



Photo by]

[Willis, Chatham.

COASTGUARDS AT DRILL.

## THE POLICE OF THE COAST.

BY ARCHIBALD S. HURD.

COASTGUARDS are not what they seem to many persons. They are not merely sailors who seldom go to sea and who have elevated the use of a marine telescope to a fine art. It does not necessarily follow that because most of them are adepts at spinning yarns, and can foretell the weather more accurately than many barometers, that they are all ready to "shiver their timbers" or "dash their starry toplights" at the slightest provocation. Owing to the pernicious influence of certain novelists, many persons think that these amphibious sailors do little work and are fit butts for any joke, and they suffer accordingly.

A well-authenticated story is told of three men of this force who borrowed a donkey and cart to fetch some potatoes from a neighbouring village. Having procured the potatoes, they adjourned to the village inn for refreshments, leaving the donkey standing by an ordinary five-barred gate. No sooner were they out of sight than some of the villagers seized the opportunity of playing a joke upon their visitors. Taking the donkey out of the cart, they led him through the gate, then, closing it, they put the shafts of the cart through and harnessed the donkey again; thus the donkey was on one side of the gate and the cart on the other.

By the time the coastguards came out of

the inn they were unable to reason clearly, and they could not understand how the donkey had got into such a position. Try as they would they could not force him back through the bars, and the owner would not let them saw the wood away. Only one way out of the dilemma suggested itself: that was to take the gate off its hinges and let the donkey take it home as it hung on the shafts. This was quickly accomplished. Judge of the enjoyment of the villagers as they watched these three Jack Tars walking beside the heavily burdened donkey cart, discussing the mysterious manner in which their beast of burden had got himself so inextricably mixed with the gate.

Now that there is little or no smuggling there is an impression that coastguards have very easy lives. During the summer months, when the nights are short, the sea calm as a millpond, and the wind soft and balmy, we come across coastguards at some popular holiday resort and are inclined to envy them; the remark of townsmen may often be heard, "Oh, those men have a pleasant and easy life: nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in." Let these summer visitors to Scarborough or Lowestoft, Newquay or Bude, or some out-of-the-way part of the coast, return to these seaside resorts in the depth of winter, when the equinoctial gales are filling the newspapers

with tales of disaster and shipwreck, and they will understand that there are two sides to a coastguard's life.

Who envies him his lonely patrol in the long, windy, winter nights along the cliffs, battling with the wind, keen and cutting? Maybe he has to make his way by some narrow cliff track in face of a lashing storm of rain, hail, or snow, knowing full well that a false step means a terrible fall and perhaps death. The coastguards have little credit for all they do. During the rough winter days and nights, when they are most busy, even those who in the summer claim that they are never so happy as when "by the sad sea waves," wisely retire to some sheltered inland town. Thus coastguards have no audience and seldom any praise.

There are 4,200 coastguards stationed round the shores of Great Britain and Ireland, and they form the finest and most highly trained reserve force for the Navy in case of war. When the ranks of our Jack Tars are thinned by the enemy's shots in the next great naval war, it is the coastguards who will be called upon to fill their places.

Every coastguard is a naval seaman of at least nine years' standing, who knows pretty

well all that there is to be known about navigation, gunnery, and torpedoes, before he has the option of retiring from the roving life of the sailor and settling down ashore with his wife and family. The drill of these land sailors is kept efficient by continual exercise, so that when the news of war flashes through the land we may safely place confidence in this first reserve line of naval defence—"the backbone of the Navy," as they were once called by Rear-Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, and the plucky captain of the *Condor* knows a real sailor when he sees one.

Under certain conditions the coastguard and his family have little of which to complain. There are several hundred stations in England where there are many compensations for all the hardships of the life. At seacoast towns and villages which are thronged with visitors from far-off counties until summer trips upon the heels of autumn, the life of a coastguard has many pleasures, and even in the winter months he has the villagers for companions, and is no longer their sworn enemy as in the old smuggling days. Who cannot call to mind some little village by the very margin of the sea, where the gleaming whiteness of the coastguard cottages, spick



Photo by]

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

THE MOUNT BATTERY (PLYMOUTH) COASTGUARD CREW AND THEIR DIVISIONAL OFFICER.

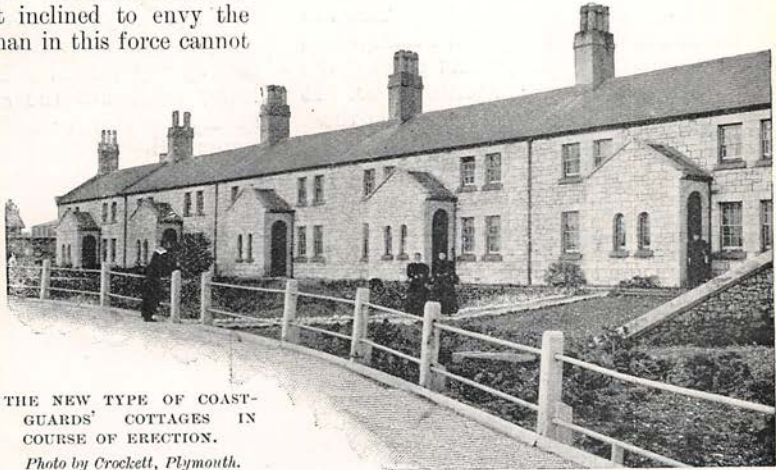
and span in their frequent new coats of whitewash, and high pitched on the edge of the cliff, sets off in relief the quaintness of the cottage homes beneath? Under such circumstances one is almost inclined to envy the station crew. But a man in this force cannot always enjoy even such a modified paradise. Any day he may receive directions from Whitehall to pack up his *lares et penates* and be ready to embark on one of the obsolete little cruisers by which men and their families are moved from station to station, with little or no consideration for comfort or health.

It may be that after living at some such bright station his orders are to go to what is called by the force a "backward station"—backwood station would be more appropriate. There are many of these "backward stations" (particularly in Ireland) where it is difficult to live decently, much less with any degree of comfort. Many causes have contributed to the depopulation of Ireland, and in some parts there never have been many residents.

It is unfortunate for the coastguard service that in the most benighted, isolated spots on the shore of the Emerald Isle members of the force are most required, for the fact that a piece of coast is so barren that no man will voluntarily live there is the strongest argument in the eyes of the Admiralty for dotting the barrenness with whitewashed coastguard cottages. There are places in Ireland, far from the haunts of civilians, which would not do credit to the West Coast of Africa. At such stations as the World's End in the north, and Bullsmouth and Doohooma in Blacksod Bay in the west, the coastguards are landed, and there, in the midst of scenes of absolute desolation, they have to make their homes. Blacksod Bay—the very name is repulsive, and closer acquaintance with its shores does not dispel first impressions.

As a picture of a scene of desolation in a civilised country, what can equal this description of Bullsmouth culled from the letter of a coastguard?—"In front is a stretch of Blacksod Bay, bounded in the distance by a range of barren mountains, not unpicturesque

in summer time, but most dreary in winter. In the rear stretches for miles the surging bog, the monotony only broken by the stacks



THE NEW TYPE OF COAST-GUARDS' COTTAGES IN COURSE OF ERECTION.

Photo by Crockett, Plymouth.

of turf which are piled here and there, and a few huts in the distance, with small patches of cultivated ground around them. Our post office is four miles away, and approached by a mere track across the bog, for it cannot be called a road. The telegraph office was thirty miles from us during more than five years of my stay there, when it was brought within ten miles. Our nearest shop is ten miles away by the road, but something nearer by water, and even there we can only obtain the bare necessaries of life; anything beyond has to be obtained from our nearest town, a distance of forty miles, and is conveyed by small smacks. Our church is five miles away, also approached by a track across the bog impassable during the winter; another and better road has now made the distance nine miles. We are fortunate in having a butcher who (to use his own words) kills a "beef" once a year, at Christmas, which is the only time that we get any beef; for six months, July to January, we generally manage to get some mutton; the remainder of the year the sheep are too poor to kill, so we have to live on bacon, with an occasional dinner of fresh pork when someone in the station kills a pig."

A cheerful place, this, in which to live for five or six years! It has not even the distinction of being unique. Overlooking the same quiet bay, though many miles from Bullsmouth, is the coastguard station at Doohooma. It is situated in the middle of a bog with an area of about fifty miles—forty-five miles from the nearest railway

station, seventeen miles from the nearest market town, from the church, and the doctor, and six miles from a post office, a little mud cabin from which letters can be fetched three times a week. It is needless to say the Admiralty do not provide coastguards with broughams or spring carts or even the ordinary Irish jaunting (or jolting) cars. It is to such places that a large number of these seacoast policemen are sent, and there they live, week after week, until the weeks stretch into months and months into years—excommunicated from the world of men, human islands in a desert of bog.

There is more tragedy than comedy in the work of a coastguard. Even on the most

backwards and forwards, bearing its human freight in safety across the boiling sea to the shore.

There are over 300 rocket appliances round our shores, and who can calculate the number of lives which have been saved by this agency alone? They are constantly being used, but the coastguards have no gallery to play to. In oilskins and sou'westers they do their work, whether it be night or day, risking their lives to save those in peril on the sea, thinking neither of fame nor reward. There is often not even a six-line paragraph in the daily newspapers, but in a corner of the *Shipping Gazette* the bare fact of the rescue of some crew may be mentioned.

The general public know little of this continual fight with the sea for human lives which is being waged by these men of our first line of reserve, and the gallant crews of the boats of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. No poet sings their praises. They are out of sight and out of the mind of all except the mariner in distress.

Coastguards often look death in the face in the course of their daily round and common tasks. Not many months ago the north-west gale which had been blowing for many days on the wild



Photo by]

ON THE LOOK OUT.

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

barren parts of the coast the routine of their duties is often broken by the sight of the ghostly lights of some storm-tossed vessel drifting aimlessly amid hidden rocks until she strikes; and then the darkness of the night is lighted by the lurid flash of a rocket, her signal of distress. Once such a signal is seen, all thoughts of the long months of lonely night patrols and service grievances are thrown to the winds, the lifeboat is promptly manned, and the rocket apparatus is prepared. In a short time the boat has put off in the raging waves, or a rocket with a rope attached has been fired over the doomed ship, and in a few momentous minutes a basket-like contrivance is being pulled

coast of North Cornwall culminated in a perfect hurricane. The coastguards in the solitariness of their lonely patrol knew that many lives probably depended on their vigilance, and they were not wrong. Suddenly through the clouds of spray one of these coast policemen descried a sailless, water-legged schooner, being driven ashore. When first sighted, the wind was irresistibly conveying her ashore under the towering heights of Gurnard's Head, a bluff as famous for the number of vessels which have been wrecked at its base as for the many delightful memories of picnics which are cherished by holiday-makers from all parts of the world. As quickly as his legs could carry him the



Photo by]

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

## OFF TO THE RESCUE.

coastguard returned to the station, and in a few minutes a telephone message had been despatched to the neighbouring station of Pandeen for the rocket apparatus. Meanwhile the fury of the sea increased, and it was soon evident that if the crew of the doomed ship were to be rescued, somebody must do something at once. Without any thought of the danger or of reward, the coastguards caught up some surf lines and in the teeth of the gale climbed down the narrow ledge in the side of the cliff. It was a hazardous task even for men who are complete strangers to fear, to cling in the face of that fierce wind and icy rain to the sheer, featureless rock, with the champing and churning sea many feet below. When the schooner at length grounded, these brave men were at the margin of the sea, ready to

help the distressed crew. Then commenced a fierce struggle with the waves, which washed right over the vessel, the coastguards themselves working on undaunted, though they were at times up to their necks in the boiling, surf-covered water. But victory was theirs, and, one after another, the crew, wet and bruised and exhausted, were safely brought ashore.

This is only a chance incident in the life of one coastguard station; there are hundreds of scenes such as these enacted every year round our coasts. We praise the sailors and soldiers who brave the terrors of war, but who thinks of these police of the coast who are ever braving dangers to save some shipwrecked crew from certain death?

Right round our shores from John o' Groats to Land's End, and from Land's End

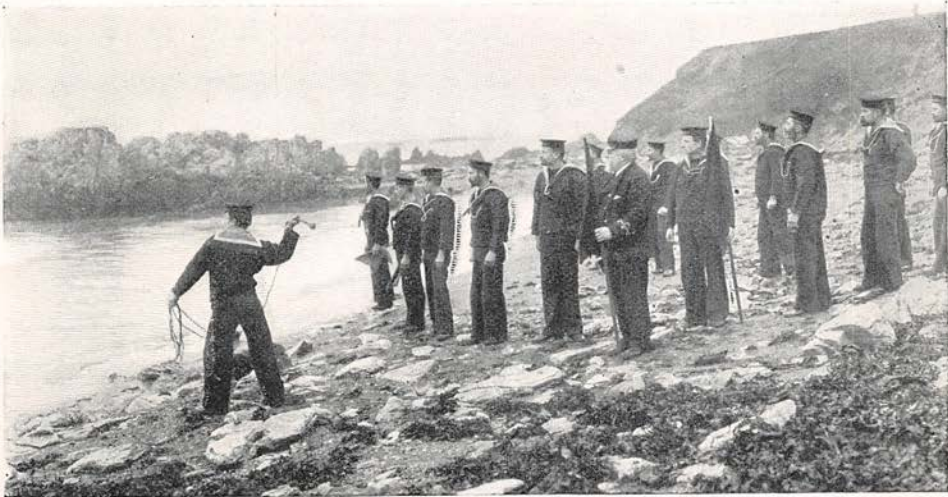


Photo by]

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

## THROWING A LIFELINE.

to John o' Groats again, stretches this human chain of trained seamen, with telegraph or telephone, signal rockets and lifeboats, ready to render help when the storm is fiercest and landsmen have

dynamite into the country, protect the shore ends of marine telegraphs, act as signallers for Lloyd's, and, among other duties, must care for the dead as well as the living.

The coastguards' pay ranges from 1s. 7d. to 2s. 2d. a day, according to their length of service. If they happen to rise to the dignity of chief officer, after serving in the Navy

and the coastguard for a period of twenty-five years, they will receive as much as 6s. per day; but these appointments are scarce as blackberries in June.

It must be admitted that the pay of these guardians of our rock-bound coasts is not excessive, even when the fact that they have no rent to pay is taken into account. Everyone who knows anything of these 4,200 officers and men admits that they form the cheapest and best naval force we have, for they only cost the country just

over £150,000 a year; and in return the Admiralty are able to provide a linked chain of trained seamen, who patrol by day and by night a coastline of 4,000 miles, and are available to fight at sea in place of comrades who have fallen before the foe.

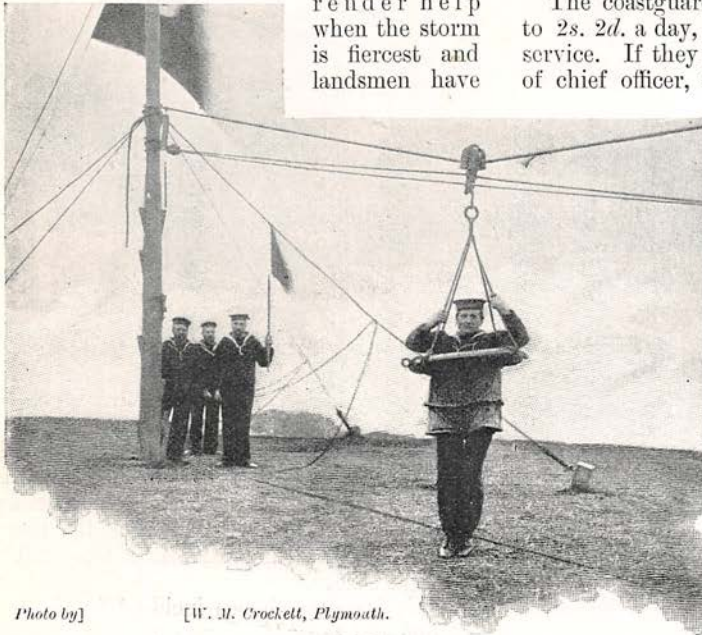


Photo by]

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

THE ROCKET LIFE-SAVING APPARATUS AT WORK.

shut themselves in their homes in self-complacent satisfaction that it is not their fate to stir abroad in such weather.

In order to impress the public, apparently, but primarily to remind the coastguards of their varied calling, the Admiralty recently issued a list of their duties, arranged under no less than twenty-seven heads; so it will be understood that these policemen of our coasts have other work besides watching the coast for shipwrecks and smugglers and saving life. They have to assist in enforcing the fishery laws, act as naval recruiting-officers, drill the men of the Royal Naval Reserve, stop illicit distillation, prevent the introduction of arms or

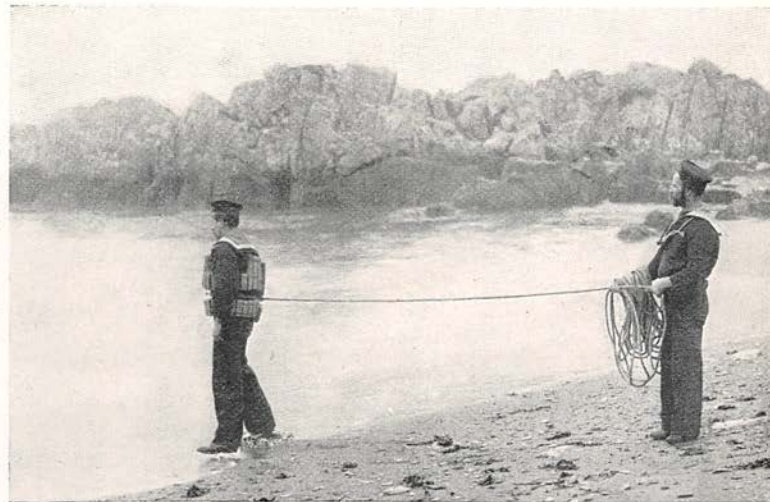


Photo by]

[W. M. Crockett, Plymouth.

COASTGUARD, WITH LIFEBELT, ABOUT TO WADE INTO THE SURF.