

# YACHTING

VOLUME XXX  
NUMBER IV

OCTOBER, 1921

35 Cents a Copy  
\$4.00 a Year



Running off at nine knots, with spinnaker set, through a dense fog, on the passage from Halifax to Newfoundland. Dory and crate of bananas are seen lashed on deck

## Crossing the Atlantic in Neith

By V. C. JOHNSON

With Chebucto Head shrouded in dense Nova Scotia fog and the restless Atlantic stretching out some 2,500 miles ahead of them, the little American-built yacht *Neith*, manned by her owner and four amateur yachtsmen, got her hook on July 13th, passed out by the Head and swung to the eastward on her long voyage to Burnham-on-Crouch, England.

The story of the eventful voyage through fog, gales, and fair weather will appear in this and subsequent issues of *YACHTING*, written by members of the crew. She made an unusually fast passage, arriving at her destination on August 8. The story of the voyage from Halifax to Newfoundland, where the yacht called, is by Capt. V. C. Johnson, a Nova Scotia yachtsman who will be remembered as skipper of the Class P yacht *Windward* on her voyage from New York to Halifax some years ago, while subsequent installments will be by Clifton Willard of New York, a junior member of the Bayside Yacht Club, one of the crew.—Editor.

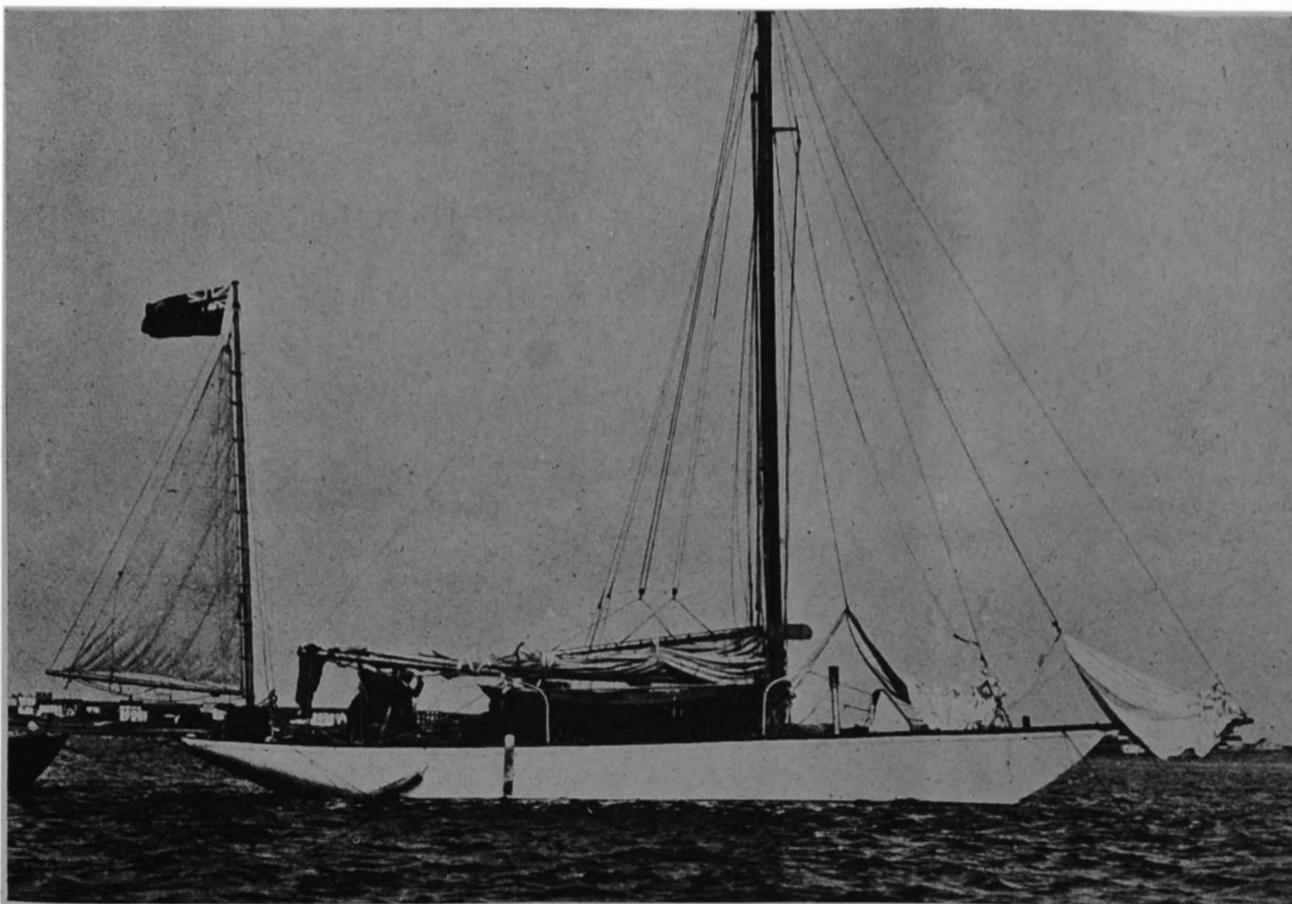
**D**URING the late Summer of 1920 Commander Sydney C. Houghton, R. N. V. R., of London, Eng., purchased the Herreshoff sloop *Neith* from B. R. Stoddard, of the New Rochelle Yacht Club, with the intention of sailing her home to Burnham-on-Crouch, England, where Commander Houghton is Commodore of the Crouch Yacht Club.

The *Neith* is a cutter rigged yacht only 52 ft. 10 in. over all; 38 ft. 6 in. waterline; 10 ft. 6 in. beam; 8 ft. 3 in. depth, and 7 ft. 6 in. draft, with a flush deck under which is 6 ft. 2 in. headroom extending right up into the galley. Here a Shipmate range is installed and also two Primus stoves hung in large gimbals and fitted with cylindrical retainers for pots or kettles which effectually hold them in upright position in the roughest weather, a detail which is quite necessary for ocean passages.

Late as the season was Commodore Houghton left Montauk Point for the trip across the Atlantic in September of that year with

the full cutter rig on *Neith*, consisting of some 1,600 square feet of canvas. They took the southern passage, encountered head winds and two heavy gales, lost two sea anchors and their trisail, and after working across about 1,000 miles, decided at last to give it up, and run for Nova Scotia. They made the Canso coast after being at sea for 29 or 30 days, ran up to Halifax and left the yacht there for the Winter to resume the voyage in the Spring.

Before starting this Summer Commodore Houghton converted the *Neith* to yawl rig for the Atlantic passage, reducing her sail to about 950 square feet and preparing her thoroughly for every eventuality. The same mainmast, a large hollow stick 10¾ inches in diameter, and same bowsprit and rigging with which the *Neith* was equipped as a cutter, were used in the yawl rig, but with a smaller staysail and jib. The mainsail was made of heavy hemp canvas, No. 3, with very heavy roping on account of its being loose-footed and



*Neith*, rigged as she was for the Atlantic passage

only attached to the boom by the outhaul. The mizzen was a jib headed sail of only 105 square feet and was also made from the same heavy canvas.

She balanced nicely with this mizzen and a small staysail of about the same area when running off before a half a gale of wind.

A fisherman's dory was lashed on skids on deck. This had watertight tanks bow and stern, two fresh water tanks of 10 gallons each, provisions for two weeks, compass, charts in water tight case, small spritsail (the dory has a center-board), while a canvas pocket on bow and stern each contained a sheath knife near the lashings, so that it would be only the work of a few seconds to cut the lashings and slide her off the skids. A canvas cover completely enclosed the top of the dory, keeping out the spray, and this would probably afford considerable protection to the occupants if the worst should happen. This was the most completely equipped lifeboat which I have ever seen on a big or little ship.

Early in July, after taking in a couple of tons of provisions, including everything a man could desire in the way of food or d—, *Neith* was lying off the Royal N. S. Yacht Squadron waiting for a favorable slant of wind. The crew for the long voyage consisted of Commodore Houghton, Dwight De Wolf of Halifax, Clifton Willard of Bayside, L. I., Howard Bell, son of Dr. McKelvie Bell of New York, all amateur yachtsmen, and Mortimer Gordon, a negro cook from Barbadoes—and let me say in passing that the latter is "some cook" and never failed to deliver a full,

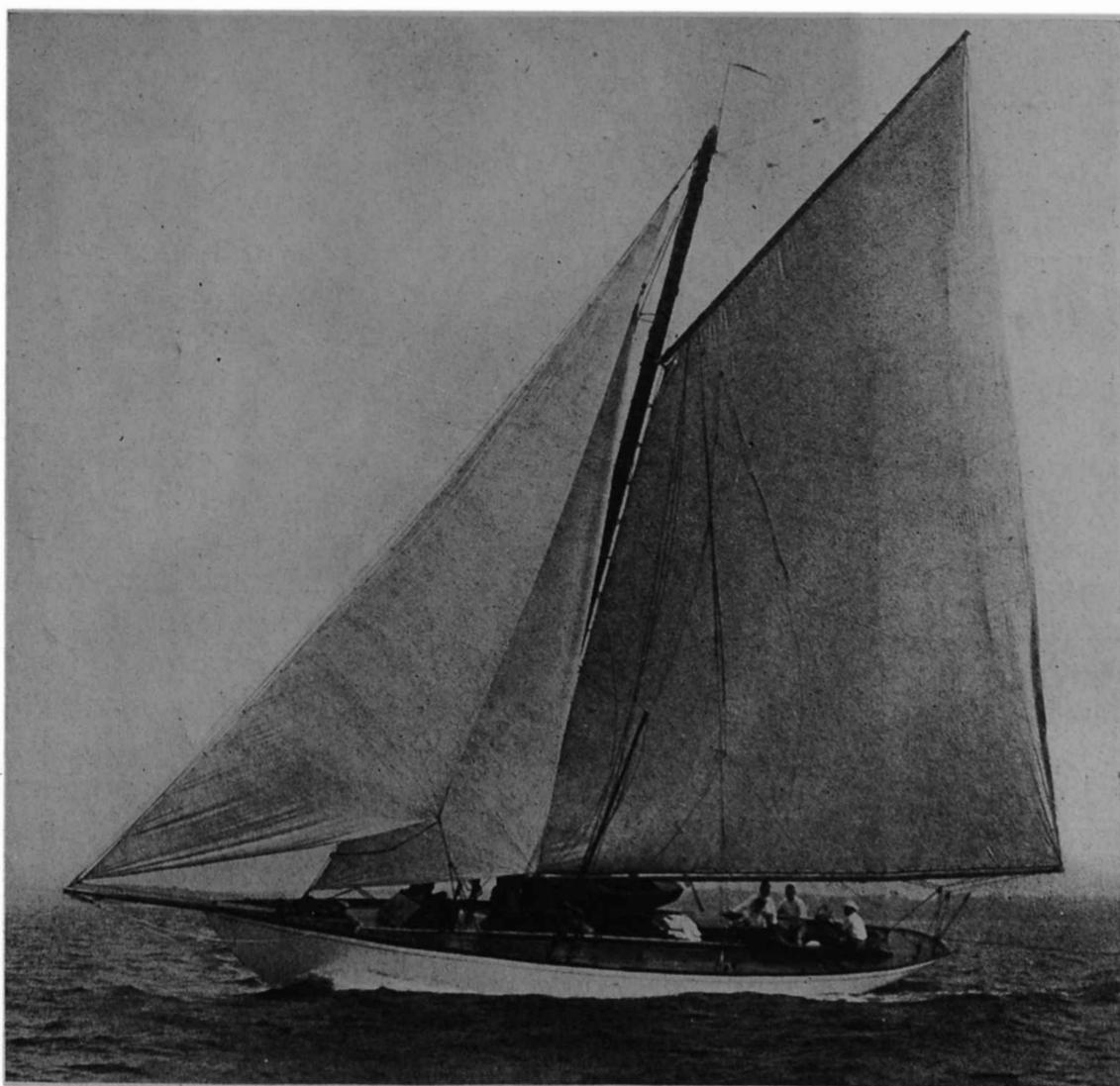
man-sized meal of well-prepared food under the worst conditions of weather. I was going along with them as far as Newfoundland, where I had to leave them.

On July 13th (indicating not much superstition on the part of the crew) at 3:00 P. M. we left the yacht club anchorage for Cape Race, setting our clock to real time. The wind was moderate, W. S. W., and we were close-hauled for 5 miles leaving the harbor. She seemed to do fairly well under this reduced rig, as the *Windward*, a class P sloop, ran along to weather of us and her skipper did not appear to be checking her very much

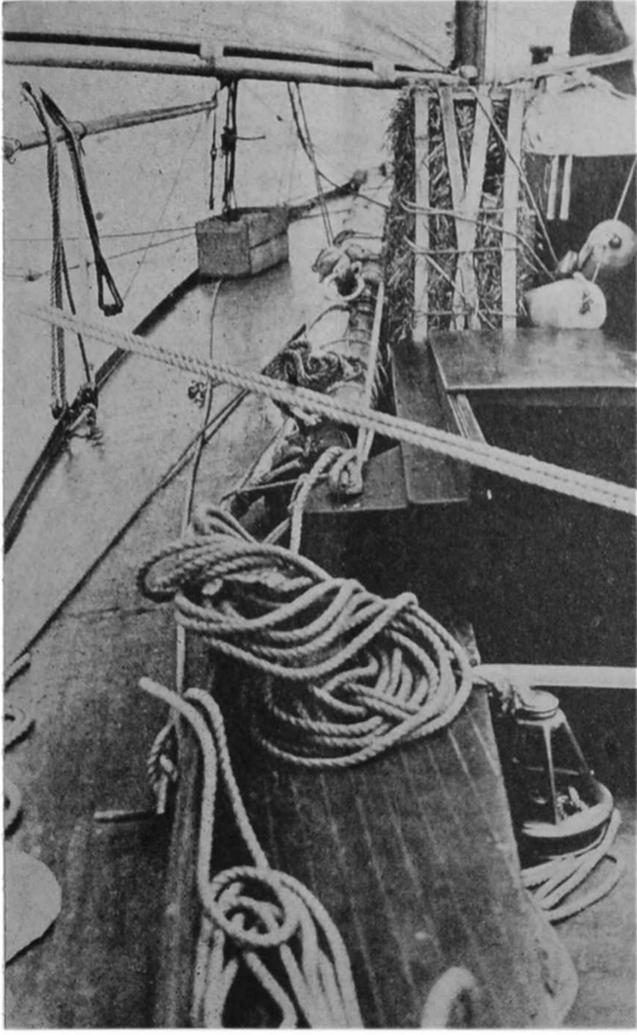
to keep alongside of us. We rounded Thum Cap buoy at 2:25 P. M., bade good-bye to the *Windward*, which left us here, squared off E X S  $\frac{1}{2}$  S and streamed log reading 82:6 for our first leg of 30 miles to Egg Island. The wind was on the starboard quarter, freshening a little, and we set sea watches. Commodore Houghton and Bell were in one watch, Dwight De Wolf and Willard in the other.

On a cruise or voyage of this kind, or at any time that you are to be out over 24 hours, the watches should be set and the men whose watch it is below should *go below* and get some sleep. Don't wait until every one gets so sleepy that no one can keep awake before you get down to watch and watch. Do not try any newfangled sort of watches, but use the old-fashioned ones which sailors have proved to be the best during the first few hundred years. Keep them as Noah used to keep them when he was looking after the elephants, and give the animals their meals at regular times—half an hour before the change of watch. Four on and four off with the two two-hour dog watches in the evening which change the night watches are the best.

At 5:15 in the afternoon, everything being cleared up and stowed away shipshape for sea, the spinnaker was set and our speed increased somewhat. The weather was dull and hazy and we could not see very far. Picked up Egg



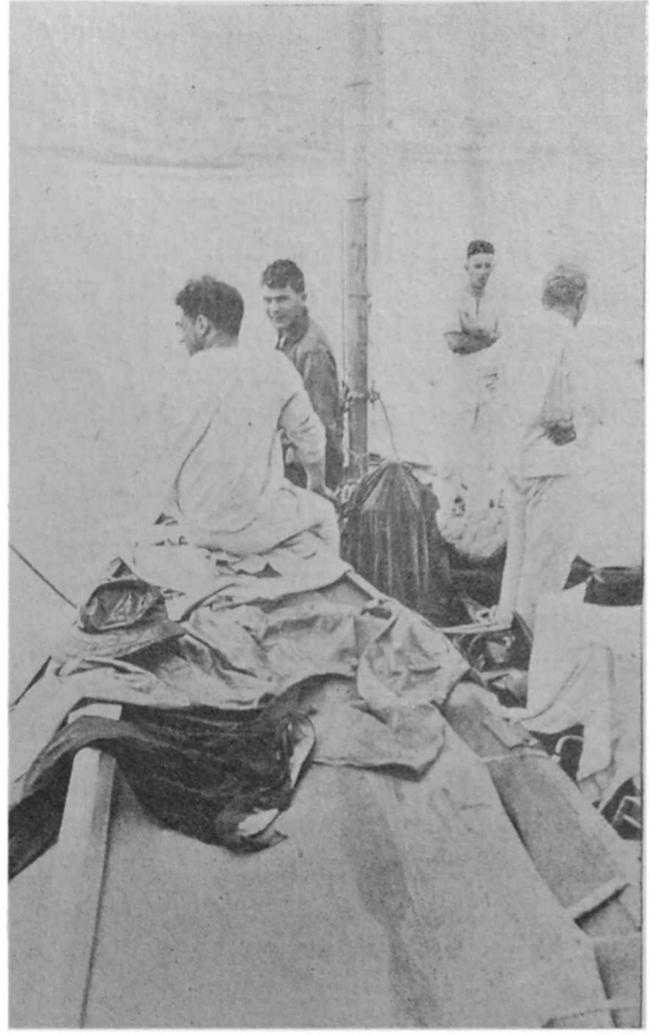
*Neith* under sloop rig, when she made her first attempt last year



Deck, looking forward, and corner of cockpit



The Barbadian was "some cook," and never failed to deliver a hot meal



Drying out in Trepassy after the fast run from Halifax

Island Automatic Buoy and passed it close aboard at 6:33 P. M. Log 112.5. Run 29.9 miles, indicating that log was registering practically correct. A necessary precaution on starting a trip is to test the log on a known distance at the start so that you may know what to allow for error during the passage.

We had made thirty miles in 4 hours, 8 minutes, averaging  $7\frac{1}{4}$  knots. At 6.33 we altered course to E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  S., log 112 $\frac{1}{2}$ , and let her go for Cape Race.

12:00 Mid. Dull and foggy

weather. Log 144 $\frac{1}{2}$ . Barometer 29.9.

July 14, 8:00 A. M. Thick fog. Log 188. Barometer 29.9.

During the morning the wind freshened, sea made up and we had very thick fog. Kept a sharp look out and piled along better than 8 knots. About 9:00 A. M. we heard a strenuous one blast dead ahead and in about a minute, a nervous minute, I might say, the black bow of a steamer seemed to rise out of the sea just on our starboard bow. We swung off to port, and she

passed so close that we could plainly read her name on the bow. Sorry I forgot to put down the name and, as it was an odd one, it has slipped my memory.

At noon we had fresh to strong W. S. W. wind and moderate sea. Log 220. Run since leaving yacht club 142 miles.

The watches were now racing to see which could do the most miles in its watch. Commander Houghton's watch was on deck during the afternoon and he was at the wheel and driving her. That spinnaker pole did some awful twisting and bending as she rolled and lurched forward on top of the seas.

"Think we'd better take it in, Commander, or we'll lose it," I suggested.

"Oh no, let her go, I want to beat that last watch's record. Think we'll do 35 or 36 miles this watch," he replied.

That old spinnaker pole fairly creaked with pain. Then, "bang," like a young cannon going off, and the spinnaker disappeared forward around the forestays with about 8 feet of pole lashing around the fore deck. Part of pole flew out of the socket and landed nicely fore and aft on deck. The Commander and Bell went forward and had 15 minutes of hard labor clearing away the wreckage and getting her snugged up forward. This happened at 3:30 P. M. Log 254. Barometer 29.9. So the Commander made 34 miles during his watch, spinnaker or no spinnaker.



The crew, left to right, Dwight De Wolf, Commander Houghton, Howard Bell and Clifton Willard. The combined ages of the three "deck hands" was only 57 years

At 8:00 P. M., strong westerly wind. Sea getting up. Log 287½. Barometer 29.8—33½ miles in the two dog watches.

At midnight log was 320½ miles. Did 33 miles last watch. Altered course to E. ¾ S. as variation was increasing rapidly as we went East.

July 15, 8:00 A. M. Log 388. Barometer 29.7, 34½ miles during last watch. At noon, still very thick fog and blowing hard. We had not been able to see 100 yards during the past 36 hours. Log 422—another 34-mile watch.

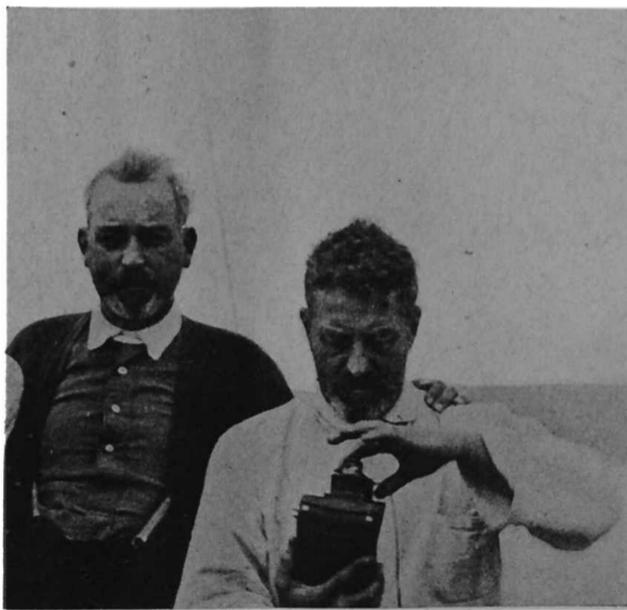
During the last 24 hours we had run 202 nautical miles. This is the best run which I have ever heard of for a small boat of this size. The next best run which I have had the pleasure of making was 172 miles in the "P" class sloop *Windward*. I do not claim that others have not exceeded this run, but merely state that a better run has not come to my notice.

We were still running off before it at 4 P. M. with the sea making up fast behind us, log 453, showing we had dropped down to 31 miles, but the ship's clock had been set ahead for longitude made good, which accounts for some of the loss.

At nightfall it was blowing half a gale of wind with big sea running. We were not certain as to our position, for it was still very thick fog and we had not been able to see 100 yards since leaving the Nova Scotia Coast. The bold, dangerous Newfoundland coast was to leeward. The lead gives very little warning here and in the sea that was running it would have been almost impossible to get a cast of the lead. We decided that discretion was the better part of valor, so took in mainsail and jib and hauled her off two points so as to run parallel with the coast, as we figured we were still 40 miles off Newfoundland. By doing this safety first stunt we lost the chance of making a very fast passage to Cape Race, but it looked very bad that night and it was no use taking a long chance in that dense fog.

It turned out to be a very dirty night. There was a heavy sea on the starboard quarter and she took a lot of watching to keep her from broaching-to. If she had done that—good-night. Every now and then a big one hits her an awful smash, a little slops on deck, just as though you had hit her with a gigantic sledge hammer, and she trembles all over—just feels as though she had hit something solid.

At 4:00 A. M., log 529, she was



Commander Houghton and Capt. V. C. Johnson, of Halifax, who navigated *Neith* to Newfoundland

still making nearly 6 knots under the two little sails, the combined area of which was about 210 square feet. The barometer had begun to rise a little, it was now 29.75, so it looked as if the worst of the gale was over.

When daylight came the fog thinned out a little and we were able to see a mile or so. Altered course to N. E., log 532, to run in toward Cape Race. During the forenoon the weather cleared and wind moderated, though there was still a heavy sea. Set mainsail and jib. Took soundings but got no bottom at 50 fathoms. It was some pull to get that 15 lb. lead back out of 300 feet of water.

At 10:30 A. M. we saw the sun for a few minutes for the first time since leaving Halifax. I got out the little box sextant and with difficulty got a sight. This was no easy job when one minute the boat was about the length of her spars below the level of the next sea and then went climbing over the hill only to flop down and lose sight of that red ball I was trying to bring down to a very bumpy horizon. We assumed we were in latitude 46° 20', so this sight with that latitude placed us in longitude 53° 38' W. which was miles further west than our dead reckoning gave us. The sun's bearing at time of sight was S. 65° E., so running a position line at right angles to this bearing through latitude 46° 20', longitude 53° 38', and prolonging the line toward the N. E., this line ran right into Trepassy Harbor; so all that was necessary to reach Trepassy, was to steer on this line and we would eventually reach Trepassy, no matter where we were with reference to latitude. This is the great advantage of putting a line of position on your chart from every observation which you take. It will

(Continued on page 204)

### Across the Atlantic in *Neith*

(Continued from page 164)

always point somewhere, and if taken at the correct moment will point exactly where you will go if you steer on it.

At noon the log read 557 miles. Got sight for latitude which gave 46° 06', showing that our assumed position by dead reckoning at 10:30 this morning was 40 miles E. N. E. of our true position, which indicated that in a run of 400 miles in a small boat with all amateur (or any other sort) of helmsmen one cannot place absolute confidence in dead reckoning. Our run for the last 24 hours had been 135 miles in spite of our being under short canvas over 15 hours. The wind died out shortly after noon and we flopped about in a flat calm with a heavy sea, which, I may state, is more or less conducive to *mal de mer*. De Wolf and the cook were the only real hard-boiled sailors who were able to resist the insistent call of the sea to give up something as a peace offering to old Neptune.

At 4:00 P. M. a little breeze sprang up from the S. E. and freshened. We sighted Cape Pine about 6:00 P. M. When darkness came on we saw a light and made it out to be the fixed white light on Cape Pine. We passed this at 11 P. M., the log reading 594 miles. It was blowing fresh E. N. E., raining heavily and we were very cold and miserable, while a heavy sea was still heaving in on coast.

Beating into a strange harbor at night with nothing but one light as a guide and the sea roaring as it breaks at the foot of cliffs rising 200 to 400 feet in the air makes a fellow feel a little like Columbus did when he came onto San Salvador.

We finally arrived off the little Newfoundland fishing village of Trepassy just as day was breaking, a tired, cold and hungry bunch. The cook turned out and soon had a very appetising hot meal on the table, after which we turned in and slept for eight or ten hours.

Our passage from Halifax to Trepassy had taken 85 hours, wharf to wharf. The distance was 549 miles by log. Trepassy is about 12 miles from Cape Race, from which Commander Houghton wished to take his departure for England.

The account of the passage across, which was made in fast time for a vessel of this size, will be told by Clifton Willard in the next and subsequent issues of *YACHTING*. Willard is at this writing on his way back from England.