

three classes of potential recruit. One consisted of adults, and to these we shall return shortly. The other two classes were composed of boys whose normal ages would average 14 or 15, though some were as much as 17, some as little as 12. The surviving books of the Society seem to show that many were boys of the unwanted or waif class, or of those who had been in minor trouble. They came mostly from poor but respectable homes, some from the country, but more from the towns. The Society took them in, brushed them up, clothed and fed them. Most of them appear to have been in need of this last attention, for the records of the height of every one of them, meticulously entered in the books, show that, on the average, they were very small for their age. To some of them the Society gave an elementary grounding in seamanship and even a (very rudimentary) dose of the 'three R's', keeping them for as much as four months. But most of them it had for only a few days. It then disposed of them as they were applied for. In peace-time they went mostly into the Merchant Service, in wartime mostly into the Royal Navy; and they reached the warships under one of two names—'Apprentices' and 'Servants'. The details of each category are carefully kept, in separate books. The former were fully-articled and legally protected apprentices, with proper indentures covering, usually, a term of five years. The 'masters' in these contracts were mostly the Warrant Officers of the ships of war—the Gunners, Boatswains, Carpenters, etc.: but occasionally—and strangely—a Captain was a 'master'. Once on board, these lads were absorbed into the small 'families' or coteries of the various heads of departments. These were odd, tight, even jealous little corporations existing in every ship, made possible by the fact that these departmental heads were 'standing' officers, who were fixtures (like the 'standing rigging') each in his own ship for years on end, and not, like the commissioned officers and the ship's company, people who left when their ships paid off (see p. 261). The boys 'apprenticed' to them would, if lucky, rise slowly in their department, and might finally emerge as head of it, *via* the ratings of Gunner's (or Carpenter's) Mate or Purser's Clerk. The number of apprentices was quite large in peace-time, but much rarer in wartime.

The other group went on board as 'Servants', and without articles. They were usually dispatched in drafts, sometimes up to twenty strong, to the Captain of a ship about to commission, and were by him distributed to such of his officers as were entitled to personal servants—which they were and how many each was allowed we shall see later. The