

MEN WHO GO DOWN TO THE SEA

SHE was called Antiope and she was built in 1865 for Joseph Heap and Sons, of Liverpool, for the rice trade. She made her first voyage to Melbourne in 65 days, under Captain Withers, after being becalmed on the Line for 10 days.

"Which shows what she could do," said Mr. Renner, "when you think that the Thermopylae, the ship that held the record from London to Melbourne, took 63 days.

SHE had a variety of experiences. She was captured by the Japanese when under the Russian flag in the Russo-Japanese War.

When she was bound for Bluff from Newcastle in 1913 she went ashore at Port Chalmers and lay on the rocks for two years, until an inquisitive reporter was out seeing her one day and found out where the hole was. Largely through his observation, she was refloated, and recommissioned again in 1915 for the Otago Rolling Mills.

One of Her Apprentices

FRANCIS M. RENNER, aged 14, went with her as one of the apprentices.

"Why?" I asked again.

"Well," said Mr. Renner, "my father was the first oldest son in our family who hadn't gone to sea for something like seven or eight generations."

The tug of the generations.

IT would have been queer if he hadn't gone to sea. He left Wellington under Captain James Broadhouse bound for Suva in ballast. They loaded copra there and went Home round the Horn.

It wasn't luxury touring on those journeys round the Horn. There was that time they struck the black cyclone off Rio, the pampero cyclone, bred inland, that swept dust, sand and insects out to the ship and blew a really dangerous wind.

"We had shortened sail, but she threw the ship on to her beam-ends so fiercely that we were thrown out of our bunks."

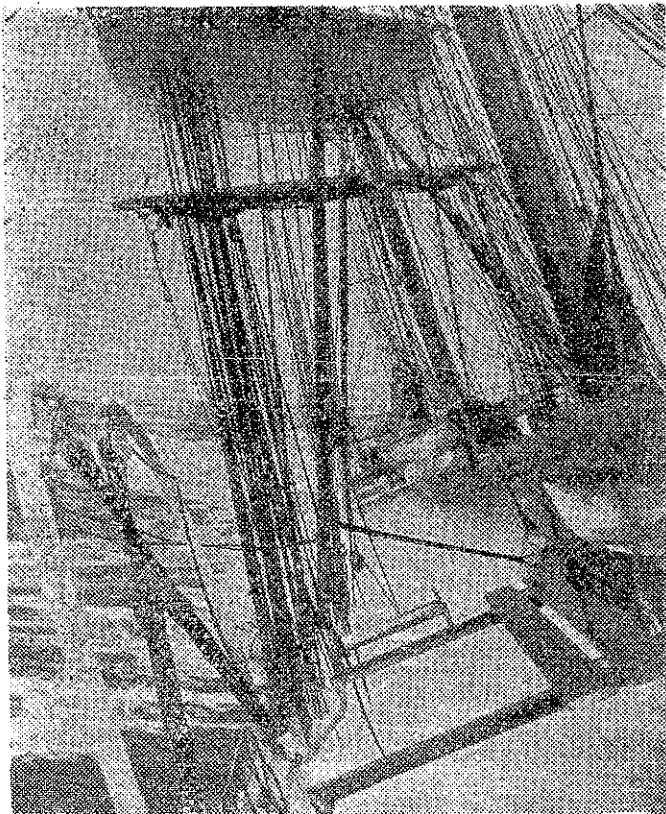
There was that time they ran out of potatoes between Suva and the Horn, and all they had for 70 days was pork and beans. Hashed for breakfast, boiled for dinner, baked for tea.

THE Antiope arrived in the English Channel and was taken in tow to Rotterdam. She was put in dry dock there, and the youngster Renner saw the remarkable durability of iron as against steel. The ship had been built for over 50 years, and her bottom plates right up to the water-line were absolutely solid. They showed no sign of rust or erosion.

The youngster took a boat and paddled round the ship to study her. The hull was sound, but on the water-line he saw a number of small holes, particularly at the bow of the vessel. Going round the ship he twice put the boathook through the ship's plates between the wind and water-line.

THEY left Rotterdam for Viborg in Finland, sailing up into the Baltic. But at Stockholm the ship was advised that the Gulf of Finland was full of mines and that they would have to tow from there to Viborg. This was in 1917, the year of war. From Viborg they sailed off for Delagoa Bay, and while there the youngster deserted and stowed away with a friend on the American ship Lake Gratis.

"An extraordinarily cranky vessel," said Mr. Renner, "built by the mile and cut off by the yard. She was one of those built by the U.S.A. to capture world trade during the war."



—Photo by Spencer Digby.

FRANCIS M. RENNER.

... One expected a tarry old salt.

THE phrase, "a cranky" ship, reminded me of something that I wanted to ask him. Did ships really have those human, and sometimes inhuman, traits? The former sailor had no doubt about it.

There was one ship that would balk, he remembered. The skipper was trying to get the ship to come about going up a narrow sound in the face of a head wind. She refused to come about, she missed her stays every time. Until by chance when a young apprentice took the wheel, the ship went round. Every time the boy went to the wheel there was no chance of the ship missing her stays.

And there were some ships well known as man-killers. Others never lost a man. The Thermopylae never lost one, and the Cutty Sark only one, and that through no fault of hers.

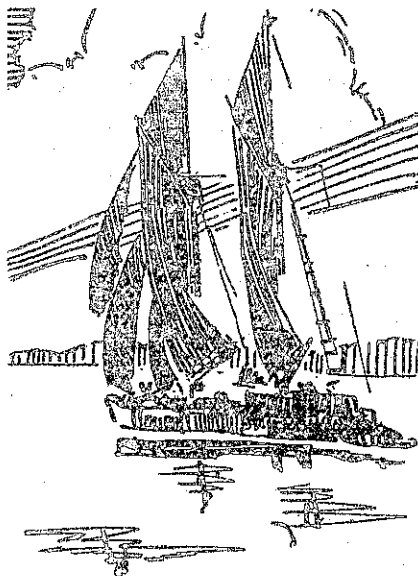
Ships had their ways, all right.

Stowaways

THE Lake Gratis had a cargo of pit-props for the mines in Sunderland. While the two young stowaways were in hiding on deck the ship took a toss in the North Sea and fell to a list of 37 degrees. All the deck cargo went overboard and the stowaways quickly came out of their hiding-place.

They avoided jail at Sunderland for stowing away and were offered jobs by the skipper of the Gratis at £20 a month. Luxury, indeed, for on the Antiope, as apprentices, they had got only 13/4 a month.

THEN began a series of voyages all over the world for Francis Renner. He was in the States for a time, including seven days "on the beach" (out of work) in New York; trips to the East in the City of Hankow; and a call at Delagoa Bay, in which he saw again the old (Contd. on p. 43.)



... Vanishing Days of Sail.