

In 1896 Sir John Jackson entered into a contract with the Board of Trade, by which his firm was permitted to dredge sand and gravel opposite Hallsands for the purpose of constructions in Devonport Dockyard. Some 650,000 yards appear to have been removed. In 1901 the sea-walls at the south end of the village were undermined, and the beach level was found to be reduced 7 feet in height. At Wilson's Rock the corresponding reduction in height was 12 feet. In the following year the sea-wall fell, and by definite stages the wrecking of the coast-line progressed. The *coup de grâce* to the entire hamlet of Hallsands was given in a violent north-easterly gale in January, 1917.

It will thus be noted that, under the specific authority of the Board of Trade as now constituted, authority was granted to carry out operations, the effect of which was for practical purposes the destruction of a coast-line of immemorial stability.

Plate XXVIII and figs. 52 and 53 illustrate the sequence of events. Plate XXIX, the reproduction of a photograph of Hallsands taken in 1917, shows the fifth act of the tragedy and the logical sequel of organized denudation under departmental control.

Speaking broadly, Commissioners of Levels and Sewer Commissioners are bodies whose functions are exercised, without pay or recompense, by country gentlemen. Their procedure may be in some instances antiquated in form, but public affairs in their hands are, in the vast majority of cases, administered with economy and fairness. In spite of many notable instances to the contrary, small corporations and urban district councils have not proved themselves ideal instruments of government. Men of administrative capacity are apt to hold themselves aloof from their deliberations. It would be distinctly a retrograde step to increase the power of the urban authority at the expense of that of Commissioners of Levels.

In Appendix No. VII, p. 274, is given a list¹ of the Commissions of Levels and of other authorities who exercise statutory control over foreshore lands and lands liable to tidal flooding, and in the case of those marked (*) their jurisdiction abuts on the sea-coast.

These authorities, however, have jurisdiction only over

¹ See Appendix XLIV of *Report of Royal Commission on Coast Erosion*.