

A Sounds Cruise in Taipari.

[BY BOAT 'ARBOUR BILL]

The most notable event in the Taipari's career is undoubtedly her memorable cruise to the Sounds in 1898. It is chiefly remarkable on account of the gruelling she received on her return trip through the Straits. Had it not been for her plucky crew sticking to it as they did, she must inevitably have shared the fate of many larger vessels that have been lost on our rocky shores. Only a few of the largest such as Waitangi, Maritana and Siren cruised in the Sounds in those days, and they were to most yachtsmen a terra incognita.

They were so to Taipari's crew, consisting of Bob Stead, Dave Martin and Frank Martin. Bob had lost his right hand when a lad, but like Captain Cuttle of immortal memory, could do more things with a hook than most people can do with their hand.

After laying in a full supply of provisions the Taipari set out one Saturday afternoon from the moorings at Te Aro, the wind being a light southerly. It was 24th December, 1898, Xmas Eve. Shortly after clearing the Heads the wind died away, and at 6 p.m. it was a dead calm, the night being spent in the engrossing occupation of drifting backwards and forwards with the tide. Off Terawhiti, about midnight and a fine moonlight night, a school of porpoises put in an appearance. Their sudden appearance right alongside the little Taipari astonished Bob Stead, as he had never seen them so close before. Outside there was a big southerly swell, but it was not till 3.30 a.m. next morning that a breeze was picked up, and then it was a two-reefer. There was a big swell but no rip on at Terawhiti. Hanging on to full sail, the little Taipari made the knots fly behind her as she sped across the Strait bound for Tory Channel. Some water came below, as was only natural, considering the size of the boat, and off Wellington Head on the other side it blew very hard. I have mentioned above that the crew had not been across before, and they were now in a dilemma, as they could not tell from the appearance of things whether the tide was going in or coming out, as there was a big wash round Jordy Rocks and Wellington Head. Abstruse calculations as to tides were not in their line, so Bob tells me, and they were not singular in that respect, for many Wellington yachts for some time after did the same thing, and just chanced what the tide would be when they got across, in many cases going in against it, and it runs from five to seven knots at full tide, and in other cases getting caught by the first of the ebb when the wind took them just inside and then left them helpless, which happened very often. The result is that the yacht makes a stern board out again and spends the night, or perhaps two nights, outside.

To return, however, fortunately for them the tide was flood, although there was a big wash round the

rocks and the water was boiling around in a mass of foam. Tory Channel is a very narrow entrance in a particularly rock bound coast, and the southerly swell hurls itself against the cruel looking cliffs at the entrance, and in entering the channel you are within a biscuit throw almost from the surge swept rocks on either hand. The Taipari with wind and tide helping her went in flying, but once inside the wind dropped. Anchoring at Te Awaiti a short stay was made whilst someone went ashore in the dinghy and obtained some kerosene, of which they were out. While lying at anchor here a whaleboat 'manned' by about 20 Maori boys pulled in from the channel and, laying alongside the Tai, swarmed all over her, up the mast and out on the bowsprit. A tin of jujubes was handed them by Bob and polished off in a twinkling.

Leaving Te Awaiti the Taipari proceeded up the channel, the wind being S.W. and variable. At times it was blowing a three reefer or more, and at other times it was a dead calm. The tide had now turned and was ebbing as they soon discovered, as just this side of Oyster Bay the Taipari spent four hours beating backwards and forwards in an effort to stem it, but did not make an inch of headway, although the wind was fresh and the boat appeared to be tearing through the water. A large jib of Corona's was then set filling up the whole fore triangle and finally succeeded in getting them out of the difficulty. Eventually, however, she made some headway and approached Point Diefenbach at the junction of Tory Channel and the Sound. Here a particularly heavy squall struck them and, although the little packet had three reefs down at this time, she lay right down to it, almost flattened out, and, as Bob has it, 'we thought she was a gone coon.' However, she was very far from that and made good headway up the Sound to Picton, which was reached about 6 p.m., the anchor being dropped about a couple of hundred yards off the wharf on the eastern side.

All Picton turned out to see her arrive, and her lack of size caused quite a commotion in the town. She was certainly the smallest boat that had been seen from Wellington in the Sounds. The same night the Peranos came aboard the Taipari to pay a visit, and to secure an account of the trip across for the Marlborough Press. The Peranos at that time had a sailing boat in Picton called the Britannia. They had unbounded confidence in her, and challenged the Taipari to a race whenever they liked.

The next day after the arrival of Taipari was Boxing Day, and was spent in Picton meeting friends from Wellington on the excursion steamer Rotomahana. Next morning about 8 a.m. the Britannia and Taipari hoisted anchor together for their race down the Sound, wind light N.W., but the contest was not a close one. Although no doubt the Britannia could fly off the wind, on a wind she was not so good as Taipari, and after about half an hour the Taipari had gained about a mile on her, and on reaching Diefenbach the Britannia turned back, as the nor'-wester showed signs of increasing, and her crew did not wish to be caught

so far from home with their huge boom and sail spread. Waving each other farewell, the two boats separated, the Britannia returning to Picton, and the Taipari proceeding down the Sound in the direction of East Bay, to a small bay in Arapawa Island. Lines were put over and blue cod were hauled in as fast as the lines could be pulled up, so that in the space of about an hour the deck was covered with them. The rest of the evening was filled in with an impromptu smoke concert in that quiet little bay, all hands singing songs 'till the cows came home.'

Wednesday, December 28, 1898.—Hoisting anchor early in the morning the wind was at first calm, and then a light southerly arose, enabling the Taipari to enter Tory Channel, this time without a gruelling off Dieffenbach. The Taipari passed the Wellington yawl Ariel, belonging to Oscar Freyberg, inward bound. The writer had the pleasure of being on board the latter craft. About three or four that afternoon the Taipari reached Te Awaiti, and the ship's company spent the rest of the afternoon ashore there picking gooseberries. I wonder if there are any to be found there now. Early next morning Greyhound, another Wellington yacht belonging to Mr. Darb Sargent, put in an appearance. She had two reefs down, and reported having had 'a h—l of a time' crossing, losing their dinghy in the Rip. Seeing the weather looked so bad the Taipari remained at Te Awaiti and lay there all day fishing. The weather was calm in the bay, and a bright sun was shining, but overhead the little fleecy clouds were travelling at express speed, showing that it was blowing some in the Strait.

Next morning about 8 o'clock the Tai hoisted pick and bore away for the entrance. The wind was N.N.E., and Tory Channel was left with one reef down, another being put in after clearing Wellington Head. Five or six miles further on a third reef was put in, but she couldn't carry this, and the storm jib just then blew out of the ropes. Of course they were now fairly in the Strait and felt the full force of the gale which they had been partly sheltered from up till then. A big jib belonging to the old Corona, 14 feet on the foot and roped all round, was now got out, to be rigged up as a trysail, and it is chiefly because of the mishap that occurred shortly after setting this sail that most of their troubles took place. The lashing on the tack came adrift, and the flapping of the sail caused the clip hooks on the clew to come adrift also, with the result that the whole thing went aloft in a most exasperating manner and twisted round everything. It was now impossible to do anything more with it, as it would not come down, and no one could go up to clear it. It just simply flapped away from the masthead with a noise like thunder. This occurred about four miles off Terawhiti, and this outrageous encumbrance had to be endured with the best grace possible, right up to almost the last thing. Another jib had been bent on slightly bigger than the storm jib, but this one was also lost off Tongue Point. Frank now went below again and got number three jib out, about the same size as the last one, but stronger. Coming on deck he went for'ard to bend this sail on,

his brother Dave easing her up as much as he was able, but while Frank was leaning out to fix the jib on the hook at the end of the short bowsprit, the old Tai took a dive and buried up to the mast. Dave, at the tiller, sang out 'Good-bye Frank!' as he thought Frank was gone, but his brother had hugged the bowsprit with his left arm underneath and just managed to stay aboard. It was while sagging into the trough of this sea that both lee ports were smashed, as was shortly afterwards discovered, and the holes had to be stuffed with clothes to keep the water out. An unwelcome discovery also made at the same time was that one of the planks in the counter had started, and had to be dealt with by fixing a coat over it with a locker lid on top, and prising another board against the deck—a kind of primitive collision mat.

Owing to the inconvenient trysail, the Taipari could make no higher than Cape Turakirae, the western cape of Palliser Bay, and off Turakirae, as a last resort, Dave decided to anchor and straighten things up a bit. The Taipari was inside the rocks clustered at Tirakirae and only about 25 feet off the shore. Frank says he could have got ashore with a hop, step and a jump. There was a small swell on but no sea. In the attempt to anchor, a 56lb. galvanised anchor was brought on deck and 14 fathoms of 3in. Manilla, all of which was brand new and specially bought for the trip. The line snapped as soon almost as it was let go, in fact, they did not think it had reached the bottom, but it had, and the line parted at the gunwhale, leaving an end of about three feet aboard.

There was nothing to do now but to square away, so hoisting the jib once more, Taipari's head was pointed seawards and the trip continued, but not without incident, for one wave dropped the Taipari down the side of a huge rock that it uncovered. Had she been a foot closer she would inevitably have been smashed to matchwood. It was still blowing hard, and Dave thought the only thing to be done was to try for shelter somewhere in Palliser Bay. They proceeded up the Bay for about an hour and a half, nearly reaching the head of the bay, but there was no shelter to be had, although the wind was off the western shore. About 2 p.m. the Shaw Savill liner Delphic was sighted crossing the bay, and the ensign was hoisted upside down in the shrouds, the Taipari at the same time running down towards her, but she passed at about five or six miles distant.

Shortly after the wind dropped right away. Dave went aloft and cleared the trysail and brought it down on deck, none the worse for its long flap. Full sail was hoisted once more, and the trysail was set in its proper place as a jib. At 4 p.m. all hands had their first feed since leaving Tory Channel. Lashing the tiller they went below for a welcome spell and snack. About 6 p.m. a two-reefer westerly sprang up, so the Taipari was reefed once more, and a third one was put in on top of it. After a couple of hours the wind shifted again, this time to S.W., and Frank thought it a bad omen, but it was not, as it fell light and then shifted to S.E.

The position of the Taipari was now about 14 miles south-west from Turakirae (between that point and Cape Campbell). Everything was now plain sailing for the sadly storm-tossed mariners in their good little ship, for it must be admitted that the Taipari came through the ordeal exceedingly well under conditions in which many a larger boat might have done much worse. Porpoises were playing all round the weary mariners, as if to emphasise the fact that fortune was smiling upon them at last, as the yacht sped before the light S.E. with boom well spread. Pencarrow was passed at 11 p.m., and at ten minutes to twelve the moorings at Te Aro was reached. Running alongside the steamer Louie, one of the boats was taken, and the Taipari put on the moorings. Next day they went down and dried all the gear, there meeting Mr. John Coutts, who was the first to come down and congratulate them on their safe return. It is interesting to note the quick changes in the weather on the last night of Taipari's cruise. The weather now at that time of year is still as changeable. My thanks are due to Messrs. Bob Stead and Frank Martin for much of the information in this narrative, and to the latter and Mr. C. V. Fordham for photos kindly supplied.
