

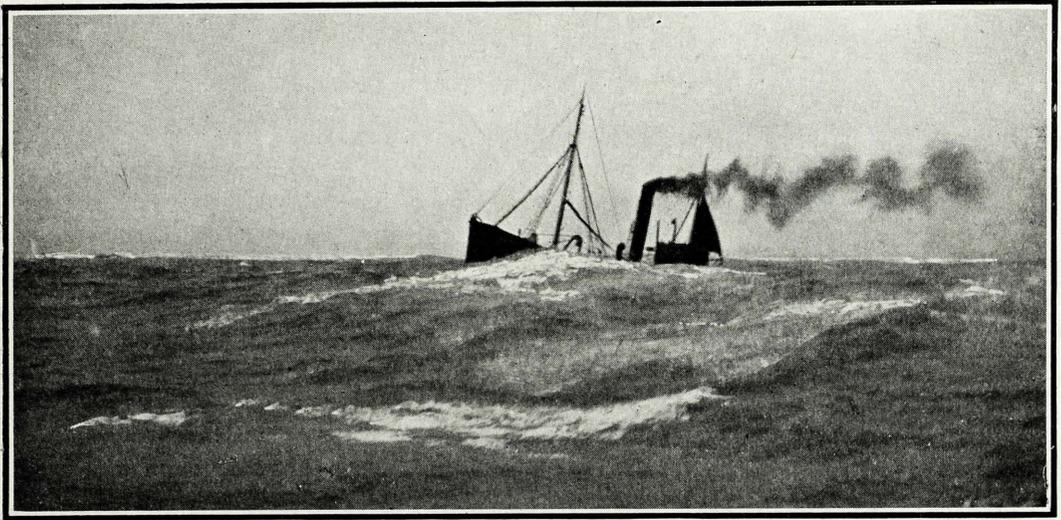
## CHAPTER CXXI.

# FISHERMEN AND THE WAR.

USE OF FISHERMEN BY THE ROYAL NAVY—THE TRAWLER SECTION—SIZE OF THE BRITISH FISHING FLEET—TRAWLING IN PEACE AND MINE-SWEEPING IN WAR—HEROISM OF THE MINE-SWEEPERS—FISHERMEN AT THE DARDANELLES—SOME FAMOUS ADVENTURES—ATTACKS BY GERMAN AIRCRAFT—FISHERMEN OFF THE BELGIAN COAST—PATROLS AND MOTOR-BOAT WORK—SOME BRAVE DEEDS.

SO vast soon became the number of fishermen, mostly of the deep sea, who were mine-sweeping and patrolling in connexion with the Royal Navy, and so great was the number of steam trawlers and steam drifters which were requisitioned by the Admiralty, that it is hard to realize that before the war this invaluable auxiliary was practically non-existent. There was a nucleus, a skeleton, and that was all; but it was enough to allow of the building of a super-structure in the shape of the Trawler Section, which did so much to secure the safety of the Grand Fleet and the lesser fleets of the British Navy. At the outbreak of war there were very few naval officers, either at the Admiralty or elsewhere, who knew anything of the deep sea fisherman and his possibilities of service in connexion with the Navy, and for a long period no adequate use had been made of these unrivalled men. The war caused a complete change in the official attitude towards fishermen and they were gladly absorbed, to become one of the most remarkable of the many remarkable auxiliaries of the Navy. It is to the work of the fishermen in combating the deadly menace of the mine that the failure of many of the German plans for our defeat was due. It was a North Sea skipper, in an old beam-trawler, who gave one of the very first alarms of German mine-layers; and after that opening period of the war trawlermen were the means of destroying enormous numbers of German mines which had the power of causing incredible loss in ships and lives.

At the outbreak of war the fishing industry was in full swing. Four fleets of steam trawlers were at work on the North Sea—the Red Cross, the Great Northern, the Gamecock, and Messrs. Hellyers; single-boaters were everywhere, from Iceland downward; steam drifters, which had begun the season at the Shetlands, were following the herring southward, and many beam-trawlers and liners were making profitable trips. The fleets were the direct successors of the old fleets of sailing smacks, which worked the Dogger and other banks, sending their catches to Billingsgate by steam carrier, and remaining at sea for eight or more weeks at a time, returning to port only for a few days, to refit and get fresh water and stores. Small paddle tugs at north country ports had been equipped with beam trawls and had proved a great success; these picturesque pioneers had been succeeded by screw trawlers, which used an improved and more efficient trawl known as the Otter, and were formed into fleets as the smacks had been formed. These steam trawlers, 40 or 50 to the fleet, remained on the fishing banks in an unbroken succession, a vessel leaving for port, to recoal and get fresh water and stores, when she had been at sea for four or five weeks and her supplies had come to an end. The old system of boarding the fish and sending it to market by carrier was maintained, and a very high degree of efficiency in trawling was reached, each fleet being under the control of an experienced and specially selected fisherman, who was known as the admiral. This important leader, whose duty was to select



A NORTH SEA MINE-SWEEPER AT WORK.

the best fishing-grounds and so secure the most satisfactory results, had under him a vice-admiral who, in his chief's absence or at other times of need, could take over the direction of the fleet.

Grimsby, the world's greatest fishing port, was the headquarters of an enormous fleet of steam trawlers, mostly engaged in single boating; that is to say, the vessels worked individually, going to sea and fishing until enough fish had been caught to make it worth while to return to port. Many of these trawlers, exceptionally fine craft, made the Iceland trip, lasting about three weeks, and there were voyages to the White Sea and elsewhere. The fleeters belonged mostly to Hull. Extensive operations were conducted from other bases, such as Aberdeen, and great numbers of vessels worked from the lesser ports like Scarborough. Yarmouth and Lowestoft maintained their position as the chief ports for the steam drifters. Before the war, therefore, there was a vast aggregation of first-rate steam fishing vessels, manned by crews of whom many members practically spent their lives on the North Sea, for out of a whole 12 months a fletcher would enjoy only about three weeks ashore. The rest of his life was lived in his little steamboat, far from land, and in this environment he had to contend with the bitterest and heaviest of the winter gales. This compulsion made him what he was—an unrivalled sailor and an expert in knowledge of the North Sea grounds.

Fortunate indeed was it that there were available these wonderful *personnel* and *matériel*: doubly fortunate that prompt and comprehen-

sive steps were taken to secure them for the Royal Navy. At the very outbreak of war the Germans realized what a precious asset our deep sea fishermen were to us, and they tried hard to destroy or seize the vessels. In one swoop in August, 1914, they captured a number of steam trawlers which were fishing in the North Sea and made prisoners of the crews, but beyond minor successes of that description their efforts failed. Subsequently many steam trawlers were lost, some by submarine attacks, most by striking mines; a large number of brave fellows perished, and a lesser number were made prisoners of war. After a year and a half of war there were nearly 300 fishermen prisoners of war in Germany. Many of them suffered cruelly through neglect and ill-treatment, and it is comforting to know that special help was provided for them by means of the Fishermen Prisoners of War Fund, which was organized and administered by the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. Further reference will be made to losses amongst fishermen and their vessels; but it may be stated here, as an indication of the extent of both, that Grimsby alone during the year 1915 lost 57 steam trawlers, with a death-roll of 287 men. In some cases the crew escaped; but in most instances they perished. Twenty of the vessels carried a crew of nine each; in one case, the *Horatio*, the number was 14.

When the war broke out the number of first-class British steam fishing vessels was more than 3,000, mostly trawlers and drifters. In 1913 more than 1,600 steam drifters were at work, in addition to motor and sailing craft;

and of these about 1,000 had their headquarters at Yarmouth. The total number of whole-time fishermen was upwards of 125,000, and it was calculated that the entire industry supported one-twentieth of the population, with an invested capital of about £200,000,000. It was remarkable that while the British steam drifter industry developed with extreme rapidity there was no such progress in the German drifter fleets. The Germans, however, had made full use of English and Scottish markets for their catches of fish, and their Iceland boats especially did a large business at Aberdeen. The Germans were also quick to see the advantages of wireless telegraphy on North Sea fishing vessels, and they established installations well in advance of the experiments which were carried out by British enterprise

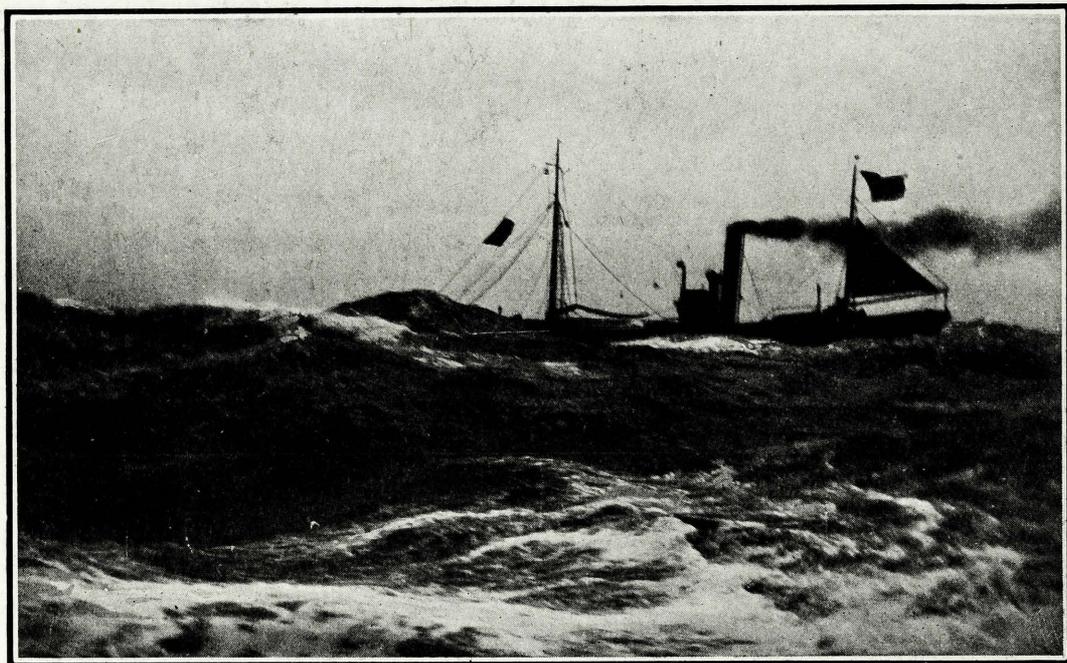
Heavy demands were made by the Admiralty on the ships and men, and these demands grew rapidly as the necessities of the war increased. It was publicly known that nine months after war broke out there were 14,000 fishermen engaged in mine-sweeping, and a thousand of their vessels.

The Otter gear had reached a high state of development, and the fishermen had become very proficient in its use. It is important to bear this fact in mind in considering what the mine-sweepers accomplished; because without experience they could not have achieved their

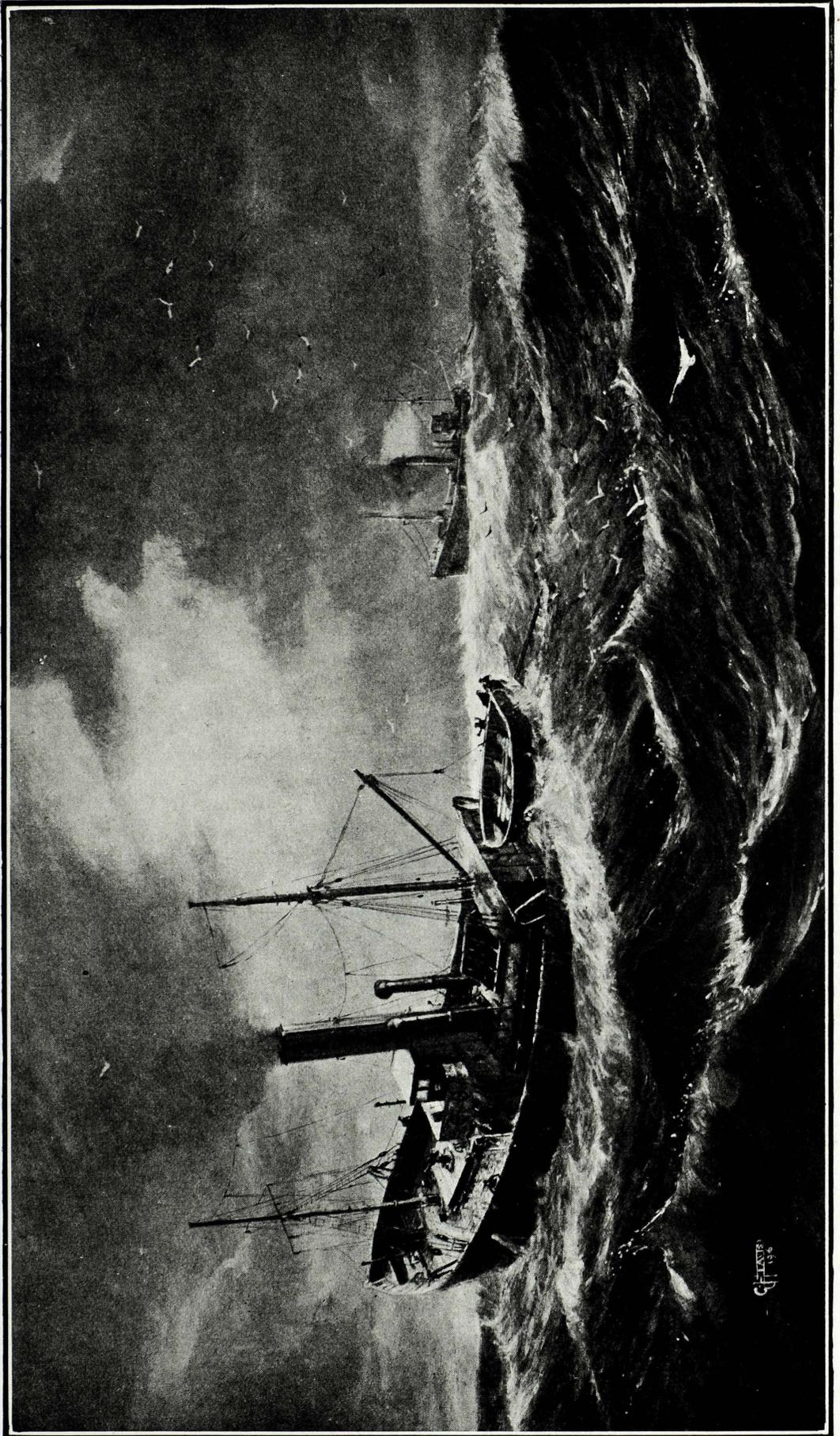
astonishing success in dealing with the mines. The net of the Otter gear was of the usual bag-shaped variety, the size varying according to the power and dimensions of the vessel using it; but an average size was about 100 ft. in length, with a spread of from 80 to 90 ft. The principal features of the gear were fore and after gallows, with fairleaders, a towing-block, a powerful steam-winch, the Otter boards, and the towing-warps. A steam trawler used hundreds of fathoms of heavy wire warp and the handling of these warps called for the greatest skill and care. It was not difficult to adapt the method of trawling for fish to sweeping for mines, the great difference being that, while a trawler in fishing worked alone to get her catch, in sweeping they worked in pairs. What had been done by the towing-warp was accomplished by the sweeping-wire.

In the system of sweeping employed there was a "kite" and a "shoot," and great skill and care had to be exercised in using them. Many accidents happened which were unavoidable—for example, a man engaged on board a sweeper was working between the "kite" and the "shoot" when the vessel rolled and the "kite" swung over and killed him.

In sweeping, the pair of trawlers, steaming abreast at a certain distance, dragged a weighted steel hawser which, striking the mooring of a mine, brought the mine to the surface, where



A NORTH SEA TRAWLER IN A GALE.



MINE-SWEEPERS AT WORK.

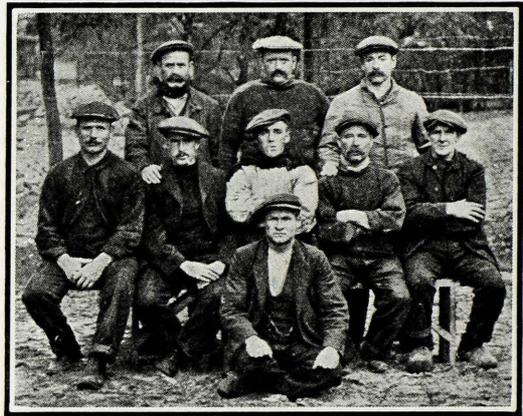
it was promptly exploded by gun-fire from an accompanying destroyer or armed trawler or by rifle-fire. At the very outset the sweepers encountered perils and hardships which continuously attended their calling. Mines exploded and destroyed vessels and crews, and the danger was always present with trawlers which were carrying out fishing in the ordinary manner in the areas indicated by the Admiralty and made known to fishermen. The Grimsby trawler Uxbridge had a mine in the net when the gear was hauled. As the net reached the side of the vessel the mine exploded and the Uxbridge was so severely damaged that she sank in ten minutes. Her crew of nine men, of whom three were wounded, were just able to escape in their small boat, and they were lucky enough to be picked up by another trawler.

Sometimes sweeping was done under actual fire, and a fisherman in a letter described what happened to him and his comrades when they were sweeping in a winter gale. The perilous and excessively uncomfortable work was in progress, warships being in attendance, when German cruisers appeared, and the little sweepers had to leave the scene under shell-fire. "They must have taken us for Dreadnoughts," wrote the fisherman sarcastically. Two days later the sweepers were recompensed, for they ran into some German mines and immediately set to work to sink them. This sweeper alone, within a very short period, blew up no fewer than 18 German mines, "any one of which," the writer said with truth and pride, "might have destroyed a battleship." On this point it may be recalled that during the first winter of the war Admiral Jellicoe's secretary, writing from the Iron Duke, the flagship of the Grand Fleet, to a little blind girl who had sent the admiral a knitted scarf, said:—"We often pass German mines floating about in the water, and we know that if we did not see them, but ran into them, the Iron Duke would be blown up. . . . It is very cold on the North Sea, and very stormy, too, and sometimes the snow falls so heavily that we cannot see at all where we are going, and very often the great seas sweep right over the ship." That truly lovable letter, reminiscent of Collingwood and his little Sarah, gives at once a picture of the appalling menace of the mine and the saving work of sweepers. The peril to the super-Dreadnought, with her vast bulk and tonnage, was precisely the same as that which confronted the little sweeper, with her

tonnage in the neighbourhood of a hundred register.

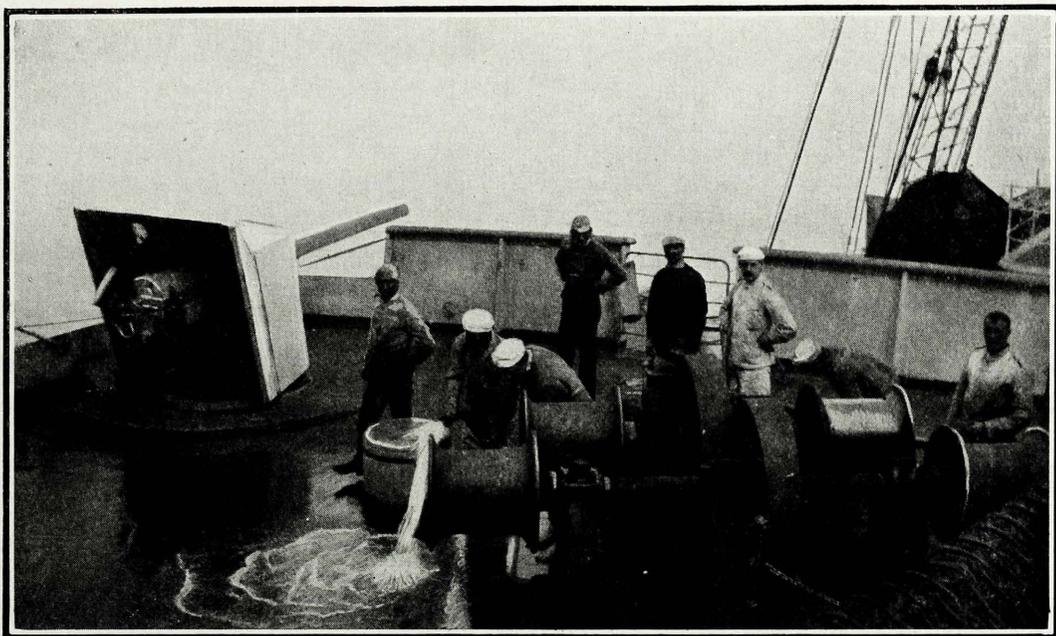
In addition to the floating mines there were the anchored mines, which were frequently encountered by vessels fishing in the ordinary way—a Grimsby trawler caught two of them in her trawl, and as they could not be disentangled, part of the fishing-gear had to be cast away; but the position of the mines was carefully noted, so that they could be subsequently found and destroyed.

Mine-sweepers very soon established a roll of honour and the announcements of rewards for their deeds contained the only details that were made public concerning the work of officers and men in trawlers and drifters. December 19, 1914, was a day of uncommon activity amongst them. The Orianda was



BRITISH FISHERMEN PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY.

blown up by a mine, but the gallantry of Lieutenant H. Boothby, R.N.R., her commander, resulted in all the crew being saved except one man, who was killed. Lieutenant Boothby was given another vessel, and in this he was again blown up, but he again escaped and received a companionship of the Distinguished Service Order. Another officer, Lieutenant C. V. Crossley, R.N.R., on December 19, was in command of a sweeper near which no fewer than three mines exploded. The little ship was badly damaged, and she was saved only by the perfect discipline of the crew and the courage of the officer, who crawled into the cramped space near the screw shaft, found out where the leak was, plugged it sufficiently to enable the pumps to keep the water down, and so kept the ship from sinking. For this splendid performance Lieutenant Crossley received the Distinguished Service Cross. Then, on the



ON A BRITISH PATROL SHIP.  
Washing down the decks after coaling.

night of Christmas Day, 1914, in total darkness, Skipper T. W. Trendall, in the sweeper *Solon*, of 121 tons, went to the assistance of a vessel which had been mined. The steamer was not showing any lights; it was low water, and she had to be searched for in the mine-field. Utterly disregarding the danger to himself and crew, and bent only on giving help to brother seamen in distress, Skipper Trendall and his crew succeeded in reaching and helping the mined steamer, and for this gallant conduct he also was decorated by the King. Splendid also was the conduct of Lieutenant Godfrey Parsons, R.N., who, on December 19, despite the fact that he had been mined in his trawler, continued to command his group of sweepers. On that great day his group exploded eight mines and brought up half-a-dozen more. While these operations were being carried out the lieutenant's ship and another trawler were damaged by explosions, and a third trawler was blown up. And all this happened in ten minutes.

The achievements of the sweepers at that period were the preliminary of the gallant exploits of British fishermen in the Dardanelles operations. Concerning those doings there was not for the public so much of the fog of war as enveloped other undertakings. Time after time the sweepers carried out their work under heavy fire, and in the mine-infested waters there were serious losses. On a March night,

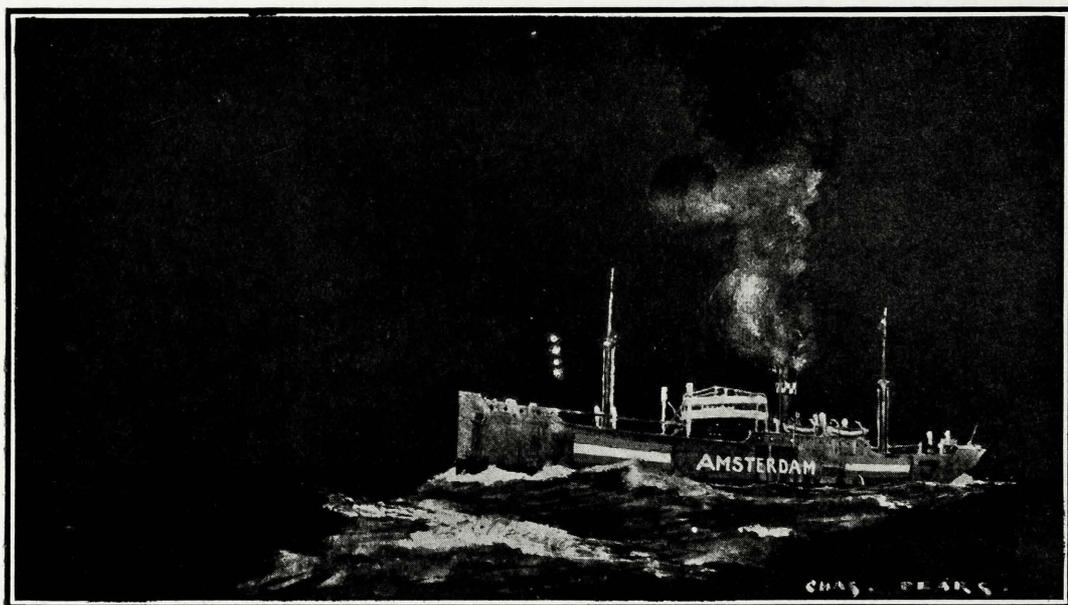
when the *Okino* and *Beatrice* were sweeping in partnership, the *Beatrice* at the end of the sweep slipped her sweeping wire, leaving her partner to heave it in. Having got the wire aboard, the *Okino* steamed away full speed for the fleet; but in a few minutes she foundered, having been in contact with a mine or struck by a stray shell. She carried a large crew—15—and of these 10 were killed or drowned. Another pair of trawlers were sweeping when one of them, the *Manx Hero*, was blown up; but her crew of 11 men were saved through the skill and heroism of Skipper Woodgate and his crew in the *Koorah*. On returning from the Dardanelles Skipper Woodgate gave an account of his experiences in which he said: "When we were up in the Dardanelles there were what we call three groups—One, Two and Three—and each group had to go up, one at a time. The vessel I was in belonged to the second group. The night we were going to make the final dash in the Dardanelles, up in the Narrows, we went, no lights up, everything covered in. They let us get right up to the Narrows, and as we turned round to take our sweeps up one of our number was blown up. Then they peppered us from each side, from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 miles. We heard cries for help. I said, 'We shall have to do the best we can, and go back and pick up.' There was no waiting, no saying 'Who shall go?' As soon as I called for volunteers three jumped in. I

kept the vessel as close as I could to shelter them. I did not think any would come back alive, but they did come back. No one was hit, and I said 'Now we'll get the boat in.' Just as we got the boat nicely clear of the water, along came a shot and knocked it in splinters. I shouted, 'All hands keep under cover as much as you can,' and I got on the bridge, and we went full steam ahead. I could not tell you what it was like, with floating and sunken mines and shots everywhere. We got knocked about, the mast almost gone, rigging gone, and she was riddled right along the starboard side. One of the hands we picked up had his left arm smashed with shrapnel; that was all the injury we got. When we got out the commander came alongside and said, 'Have you seen any more trawlers?' I said 'Yes, we've got the crew of one on board, the *Manx Hero*.' We were the last out, and I can tell you I never want to see such a sight again. . . . I thought of the three men in the fiery furnace, how they were preserved, and of Daniel in the lions' den, and I think of the 24 of us coming out under that terrible fire and the water covered with floating and sunken mines."

In what appeared to be the final list of naval awards to officers for services in the Dardanelles operations the names were given of eight skippers in command of trawlers who were commended, and these were "specially selected from over a hundred names." The awards were for service between the time of landing on the

Gallipoli Peninsula in April, 1915, and the evacuation in December, 1915-January, 1916. Of the eight skippers four received the Distinguished Service Cross. The only details officially given were in the case of Skipper F. W. Barnes, R.N.R., and they were comprised in the sentence, "While off Anzac gallantly took in tow a tug under heavy fire." In the other cases the skippers "performed long, arduous, and dangerous duties." How dangerous those duties were was indicated by the official lists of naval casualties announced by the Secretary of the Admiralty. Between February 26 and March 18, 1916, five skippers were reported killed, no reference being made as to locality; while during about the same period, under the headings "H.M. Ships" and "Mediterranean" there were announced as killed a large number of fishermen who had died at the post of duty.

Apart from the direct work of the fishermen in protecting the Navy and the Mercantile Marine by their wonderful mine-sweeping operations a most important work was done in making the seas safe for the fishermen who went to sea and continued to help largely in keeping up the food supply of the country. The arrangements of the Admiralty made it possible for a small composite fleet of steam trawlers to work in a safe area, and other dispositions enabled sailing and steam fishing vessels to carry out their work in comparative security, and very often, indeed, in most cases,



WAR "PASS LIGHTS" AT SEA.

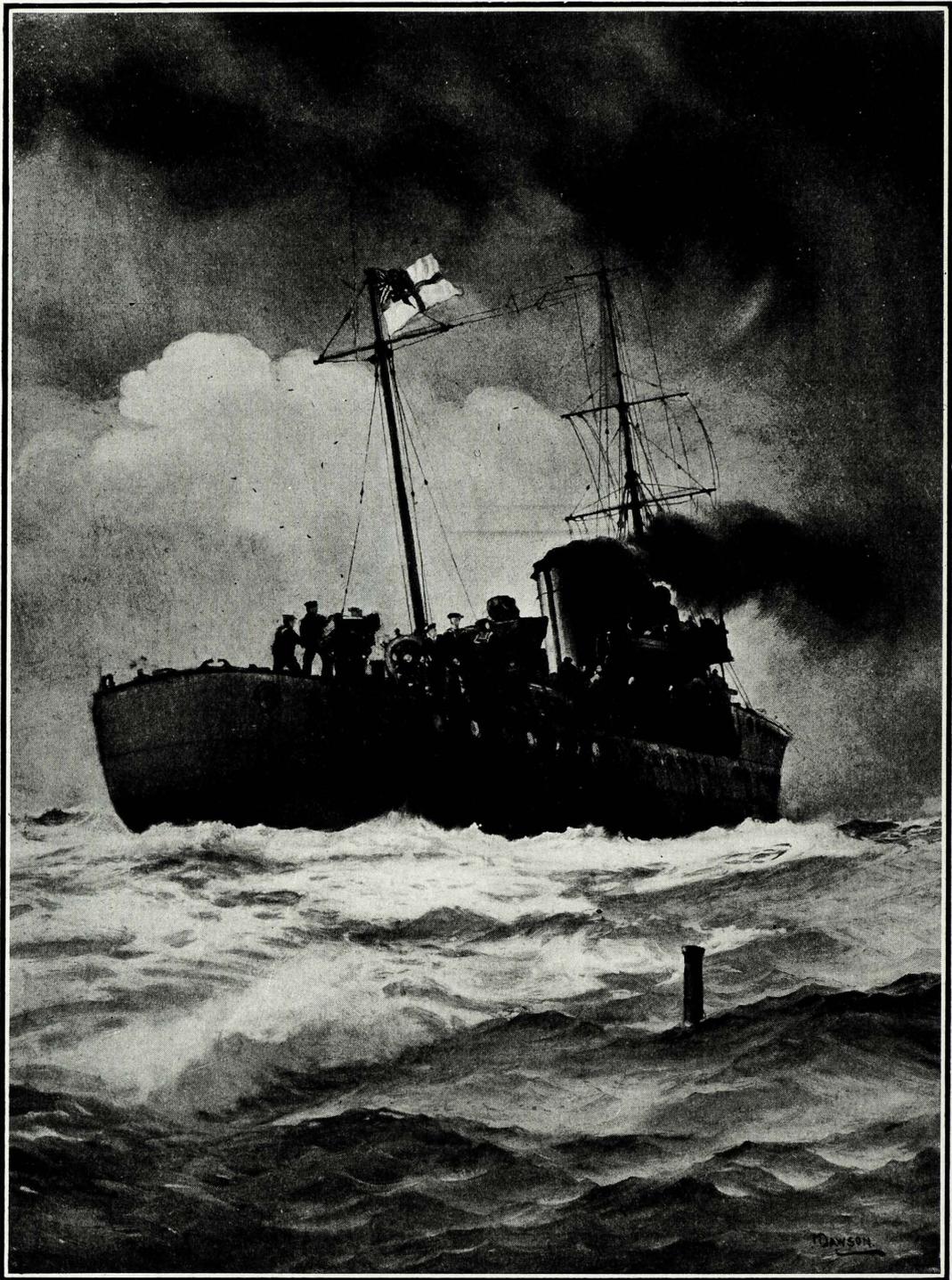
A neutral vessel proceeding to port after obtaining leave from an examination ship.

at great profit. Record after record was made by steam trawlers, drifters, beam-trawlers and smaller craft, and skippers and mates in particular, because of the share system on which they are employed, made abnormal incomes. In April, 1916, a few days before Good Friday, when fish was scarce and prices high, the Hull trawler *Elf King* landed a catch of fish which realized the record sum of £3,670. The same vessel held the previous record of £3,480. The *Elf King* had made the Iceland trip, lasting nearly four weeks, and the skipper's share of the profit came to about £300, being at the rate of nearly £5,000 a year. In other directions there were inevitable hardships, and a correspondent of *The Times* pointed out that the skilled and industrious females who, irrespective of age, are known as fisher-girls, had found their occupation of "gipping" and packing gone, and had taken to munitions, postal work and other uncongenial tasks, though many of them found it hard to make the living to which they had been accustomed.

A remarkable feature of the absorption by the Admiralty of such great numbers of fishermen was the steady effort made by prominent naval officers at naval bases to provide means of satisfying the moral needs of men who were far from home for long periods. Every encouragement, therefore, was given to organizations apart from the Naval Chaplains' Department, such as the Young Men's Christian Association and the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. In this direction Rear-Admiral Ballard showed great interest and resource, and other naval officers did the same. Two of the Mission's fine hospital steamers were taken over by the Admiralty for patrol work, the third became a hospital steamer, at the cost of Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey; one Mission sailing smack was permitted to work amongst the sweepers and patrollers attached to the Grand Fleet, and another was allocated to a great naval base on the North Sea shore. The value of these societies was warmly admitted by officers, who of necessity had had little or no experience in dealing with a class of men who were unaccustomed to the rigid discipline of the Royal Navy, of which they had become a part, and asserted their independence in a manner not in keeping with the strict traditions of the Senior Service.

So ubiquitous were the fishermen in sweepers, patrollers and other craft that there was no great mishap at sea in connection with which

they did not take a part in helping and saving while fishermen were associated with many strange happenings, such as the loss of the German naval airships L 19 and L 15. Reference has been made in the previous chapter to the gallant conduct of the crew of the little Brixham beam-trawler *Providence* when the *Formidable* was torpedoed in the Channel; and the same resource and heroism were shown in all the home and foreign waters when warships, liners and other vessels were lost or damaged through torpedoes wantonly discharged, striking mines, or in action. On the night of January 31, 1916, a squadron of German airships raided some of the Eastern and Midland counties of England, killed a large number of inoffensive civilians, including women and children, and caused serious damage to property. The airships escaped from England, but one of them, which is believed to have shared in the raid, was found, a helpless wreck, floating on the North Sea. The discovery was made by the skipper and crew of a Grimsby steam trawler, the *King Stephen*. The fishermen counted twenty-two Germans on the wrecked airship, and as the trawler carried only nine hands and had no weapons the skipper adopted the only course which was open to him—he declined to rely on the worthless word of such an enemy, and left the airship and reported the matter as soon as he possibly could to a British naval vessel. It was inevitable that there should be in Germany fierce outbursts in referring to the trawler and the airship, and that our North Sea fishermen should be accused of cowardice, brutality and inhumanity. In making these charges the Germans forgot, or did not wish to remember, the courage which was consistently shown by North Sea fishermen in rescuing perishing German sailors and passengers. An outstanding illustration is that of the North German Lloyd Company's express mailboat, *Elbe*, on January 30, 1895, in an exceptionally bitter winter. The loss of this vessel through collision, in itself one of the most terrible disasters to Atlantic liners, had its horror lessened through the skill and courage of North Sea smacksmen, who saved the few survivors. The *Elbe* foundered within twenty minutes. There were 352 people on board, and of these only 20 were saved—rescued by Skipper Wright and his little crew in the smack *Wildflower*. It needed half an hour's excessive effort to haul the trawl, and instantly the skipper fought his way to the boat which



WITH A DESTROYER PATROL.

"Periscope astern to starboard, Sir!"

held the survivors and plucked them from the very grasp of death. The rescued Germans were crowded into the smack's tiny cabin, and were fed and warmed and clothed to the last generous limit, for when the smack reached port there was not even a biscuit left. The

last had been given to Miss Anna Böcker, who was afterwards commanded to Osborne to tell the story of the wreck and rescue to Queen Victoria and the Empress Frederick. That is merely one of unnumbered instances of the courage and skill of our deep sea fishermen.



SHIPPING HELD UP IN THE SCHELDT, ANTWERP.

It was an auxiliary patrol trawler which on April 1, 1916, discovered the wrecked L 15 off the mouth of the Thames. Being everywhere, as they were, fishing vessels were particularly liable to attacks from German airships and such German craft as dared to venture from the refuge of the Kiel Canal and other hiding places. The Germans declared their intention of using all means within their power to destroy British fishing vessels, and on more than one occasion they tried to destroy these vessels by dropping bombs on them from the air. From this peril, against which the fishermen were utterly unable to defend themselves, a number of the men and their craft had amazingly narrow escapes.

In the course of his speech in the House of Commons on March 7, 1916, on the motion for going into Committee on the Navy Estimates, Mr. Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty, paid a warm tribute to the mine-sweepers, the armed trawlers, and other fishermen engaged on war work in various areas. "I am afraid," he said, "I cannot do justice to all that I feel about the work of these men. Necessarily, it is little known to the public. They do not work in the presence of great bodies of men, to admire and applaud them for their gallantry.

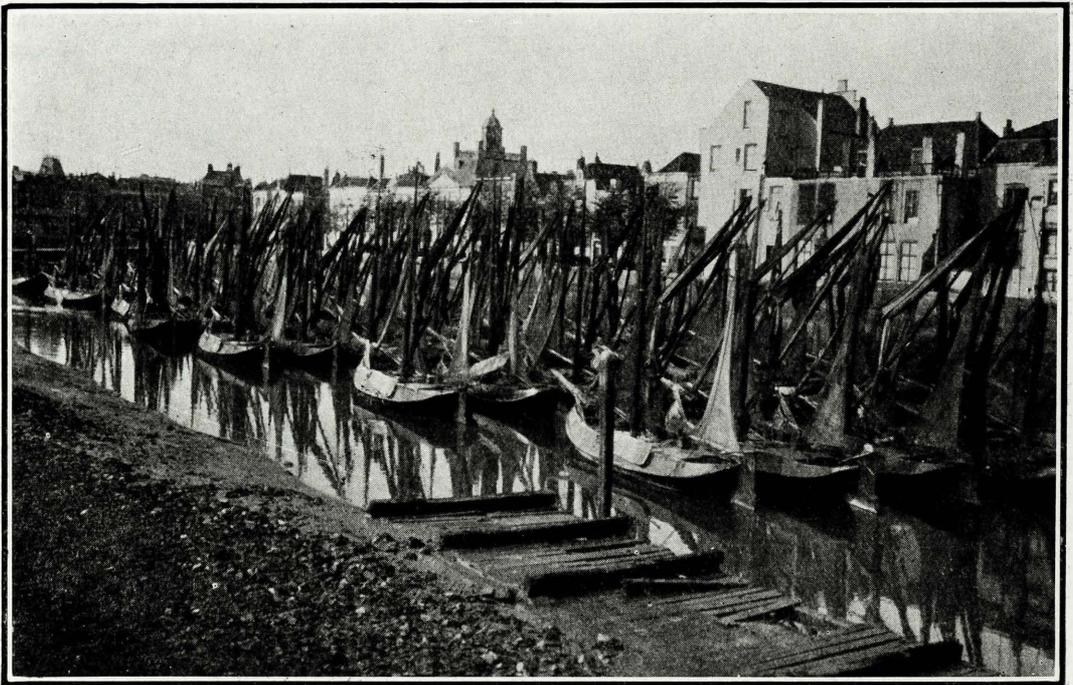
Small crews in stormy seas suddenly face to face with unexpected peril, they never seem to me to fail. No danger, no difficulty, is too great for them. The debt of this country to them is almost incalculable." A short time previously Lord Selborne, speaking in public, declared that our fishermen had been a priceless asset to the nation in connexion with the war. "It was known," he said, "that the Germans would make the mine one of their principal instruments, but we did not realize that the German fleet would not dare to fight, and would resort to mines as almost its sole instruments." He did not know how many mines the Germans had sown round our coasts during the last eighteen months, but he was prepared to risk the statement that it was many, many thousands, of a most extraordinary ingenuity of construction, charged with an explosive calculated to destroy a most powerful ship, and to blow a small fishing craft to matchwood. Many vessels were destroyed in this manner, including some belonging to neutral countries; but, on the other hand, there were some remarkable instances of sweepers and patrollers and larger ships being salvaged, in spite of serious damage sustained through striking mines, owing to the skill and

courage of their crews. Fishermen, accustomed to their little steamboats in time of peace being badly damaged in gales and collision, had acquired the knack of salvaging seemingly hopeless wrecks, so that they were peculiarly well able to bring lame ducks to port and safety.

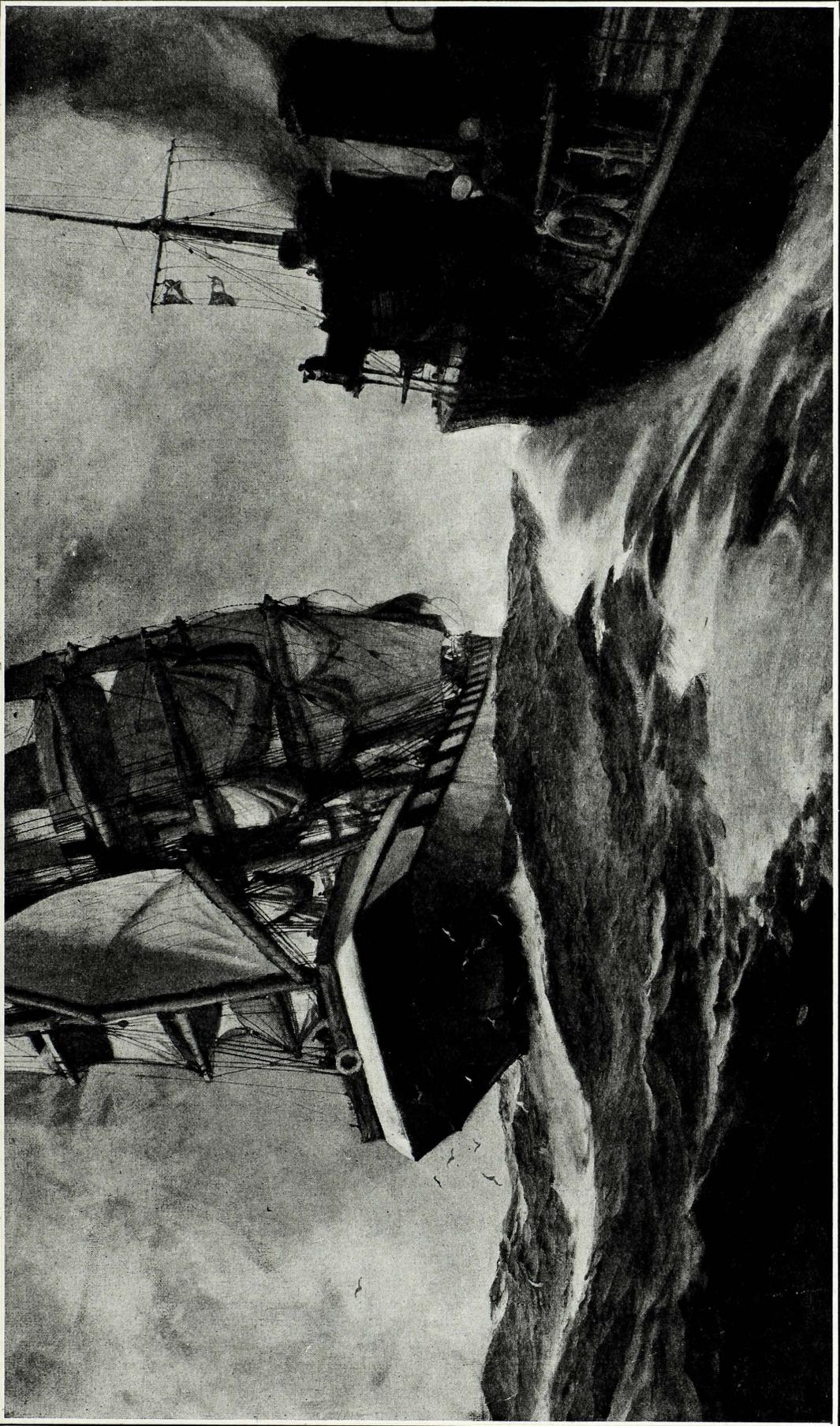
For the purposes of the mine-sweeping the trawlers, by reason of their build and equipment, were with ease and quickness adapted, and under the direction of their skippers, in most cases men who had been given warrant rank and were officially described as "Mr.," they carried out their dangerous work with unflinching fortitude, though many a brave man willingly admitted that at first he found the new and unfamiliar task "a bit nervy." In the other and equally important and perilous work of dealing with enemy submarines, the steam drifters were available in large numbers, ready for immediate service. Just before the outbreak of the war, when the herring season had opened and was in full operation in the north, there were assembled at Lerwick, in the Shetland Islands, between 500 and 600 of these fine and seaworthy little vessels, manned by fishermen who, though they did not keep the deep sea in the same manner as the fleeters and single-boaters, were yet hardy and reliable in every way.

We have seen that the steam trawler worked with a huge net, dragging on the bed of the sea; the drifter adopted a different method, for while the trawler secured the demersal fish the drifter netted the pelagic fish, mostly herrings, which swim close to the surface of the water. Accordingly the drifter when at sea got overboard about a mile of fine netting which hung vertically in the water, and while the vessel drifted with the tide, the fish, dashing in shoals against the net, were caught.

Gathered in from their respective stations on the East Coast, the stout little ships were set to work to take their share in combating the menace of the submarine, not only in the North Sea, but elsewhere, and we know, from official statements, that at least one of them achieved renown in the Dardanelles. Let it be borne in mind that these craft were very small, with cramped deck space and extremely limited cabin accommodation, and that they had practically no freeboard, and the task of getting across the Bay of Biscay and up the Mediterranean will be recognised as no light one. Many steam drifters in use were built of wood, and a representative vessel—oak, built in 1909, was 75 feet long,  $17\frac{1}{2}$  feet broad, and  $8\frac{1}{2}$  feet deep; bunkers, eight tons; and compound engines developing a speed of nine knots. Such a vessel, and there were many like her,



HELD UP OWING TO THE MINES IN THE NORTH SEA.  
A fleet of fishing boats at Flushing.



A BRITISH DESTROYER STOPS A NEUTRAL SAILING SHIP IN NORTHERN WATERS.

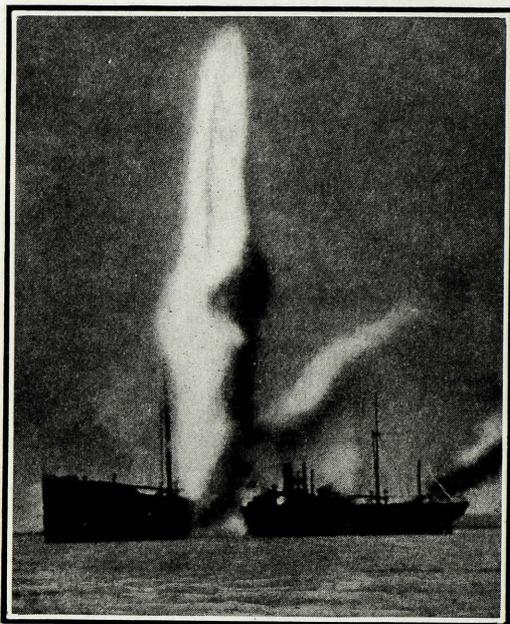
was for sale in March, 1916, and by way of comparison it may be said that at the same time there was on offer a steel-built trawler, constructed in 1908, 126 feet long, 20½ feet wide, and 12¼ feet deep; flush-decked; bunkers, 130 tons; boiler with a working pressure of 180 lbs., engines developing 11 knots; winch, 1,200 fathoms; electric light. These vessels were representative. There were larger craft in both classes, but there were very many smaller, and in these the fishermen had to keep the stormy seas in winter and not only fight the gales, but also run the constant risk of destruction from mines or attack by enemy war vessels.

"We arrived in port after being at sea 19 days, and we sail again in the morning. . . . I should love to spend an hour amongst the flowers, instead of looking for submarines on the briny . . ." wrote one fisherman from sea. "We have had a very stormy week," another reported; while a man over military age said in a letter: "They have taken a lot of trawlers for mine-sweeping and other purposes. When I am better I may go mine-sweeping. I should be doing a little, and it is better for me to let the younger men go in the Naval Reserve. I have just had letters from my two sons—one says he has had terrible weather: four vessels disabled. The other says he is waiting for the Germans to come out. He likes it very well." Later, this man over military age, with the gallant son who was waiting for the Germans, and liked it very well, wrote and said, "I have joined the mine-sweepers." Such was the spirit in which the British fishermen undertook the dangerous duties of their calling in connexion with the war.

In a humorous but very true description of the sweepers and their work the writer of "A Grand Fleet Chaplain's Note-Book," published in the *Westminster Gazette*, said of mines: "There are some kinds that have horns, like a dilemma. . . . Some are arranged to come up to the surface long after they were hidden in the depths, and at unexpected times, like regrettable incidents from a hectic past. Others are constructed with fiendish ingenuity to wait after touching a ship until they have felt out its most vulnerable spot before exploding. Some are made to float about at random; and others, more dangerous still, drift when they were meant to remain anchored. The task of sweeping for all these different brands of tinned doom is almost as great as that of

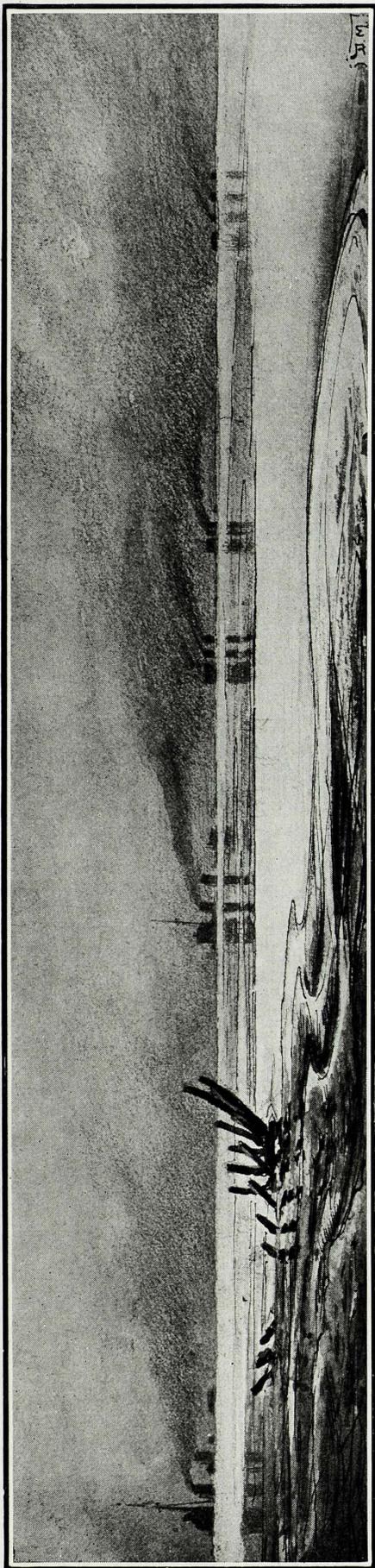
the old lady in the nursery rhyme whose job it was to sweep the cobwebs out of the sky. The labour of Sisyphus was child's play compared to it. For this labour must go on incessantly, over a vast area, and often with a doubt whether the desired results have been fully or only partly accomplished."

In the dispatch issued by the Admiralty on January 12, 1916, from Vice-Admiral Bacon, commanding the Dover Patrol, reference was made to the part played by fishermen in the operations off the Belgian coast between August 22 and November 19, 1915. Three vessels were lost—the armed yacht *Sanda*, sunk by gunfire; the drifter *Great Heart*, sunk by mine, and the mine-sweeper *Brighton*



A VESSEL BEING STRUCK BY A TORPEDO.

*Queen*, sunk by mine. The Admiral said that their lordships would appreciate the difficulties attendant on the cruising in company by day and night under war conditions of a fleet of 80 vessels comprising several widely different classes, manned partly by trained naval ratings, but more largely by officers of the Naval Reserve, whose fleet training had necessarily been scant, and by men whose work in life had hitherto been that of deep sea fishermen. The protection of such a moving fleet by the destroyers in waters which were the natural home of the enemy's submarines had been admirable, and justified the training and organization of the personnel of the flotilla.



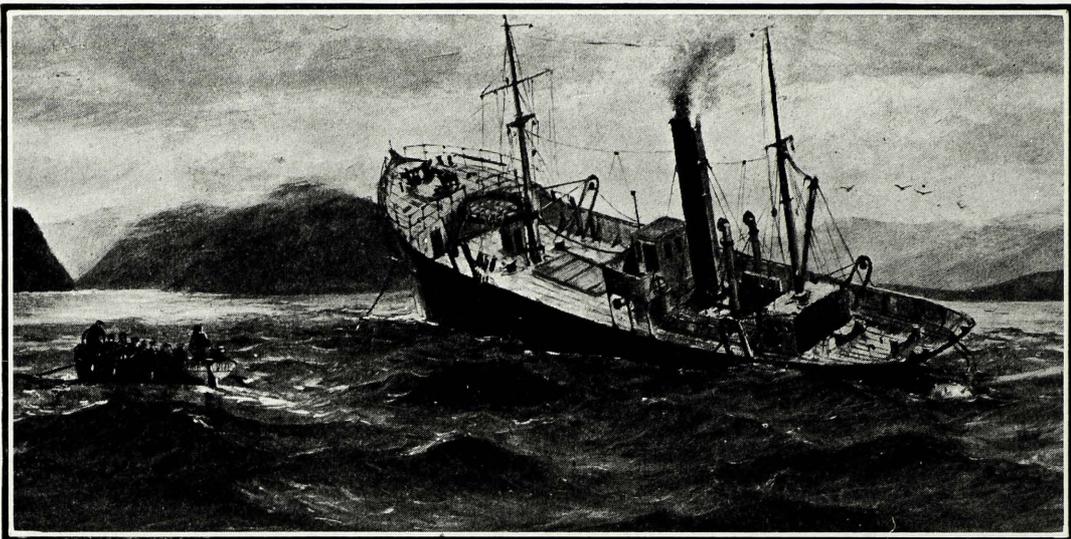
ACROSS THE GOODWINS AT LOW TIDE: A VIEW OF BRITISH DESTROYERS "HULL DOWN."

The Admiral added: "But more remarkable still, in my opinion, is the aptitude shown by the officers and crews of the drifters and trawlers, who in difficult waters, under conditions totally strange to them, have maintained their allotted stations without a single accident. Moreover, these men under fire have exhibited a coolness well worthy of the personnel of a service inured by discipline. The results show how deeply sea adaptability is ingrained in the seafaring race of these islands."

Skipper L. Scarlett, of the drifter *Hyacinth*, was specially recommended for his great coolness in action off Zeebrugge on September 25, when, although he was exposed to heavy gunfire, he remained and completed his task. Mr. Scarlett received the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Distinguished Service Medal was awarded to Second Hand Thomas John Prior; while other skippers and men were commended for service in action. At this period in many directions skippers, second hands, deck hands, enginemen and trimmers in every sphere of sweeping and patrolling were daily showing courage which was acknowledged by the bestowal of the Distinguished Service Medal, and in other ways. These recognitions were naturally a source of the greatest pride to a body of men who previously had been but little in the public eye, and of whom practically nothing was ever heard unless some great calamity happened to a fishing fleet—and then they were soon forgotten. The war in its earliest stages firmly established the deep sea fishermen in an honourable place in the naval defences of the Empire.

In the less exciting work of patrolling and in connexion with motor-boat work fishermen were also of invaluable service, and in these capacities they served all around our coasts and in much more distant regions. Keeping the seas, as they did, in all weathers, they had to endure much discomfort and danger, apart from the perils of war. A skipper of one little vessel never left the bridge for three days and nights owing to the fearful weather, and that sleepless vigil was the experience of many more like him.

The method employed by the Germans in laying mines was made known at the time of the bombardment of Scarborough and the Hartlepoons. In reference to that affair a memorandum was furnished by the Admiral commanding the East Coast mine-sweepers, detailing the mine-sweeping operations off Scarborough. It was stated that from

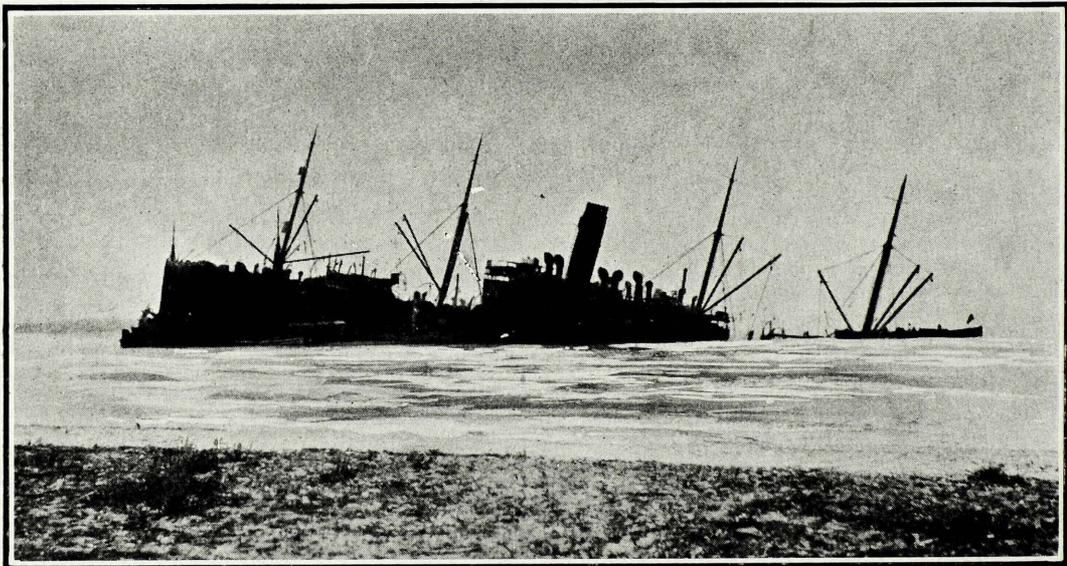


#### AN AWKWARD MOMENT.

A Mine-sweeper drawing a mine up under the stern.

December 19 to December 31, 1914, sweeping operations were conducted with the object of clearing the minefield which had been laid off Scarborough. At the beginning there was no indication of the position of the mines, although, owing to losses of passing merchant ships, it was known that mines had been laid. In order to ascertain how the mines lay it was necessary to work at all times of the tide, with a consequent large increase in the element of danger. Commander Richard H. Walters, R.N., A.M.S. Staff, was in charge of the whole of the mine-sweeping operations from December 19 to December 31. During that period a

large number of mines had been swept up and destroyed, and by Christmas Day a channel had been cleared, and traffic was able to pass through by daylight. It was in association with these operations that Lieutenant Parsons and other officers, already referred to, distinguished themselves. Other officers were specially noticed for their services during the operations. Commander Lionel G. Preston, R.N., H.M.S. Skipjack, on the 19th proceeded at once into the middle of the area where the mines had exploded to give assistance to damaged trawlers. He anchored between the trawlers and the mines which he had brought



THE BRITISH STEAMER "NORDMAN."  
Torpedoed by a German submarine near Kara Burnu.

to the surface, and proceeded to sink them. Skipper Ernest V. Snowline, drifter Hilda and Ernest, was commodore of the flotilla of Lowestoft drifters under Chief Gunner Franklin. He kept to his station in heavy weather, and stood by the steamship Gallier after she had been damaged by a mine. Very fine was the performance of Skipper T. B. Belton, of the drifter Retriever, who, when all the other drifters had been driven in by the weather, kept to his station, marking the safe channel for shipping. A skilful and courageous rescue was effected by Sub-Lieutenant W. L. Scott, R.N.R., of the drifter Principal. He went alongside the trawler Garmo in a dinghy to rescue a man, running great risk to himself and his boat, for at the time the vessel was floating nearly vertical, with only the forecastle

above water. A few minutes after the boat left her she turned completely over and sank.

The lead of the officers in these dangerous operations, all the more dangerous because in those early stages of the war there was not the wide experience in dealing with mines which became available later, was nobly followed by the men, and a number of second hands, engine-men, deck hands and a cook were commended for good service. To those who visited Scarborough and the Hartlepoons soon after the German raid, and looking seaward from amongst the ruins could observe the sweepers at their work, there was brought home with impressive force the vastness of the debt which the country owed to the crews—the skilled, courageous fighters who had been our toilers of the deep.

