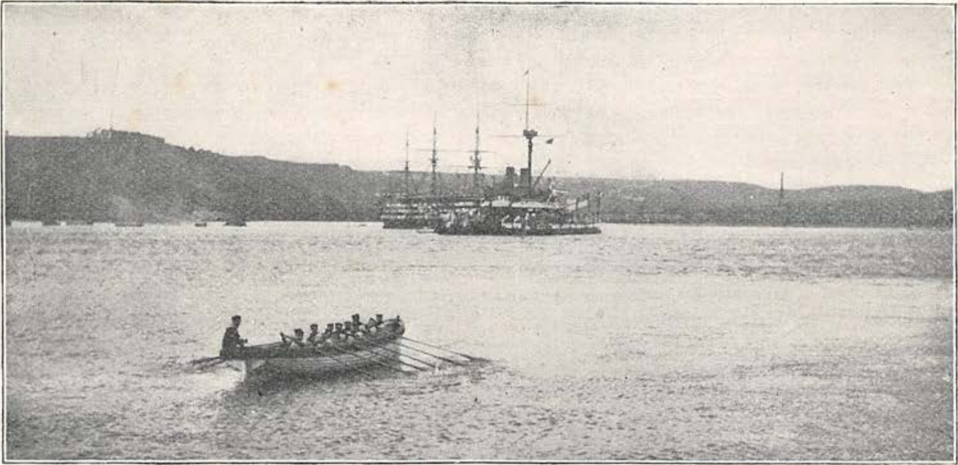


A ROWING PARTY.

HOW BLUE-JACKETS ARE TRAINED.

BY ARCHIBALD S. HURD.

Illustrated from Photographs by MESSRS. HEATH & CO., *Plymouth.*

THE days of the typical old salt are past. Our warships are no longer manned by the rough-and-ready Jack Tars with whom Captain Marryat has made us familiar, and whose yarns we loved to hear when we were boys. New times and methods have demanded new men.

A "FIRST-CLASS" BOY.

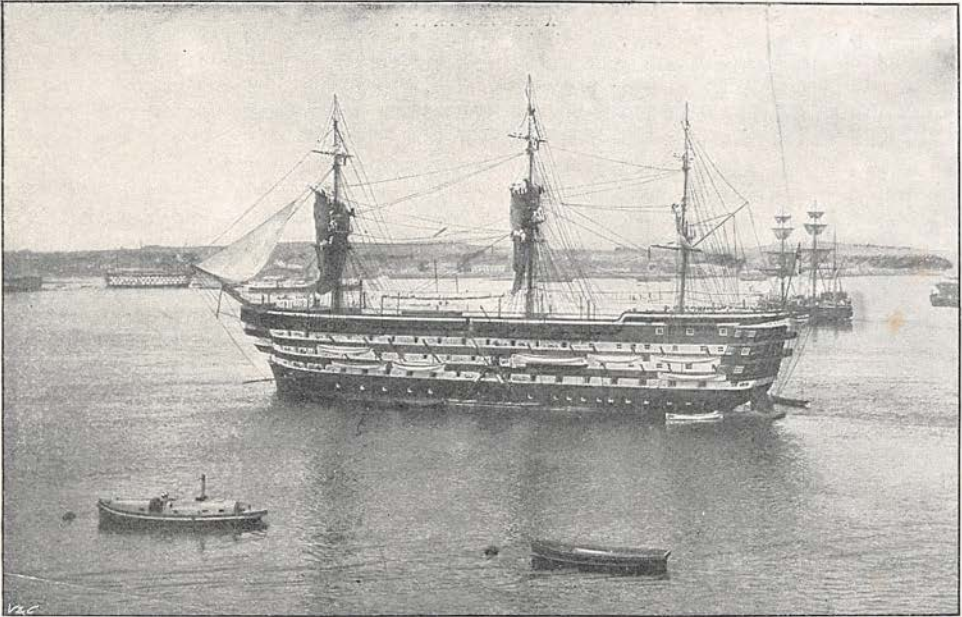
In the days when the press-gang did the king's bidding, and men were dragged from their homes to man our war-vessels, little training was required. Once at sea, men soon picked up the rudiments of seamanship, and in the hour of action British pluck covered a multitude of deficiencies. We still call the seamen who navigate and fight our ships sailors, and in our minds they are always associated with the great spreads of canvas which were carried by Nelson's flag-ship the *Victory*, and by all our warships down to the middle of this century. But as a matter of fact, after they leave the training-ship, blue-jackets in these days of steam seldom handle canvas or make or shorten sail. Every blue-jacket is now trained from boyhood to use the cutlass and rifle and lay a gun with precision.

Whereas it used to take several years to build a wooden battleship, one of our modern leviathan vessels can be built in less than two years; but it takes twice as long to train efficient blue-jackets to man it. To man the comparatively few ships that then left the stocks was a matter of constant difficulty, and when war threatened recourse was had to force to get men on board. The strength of the fleet was then very elastic, and the number of men could be doubled or trebled in a short time by the aid of press-gangs. Hence, when the war with America became imminent and the navy had only 20,000 men available, orders were given to increase this number. In six years it had grown to over 110,000 men, untrained and undisciplined it is true, but ready to fight desperately for their lives and their country's honour. This is an illustration of the rapid recruiting of a century ago.

Now we are able to man the largest fleet the world has ever seen with men who volunteer for service, and the navy in this year of grace, when we are not at war with any of our neighbours, consists of about 60,000 seamen, thus disproving the statement that is sometimes heard that the British are no longer so eager for life on the sea as they were in the good old times. This is one of the many popular fallacies about the navy. They never die.

It must not be supposed that our navy stands at 60,000 men because more could not be obtained. Unlike the army, the navy has no need of recruiting officers. Continuous streams of boys daily present themselves on the various training-ships seeking to join the navy. So great is the number of would-be sailors that of every ten boys who leave the shore in watermen's boats to be examined by the officers of the training-ships, nine are returned to their parents. The medical examination is of a most stringent character. A weak chest, a swollen joint, missing teeth, or any slight irregularity is sufficient to condemn a boy in the eyes of the examining surgeon. Hence the lads who undergo training in any of the ships, whether it be the *Impregnable* or the *Lion* at Devonport, the *Boscawen* at Portland, the *St. Vincent* at Portsmouth, or the *Caledonia* at Queensferry, are the finest specimens of aspiring sailors that the country can produce. Moreover, not only have the boys to show their physical fitness for sea-service, but they must satisfy an examiner in reading, writing and arithmetic. Every year, of the many thousand boys examined, about 4000 are taken on to one or other of the training-ships and commence the course which eventually results in their winning the proud distinction of A.B.

The *Impregnable*, the largest of our training-ships, is moored off Devonport in the Hamoaze, the broad estuary of the river Tamar, which divides the sister counties of Devon and Cornwall. This old three-decker, the largest and the last of the wooden walls of England, is a conspicuous object and suggests comparisons between her huge bulk and the modern battleship *Devastation*, which is anchored close by and flies the flag of the admiral commanding the port. Constructed soon after the conclusion of the Crimean War, the *Impregnable* has only once been to sea. Before she was launched at Pembroke the Admiralty had made the momentous decision to fight England's future battles with ships of steel. Hence the *Howe*—for the *Impregnable* was named after this famous admiral when she left the slip at Pembroke (the name being subsequently changed)—was already out of date before she was completed for sea, and she was towed round to Devon-



H.M.S. "IMPREGNABLE."

NELSON'S BELL.

port there to serve her country as a naval nursery. Since then a thousand lads have left her side each year to man our war-vessels.

One of the most interesting objects on the *Impregnable* is the ship's bell. Nearly a hundred years ago it was taken from the Spanish ship *San Josef*, by Nelson, at the battle of St. Vincent. Until about three months ago it was used as the ship's bell. It is now cracked and unmelodious, and is preserved with care on one of the lower decks, where is hung a record of its history, which typifies the daring of Nelson in attacking ships larger and better armed than his own. This record states: "During this action the seventy-four ton ship *The Captain*, commanded by Commodore Horatio Nelson, ran alongside and boarded the *San Nicolas* (80 guns), and having captured her, the boarders, also under Nelson, proceeded to board and capture the *San Josef* (112 guns), which ship was lying across the bows of the *San Nicolas*." Naturally this bell is regarded with much veneration by blue-jackets of to-day.

Every morning one of the surgeons of the *Impregnable* is kept busy examining boys who wish to join the navy. It is a motley crowd of young life, ranging from fifteen years and three months to sixteen years and nine months—the two age limits—which seeks admission into the ship, many, it is to be feared, to have cherished dreams dispelled. It is an error to suppose that our sailors are drawn from the gutter or even exclusively from the lower classes. Many of the lads come from the *Exmouth*, moored in the Thames, and from other non-service training-ships. Some of these boys have spent most of their young lives in workhouses, but they make good, hardy and well-disciplined seamen. Many other lads come from the homes of old seamen and small country tradesmen. Having satisfied the surgeon and chaplain as to their physical and mental fitness each boy signs a contract, endorsed by a parent or guardian, to serve in the navy for twelve years from the time that he reaches the age of eighteen years. When a boy has satisfied all these requirements he is taken to the *Circe*, the tender to the *Impregnable*, where he is bathed, and fitted out with a complete equipment of clothes, a combined prayer and hymn book, and what is known as a "ditty" box, in which he can lock away his letters and personal trifles. The boy is now ready to go on board the training-ship, where he is vaccinated and placed with other newly entered lads, known as novices, under the charge of a kindly petty-officer who, during the first week of his new life, acts in the capacity of father. Despite this very wise separation of the boys from their future companions, who would be likely to take advantage of their "greenness," many of them suffer keenly from home sickness and a general feeling of forlornness.

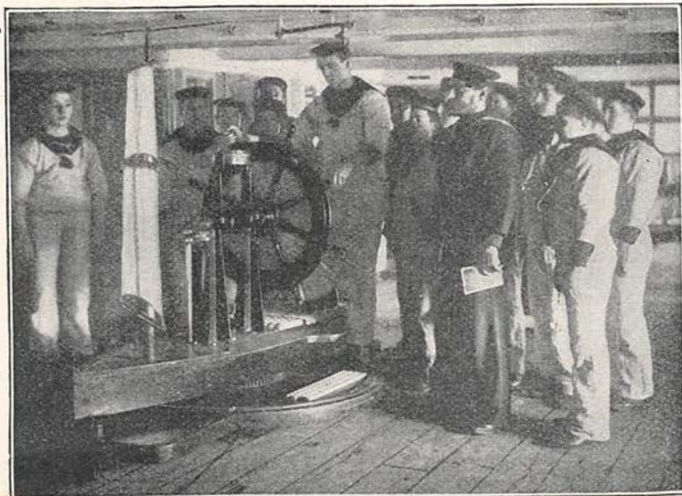
NOVICES MARKING THEIR KIT.

"JUST ENTERED."

The life of the boys is vigorous and thoroughly healthy. The instruction as at present carried on is the result of long experience, and the aim is to enable the lads to acquire as much general, educational, and seamanlike knowledge as can be assimilated in about fifteen months—the length of time occupied in transforming a novice into a first-class boy ready for sea service. But to the newly entered lad the life on this old wooden ship is full of strange surprises. He begins his training, not by learning how to handle a sail, wield a cutlass or lay a gun, but by being taught how to hold a needle, and to put his clothes away neatly. His first duty is to mark his kit and to pack his clothes and other belongings into the long capacious bag which serves as his portmanteau in his future travels over the seas.

Having mastered the initial lesson that tidiness and method in the little things of life are of paramount importance even to a sailor, the neophyte begins his course of sea training. This includes swimming. To many boys this is a great trial, for even their desire to go down to the sea in ships does not always overcome their landlubberly dislike of more water than can be conveniently contained in a wash-hand basin. The regulation requiring that every sailor shall be able to swim is of comparatively recent date. Strange as it may seem, to this day there are many men in the Royal Navy, and many more in the merchant service, who, though they spend their lives on the sea, cannot swim. Hundreds of sailors have been drowned through this inability. This fact has led to great attention being devoted to this subject on all training-ships. Now, before any boy can go to sea he must be able to swim at least forty yards with a duck suit or other light clothing on, and, in addition, he must know how to ply an oar with ease, strength and precision. In these ways and by gymnastics a boy's chest broadens and his body is strengthened and toughened to endure all the hard work and variations of climate that he will have to undergo. This instruction is carried on daily, winter and summer, concurrently with the boy's general education and his seamanship classes.

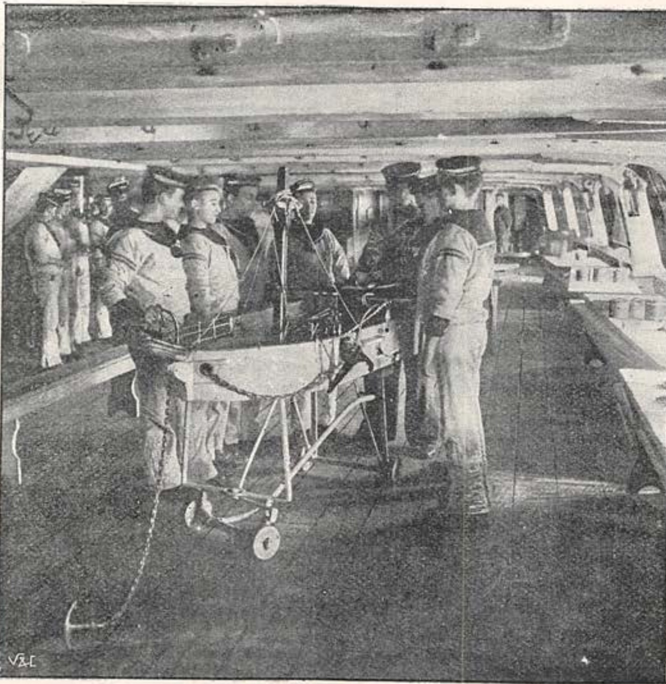
The novice who has chosen a sea life because he hates lessons is at once disappointed, for he has not been long on board the training-ship before the schoolmaster and his assistants claim him for two hours a day. Every boy who enters a training-ship is supposed to have had an average education, but usually there has been two years' interval before he joins the navy in which to forget a great deal that he learned. Therefore when



LEARNING TO STEER.

he commences his training he has to return to the desk for at least seven months, and wonderful progress some of the lads make in this period. Thousands of our sailors of to-day have learnt as much as a sixth or seventh standard schoolboy.

Many of the brighter boys, fired with a desire to eventually rise to the rank of warrant officer, with pay ranging from £100 to £150 a year, continue their studies in odd leisure moments long after the usual seven months' compulsory schooling is finished. They soar into astronomy, trigonometry, logarithms, algebraic problems and navigation, and many of their examination-papers would make a public schoolboy gasp. For instance, in a recent examination of a large class—not of advanced boys—the following question was asked: "A prize was valued at £12,000; the flag-officer received thirty shares, and the officers and men altogether 1470 shares, a first-class petty officer was allotted six shares: what amount did he receive?" Here again is a question in navigation put to and answered by an advanced class: "On March 19, in longitude 33° east, the observed meridian altitude of the sun's L.L. was 49° 20′ 30″ (zenith N.); the height of the eye was 21 feet and the index error + 3′ 40″: find the latitude." While a lad is carrying on these studies much of his time is claimed by the various instructors—petty officers of good character who preside over the seamanship classes.



LEARNING HOW TO ANCHOR AND GET UNDER WAY.

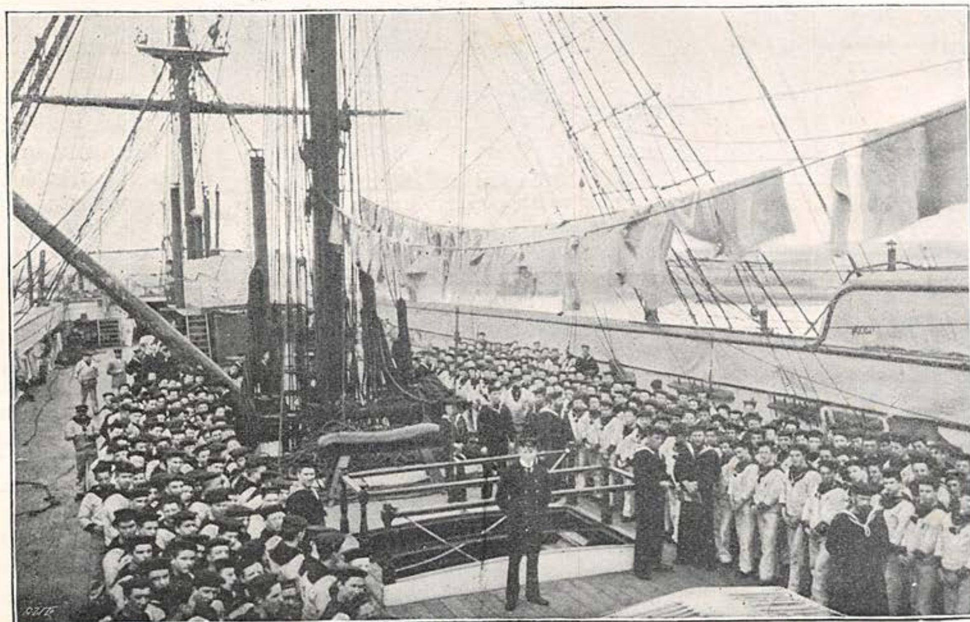
To a landsman much that the boys have to learn seems out of date in these days when steam has so completely superseded sails that in our modern ships there are not even the ornamental spreads of canvas which were borne by vessels until quite recently. Although this change has taken place on our men-of-war, boys have still to learn all that was the necessary equipment of sailors in the old days—the making of bends and hitches, the management of sails, knotting and splicing, and the making of mats, such as are used after a collision to temporarily stop the inrush of water through a hole in the ship's side, the mat being placed outside. These classes are carried on during the best part of every day on several of the five decks of this old "three-decker." One knot of boys will be learning the points of the compass, or the elements of the Morse and semaphore systems of signalling, while in the centre of another class an instructor will be pointing out the yards, spars, sails and ropes on an exact model of a sailing-brig, or another class will have foregathered round one boy who, mounted on a rotating-model, is learning how to steer by compass and by wind. At another part of the ship a cluster of lads is seen learning how to anchor and to get under way. These are only a few of the twelve classes in seamanlike knowledge through which each boy has to pass. Meanwhile on the upper deck another section of the boys is doing physical drill with arms, lustily singing "The ship I love," or "Two little girls in blue," or are practising on the horizontal bar or the horse.

This represents the more serious element in the life of a boy on a training-ship. He has plenty of leisure. At midsummer and Christmas he is able to visit his relatives for a fortnight or three weeks, while boys

ON THE SICK LIST.

with friends within easy distance are allowed to spend occasional afternoons and week-ends with them. There is a field within a few hundred yards of the training-ship, and here boys can play cricket, football and other games. The dull evenings are beguiled by magic-lantern entertainments and concerts, when the lads themselves sing and recite, while a good library, bagatelle and draughts fill up other odd half-hours. In this way the boys' lives pass very pleasantly, never lacking in interest and even excitement.

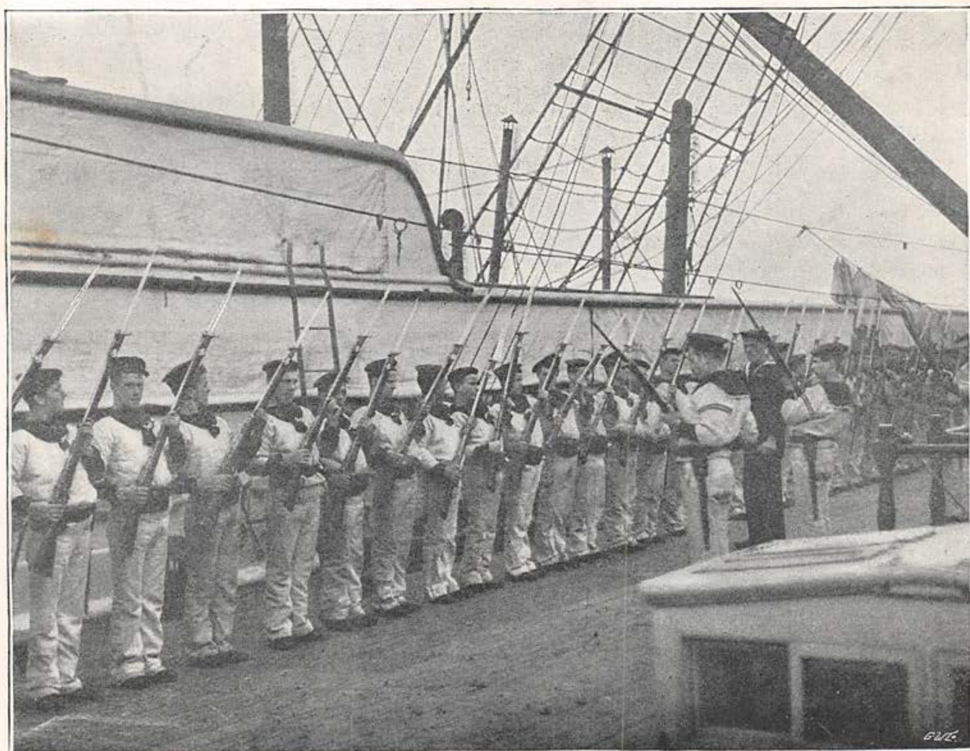
After about nine months the young seaman is able to handle a gun, pull an oar, and swim, and, having passed through the necessary classes in seamanship, becomes a first-class boy, and his drills become more intricate. He spends a part of each day on the gunnery ship *Cambridge*, where he goes through further gun drills. Having learned all that is required of him on the training-ship he leaves for a six weeks' or two months' cruise in one of the sailing-brigs, four of which, the *Nautilus*, *Pilot*, *Liberty* and *Sea Lark*, are continually passing in and out of Plymouth Sound. On a fine breezy day they present a pleasing picture, and their well-bellied sails fill many old seamen with longings for the days before the advent of steam, when sailors were sailors in fact as well as in name. A cruise on one of these sailing-ships does wonders for a boy. All the seamanlike knowledge he has acquired when on the training-ship is put to a test, and he gains his first experience of life at sea. Though he has plenty of work on board, drilling, handling the sails and becoming generally familiar with the conditions in which seamen pass their lives, he thoroughly enjoys his time on the brigs. Each morning, as a rule, two or three of these vessels leave their moorings under Plymouth's famous



WAITING FOR DINNER.

Hoe and cruise along the Devon or Cornish coast, returning to the Sound before nightfall. Sometimes more extended cruises are made, but the end in view is primarily to fix in each boy's mind all the knowledge in seamanship which he has acquired on the training-ship. For this purpose short cruises are quite sufficient.

All too soon this playing at sailors comes to an end and the boy returns to the training-ship, where he has a complete kit for sea provided for him. Presently he receives orders to enter on the last stage of his preparation. He is drafted to a sea-going warship or to one of the harbour or coastguard ships, or he may be fortunate enough to join the training squadron, which, under the command of a commodore, goes for extended cruises lasting for several months. This squadron consists of four small cruisers, and as each carries from twelve to sixteen guns, the young sailor not only gains further knowledge of seamanship but his gunnery training is carried forward, and cruising from one foreign port to another he acquires a practical acquaintance with the world. His life during these six months is full of fresh interest, and he is borne back to England, where further instruction in gunnery awaits him. At the age of eighteen years he becomes an ordinary seaman and a unit, though an insignificant one, of the ship's company of some battleship or cruiser. His life in the Queen's navy begins in real earnest. It is not until he has seen about six months' sea service, and has shown himself thoroughly acquainted with a seaman's duties, that he is rated an able seaman. Even after he has gone through all this preparation his training is not complete. He must be an expert gunner and torpedo man. He will take a long gunnery course at Whale Island, Portsmouth, on the *Cambridge* at Devonport, or at the Sheerness School of Gunnery. He will also go through a course of torpedo instruction on the *Defiance* or *Vernon*, the torpedo-school ships stationed at Devonport or Portsmouth. It is impossible to give an accurate idea of the technical knowledge which a thoroughly competent seaman has to store away. The complexity of the work—with heavy guns of various makes and calibre, with turrets and barbettes, and with torpedoes and all the



BOYS DRILLING WITH ARMS.

intricate arrangements of such vessels as the battleship *Magnificent*, or boxes of delicate machinery such as our torpedo-boat destroyers —only those can understand who are practically acquainted with one of our modern engines of war.

There are no seamen in the world to compare with British blue-jackets. The reason is not far to seek. During the most important periods of their lives these well-built, broad-chested, muscular men live active healthy existences, with every opportunity for development. They are traditionally known as jolly tars, but they are more than that. They are masters of something of the sciences of seamanship, of gunnery and of navigation, and if to these they can add sobriety and ready and implicit obedience to orders, they have the talisman with which to become warrant-officers. But though we admire our blue-jackets as highly trained sailors and fighting men, it is Jack's large heart, honest face and good-fellowship which wins him a welcome at every port.

A TRAINING BRIG IN FULL SAIL.