

SHIP BOYS.

## THE MAKING OF AN "A.B."

BY C. LANG NEIL.

*Photographs by W. S. Campbell.*

SIX a.m., and a bright spring morning. All is stillness within the sleeping walls. Occasionally one of the dormant figures turns in its resting-place, and a head is buried yet deeper between pillow and blanket, or a very vigorous snore proceeds from some part or other of the vast dormitory. Otherwise the sleeping-chamber of Britain's embryo heroes presents a very peaceful aspect.

Suddenly, the clear ringing voice of a company officer resounds through the crisp morning air, and the figures that a moment previously were comfortably curled up and in many cases fast asleep in their cots, are now huddling on white ducks as fast as possible, and struggling into blouses whilst giving vent to many a vigorous yawn.

But discipline at the Royal Naval School at Greenwich is very rigid, and allows of no unnecessary delay in anything, for Captain Anson, R.N., who is the superintendent of the School, prides himself that his Greenwich boys are as smart as the "lads" he has had afloat under his command in former years.

About five minutes after the order to "turn out" has been given, a thousand boys are making their way in perfect order to the various lavatories, there to indulge in a refreshing morning wash. And the youngsters, critically examined by their company officers as, stripped to the waist, they perform their ablutions, are worthy specimens of Britain's budding manhood.

Ranging from the age of eleven to fifteen and a half, they are the sons of naval warrant officers, seamen, coastguards, and marines; and doubtless many a man to-day has cause to bless the training he received at the School, and the education imparted to him there, for, be it known, although in the strict sense of the term a nursery for the Navy, yet it by no means follows that because a boy is an inmate of the School he will necessarily become a sailor. Far from it, for unless a lad at fifteen and a half is physically fit to join one or the other of the training ships round the coast, he is not allowed to entertain any more ideas of fighting his country's future battles on the deep blue sea. No, he must turn his attention in



THE ROYAL NAVAL SCHOOL, FROM GREENWICH PARK.

another direction, and endeavour to be of service to his country in the only other sphere left open to him—that of a useful and law-abiding citizen.

This is a matter to which the authorities at Greenwich have paid especial attention, and consequently, when a lad proves unfit for the hardships of a sailor's life on leaving the School, he is taught a useful trade, and one at which he can at least earn a living wage.

While the morning toilet is progressing, an officer singles out one lad who is evidently the despair of the establishment.

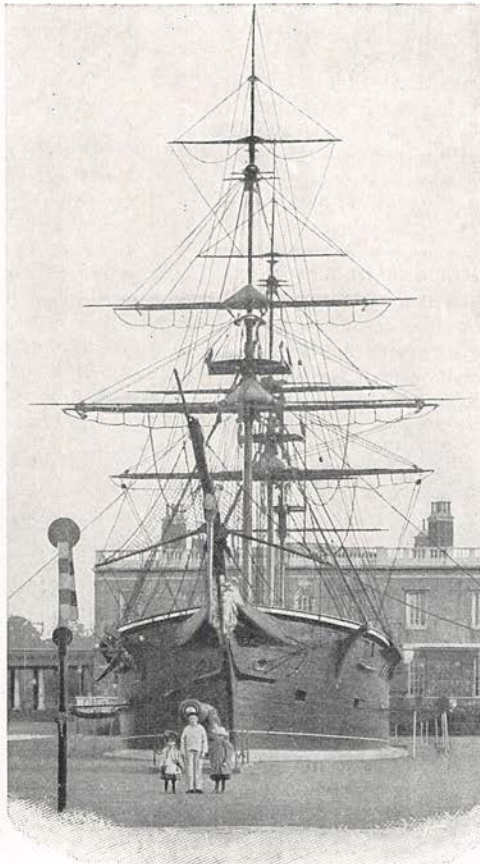
"That boy eats more than any other three put together, and yet look at him! He's been here three years now, and despite the amount of beef he eats, and the physical, muscle-making drill he goes through, he's like a couple of deal boards nailed together," says our guide.

The lad in question is certainly a remarkable specimen. One would judge him to be fourteen years of age; he is about four feet nothing in height, whilst his chest

measurement is exactly twenty inches. He apparently belongs to the greyhound tribe, and from all accounts is just as wiry and strong, despite his weakly appearance; and at breakfast, to which the boys are marched shortly after, in the great hall, the same young fellow, a pigmy beside the youthful giants around him, does not belie one whit the character just given him, attacking the food provided with a vigour quite remarkable amongst a thousand boys whose reputation for appalling appetites is world-wide.

But the business of the day must be got through. Consequently none too much time is allowed to pass in consuming breakfast, since there are beds to make, lessons to learn, jobs to be completed in the workshops, schools to attend, and athletics and drill to be gone through before another meal is eaten.

As it is the pride of the institution that it is self-reliant, it is not a matter for great surprise to find that everything is made by the boys themselves—under instructors, of course—from the



THE "FAME" AND QUEEN'S HOUSE, FROM THE FRONT GATES.

bread they eat to the trousers they wear.

Accompanying our guide through countless passages and corridors, through dormitories whose floors are better polished than those of many a ballroom, we suddenly emerge from the main building and enter a house where a score or two of boys are busy sorting out, washing, wringing, and drying by a steam process the School's washing.

What a scene it is!

Here is a lad who may some years hence break a dozen heads just as calmly



"FIVE STONES," THE CLASSIC GREEK GAME.

as he is now sorting out his comrades' linen and depositing the garments in separate bins. There is a young fellow, with biceps like a Samson, vigorously turning the handle of a washing machine, while others, all young Hercules in their way, are engaged in manipulating the huge levers that screw and unscrew the valves of the drying machines.

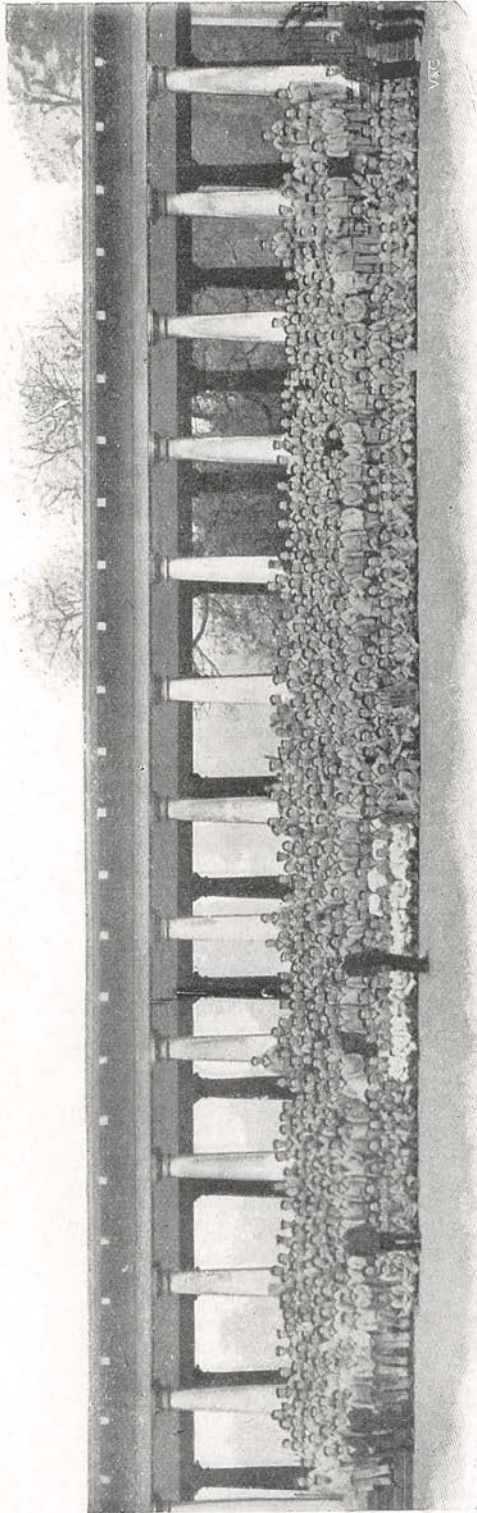
But the laundry is not the only place where strength is required. The blacksmiths' shop, the plumbers', and the carpenters' are not places where any boy of a weakly nature—an impossibility at Greenwich—would be chosen to work. Every-

SERVING.

where it is interesting, everywhere it is busy. Other workshops are the tailors', where the canvas and drill suits are made by rosy-cheeked lads sitting cross-legged, in truly professional fashion, on boards raised about three feet from the ground. Then the mending shop, where everything that is worn or torn—and, as may be imagined,



STROPPING BLOCKS.



GROUP OF THE SCHOOLBOYS ON THE COLONNADE STEPS.

garments *do* get torn even in a naval school—is relegated. This is a sight in itself.

Imagine, ye housewives who sigh over mending a gigantic hole in a stocking, half a hundred boys busy with needle and worsted, and patching shirts hour after hour, and regarding it as but an item in the day's work.

To some it may be a matter of surprise that mending and patching shirts is included in the curriculum of a sailor boy. The explanation is very simple. Jack afloat must be tidy, and as he has nobody in the shape of a housekeeper or a wife to do it for him, he must do it himself. And the authorities at Greenwich have acquired the idea that it is never too young to learn anything, and many out-of-the-way accomplishments are taught the youthful graduates at the Naval School as a consequence.

But what is that we hear? No! it cannot be—we are mistaken. A Strauss waltz in a place like this—absurd! It proves to be the Naval School band at practice, and somehow our feet would fain mark the steps of the measure as the conductor, Mr. Harding, beats the time of the beautiful "Doctrinen" waltz; so perfectly do the boys in blue play the graceful dance that on some future occasion they may be called into requisition when a dance is being given on the deck of a battleship or a cruiser.

The band is generally fifty strong, and the boys who compose it have to devote their whole time to music, its theory and its practice, with a view to their becoming instrumentalists of a no mean order. As a result these youthful performers are looked upon as the "gentlemen" of the School by their messmates, who in their innocence imagine that sitting on a stool all day blowing out crotchets and quavers is child's play compared to kneading bread or washing shirts; and no amount of argument will convince them to the contrary.

"And this is the bath?"

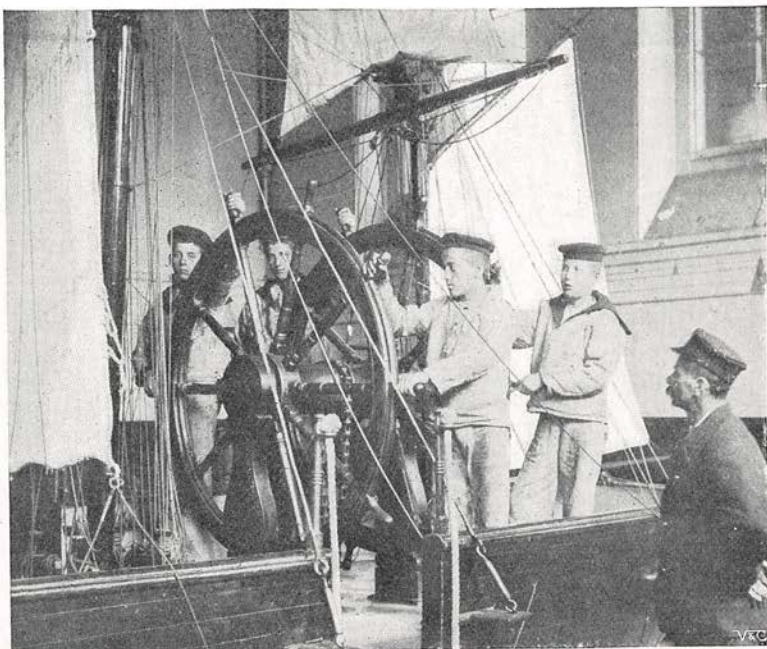
"One of them. We have two, you know, but this is the favourite one and the largest. The boys call it the 'B. P.'—*i.e.*, bathing pond!"

And well it deserves that title. Imagine a huge concreted cavity, built on the same principles as the public baths, with the exception that the centre is raised some three feet higher than the

remaining portion. This is railed round, and a bridge stretches from the edge of the bath right over into the "centre pond," which, by reason of its shallowness, is that in which the lads are taught to swim. Some idea may be gathered of the size of the pond when it is mentioned that no less than 500 boys were swimming at once at a recent exhibition for the benefit of an admiral who was making a tour of inspection.

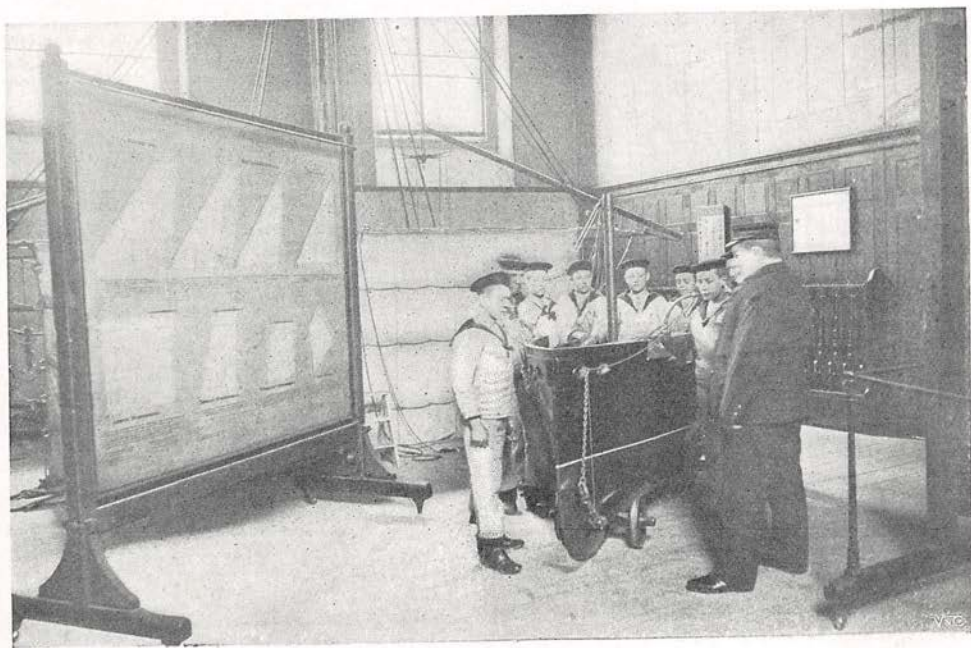
Another of the interesting sights at the Naval School is the instruction

room, where a dozen boys or so are busy making mats of various sizes. One boy "reeves," while another "drives" home with much muscular force and the aid of an oar-shaped piece of wood, the intertwining cords

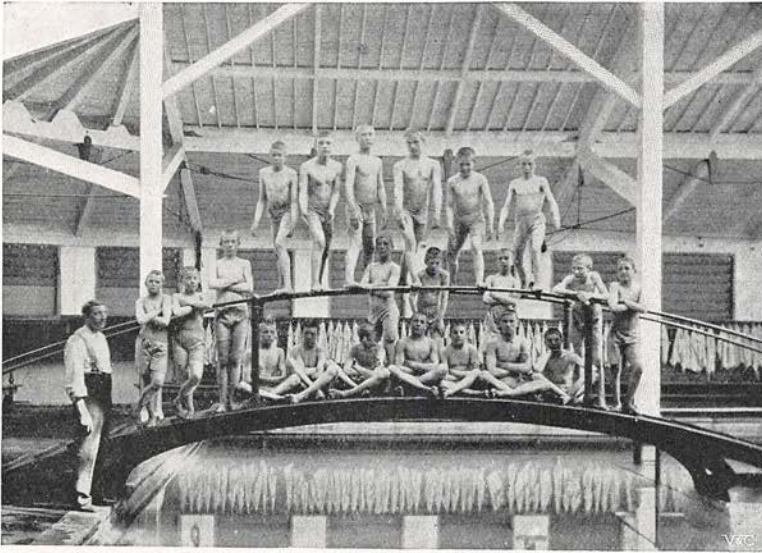


SWINGING MODEL.

that are first run through a number of strands stretched from one post to another, and which in a very short time are converted from a coil of cord to a mat that for durability cannot be equalled.



ANCHOR MODEL.



IN THE "B. P."

"Just look at them!" our guide remarked as we stood upon the colonnade a little later watching the boys scampering about at play. A large section was indulging in football, but by far the greater number were engaged in punching a ball that hung from a post in the playground, and seemed to enjoy the sport, too, although the recoil of the sphere sent many a brawny lad sprawling.

"That's our patent method of hardening the young fellows' fists, and there is no better method in the world. Boy, come here!"

This last remark was addressed to a lad who was passing. He approached.

"Show me your hands." Then turning to us, "Just you feel these!"

We did. We pressed, we pinched, we pulled, but with less effect than though it had been made of leather. As a matter of fact, we

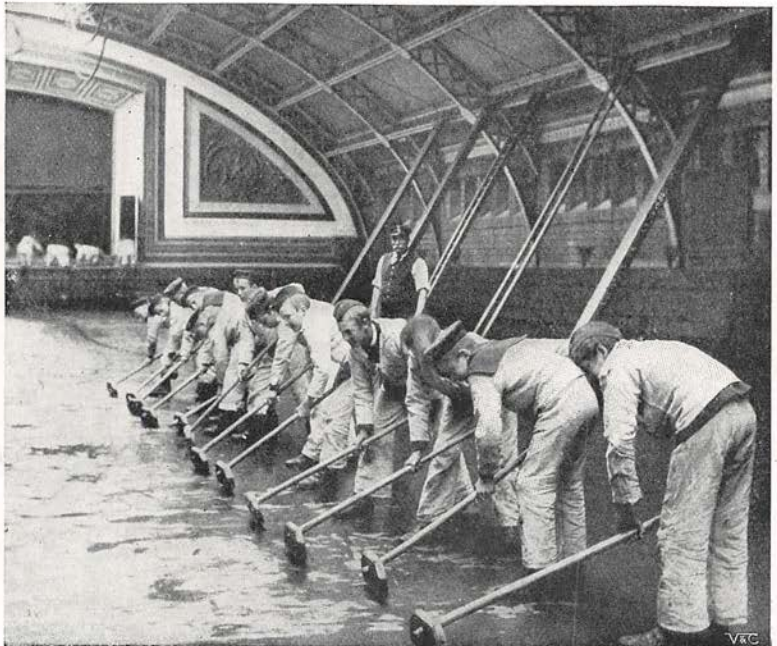
hurt our hands in the testing.

A very conspicuous object, indeed, at the Naval School is the sloop typical of the days of Nelson, which rides out every kind of weather; securely anchored in a bed of concrete in the grounds. She is manned by a crew of fifty-five, composed of those lads whose turn next it is to leave the School for a training ship at one or other of the naval stations round the coast.

Here the boys have to sleep in

hammocks, holystone decks, man the yards, and in the first instruction school learn all about sails, yards, masts, anchors, and, in fact, a smattering of everything nautical.

Amongst other interesting things in the instruction schools is the compass room. This is a sight that never fails to impress visitors, as much with the ingenuity of



CLEANING THE GYMNASIUM.

the instructors as with the skill of the lads in steering a model man-of-war, which revolves on a turn-table, and answers every movement of the helm in the hands of the youngster steering with the same precision, and on just the same principles, as a 10,000 ton ironclad would do.

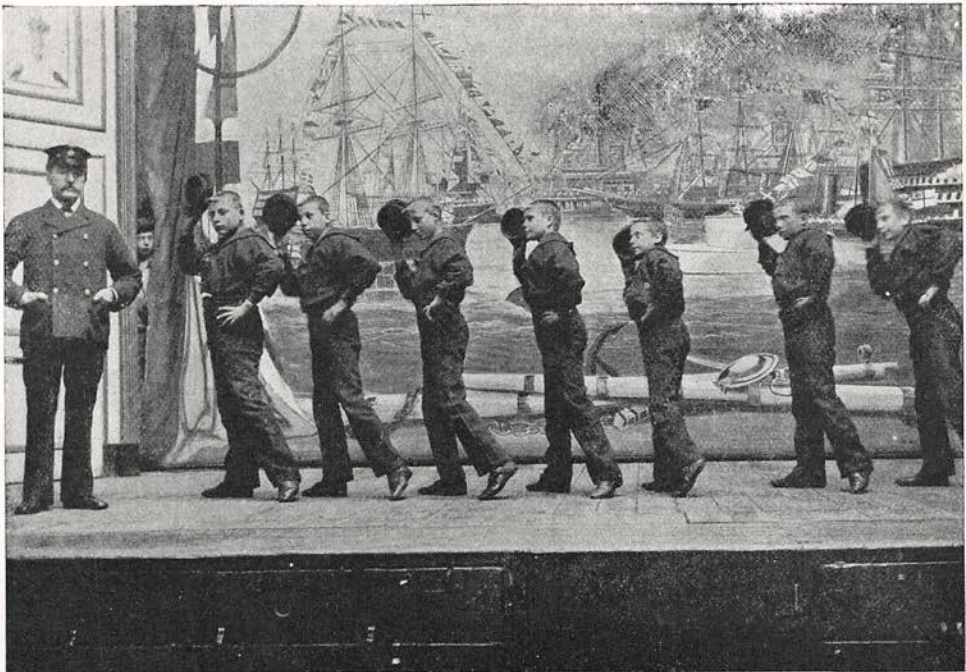
But it is impossible in the limits of an article like this to do anything like justice to the institution under Captain Anson's jurisdiction, and give in detail every little particular and many of the interesting sights to be seen Greenwich way. One can only advise the reader to go and see for himself, and, under the kindly and courteous escort of one of the officers, wander through its schools and workshops, over its ship and in its dormitories, and watch, both at work and at play, the youngsters who at no

distant date will form a considerable item of our fighting force on the sea — that



SPORTS DAY: BUCKET OF WATER RACE.

force which we landsmen have come to regard, and with every reason, as Britain's bulwark.



DANCING PARTY AND INSTRUCTOR.