

DOWN TO THE SEA



Off The American Coast In Water Like Molten Iron

IT is a shock when you go to interview what you think will be a tarry old salt drawing away at a short clay and he turns out to be a lively young city business man.

You feel cheated a bit at first; it seems just another of Life's dirty tricks in destroying one's boyhood illusions.

UNTIL he begins to talk about his days under sail. Then it starts to become real. You begin to see a ship taking shape in your mind's eye, and on board it a youngster, about 14 years old.

The ship goes spinning sweetly along through the lazy Pacific; she hits a cyclone off the Horn that comes from the interior, bringing a black, blinding cloud of dust and living insects and rain that is so heavy it suffocates. . . .

The ship goes on her journey to the North Atlantic, where she ships a green sea of water in a great wall. The boy goes floating away up to the bows of the ship and then aft. The water brings him to an iron door in the bulwarks that opens to let heavy seas out.

The youngster is swept halfway through the door, but the ship lurches upright again and the door slams against his back. His mates grab him in time. . . .

Seven Years Under Sail

GRADUALLY, as the man in a Wellington office talks, you begin to forget your childish regret that he is not the traditional salt. You forget about his dark-grey business-like suit and his small toothbrush moustache.

UNTIL the end of the interview, when he brings you back from his seven years of journeyings under sail, back to the office room and the papers on the desk and the toothbrush moustache.

"It's a fine thing," he said, "the sea in a sailing ship. It's a fine thing to have been on it, and I like telling listeners about it on the radio.

IN a Wellington business office a youngish man in typical city clothes took me, one morning last week, for a fascinating journey. We crossed many seas, called at foreign ports, ate queer foods. Sixty minutes later we were home again, in the business office. It is a journey that he often makes with listeners in his radio talks for the NBS. He is Francis M. Renner, one of the men who have been down to the sea in ships in the days of sail. . . .

Interview by JACK DAW

"WHENEVER I feel restless, I've just got to sit down in the evening and begin to write out a radio talk or a play on the sea and I get cured. I've been back there again in my mind."

LISTENERS seem to enjoy it, too, when

Mr. Francis M. Renner gives his tales of the sea in talks for the NBS. He has given 40 so far, and written a number of radio plays of the sea. "Barenetha" and "Flying Horse Clipper" are two of them, and another has just been accepted.

"My object in doing radio work," he says, "is that I believe there is a tremendous amount of valuable history in the story of endeavour in sail, and there is so little done to-day to perpetuate the memory of what was done by these ships to make the way easy for the luxury liners of these times. I want to do my share to perpetuate that memory."

But Not Tattooed!

We were on our way back from the voyaging at this stage.

"There's just one thing about seagoing," he said. "I'm glad that I managed to restrain myself from getting tattooed all over with mermaids and anchors. It was hard to resist at times. But it wouldn't have been much good in business, signing things with an anchor tattooed on your hand between thumb and forefinger."

Yes, we were right back in the office now.

WHEN I asked him how he first went to sea, Mr. Renner very properly took no notice of me and began to tell me all about a ship.

For, after all, it is the ship that is important to the sailor. It is as important as the home to the mother, the train to the engine-driver and the bank balance to the business man. It was the ship for which the sailor of old days, at least, lived, and for which quite often he died.