



INTER-ISLAND Steamer

A KORERO REPORT

CIRCUMSTANCES THE master of the inter-Island steamer express, "Wahine," was saying, have to be exceptional for our crossing time-table to be altered; we steam to a schedule that is set to the minute and run to routine. In fact, the third officer said (indicating the clock in the wheelhouse) we find this something of a nuisance: it keeps perfect time, of course, but it's electric and the minute hand advances at thirty-second intervals; it means we can keep our position accurate only to the half minute. The ship swung into the stream; we were on our way.

Suddenly, breaking the quiet, somebody came running fast, his shoes smacking against the deck; a someone that was a civilian, hat in hand, and he came puffing up the steel ladder to the navigation bridge. The master unclasped his hands from behind his back, the third officer stepped forward, the helmsman looked and grinned, we wondered; only the ship seemed to notice nothing unusual about a civilian coming running to the navigation bridge with hat in hand. The urgency of the position did not call for introductions. "Captain," he said gasping, looking red, "I'm aboard." He took a breath, and seemed to resent the time it wasted. "But I shouldn't be. There's been a mistake, my wife's at home and I should be too; I came on board to do some business and I've been left behind." He took another breath. In his despair and excitement he dropped his hat, his face was colouring even redder. The ship, with her cargo and mails and six hundred passengers, including the one "left behind," was on the way to Lyttelton, the Wellington wharf was lost far back in the twilight.

There was a pause for the master to say his mind, then to make it up. Away, dimly through the evening, was a racing skiff with crew of four practising, backs bending to the count of the school-boy cox. The light craft was skimming over the harbour water. "Perhaps we can hail 'em; we'll give it a go," said the captain. Orders went to the engine-room, the ship slowly lost speed; a rope ladder dropped over the side swished through the water; to attract the attention of the skiff's crew a seaman flashed, blinked, and winked with an Aldis lamp; the third officer with a megaphone to his mouth began to shout. Unable to understand what had happened, passengers clustered to the rail, wondering and supposing and finally realizing; knowing what had happened, the unwilling passenger stood twisting his hat nervously in his hands with nowhere to look—the dismayed embarrassment on his face showed plainly that if he was a stowaway it was through no wish of his.

"Can you come alongside?" the voice roared from the bridge across the quiet water and through the still summer evening. But to the skiff's crew it was a message easier to hear than to understand: what on earth, you could imagine them asking each other, does a 4,000-tonner with two big funnels want with us, a 12 ft. racing skiff? If the question had been, "Our engines have broken down; can you give us a tow?" it could have perplexed them no more. They lay on their oars. Then thinly across the water came a small voice. "Who said so?" it asked. More shouting from the bridge made the position as clear as distance would allow. Oars dipped and flashed and feathered, the skiff drew