The Rudder
The Sloop-of-War St. Mary's

IN former numbers I have written a deal about square-riggers, both of the trading and naval kind, leaving little to be said that would interest you. The vessel we now have in hand is somewhat different from the other men-of-war, whose plans have been printed in earlier issues. She is of much later date, being one of the last, if not the last, sailing sloops built for the United States Navy. It is difficult to say exactly what is meant by the word sloop as defining a naval vessel. Roughly speaking a sloop was a ship-rigged vessel, carrying from ten to twenty-two guns. They were supposed to be smaller than a frigate, but in the British Navy there were sloops larger than vessels rated as frigates. Some of the sloops-of-war employed in the great French war were not over 120 feet long, and of less than 300 tons. But small as was such a hull to be square-rigged, there were at the same time war brigs of 80 feet in length, about the dimensions of a good-sized schooner yacht. When the St Mary's left the ways the screw was just coming into use, and soon after firmly established its supremacy over sail for war purposes, by employing the screw. This invention gave the death blow to sloop men-of-war. So long as paddles had to be used the arguments against steam-driven war craft were strong ones, but the advent of the screw at once knocked the pins from under the whole structure of dangers and doubts.

Previous to this naval officers argued that the only use that could be made of paddle men-of-war in a general action would be to tow the sailing vessels into position, haul off the crippled, and act generally the part of tug boats. As there was no way of protecting their engines and wheels, one lucky shot would put the vessel out of action, and the old salts were decidedly averse to trusting their lives and reputations to the arbitration of a single ball. To-day, after the battle is long over, it is rather amusing to read the warm pamphlets and red-hot letters that the naval men of that day exchanged with each other and with engineers, shipbuilders and other outsiders. The majority of the old naval seamen who had been brought up under sail, and who had fought their countries' battles with the wind for a moving power, detested the steam vessel, and died lamenting the change that had come over naval armaments, owing to its use. It was only when men born during the steam era came into command that the new power was given a chance to show what it could do.

But there is no question, but what one of the pet contentions of the old salt has proven correct. Seamanship as it was practiced in those days has passed away, and with it went the grand old mariner. The commander of our present war vessel is not a seaman, he is simply a navigator, and his men are half blacksmith and half artillerist. The small square-rigged war vessels were splendid training ships for the young officers. To handle a ship like the St Mary's, and to handle her properly, takes more skill than it does to handle the biggest and fastest liner afloat. A man brought up in steam will promptly deny this, but any man who spent his years of apprenticeship jamming wind will endorse the statement from capital letter to final period.

It will be noticed that in the sail plan the sloop is shown with single topsails; she is also rigged man-o'-war fashion in the picture, showing her at anchor. In another picture of her under sail with the wind on the quarter, she is seen to be carrying double topsails like a merchantman. This rig was given her after she became a schoolship in order that the boys might have practice with the sort of sail, they would have to handle in the merchant service. The St Mary's was built from the county of St Mary's, in Southern Maryland, was built at the Navy Yard, Washington, D. C., in 1843-44. The orders for the commencement of the work were issued on June 6, 1843. The St Mary's was launched, October 24, 1844, was toed to Norfolk, Va., in December, for the completion of her rigging and equipment, was commissioned in November, 1844, and ordered to relieve the Fairfield in the Mediterranean Squadron, but, however, joined the Home Squadron. The following is a short summary of her life from the date of launching until the breaking out of the Civil War:


In June, 1845, St. Mary's, 20 guns, was part of the Gulf Squadron under Commodore Conner, and was on the blockade of the coast of Mexico, when war was declared in 1846. In November, in connection with Raritan and Potomac rendezvoused off Tompico, and captured that port, and assisted in the landing of troops at Vera Cruz, in November, 1847.

Oct. 14, 1853, the St. Mary's sailed from Philadelphia for the Pacific Station, and cruised from Valparaiso, Chili, to Sitka, and among the islands of the Pacific; was repaired at Mare Island, in 1858. In 1861 was repairing at Navy Yard, Mare Island. The commanding officer of the Pacific Station left urgent orders to expedite repairs, and as soon as ready for sea to go to Manzanilla and co-operate with the Cyane under Commander Bissel, in the protection of the Pacific mail steamers. In 1861, while under repairs at the Navy Yard, Mare Island, the rudder, which the St. Mary's now has, was built by the Chief Constructor, Admiral Hitchborn, then serving as a journeyman shipwright at the Navy Yard, Mare Island, the entire work from the selecting of the log to the hanging of the rudder being performed by Admiral Hitchborn.

Aug. 7, 1861, orders were sent to the commanding officer, Commander Middleton, to proceed as soon as prepared for sea to relieve the Cyane, cruising off Cape San Lucar.

Aug. 29, 1861, the Saranac was ordered to relieve the St. Mary's off Cape San Lucar, which vessel was ordered to cruise along the upper coast of California, from San Francisco to San Niguel, off Santa Barbara to protect mail steamers.

In May, 1863, was stationed as guard ship at Panama, for the protection of the Panama Railroad. Sept. 22, 1863, was ordered, upon the reporting of relief ship Cyane, to proceed to Talcahuano, Chili, and to cruise along the coast of South America, as far as Valparaiso, then back to Panama, to arrive on or before March 1, 1864. Was at Panama, March 24, 1864, and remained until March, 1865, when on being relieved by the Cyane, sailed for Callao, to protect American interests at Chincha Islands.

Feb. 27, 1865, the commanding officer reported that, it had been learned that plans had been made to construct torpedoes and blow the St. Mary's up; this was frustrated by Captain Middleton. Was at Callao, Peru, May 28, 1865, commanded by Geo. M. Colcroce, who reported the expected arrival in Peruvian waters of the Confederate steamer Shenandoah, that he would go to the Chincha Islands to protect American vessels. June 10, 1865, same officer reported nothing further had been heard of the Shenandoah, and that there were thirty American
ships there waiting for cargoes, and that he was going to cruise between the Islands and Callao, to protect our commerce.

The Norwich, Conn., Bulletin of June, 1872, published the following story of Captain Colvocoresses's experience during the latter part of the war, when in command of the little sloop of war St. Mary's, which then comprised nearly all the effective force of the Pacific squadron:

"He chanced to be on duty in Valparaiso, when that port was menaced by a powerful Spanish squadron under the command of Admiral Pinzon, and was exceedingly active in his efforts to protect the rights and property of American citizens. For his success, as well as for a famous correspondence with the Spanish admiral, he will be long remembered there. Somewhat inexplicably, he sailed in one morning from a short cruise outside, and anchored the St. Mary's directly in front of the business portion of the city, and between it and the iron-clad ships of the Spaniard.

"Pinzon saw the awkwardness of the situation, and in a characteristically arrogant note informed him that he had better move his corvette, as he intended to bombard the place, and would not be answerable for any damages that might result. This roused the ire of the Greek, and he hastened to inform the Spanish Admiral in language that was a model of explicitness and force, that the St Mary's was anchored to his perfect satisfaction, and would remain where she was, and added further:

"In the event of a bombardment of the city, I beg you, sir, to remind you that none of your shot touch the hull of the St. Mary's. I am perfectly aware of the weakness of my corvette in comparison with the powerful squadron of her most Catholic Majesty, now blockading the port, but I beg, sir, to remind you that the flag that floats at her peak represents 3,000 guns on the sea."

"The correspondence was printed in the Spanish papers, and besides creating the greatest enthusiasm for the plucky captain, rather opened the eyes of the Chilenos to the fact that the leerails and lee quarter boats were in the water, she behaved admirably, however, as she always does, lying-to beautifully, shipping no water and without laboring, although her heavy battery would be trying, were she not so strong and staunch. At daylight the gale moderated, the vessel having been hove-to for 24 hours, and although it was still blowing hard, and a heavy sea running, the proximity of the land, with a current setting in, rendered it judicious to proceed ahead. The hatches were battened down and all the necessary preparations made for scudding. A smooth time was watched for, and the vessel kept off before the wind and sea. A fine boat does not float, and as for speed she has never been excelled."

Touching at St. Thomas, the St. Mary's arrived at Norfolk, June 3, 1873, completing her last cruise as a regular cruising naval vessel. During this cruise of three years and four months the vessel visited all the principal ports of the western coast of North and South America and islands of the South Sea, including Australia and New Zealand, and sailed over 65,000 miles.

After the passage of the act of June 20, 1874, to encourage the establishment of public marine schools, and upon the request of the Governor of New York for a vessel, the St. Mary's was selected as the best available vessel. She was towed to Boston by the Powhatan for the request, leaving Fortress Monroe, Sept. 7, 1874, arrived at Boston, Sept. 10. After repairs amounting to $13,494,87, were completed at Boston, the Gettysburg towed the St. Mary's to New York, leaving Boston, Dec. 8, 1874.

The vessel was delivered to the New York City authorities, and has to the present time continued to be used as the Public Marine School of the City of New York, making summer cruises for the instruction of the boys. The principal dimensions of the St. Mary's are as follows:

- Length between perpendiculars: 150 feet
- Breadth: 37 feet 6 inches
- Mean draught: 15 feet 6 inches
- Displacement: 1,025 tons
- Tonnage, gross: 260.54 lbs.
- Hold: 16 feet 6 inches
- Ballast: 5 to 18 tons
- Water: 25,000 gallons
- Provisions: 6 months

Original battery was 18 32-pdr., and 4 8-inch guns. The battery in 1860 was 6 8-inch of 55 cut.; 16 32-pds. of 42 cut.; 1 12-pdr light. The original cost complete ready for sea was $201,372.91. Reports by different commanders:

- Maximum draught, 17 feet, and sails best when trimmed about 28 inches by the stern. "Sails, steers and works well, is very easy on her spars, rigging and cables—1846." "Makes bad stowage on account of the size of her tanks—1847."
- "Sails indifferently well; steers easily, but rolls and works badly, and stands up well under canvas—1845.
- "Was 420 days at sea during her last cruise in the East Indies and Pacific." Her commander reported her remarkably weatherly and a fine sea boat. In other respects, speaks as favorably of her general qualities as the report of her first cruise.
By NINETY-SIX OF SEVENTY-NINE

SOMETIMES during the year seventy-nine, after many years of dreaming, I put my little feet on the first square-rigger I had ever seen, and the planks upon which I made my initial sea steps were part and parcel of the trim old ship St. Mary's. Years before having seen the real ship, I had sailed everything, from a ten-foot plant up to a "home-made" flat-bottom boat. As a river and creek mariner I was more or less successful, and never failed to get a good trouncing every time the Old Man found out that I had been indulging in the primitive navigation which our home waters afforded. My Pater had put me down as a future coal-heaver or admiral, and if the truth were known he didn't care much.

Years before, the St. Mary's, I will tell you just what they did to me and for me from the time I went "up stairs" over her old deck When we entered here we were told to strip. Then the doctor gave us a close physical examination. I was one of those that passed, and was duly entered on the ship's roster. Then I was given a list of things to wear—a suit of slickers, rubber boots, etc., etc. A New York tailor measured me for my clothes, and in about a week I reported aboard. After my kit had been examined and passed I was allotted to gun No. 5. My number, "96," was stenciled on everything, and I was ready for business. The first few weeks were spent in going to school, practicing on the monkey yard, reciting the compass, lowering and hoisting boats and getting into routine work.

Early in May we commenced the work of preparation for sea. We were taught how to scrape, sandpaper, varnish, paint, holystone, slush down, tar down and get a q-irtermaster's or petty officer's berth on any ship. The ship was towed up to Glen Cove, and while we lay here we were taught how to handle the small boats.

The crew numbered about 120 boys. There were, I think, ten able-bodied seamen to teach us. We handled that ship from keel to truck and sailed her from port to port. The officers are the instructors. They are Naval Academy graduates and commissioned officers in the United States Navy. They took great interest in us, and we all progressed rapidly. By the time the ship left Glen Cove we knew the ropes, knew our stations and were ready for business. Our first port was New London. We provisioned here and then put to sea. The ship reached Lisbon, Portugal, in twenty-six days, and we boys were old tars when the "Dago" came aboard to take us up the Tagus. I will never forget that anchor. We had both bowers out, with over a hundred athwart each. It was the 3d of July when we went to the windlass to walk that chain up. As we had no swivel, our chains fouled, and it was a hard job to get everything cleared up. We sailed to Funchal, Madeira, next, and laid there for several days. From Funchal we laid our course for home, taking the trades to the coast. For ten days we had stuns'ls on her, and never touched a rope yarn. After reaching New London, in August, a few weeks were spent cruising about the Sound and up Newport way. In October we made fast to the dock at 23d street.

During the cruise, which always lasts from May to October or November, the b.ys are taught how to hand, reef and steer; they are also taught navigation, sail-making, splicing, carpenter work—in fact, everything a sailor should know. The ship is a first-class school, because she is under the direction of the best educated naval officers on earth. The men who train the future admirals of the navy train the boys on the Saint Mary's. I have tried to give a rough idea of what the old ship's routine is—how the boys are treated and what they are taught. Many of the graduates never go to sea, but a great many of them do, and our merchant marine is full of fine office. ho first bit tack on the good old St. Mary's. Any boy with a liking for the sea, but who can't stand the idea of commencing in the fo'castle of a "perfumed" coaster, can learn his trade in the St. Mary's, and get a q-irtermaster's or petty officer's berth on any of the big American lines if his "grad." papers rate him well.