

FAMOUS CRIMES and CRIMINALS OF NEW ZEALAND.

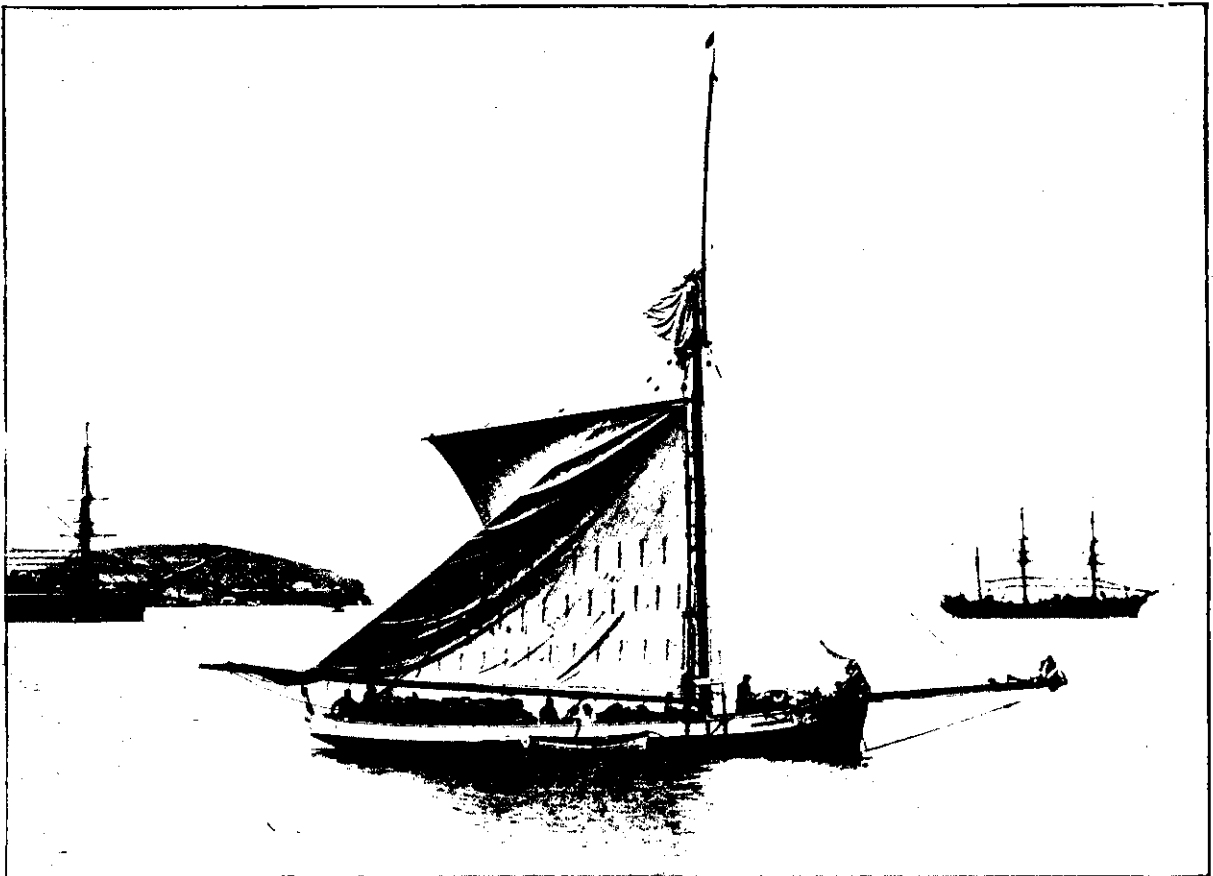
THE GREAT BARRIER TRAGEDY.

It was just sixteen years ago this very month, on Thursday, June 17th, a clear cold winter's night, and Auckland Harbour was lying bathed in the matchless glory of full moonlight. Many were drawn from their homes for a stroll down the wharf, and perchance some of these may have noticed the well-known local cutter *Sovereign of the Seas* lying moored out between the railway and Queen-street wharves, and may have heard over the peaceful waters of the Waitemata the sounds of a drunken carouse. Those who did so doubtless must have felt the contrast between the exquisite purity and beauty of the calm moonlit panorama of the Hauraki Gulf, and the brutal orgie going on on the cutter, but they could scarcely have imagined that there was then being thought out in two brains at least a plot of murder and attempted abduction which was destined to horrify Auckland, and to bring the two chief actors to the gallows, after an interval of some seven months. Such, however, was the case. John Caffrey and William A. Penn, with a paramour of the latter named Grace —, but whose second name we suppress, were the hosts. Several young fellows came on board, and there was a lot of wild talk concerning piracy and the rest. Caffrey had at one time been a suitor

for the hand of a Miss Taylor, of the Barrier — there had, indeed, been some sort of engagement between them at one time, but this had been broken off for some years when our story opens, and the lady had married a Mr Seymour. Caffrey nursed his passion and his desire for revenge on the father of the girl, and, extraordinary as it seems to us, he and his friend and mate, Penn, had agreed to become modern pirates, to run up a "Black Jack" on the "*Sovereign of the Seas*," and to abduct from the Barrier Mrs Seymour and her sister. The father was to be put out of the way if he interfered, and the cutter was to disappear from public ken, the party intending to make for South America, and scuttle her on arriving off that coast. Such was the scheme of Caffrey and his comrade. How far it was really talked over on that evening, and how far those who went on board understood of the hints which were thrown out, will never be known. For very obvious reasons all knowledge of anything approaching violence was denied by those present when they appeared as witnesses in the case. That there were some wild threats seems certain, but it is possible no one save the two criminals themselves thought more about them than the common vauntings of a drunken carouse. About eleven o'clock the roysterers helped the bemused captain and mate to get the sails up,

and then after a noisy farewell Caffrey and Penn took leave of the city, whither they were only to return manacled and ironed, and foredoomed to the gallows. Gently and imperceptibly the cutter left her moorings behind, and slipped down the silvery waters of the moon-lit Waitemata, with the ebbing tide. It seems incredible that men should have calmly set forth amid a scene of such calm beauty and peacefulness to carry out so mad and bloody a purpose, but as usual "the drink" had had its influence. For some time Penn, with his paramour, steered, but about five in the morning called Caffrey from his sodden stupor, and went below and to sleep. Caffrey's potations had, however, been deep, and the cutter drifted at her own sweet will till 9 a.m., when the trio were aroused by the boat grounding on Rangitoto Reef. Here she remained till six on Friday evening, giving ample time for meditation on the criminal folly of the enterprise. At that hour, however, she was got off, and headed for Tryphena Bay, Great Barrier, where the Taylor family lived. During the day the black flag was got out, and also three revolvers, with which some practice took place, it being noted by Caffrey that one of the pistols was faulty. That night the men took turn and turn about in steering, both, doubtless, thinking in the solitude of the awful task they

had come to pursue. It was not day when they sailed into Tryphena Bay and dropped anchor. A strong wind had got up during the night, and it was an exceedingly rough and boisterous morning. Calmly and collectively the two men went about their preparations—the sails were only partially lowered, so as to be in readiness for a speedy departure, and the woman Grace was told that they were going ashore to get the girls. Before they left the vessel Caffrey went down and loaded the revolvers, and put some balliard vopes in his pocket, for the purpose, as he told the woman, of binding Taylor should he make any resistance. He also said that if he did not get the girls he would shoot the father for revenge. Penn also saw the girl, when buckling on his knife, and she alleged that he said he would go ashore to help get the girls, but would do no shooting. The girl then told him what his mate had said about shooting Taylor, and evidently to calm her, Penn promised to warn Taylor. Callously as they had planned the affair, it was not one to be carried out without some "Dutch courage," and Caffrey treated himself to a full tumbler of neat spirits before leaving the ship. They left the vessel at ten minutes to five in the dinghy, and having watched them out of sight, the girl went to clean up the cabin in preparation for the advent of the girls whom the men



THE CUTTER SOVEREIGN OF THE SEAS," THE BOAT IN WHICH CAFFREY AND PENN SAILED.

The name of the boat may be distinctly read by means of a magnifying glass. The picture was taken about six months before the date of the tragedy.