has been judged to be very satisfactory.

It is asserted, however, that although we have a large and increasing Navy, we have not the sailors to man the ships; and the cries wailing through the country to this effect are loud and persistent.

On the other hand, at a debate at the Association of the Chambers of Commerce, in March, 1895, Sir Courtenay Boyle is reported to have said that, so far as his information went, there were plenty of highly-trained seamen to be found at different ports seeking for bread; while, on behalf of the Hull

Chamber, it was contended that any number of men could be found who would be glad to accept any position in the Naval Reserve, or obtain employment in British vessels.

But, furthermore, it is urged that there is a serious leakage from the Royal Navy. At the end of a young Navyman's ten years, when he is about twenty-eight years of age and has cost his country some £300 to train, then he leaves the service and is heard of no more. Statistics show that 33 per cent. do so.

Why is this? Again we are met with a cloud of explanations and remedies. The gist of them seems to be that, apart from the inclination which some persons exhibit for a change of occupation, superior attractions are offered to young Navymen elsewhere, and not sufficient attractions are offered them to remain. A wall against promotion is built up before the ambitious young seaman.

To sum up, then, we find from statistics, from observation, and from the testimony of gentlemen engaged in the Mercantile Marine, that boys do not enter the Merchant Service in adequate numbers—adequate, that is, to the demands for able seamen; and that the reason for this is the lack of opportunity, for owners will not carry boys. But what is wanted, before the tradition of going a-sailing dies out among British lads, is a revival of the apprenticeship system in some suitable and efficient form, or the substitution of some plan (such as an extension of the training-ship system) answering to the technical schools and engineering shops on shore, by which boys can learn the rudiments of their craft.

Ship-owners in some cases do not seem to have fully realised, any more than has many a man on shore, how vast is the revolution effected by the introduction and wide-spread use of machinery. Many have failed to some extent to adapt their business wholly to the changed condition of things. Technical schools of various kinds may do something on land; but where are the technical schools for the sea? Yet surely something is required to take the place of the almost obsolete apprenticeship system.

We do not believe that the British boy of to-day differs widely in this matter from his predecessor of half a century or so ago. There must be many a lad who would love to sail the sea and learn something of the bright lands beyond the ocean's rim. Let, then, the opportunity be fairly given, and the idea come before the boys in as natural a way as the idea of becoming a painter or a plumber, and we shall doubtless see an ample number of stalwart lads flock to the ships and engage in the honourable vocation of the British sailor.