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LOG OF A LIMEJUICER

THE LOG OF A LIMEJUICER. By CAPTAIN JAMES BARKER. (Putnams. 10s. 6d. net.)

"I am a deep-water sailor, not an author," remarks Captain Barker in his preface, referring to the fact that his seafaring recollections have been committed to paper by his eldest son on his behalf. As a general rule, a chronicle of the kind loses rather than gains by the interposition of a third person between narrator and reader. In this instance, however, the arrangement has worked well; the author's amanuensis, though not a seaman himself, is the next thing to it, and he has performed his task with discrimination and skill.

Captain Barker mentions that he has rounded Cape Horn forty-one times during the forty-four years of his life afloat; and it is one of these forty-one passages which provides him with the most remarkable of his reminiscences. It was what the sailorman of the old school would almost certainly have termed a "hoodoo" voyage—one of those, namely, in which everything seemed to go wrong that could go wrong and accident succeeded accident. By rights the "hoodoo" should have been attached to one of Captain Barker's earlier ships, the Dovenby Hall, a notorious hell-ship in her day, with enough associations of brutality and even of murder to provide her with half-a-dozen "hoodoos." But of her his recollections are entirely affectionate. "She embodied," he says, "most of those qualities that are dear to a sailor's heart," and no ghost from her troubled past ever disturbed his peace.

The vessel in which his chapter of accidents occurred was the full-rigger British Isles, built on the Clyde in the eighteen-eighties, a fine example of the later type of sailing ship which made up the grain, jute and nitrate fleets of the closing quarter of the century. The British Isles, like most of her contemporaries, "could not," as Captain Barker phrases it, "sail for sour apples with her yards on the backstays," but—also like many of her period—she could and did make surprising runs with a wind aft or on the quarter. Many of the days' records of these ships compare very well with those of the tea and wool clippers; and Captain Barker mentions one occasion when the British Isles ran 383 nautical miles in twenty-four hours—a remarkable performance which, he adds, is duly set down in the ship's logbook, preserved in the archives of her late owner. The exceptional passage already referred to, however, was not remarkable for its speed but for its length. The ship was 139 days from Cardiff to Pisagua, Chile; and the persistent bad weather and run of disasters which she encountered on the way might well excuse the superstitiously inclined to look round for a Jonah. The captain's wife accompanied him on the voyage, and no doubt those were not wanting who set down the vessel's misfortunes to her presence. As a matter of fact, there were commonsense explanations for most of them; principally, the handicap of shorthandedness which practically all the big Cape Horners of the time laboured under, the quality of sailing ship crews during the era of their decline, and the prolonged misery of a passage against the Westerlies in a big steel four-master deeply laden with coal. In this particular instance, there was added to the captain's other difficulties a disloyal mate. The ship survived, however, and is still afloat to-day as a hulk in the River Plate. A number of excellent photographs add their eloquent testimony to the kind of weather experienced by the British Isles in the high South latitudes.