

Across the Atlantic in Neith

By CLIFTON WILLARD

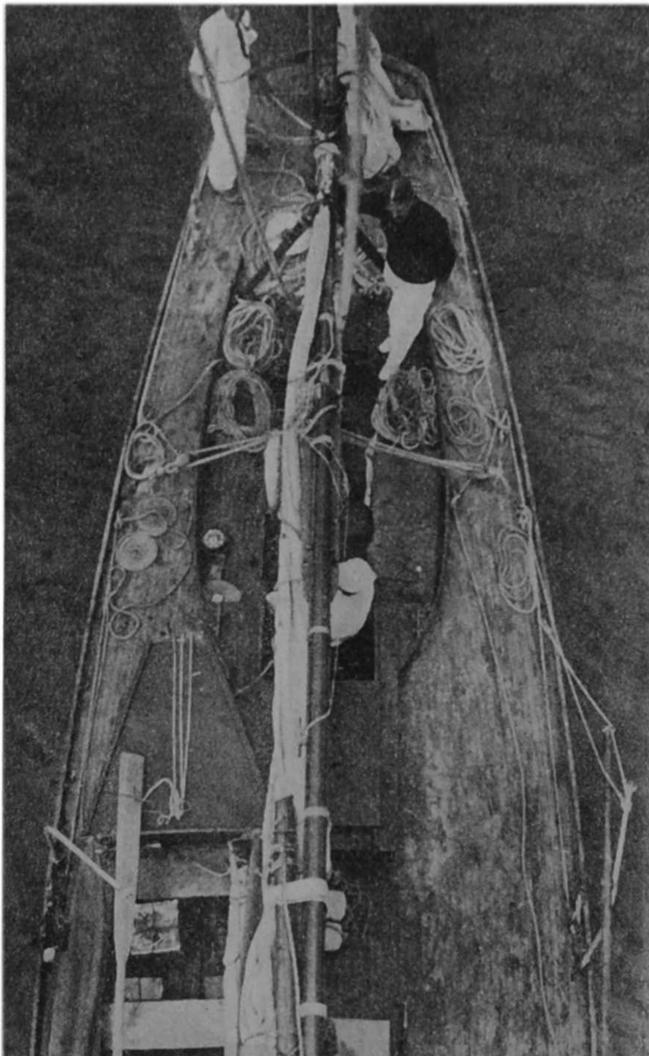
Part II

BEFORE starting to tell of the long passage across from Trepassy, where we arrived July 17th, as was told in the last issue of YACHTING, to Burnham-on-Crouch, it might, perhaps, be well to say something about how I happened to be one of the crew of *Neith* on her memorable voyage. Up to a few days before I started for Halifax to join her I had no idea of making an Atlantic voyage in a 50-foot yacht, and in fact I had never heard of the *Neith*. Mr. Carlos de Zafra made the trip possible for me as he heard of the chance from Commander Cochran, of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The latter was acting for Commander Houghton, owner of *Neith*, at Halifax, who wanted another hand for the crew. Dad and I, later, lunched with Doctor Bell, father of "Ding" Bell, who was already signed up to go. It listened good to us, and was too fine a chance to miss. So on July 2nd I breezed into the Grand Central, bound for Halifax, with the old *Curlew's* spinnaker bag chock-a-block with cruising gear in one bin and lots of willing inclination in the other. Dad said, "Good luck! Sorry cannot go with you."

Two days later I arrived at Halifax, where the proprietor of the hotel I patronized passed me the bearings of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Club, and I immediately hauled up and footed it alongside *Neith*. I had been unable to locate the Commander or DeWolf, so I had a chance to give the noble ship the North and South alone. Two carpenters were at work and signs of fitting out were very much in evidence.

The *Neith* won my heart at once. I inspected dunnage spread over the yacht club floor, and while perched on a pile of junk, DeWolf and Bell, members of the crew, hove in sight. DeWolf hailed, "Is that that guy 'Jess' Willard?" And thus we became acquainted. Three or four minutes later the Commander's smile was noted for its visibility. Also, it was the sign to get on the job, and I got under way with a list of bosun's stores for fitting out the life boat.

The next week we were busy getting ready for sea, and the last few days of it were waiting for a chance to get away. We had farewell



Neith's 10½ feet of beam didn't seem much when looking down on deck from the mast-head

parties for the last five nights as we did not know when favorable weather conditions would set in. On July 13th we were up at 8 bells and made a noise like final preparations. It had been foggy for the previous week and the Commander

was only waiting for a fair breeze and clear sky. Conditions were right at noon. At two o'clock we weighed hook in a strong S. W. breeze and with all canvas set and lifted sheet we were on our way. Charlie, the boatman, handed us a three-gun salute as we left and dipped the red ensign. After beating out of harbor, squared away and laid our course for Cape Race.

This part of the voyage has already been told by Capt. V. C. Johnson, one of our crew as far as New Foundland. What he did not say, however, was that he was at the wheel himself for 11 hours on one trick, in very heavy weather. See account in October issue. Eighty-five hours from Halifax to New Foundland is sure some record. Capt. Johnson said it was his record, all right, and he is an old timer.

While lowering sails during our record run from Halifax to Trepassy, after our fastest four-hour watch, with Captain Johnson at the wheel, our port toppinglift was slacked off and the starboard one set up and made fast when the ship rolled on a sea, the boom reared up in the air 10 feet, and when she crashed down the ¾-inch starboard toppinglift parted, letting the boom down on the binnacle, just missing Captain Johnson's head by a hair's



A bit of the North Atlantic as it looked from *Neith* on one of the few days when there was no fog

breadth and carrying his hat overboard. It was a narrow escape. This happened on July 15th at 6:35 in the evening.

Our hearts were made glad when we rounded up at Trepassy on July 17th at 4:35 in the morning. It seems superfluous to state that we turned in, dead to the world.

It was 9 o'clock the following morning, July 18th, before all hands climbed out and gazed upon real sunshine. This was the first sunshine since leaving Halifax, and the red arterial blood in us responded joyfully.

Quite a fleet of fishing dories was looking us over and their occupants expressed their astonishment at our high stick. They could not "dope it out" how any civilized human beings would put to sea with such a skyscraper, being ignorant of the fact that the aforesaid stick was a hollow spar. They nosed in closer and it was easily apparent that these shy sons of the sea were dying to come aboard. The Commander shouted a hearty invitation, in spite of their heavy, cumbersome boots, and made himself solid with them for life by treating the bunch to a shot of "Nelson's Blood." They buried their drink like men, and the tears in their eyes showed how deeply they appreciated and felt the courtesy.

We hung out everything hangable to dry, and "sweetened up ship" generally. The glorious sunshine was a blessing. That continuous fog is depressing no one knows better than we do, as we only experienced two clear days all the way across the



The forward deck, showing hood for forward hatch to keep out water

Atlantic. It was a new one on me to have heavy winds and fogs together, and we had it in gobs. The harder it blew the more fog we had, and the more fog the harder it blew.

In the afternoon we stretched our legs ashore at Trepassy. This is the point from which Captain Alcock started on his trans-Atlantic aeroplane flight in 1919. As I admit that Rudyard Kipling is a better writer than I, I would recommend anyone interested in the Newfoundland fishing banks to read his *Captains Courageous* for thrilling adventures of these heavy weather salts. We talked to the natives, sent telegrams home and listened to Captain Johnson and the Commander chinning with an old acquaintance

anent fishing. The Captain is quite a fisherman.

Upon the occasion of our first night ashore, "Tas" DeWolf, "Ding" Bell, the cook and I walked up and down the main street. DeWolf sported a ukulele, and to its accompaniment we sang right merrily a song with oft-repeated chorus "Where Are We Going, Boys?" The natives flocked around the fences and seemed to enjoy the entertainment, for a small size crowd soon collected. DeWolf played with deep feeling, and his unconscious grace appealed to the onlookers. Then we enjoyed a pleasant chat with Mrs. Martin, who ran the general store, size 6 x 8. Her heart was large, however. Also this charming lady was versatile, and among her many accomplishments she could make birch beer containing 3 per cent of the true stuff.

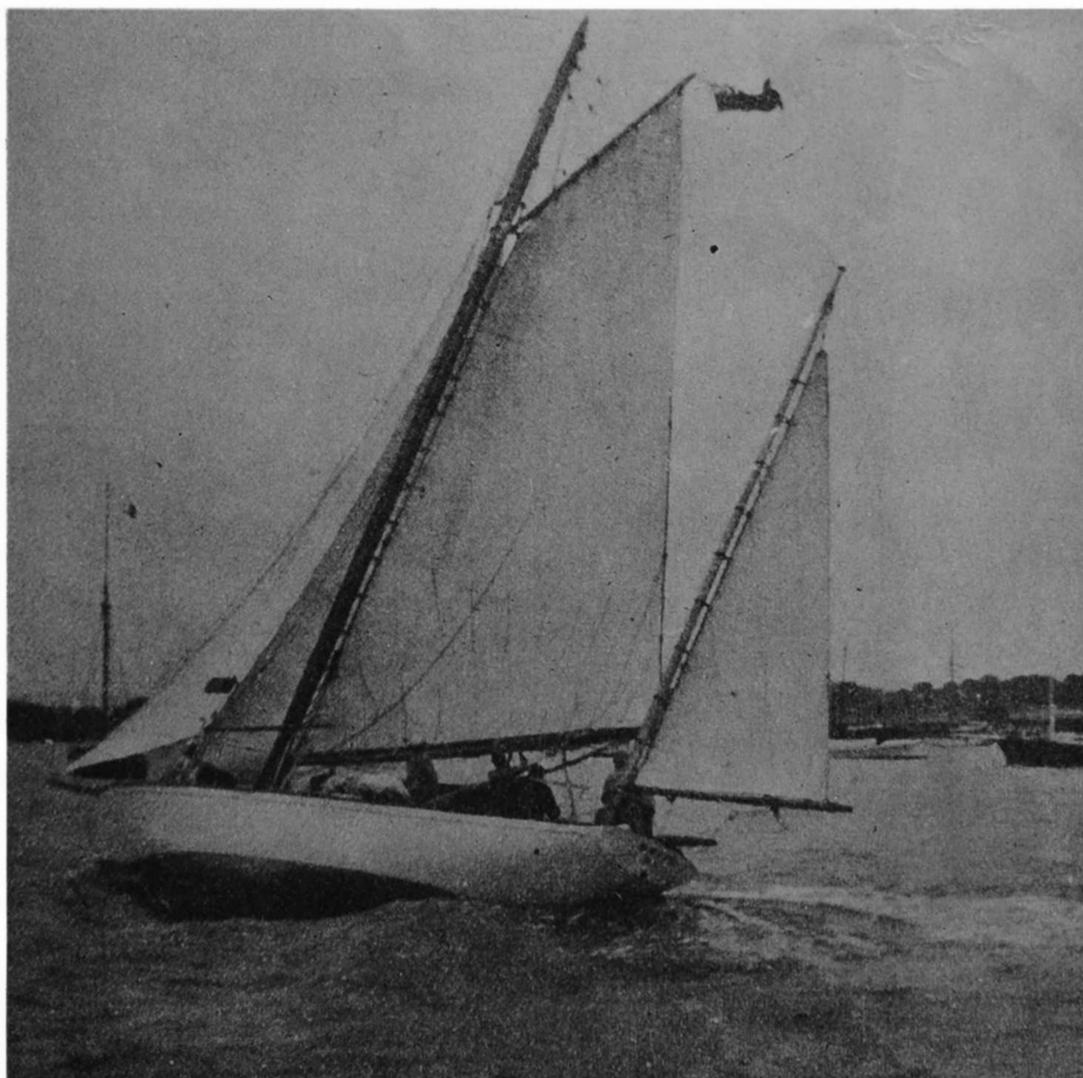
The circumspect and alert fisherman in these parts showed us a novel way of catching the wary and toothsome lobster. When the shades of night were drawn they ignored the cumbersome and old-fashioned lobster pots and, armed only with flashlights, started in to make their catch by stabbing the shallow waters on the edges of the harbor. The poor shell fish fell for it, were attracted and allowed themselves to be taken up in two or three feet of water.

The Commander and deck hands looked our staunch ship over carefully, righting things here and there, bent on new manila toppinglifts to take the place of the wire ones which went back on us, shortened up five feet on our busted spinnaker pole, and let it go at that.

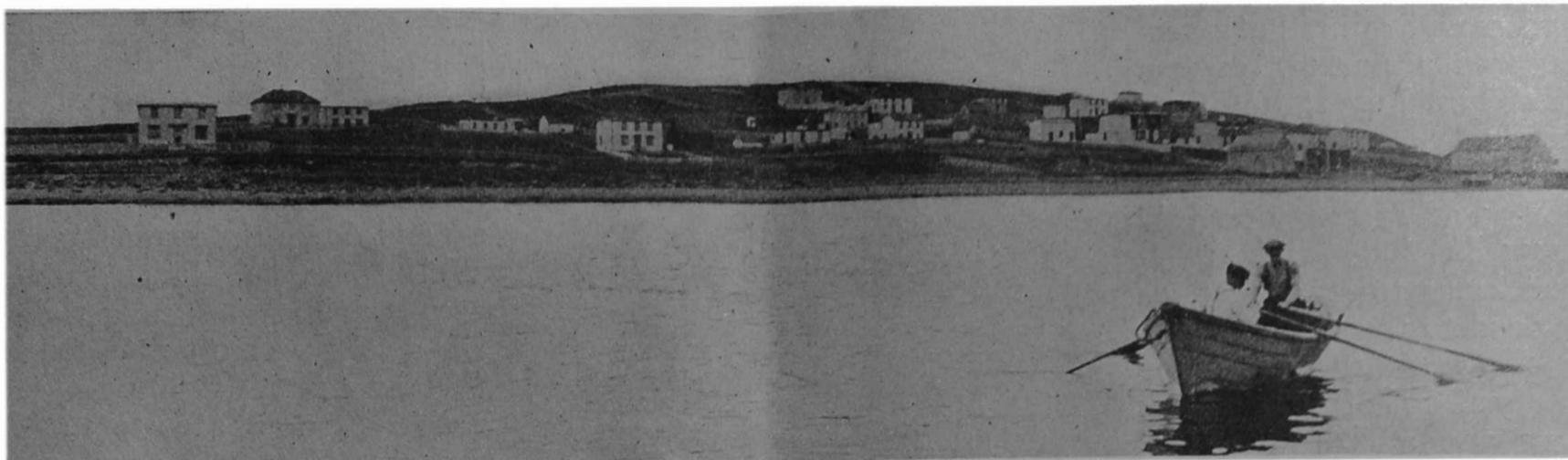
On the morning of July 19th we came to the surface early and at 9 o'clock were beating out of the harbor, on the long leg across, with our skipper, the Commander, at the wheel, and plenty of hope and determination beneath our belts. The weather smiled approval, as it was fine and clear, with a light and variable S. W. breeze.

At eight minutes past eleven A. M., on compass course S. E. by E., Prowles Point was abeam to port. Barometer 30.20. We availed ourselves here of the opportunity to purchase a twelve pound cod from a fisherman, and when we chucked him half a dollar he was tickled to death.

We squared away and ten minutes after noon, set the ballooner, the wind being still light and variable. At 3 P. M., altered course to E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., with Mistaken Point abeam to port. This Point derives its ap-



Neith, showing rig under which she made the trans-Atlantic passage



Trepassy, Newfoundland, was a little fishing village 12 miles from Cape Race

pellation from the fact that it is frequently mistaken for Cape Race. The same air continued to toddle along with us. As we passed it Cape Race said "How do you do?" *Neith* replied: "We are feeling much obliged, thank you." Barometer 30.19.

We took bearings on the Cape and laid our course. Log read 109, plus 12 miles on account of line fouling.

At 6 P. M., doused ballooner; wind falling. Barometer 30.10, dropping fast. Log 125 miles.

At 8 P. M., we started watches, four on and four off. Log 143 miles. The wind thought we had had things easy long enough so it started into blow, and bymby she blew some more. The skipper and first mate DeWolf occupied the responsible positions on deck as the head of each watch. Bell was in the former's watch and I in the latter's. At 12 o'clock, midnight, the log read 180 miles. Course E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S. A heavy S. W. by W. wind and fog blew into evidence; everything dripping.

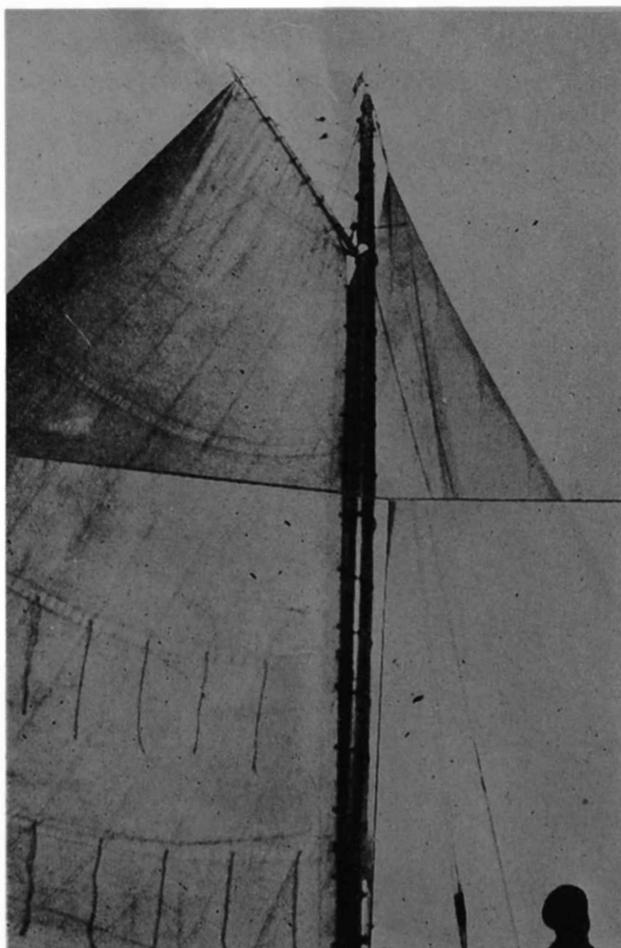
At 4 o'clock in the morning on July 20th, we were on course E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. Log 212 miles. Lots of kick in this old ocean-going sou'wester. The fog didn't standby, but crept into one's bones, and dripped mournfully from the sails, rigging and boom. It was working with us to beat the band every minute.

During the 12 to 4 watch, the one which the poets have written so much about, the time when murders are committed, suicides are indulged in, the lowest ebb of vitality, etc., DeWolf was at the wheel and I was up forward on lookout, half dreaming of my last summer's trip to Niagara Falls, when out of the murk there came an apparent explosion, and a column of water shot up towards where the sky was supposed to be. Then we noticed off to starboard the unmistakable form of a whale. He sure blew himself, and at the same time soaked DeWolf good and plenty, as the water was blown off to leeward. He was a startled humbrie, all right,

and let out a shout for the Commander. It was up to me to do something so I blew the fog horn, as that was the thing to do when in doubt, I had been told.

The whale looked us over, more or less contemptuously, flopped his mighty tail and disappeared in the fog. I was glad he did not flop his tail until he was at least thirty feet away. This instance made us realize, all of a sudden, how small our craft was. If that animal-fish had ever landed a whale-sized wallop, old Jonah would have had to double up in order to accommodate five fog-soaked adventurers.

At 8 o'clock on the following morning we were on the same course, and the log, which read 243 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles, indicated that we were on our way. Variation 29 West; true course, North 75° East. The wind was out of the Sou'west and continued strong. The barometer was unchanged from 4 A. M. and read 30.04. At 12 noon, the log revealed 272 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles. We had done 29 miles in the watch. I recall that the chow tasted unusually good that day. Sardines on toast. It was



Composite picture of *Neith's* mainmast with spinnaker set

great just to be alive and kicking!

Our colored cook had, however, troubles of his own. Occasionally things below refused to behave. For instance, on this particular day it was a case of the handle of the fresh water pump and the stove. The first named useful article caught him forcibly in the ribs when the *Neith* took an extra jump, and he executed an expeditious side-step, right onto the stove, which happened to be hot! He rushed up on deck yelling and tenderly nursing his afflicted part.

At 4 o'clock that afternoon, some more thick, wet, muddy fog butted in. The 57 Varieties could not hold a candle to that fog and retain any brilliancy. When we wished to be particularly comfortable we would take off our clothes, wring them out and put them on again. This was one of our favorite pastimes. Even the wind seemed to be disgusted with it and gave warning of giving out. Barometer 30.03, falling slowly.

By 8 o'clock that night 324 miles were registered, and at midnight 356 miles, giving us an average speed of 8 knots for the watch. A Sou'wester stole up on us and got fresh. Barometer 30.02.

July 21st, 4 A. M. The Sou'wester got fresher during the early morning hours. When our plucky Commander separated himself from his long night watch, dead tired, he must have been thinking of our national game, as he performed a magnificent slide down the companionway. This is not an easy thing to do artistically, in oilers and rubber boots, but he landed in great shape on the cabin floor, safe! He was perfectly willing to go right to sleep then, just as he was, but finally decided it was not being done that way this season and got into his bunk.

At 8 o'clock that morning we had accumulated 418 miles, with the wind piping from the south. Barometer 29.29. The fog was a

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rich shade of black this time with lots of H₂O coyly concealed within its folds. It seemed as if we would never get rid of the fog. We had made 309 miles since leaving Cape Race on the afternoon of the 19th, or an average speed of about 7.5 knots. Not bad!

We sighted a huge iceberg at 10.55, comparing in height to our Metropolitan Tower, it seemed to us. It was majestically beautiful, and I regret that the conditions

would not permit of a photograph. It grew perceptibly colder, and I was appreciative of the heavy clothing I had brought along. No one wants to undertake a North Atlantic passage in summer time without plenty of heavy clothes.

(To be continued)