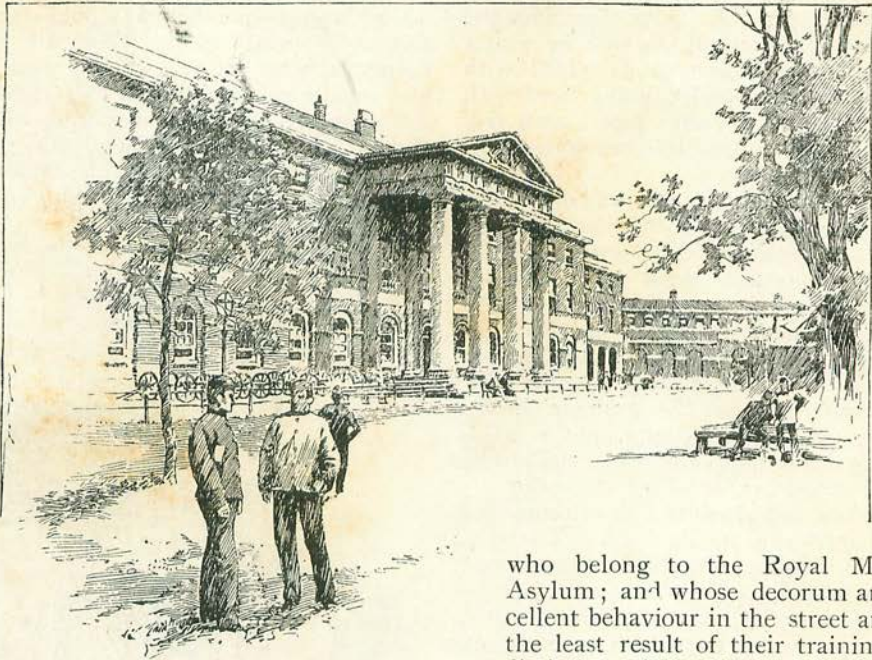


Boy Soldiers and Sailors.

BY FRANCES H. LOW.



THE ROYAL MILITARY ASYLUM.

THERE are various causes which combine to make the King's-road, Chelsea, one of the least agreeable thoroughfares of the Metropolis. From the æsthetic point of view also it can hardly be considered satisfactory. An endless succession of omnibuses, uninviting barrows, and squalid shops are the principal characteristics of the road, which is yet interesting to the stranger by reason of certain unique features inseparably associated with it. Tommy Atkins in his military splendours is a common enough and not invariably pleasing spectacle, but those fine fellows the Chelsea pensioners, with their gallant bearing, scarred faces, and maimed limbs, somehow arrest the attention of the most careless observer, and send his mind back to the roar of cannon and the smoke and slaughter of the battlefield, where so many of these heroes sounded the death-knell of their vigorous manhood. Not less interesting than the veterans who have gained their laurels and laid down their arms, are the little bright-faced, red-coated lads standing on the threshold of the fight,

who belong to the Royal Military Asylum; and whose decorum and excellent behaviour in the street are not the least result of their training and discipline within the walls of the big brick building, founded by the Duke of York during the long Napoleonic wars for the numerous orphaned children of soldiers. The Institution is now supported by Government, and feeds, clothes, and educates every year 550 boys between the ages of nine and fourteen, the sons or orphans of non-commissioned officers of good character. At fourteen the majority of the boys go into the regular army, chiefly into the Artillery and Engineers, either as collar-makers, smiths, clerks, or drummers. Owing to the splendid efficiency of the school band a large proportion enter the army band at once, and amongst the names of distinguished bandmasters who have been boys in the school are those of Lazarus and Thomas.

A record is kept of every lad who has passed through the school, and at the beginning of this year there were serving in the army 10 commissioned officers, 31 schoolmasters, 12 bandmasters, and 47 band sergeants, besides many others holding the grade of sergeant-major, master gunners, and so forth. In addition, out of 1,368 of the boys who have entered the service, only one has turned out badly,

whilst one has risen to the rank of Lieut.-General.

As we walk up to the school, a little group of boys in front of us gives us an opportunity of examining and admiring their smart turn-out. In the summer the lads wear blue uniforms, whilst in winter with the same blue trousers piped with scarlet, they have scarlet tunics, faced with dark blue, Glengarry caps piped with red, and stout well-shined Blucher shoes with straps.

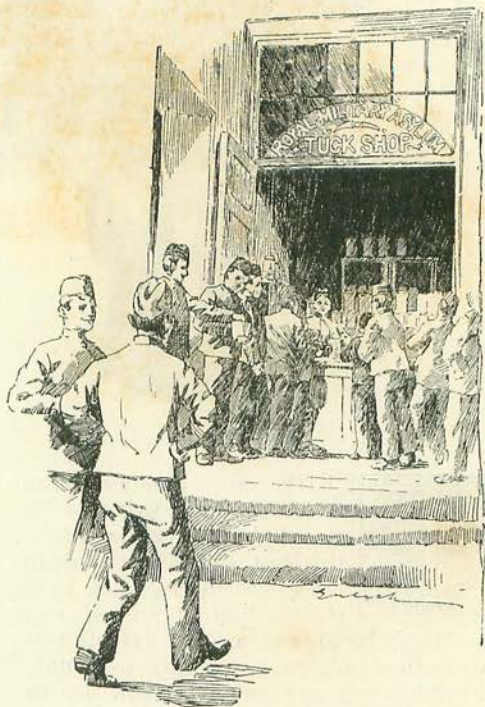
We pass through the gate, and one of the two small sentries stationed there comes out of his little box and asks us, with an air of immense importance, what our business is. When I inform him we are concerned with the Commandant, he offers to escort us, and performs this action with the utmost politeness. There is one feature that strikes and impresses the stranger the instant he enters the Asylum, and remains with him throughout—more especially if he has had experience of other institutions—the freedom and absolute lack of repression that characterise its inmates. There is, of course, during work hours the severest military discipline, but the boys evince no timidity in saying what they think; and, even in the presence of the Commandant, there was none of that horrible intangible kind of terrorism which the authorities of these institutions frequently contrive to inspire in the breasts of the youthful persons in their care.

Thanks to the kindness of Colonel Fitzgerald, the Commandant, and Lieutenant Thomas, the Adjutant, I had ample opportunities given me of seeing the whole working of the school, and also of putting questions to the lads, who, so far as I could gather, have no possible cause of complaint. Their day's work commences early. At ten to six the gymnasium master rouses three boys, who dress, and then go into the courtyard and sound the *reveillé* at three different points—north, south, and central—so that there is no fear of any sluggish failing to be aroused.

All the boys have rank of some kind, with definite military duties. On first arriving, the little fellow is a "private," and I fancy he is quite proud of this grade, until he learns how much better off corporals are, with pocket money for sweets and tarts. Privates are made up into companies of eighty boys, over which there are four acting lance-corporals.

The advantage of being an acting lance-

corporal consists in being entitled to one penny a week pocket-money, which comes in conveniently for one of the most important institutions of the Asylum in the eyes of the boys, viz., the tuck-shop. The acting lance-corporals wear a gold stripe on the right arm. Above them are lance-corporals, who get twopence a week, and also wear a gold stripe, and still higher are full corporals, or colour corporals, who get threepence a week, and wear two stripes and a crown. There is only one corporal to each company, so that it is a highly coveted



"THE TUCK SHOP."

post. Above the corporals are monitors, of whom there are seven. They are the boys who are kept on after fourteen to be trained as pupil teachers, and they ultimately go into the army, where they obtain excellent positions as schoolmasters, receiving, during a period of six months' probation, 2s. 6d. a day, and when duly qualified, 4s. 6d. a day. Finally, the whole company is under the command of a sergeant, who is a non-commissioned officer in the regular army.

Here a little chap in a blouse ran across the passage, and on his telling me that he was an orderly I followed him into the mess-room, where dinner operations were going on.

To see these little chaps—there are two orderlies to each mess—polishing up the mugs and cutting up huge portions of bread and cheese in the swiftest and deftest manner is most entertaining. As soon as everything is ready the bugle sounds, and a small drummer stations himself by the door and beats a tattoo. Then, at the word, "fall in," the boys file in two abreast, after which there is another tattoo for attention, grace is said, and, at the final drum-beat, the hungry boys fall to.

The day of my visit happened to be the one day of the week when there is no meat provided. Instead, were enormous lumps of bread and cheese—which the boys unmistakably appreciated, and which they despatched with more activity than grace—followed by portions of hot plum-pudding,

have taken part. During dinner there is much clattering of tongues and laughing, and it certainly adds to the lads' enjoyment that their meal is not partaken in silence.

Dinner over, the rest of the boys go out for a short play, whilst the small orderlies don their blouses, take away the things, and proceed to wash and burnish brightly the mugs, pewter dishes, and meat-tins. Their energy rather surprises you, till you are told that prizes are given for the smartest mess-table, and when you are further told that the prizes are tarts and pies, you understand the strength of the incentive.

What, perhaps, strikes the observer as much as anything else is the curious and interesting two-sidedness presented by the lads. During parade, gun drill, and duty



"THE SEWING ROOM."

which one little lad condescendingly invited me to taste, remarking, "Here's a plummy bit!" I could not discern a single portion which was not overrun and overwhelmed with plums, but anyway it was excellent to the taste. As the boys get Van Houten's cocoa for breakfast, meat and pudding every day but Friday for dinner, and bread and jam and milk for supper, they are tolerably well off in the matter of diet. The mess-room is a big, cheerful room, with arms and lances ranged upon the upper part of the walls, beneath which, on red scrolls, are engraved the names of Waterloo, Balaclava, Tel-el-Kebir, and other historic battles in which heroes who were trained inside the walls of the Asylum

generally, they are little automatons. Their prompt obedience, their precision, their self-control and discipline, astonish you, and you begin to wonder whether anything of the original boy-nature remains; but see them ten minutes later in the grounds playing rounders or cricket, or, better still, scrambling and fighting at the tuck-shop for possession of "monster" sticks—which, by the bye, are all examined first by the resident medical officer—and your fears vanish.

The little tuck-shop, bearing upon its front the fascinating words, is in a recess of one of the corridors, and is presided over by a capable dame, the wife of the gymnasium master, who takes a great interest in

the lads. She and the sewing-mistress and a sick-attendant are the only feminine elements of the Asylum, which is manned from Commandant to cook by the stronger sex.

After 3.30, when all book-work is over, the



A SKETCH
IN THE
TAILORS
SHOP

boys either play games or do band exercise, sewing, or tailoring, the entire school being divided into halves, which alternately play and

work in the afternoons. In the sewing-room, in which were some fifty boys making flannel vests, and darning and repairing, we were able to delight the heart of the sewing-mistress by our enthusiastic and truthful praises of her pupils' work. Such wonderfully neat darns! It almost seems as if the fingers of the British boy, when trained, are more expert than those of his sister. From the sewing-room we went to the tailoring-room, which is under the superintendence of a master. There was an unconventionality and freedom here which delighted us. The boys sat on benches in their flannel shirts, whilst several had dispensed with more indispensable garments. One small boy, whom our artist was lucky enough to catch, was energetically ironing his trousers, having meanwhile artistically draped himself in a leather apron. There is a fas-

cinating little kit-bag with which each boy is provided; it is a tiny little arrangement holding a needle and a thimble, whilst cotton is served out by the master, I suppose with a view of its not being squandered by ingeniously reckless boys. At the top of the room one little fellow was working a sewing machine, and all the children were merrily plying the needle with relaxation in the shape of subdued conversation. Perhaps more actual enjoyment in their labours was evinced downstairs in the big play-room by the band of musicians, whose energies were set on mastering intricacies of drum and fife. The sound of

fifty learners operating on fifes and wooden pads covered with leather, which do duty for drums, made our stay rather shorter than it would otherwise have been; and we were fain to acknowledge, as we lingered for a moment watching the absurdly small players energetically puffing away, that the drum and fife band seemed to require distance and atmosphere to make it pleasant to the ear.

Leaving these bright, healthy looking youngsters, we pay a visit to the pale-faced invalids upstairs who are in hospital. Most of the patients who are convalescent, clad in long grey-blue flannel coats, are amusing themselves in the day-room with books and draughts, whilst the sick boys in the spotless white and blue quilt beds appear to be suffering from nothing much



"THE DRUM AND FIFE BAND."

worse than colds and coughs. The authorities justly pride themselves on their high standard of health.

well be made briefer, and, what is still more important, the sermons should be at least specially written and adapted for the



The purely military side of the Asylum is best seen on Sundays, when the miniature red-coats are put through their weekly inspection and drill. The little army, extra-well groomed, and washed, and shined, as regards cheeks and boots, assembles on parade ground at ten o'clock at the sound of "church call" by the drums and fifes, and is disposed in companies, with sergeants in cocked hats in front, whilst the recruits are behind. The real band boys, in their scarlet and gold coats, who are a little way off, strike up a charming march, and a moment later a clanking is heard, and up comes the Commandant, followed by his Adjutant, in full military splendour. A severe inspection then takes place, followed by drill, gun practice, and finally a double-breasted march into chapel, in all of which—on the authority of a distinguished military witness—the boys compare very advantageously with the Regular Army.

After the last salute has been given, and the martial tramp of hundreds of sturdy feet has died away, we follow into the pretty little chapel, whose pale olive-green walls and columns form an effective background to the scarlet glory of the "sons of the brave."

The chapel service is the one note in the whole Institution which jarred upon me and struck me as a little out of tune. To begin with, as the congregation practically consists of boys, the service might

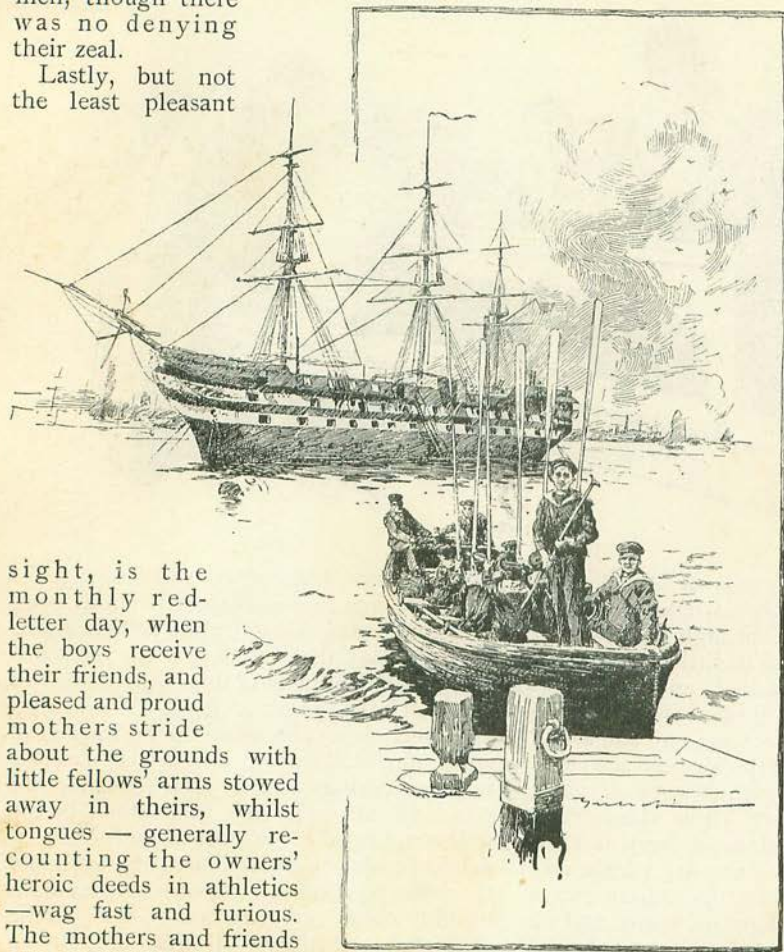
lads. As one listened to the lengthy discourse, it was impossible not to think what a magnificent opportunity the preacher lost. Here, Sunday after Sunday, at the most impressionable moment of their lives, come five hundred boys—solemn, silent, and reverent, and precisely in the mood to be impressed and influenced—who, a few years hence, will be taking part in that struggle for which the strongest and best cannot be too well equipped. Rightly conceived, it would be almost impossible to over-estimate the influence that a religious teacher with insight could exercise over the plastic characters and futures of these lads, sitting so still and attentive, as the light streams through the windows upon the solemn boyish faces, and casts golden aureoles round the fair heads. Whether it was the stern eye of the sergeant or fear of being deprived of the stripe which entitles them to the privilege of going out alone on Saturday afternoon, I know not; but their immovable calm excited not only my admiration but my envy, when I found myself less successful in suppressing yawns.

My interesting visit to the Asylum was concluded by a sight of the fire-escape at work, a fire having been especially requisitioned for my benefit, much to the delight of the boys, who regarded the whole matter as a huge joke, encouraging the lucky ones who were chosen to descend the canvas cylinder with cries of "Come down head

first." On the whole, however, I was not particularly impressed with the efficiency of the amateur firemen, though there was no denying their zeal.

Lastly, but not the least pleasant

untried and doubtful experiments. The training-ship lying some way off Woolwich



THE "WARSPITE."

sight, is the monthly red-letter day, when the boys receive their friends, and pleased and proud mothers stride about the grounds with little fellows' arms stowed away in theirs, whilst tongues — generally recounting the owners' heroic deeds in athletics — wag fast and furious. The mothers and friends are very rightly thankful for their good fortune, and indeed, if companionship, habits of order, decency, and industry, and healthy surroundings mean anything good, then the little lads of the Duke of York's School are to be congratulated.

What is being done for our future army at Chelsea is also being carried out for the navy on a smaller scale aboard the training-ship *Warspite*, with, however, one essential difference. At the State-supported institution in Chelsea there is no lack of funds, whilst the *Warspite*, which relies entirely on voluntary subscriptions, is, in common with so many other philanthropic undertakings, suffering from the loss of subscriptions and donations, which during the last year have been diverted in favour of

Pier is a big three-decker, which in former days, as the *Conqueror*, saw a good deal of active service. As soon as we were sighted a boat manned by a crew of twelve little tars put off to fetch us, and as they approached the landing stage, giving us a proper naval salute, we had an opportunity of admiring the smart and steady way with which they pulled together, and on reaching alongside the training-ship, "tossed" and "laid down" oars. All the decks, as bright and neat as possible, were full of small, barefooted blue-jackets intent upon their different naval duties; and, watching their expertness at knotting, splicing, going aloft, &c., it was almost impos-

sible to believe that not one of the boys had undergone more than nine months' training. This is, however, the case.

The boys, all of whom, though of good character, are destitute, are only admitted between the ages of 13 and 16, and are only kept on the *Warspite* for nine months, after which they are drafted into the navy or the merchant service.

On the day of my visit a batch of boys, many of whom had been taken from the streets, were having their first meal. They had all been washed, combed, and put into their new togs, which they wore with a mingled air of pride and embarrassment. About many of them there was a noticeably hungry expression, which made one rejoice



A PARADE ON DECK.

to think that for some months, at any rate, they would have good and regular meals. In connection with the subject of diet, which consists of beef or mutton and potatoes for

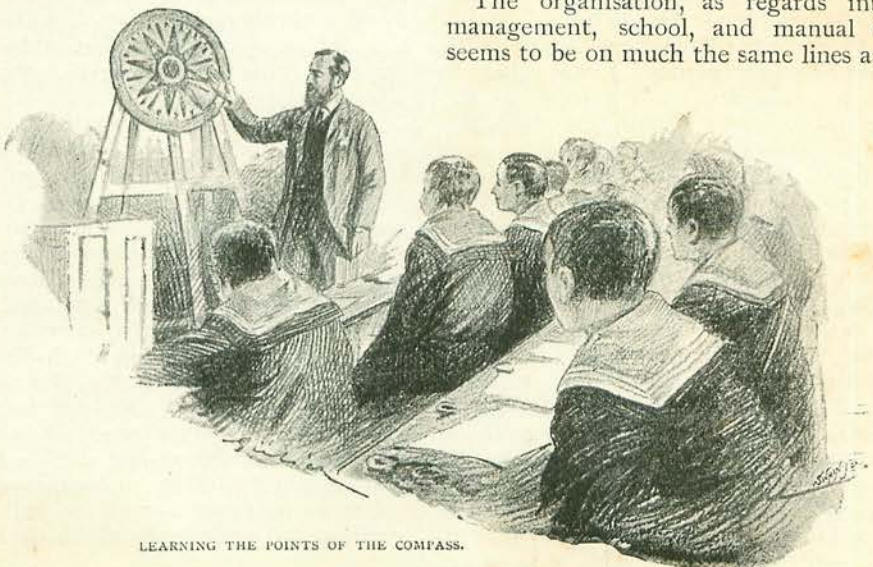
dinner, cocoa, bread, and pork for breakfast, and tea and biscuits for the third meal, I asked one jolly, rosy-cheeked little tar whether he was satisfied with his victuals. He answered with the most tremendous gravity, as "how" there was "just one thing" which he must "complain about."

"What's that?" I asked, "don't you get enough?"

"Yes, quite enough," was the tragic reply, "but the boys ought to have dripping on their biscuit twice a *week*, and we don't always get it once!"

Poor little chaps, one can well understand that after a time ship's biscuits, which may be very wholesome, though somewhat lacking in flavour and succulency, are likely to pall, and be much more grateful to a boy's palate when accompanied by the more insidious dripping.

The organisation, as regards internal management, school, and manual work, seems to be on much the same lines as that

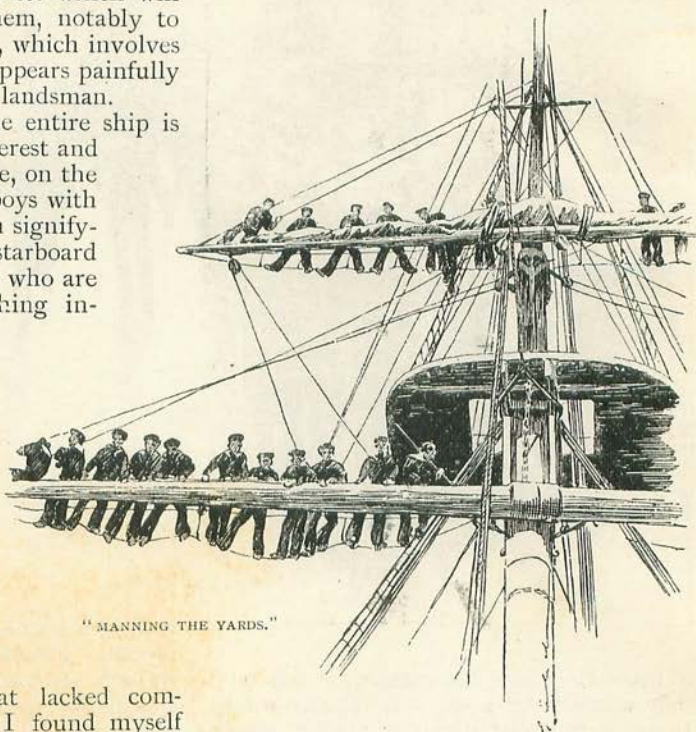


LEARNING THE POINTS OF THE COMPASS.

which prevails at the Military Asylum : half the day being devoted to school, whilst the remainder is occupied with swimming—which is the first accomplishment taught every boy—managing small boats, and the practical part of seamanship generally. In school, too, the boys give special attention to the subjects which will be afterwards useful to them, notably to the mastery of the compass, which involves three months' study, and appears painfully complex to the uninitiated landsman.

During the afternoon the entire ship is a scene of the greatest interest and activity. Here, for instance, on the main deck is a long row of boys with red stripes on the right arm signifying they belong to the starboard half of the ship's company, who are having bending and hitching instruction, or knot-making. In front of them are long poles and great lengths of rope, with which they will make you the most wonderful knots in the deffest manner imaginable. Although a little boy did some of the operations with condescending slowness (his verbal instructions consisted of "see 'ere" at intervals, which somewhat lacked comprehensiveness of detail), I found myself quite unable to grasp the mysteries of "clove hitch," "turk's head," "bowline," "running bowline," "swab hitch," and a variety of other ingenious knots with curious-sounding names. I was glad to cover my stupidity by a retreat to the upper deck, where dumb-bell drill was going on, the boys being arranged in two long lines. The dumb-bell exercises, which, as is well known, have a marked effect on the development of the muscles, are performed with beautiful precision to quick, bright music played by the band; and, bringing out all the curves and lines of the lads' little bodies, are very effective and graceful. After this, "man the yards" was piped, whereupon a swarm of boys with the agility of monkeys climbed the rigging, and went through a variety of nautical operations with remarkable neatness and skill. Then I paid a visit to the big hold of the ship, where I found a smart little captain of the hold, whose business it is to

keep clean and bright the tanks and machinery, and who is the recipient of 6d. a week for his energetic efforts. Then I went along to the store-room, where all the linen is kept, and here the youthful store superintendent told me that on admission each boy gets an extensive outfit,



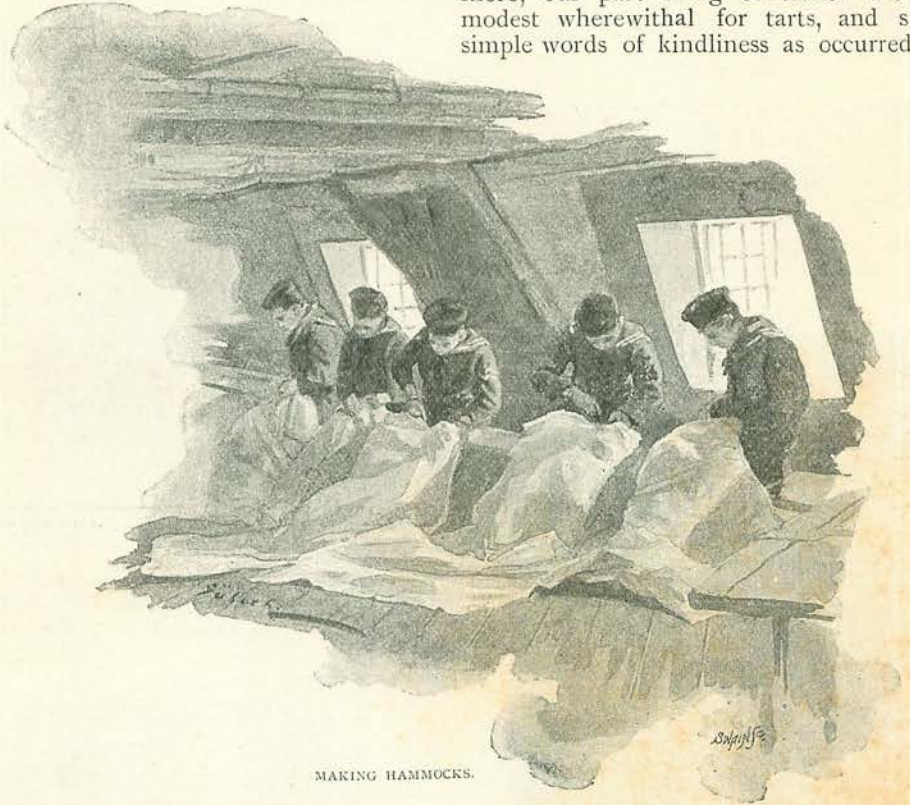
"MANNING THE YARDS."

including, in addition to two suits and a number of other necessities, a pair of mittens, a blue comforter, and an extra jacket, pair of trousers, south-wester, and knife when he goes to sea.

An exciting incident terminated our visit in the shape of a fire, which was conducted in so realistic a manner, and with such deadly earnestness on the part of the nautical firemen, that for a moment we felt positively terrified, and began to cast about our chances of getting off. As we stood on the lower deck a bell was rung, at the sound of which the entire crew assembled round us. The captain in half a dozen incisive words then stated that the fire was in the "galley." No directions were given; each lad knew exactly how to act, and carried out his special duty, which he had been told off for and practised from the moment he set foot on the ship, with a coolness and promptness which were ample

evidence of their magnificent training. We followed to the "galley" above, and found (barely a couple of minutes had elapsed) that six fire hoses were already at work, every pump was in action, and the imaginary flames, which were supposed to have originated from some cinders falling

Warspite and the British Navy. In the swiftly vanishing sunset, of which there was still enough of orange and crimson to throw great patches of bright colour on the wood-bearing barges and the huge black towers lining each side of the river, our little crew brought us back safely to shore, our part being concluded with a modest wherewithal for tarts, and such simple words of kindness as occurred to



MAKING HAMMOCKS.

out of the stove, well under control. From beginning to end there was not the smallest mistake or confusion or uncertainty, and if in the hour of real peril these gallant miniature sailors keep as cool and disciplined, they will be a credit and honour to the

us. Will not all the readers of *THE STRAND MAGAZINE* echo our wish—that these brave little bluejackets may make prosperous voyages, and get safely into sunny harbours where kind eyes and hearts are waiting to welcome them.