

Progress of New Zealand's Mercantile Marine

1840-1906

INTRODUCTION.

BY FRANK T. BULLEN.

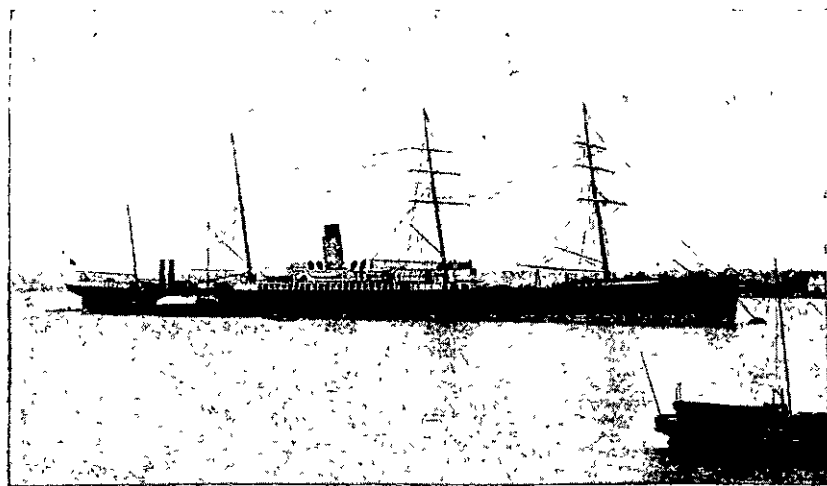
NOTHING could have given me greater pleasure, in a literary way, than the invitation which I received from PROGRESS to edit these articles on the progress of New Zealand's mercantile marine. This wonderful group of islands, far in the Southern Sea, has always, from my first visit to it 35 years ago, had firm hold upon my imagination, and, also, for many reasons on my affections. In those far-off days the coastal service was mainly carried on by means of sailing vessels—small schooners of fine lines, mostly built in Auckland. There were a few steamers running between Australia and New Zealand, mostly obsolete craft of low power and scanty accommodation, owned by the A.S.N. Co., of Sydney, and Messrs. McMeckan, Blackwood & Co., of Melbourne. Amongst those ancient craft were the Wentworth, in which I sailed, and the City of Melbourne, of the A.S.N. Co., the Claud Hamilton, the Hero and the Omeo, of Melbourne. I well remember the stir that was created when McMeckan and Blackwood brought out the Ringarooma and the Arawata to run between Melbourne and Otago three or four years later; this being at the time of my second visit to New Zealand in one of the fine sailing ships of the New Zealand Shipping Co., the Rangitiki,

upon me how great had been the strides made by the Union Company within thirty years. Unfortunately, I was then unable to go to Dumbarton but not very long after I resolved to revisit New Zealand and see for myself. The result has indeed been a revelation to me! I find that New Zealand is served by a fleet of coasting steamships, in the hands of the Union Company and Messrs. Huddart Parker that may triumphantly challenge comparison with any similar service in the world! I hardly think I should say "similar" service, because it is scarcely possible to find a coastal service like yours, except in Australia, which is "out here" anyway. The British India Company's coastal service, splendidly conducted though it is, is of a very different nature, and caters generally for a very dissimilar class of passenger; while the vessels, owing to the much easier conditions of weather on the Indian littoral, are of a distinctly lower type all round. Now, the rise and progress of this great service, of the Union Company principally, with its feelers already stretching in the direction of a fine inter-oceanic trade to the far East, as well as to British North America and the Enchanted Isles, is a tale well worthy the telling an inspiring and elevating story of how a people, numerically so feeble and situated in the remotest corner of the globe from the old civilisations, have grappled with and overthrown all the difficulties attendant upon the establishment of a local mercantile marine; and, not content with

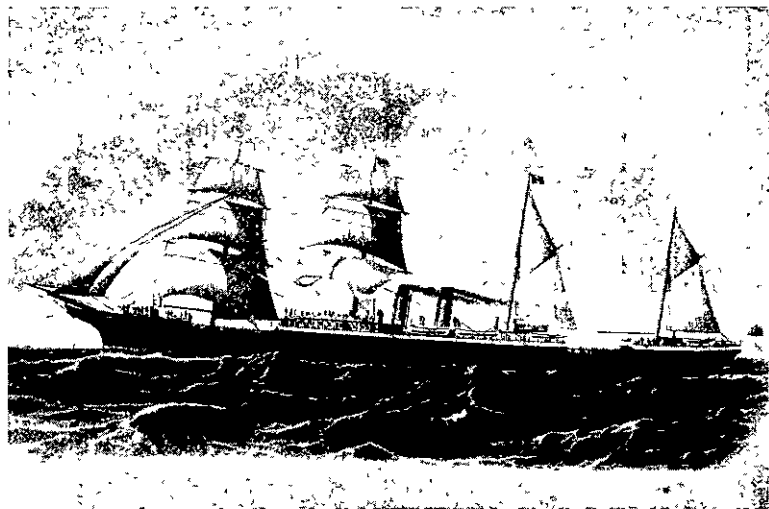
replace their old sailing ships by steamers which were principally chartered vessels. They were fortunate at the outset in securing the co-operation of the splendid White Star Line of Messrs. Ismay, Imrie & Co., who had already sent out several of their ships—notably the old Oceanic, the earliest "greyhound" of the Atlantic, to trade between San Francisco, Japan and China. The old Doric and Ionic will be well remembered as the earliest of these fine chartered vessels of the Shaw Savill line; and the arrangement then entered into with the great Liverpool firm has existed ever since, though now the ships chartered are of such huge dimensions as 12 300 tons. Two splendid vessels, the Arawa and Tainui, were built for the Company, and made a great reputation, both for speed and comfort; the Arawa, indeed, making a passage Home from New Zealand in a time which I believe still constitutes an unbeaten record, viz.: 34 d. 17 hr 23 m. But they have both passed into the realm of obsolete vessels which, under other names, are still earning dividends in different parts of the world.

EARLY DAYS.

In dealing with so extensive a subject as the progress of New Zealand's mercantile marine it is necessary that some system of procedure be adopted in order to present a statement of events in their proper order of sequence.



THE BRITISH KING, 3,559 TONS, PIONEER OF THE DIRECT NEW ZEALAND ROYAL MAIL SERVICE IN 1883, BUILT IN 1881 BY HARLAND AND WOLFF, BELFAST, FOR THE BRITISH SHIP OWNERS CO., LIVERPOOL. THIS VESSEL RAN UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE NEW ZEALAND SHIPPING CO.



THE SPLENDID OLD ARAWA, 5,026 TONS, WHICH HOLDS THE RECORD FROM NEW ZEALAND TO LONDON, WAS BUILT AND ENGINEED IN 1884 BY DENNY, OF DUMBARTON, FOR THE SHAW, SAVILL AND ALBION CO. Photo supplied by A. H. Turnbull Esq.

At that time the harbours of New Zealand were thronged with fine sailing ships, principally owned by Messrs. Shaw Savill, Patrick Henderson, and the N.Z. Shipping Co., which firms carried on the communication between the Old Country and her vigorous daughter in the Far South. The names of these ships are household words—the Jessie Readman, Margaret Galbraith, May Queen, Rangitiki, Waimate, Piako, Lady Jocelyn, Hydaspes, Pleione and so on—a long list of clippers whose names thrill with remembrance many of the old and well-known citizens.

In that day the New Zealand coasting trade was in its infancy, and I well remember the tender beginnings of the Union Company, with such vessels as the Beautiful Star, Tataroa, and the Maori, and the great strides in advance represented in the Wakatipu and the Hawea. Since then, having been roaming all over the world, and without any correspondents in New Zealand that would impress upon me the rapid strides she was making in the building up of her mercantile marine, I had lost touch with the great business. And although I heard, of course, an occasional word or two at Home about fine new ships being built for the New Zealand coasting trade, those scrappy items of news did not affect me much until one day last year when I received an invitation from my old friend, Captain Neville, to come to Glasgow and see his new steamship, the turbine-propelled Maheno. He enclosed details, and as I stared with amazement at them for the first time, it dawned

having accomplished that great feat, have made their service the best conducted, the best paid, the most comfortable and, withal, the cheapest for passengers in the whole world.

In dealing with mercantile-marine development in New Zealand this chronicle would be incomplete were we to omit somewhat extended mention of the weighty services rendered to New Zealand by the great companies which have inaugurated, kept up, and wonderfully developed communications with the Mother Country. First of all, I would place the New Zealand Shipping Co., established as a line of sailing ships, with a great deal of New Zealand capital, for the purpose of competing with the Shaw Savill and Patrick Henderson lines. That fine fleet of sailing ships was the nursery of a very large number of New Zealand-born youths who are now in command of fine vessels all over the world, and who are found in many high positions in the nautical communities of their native colony. But it is to be noted with much satisfaction that the New Zealand Shipping Co., foreseeing at a very early date the huge development of steam, turned their attention in that direction most successfully, the result being the fine fleet of steamers possessed by them to-day, which all make the long sea run round the world to and from New Zealand, *via* the Capes of Good Hope and the Horn, a voyage conspicuous both for safety and comfort.

In like manner did Messrs. Shaw, Savill & Co., adding the word "Albion" to their ancient title,

If our articles were to include a historical account of every company or every ship that has contributed to the present importance of New Zealand's mercantile marine, they would be too lengthy and irksome in the reading. Therefore, as we require to give, in as brief a manner as possible, a fairly complete account from the earliest days, we have eliminated anything that would deal at length with one particular phase, and substituted an aggregation of continuous events of first interest—a course which will no doubt, find general favour with our readers.

Going back into the dim past we are reminded that on the 22nd January, 1840, the first settlers arrived in New Zealand in the sailing ship Aruora, and from that day onwards, until 1860, there was no regular communication between the United Kingdom and New Zealand, although sailing ships arrived occasionally with emigrants. In this year the first regular line was started from London by the Shaw, Savill Co. and at about the same time Patrick Henderson & Co. (The Albion Shipping Co.) commenced a service from Glasgow; yet it was not until 1863 that any Homeward trade began to assert itself. This commenced with the export of wool, and it certainly increased very rapidly. From that date the history of the great shipping companies, which have afforded the means of conveyance for the surplus population of the Old Country to the brighter shores of our colonial possessions, is really the history of the expansion of England.