

nearer with strong rhythmic strokes. Already our stowaway, his hat now jammed tightly over his ears, had carefully but thankfully lowered himself down the swinging rope steps until he was no more than a foot or two above the water. A false step would land him either in the harbour or through the frail shell of the skiff: he was between the devil and a sea that was salt and wet if not deep blue. He knew it, and so did all the spectators; apart from the instructions from the stroke to his men, there was not a sound to be heard. At last the manœuvring was successful. the passenger stepped as lightly and as carefully as nervousness and haste would allow on the centreboard of the skiff and crouched in such room as there was between the cox's knees.

There was a cheer from the decks. A hat was waved in thanks to the master. Deep down in the bows, the skiff drew away from the ship's side; the stroke gave a last glance to the bridge which seemed to say, "As one skipper to another, I hope you won't allow this sort of thing to happen too often." The master, hands clasped again behind his back, glanced at the wheelhouse clock; it ticked over another half minute. Yes, but how did he get on board without a ticket? the ship's officers asked each other.

We steamed down the harbour into the night. The turbine steamer "Wahine," built in 1913 at Dumbarton, on the Clyde, has spent the most of her thirty-two years' service on the inter-Island run; by now she knows the way as surely as her master. Her speed of about 17 knots would be kept up effortlessly until Lyttelton was reached early next morning.

Partners on the run, the two ships, "Rangatira" (Big Chief) and "Wahine" (wife of Big Chief), sail on alternate nights from either Wellington or Lyttelton, carrying passengers, mail, light cargo, motor-cars, and stock (particularly pedigree animals and racehorses). Sailing schedules allowing for easy steaming generally are run to clockwork, and although delays in departure sometimes are caused (especially at Lyttelton and usually through the late arrival of railway trains carrying passengers and

mails), berthing in both Lyttelton and Wellington is usually to the minute. And late arrivals are caused more often by poor visibility and fog than by dirty weather.

More important than strict time-table running is safety of passengers and crew, and the company (the Union Steam Ship Co.) has a record that not often has been marred since the service began in 1879. Through the years there have been mishaps, some, of course, more serious than others, but generally the damage has been not to human life or to cargo, but to the ships. More often than not fog has been the cause. "I suppose you could find your way with your eyes shut after all these years," some one said to the skipper of the "Wahine" while we were on the bridge. "Yes, we have to—when it's foggy," he replied.

In its seventy years of passenger and cargo ship management in New Zealand, the Union Steam Ship Co. has from time to time introduced the latest and most modern improvements in transportation by ocean-going vessels: the first overseas ship of mild steel and bilge keels, the "Rotomahana" (1879); the first triple-expansion steamer to sail the Pacific, the "Mararoa"; the first vessel ever fur-



A "stowaway" is put off.