A UNIQUE PIGEON POSTAL SERVICE.

The homing and carrier pigeons have on more than one occasion displayed their remarkable innate proclivities for the quick conveyance of messages between different points when other systems of communication are either unavailable or have broken down. In the Franco-Prussian war they were used by the unfortunate imprisoned citizens of Paris to carry messages to the outside world. In the present Boer war they have been freely employed, especially during the siege of Ladysmith. Then, again, since the foundering of the French steamer Bourgogne with her four hundred souls off Newfoundland some months ago, the various French shipping companies have been conducting several experiments with these pigeons, with a view to employing them to carry news of any accident that may have occurred to the steamer during her voyage, thus explaining to the anxiously waiting relatives of the passengers ashore the safety of the vessel, the reason for her delay, and other interesting information. But in New Zealand a much more novel and enterprising attempt has been made to introduce the pigeon into the commercial world by establishing a pigeon post between Auckland and Great Barrier Island. Great Barrier Island lies about sixty miles north of Auckland. It is a bleak, inaccessible spot. The mines supply the most important means of support to the few inhabitants who eke out their existence on this lonely island, with no other means of communicating with the mainland than by the steamer, which calls only once a week. Their complete isolation has been forcibly brought home to the islanders on more than one occasion. Some months ago a terrible shipwreck occurred on its formidable coast, and though within so short a distance of Auckland, the news of the catastrophe was not known in the latter town until four days after it had happened.

In 1896 the island was imbued with a new lease of life through the mining industry increasing, owing to the efforts of one or two influential gentlemen on the mainland. The result was that a number of families of miners traveled to the island to participate in the prosperity. It was also recognized by one gentleman, Mr. W. Fricker, who was an ardent pigeon fancier, that a quicker means of transit should exist for the conveyance of news, correspondence, etc., between the island and the mainland. He thereupon established his pigeongram agency. The birds were housed in comfortable quarters on Great Barrier Island, and were soon sufficiently trained for the purpose of carrying messages to the town of Auckland. The value of this unique agency was immediately realized, and it was enthusiastically and substantially supported by the shipping company and several other mine owners and merchants who were greatly interested in the development of the island. At first, the birds were only trained to fly one way. That is to say, they were taken by boat to Great Barrier Island, and liberated as the exigencies arose, when they immediately set out toward their home at Auckland, and were returned to the island in crates by the weekly steamer. The disadvantage of this method is obvious. It was possible to carry messages from the island to the mainland, but no communications could be conveyed from the mainland to the island. Mr. Fricker, realizing this drawback, immediately commenced to train other birds to accomplish the reverse journey from Auckland to Great Barrier Island, and now it is possible to dispatch a message either way with the assurance that a reply will be forthcoming in a very short time.

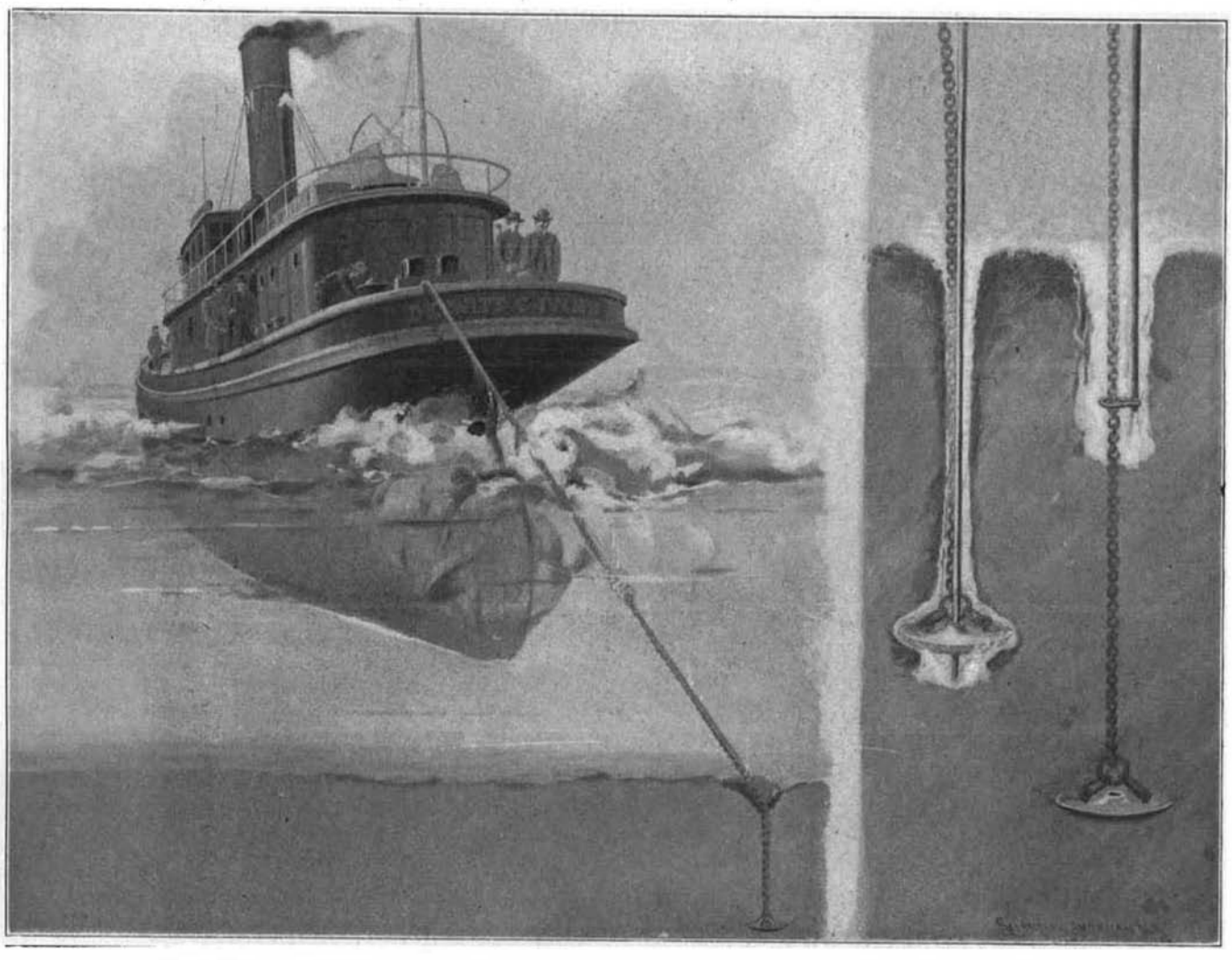
NEW ZEALAND PIGEON POSTAL SERVICE—THE BIRDS' HOME QUARTERS.

The time generally occupied on the journey by the birds averages from 65 to 70 minutes; but, as may be naturally supposed, their rate of traveling depends upon the condition of the wind and weather. When the service was first inaugurated, the cost of transmission was 50 cents per message; but when the circuit of communication was completed, and it was found that one bird could carry four messages at a time, the cost was revised. Now the cost of carrying a message from the island to Auckland is 12 cents, and 25 cents for the reverse journey. The reason that it costs more to carry a message from Auckland to the island is due to the fact that the training of the birds for this route was more laborious, since strong persuasion had to be brought upon the birds to induce them to face the long water journey. The messages are written upon tissue paper with carbon leaf. The paper is perforated down each side. When the message has been written it is folded and sealed with the agency's stamp, which secures complete privacy of the communication. The message is then wrapped round the bird's leg and covered with a waterproof legging, which serves to protect the message from injury during wet weather, and also to prevent the bird's picking it to pieces. When the bird enters the terminus at either end, he passes through the usual trap which is generally provided to the lofts of homing pigeons. In this case, however, the trap gives entrance to a kind of small ante-loft. The trap, in falling, rings a bell, which notifies the attendant of the arrival of a bird. He thereupon takes the bird out of this ante-loft, removes the message from its leg, and then permits the pigeon to enter the main loft. To open the message it is simply necessary to tear the perforation.

The service is well supported, considerably over one hundred birds being retained as messengers. It is officially recognized by the New Zealand government and the Imperial government as a bona-fide postal service between the island and Auckland. It issues its own postage stamps for franking the messages. It is a reliable, rapid, and cheap means of communication. Even when the telegraph cable eventually connects the island with the mainland, it is extremely improbable that it will fall into desuetude, since the number of words that can be written upon the tissue paper and transmitted for 12 cents—the same message would cost ten or twelve times that sum if dispatched by cable—will recommend its utilization in lieu of the telegraph.

THE LANGSTON MOORING DEVICE.

The Langston mooring device, which bears the name of its inventor, is designed to afford absolutely secure anchorage for vessels and buoys under extreme conditions of storm, ice pressure or other sources of violent strain. As represented in the accompanying engravings, it consists of a cast iron disk of any desired diameter, from 10 inches up to 2 feet, on the concave surface of which strong lugs are forged for the holding of triple rings to which a chain may be attached by a shackle. To sink the device, the nozzle of a 1½-inch galvanized pipe is passed through a hole



Ocean Tug Attempting to Start the Disk.

Method of Lowering and Removing the Disk by Means of the Hydraulic Jet.

THE LANGSTON MOORING DEVICE.