

Across the Atlantic in Neith

By CLIFTON D. WILLARD

Part III

ON July 21st, our third day out of Trepassy, New Foundland, all hands felt an unexpected drop in temperature and it grew very cold by reason of the close proximity of ice, coming down from Greenland. We passed close to a full-grown towering iceberg. It was decidedly ticklish going with these big fellows drifting around over the ocean promiscuously. Although enveloped in a fog we could tell by the tang in the air whenever we were close to one of these bergs, and sometimes we were scared stiff. We surely could have put the ice trust out of business if it had been possible to pass a hawser around one of these boys and tow him into New York Harbor.

At 12 noon the log registered 456 miles. A strong wind was blowing from the sou'west, and an hour later we showed our respect for it by taking in jib and tucking a reef in the mainsail. She went easier after that.

The log read 479 miles at four o'clock. It was now blowing up hard from the same quarter, with the seas making up fast. As darkness came on the wind increased and it looked as if it would be a dirty night.

At 10:45 P. M. we dropped the mainsail on deck, with a hum-dinger of a gale howling along out of the sou'west, right on our quarter. The seas were mountains, and we were like a little peanut shell in the ever-changing valleys between them. The *Neith* behaved beautifully, though. Naturally, we all stood our tricks at the wheel, and that thrill was a wonderful one! Our mizzen and staysail stood the gaff gallantly, and we were being driven lickatysplit for election. Each wave had a pronounced individuality all its own. A big, powerful giant would roll under and hoist us high in the air, and as we were let down a wicked looking hisser, foaming at the mouth, would make a vicious grab at us, and missing, go racing on his way, audibly cussing us. We just evaded a furious stern-chaser by inches. There were also the middle-rift short jabbers, who hung around expectantly, full of fight, with an awful wallop in either mit. They possessed a weaving-in-and-out style, like our champion heavyweight prize-fighter, only multiplied

by about ten million. If one of these had landed, there was no friendly floor nearby on which to take the count in comfort, but the bottom was a long way down, and any other than a sea-going referee might have demurred in executing the necessary formality.

It was this rapidly changing condition, plus the powerful gale which blew us on with a roar, which kept us on tip-toes and *alive* as we never



In mid-Atlantic with a fair breeze on July 26. One of the few days when fog did not shut out the horizon

had been before since we started. An ever recurrent thought in our minds was that we might run into something coming in the opposite direction, for it was still thicker than pea soup. We had a swell chance of making ourselves heard with our bellows fog horn. However, old Steve Brodie accomplished something and got by, and so did we!

At midnight the old gale was kicking right along with us. In the wee small hours, at 20 past one o'clock, to be exact, our mizzen halyard parted. We took the hint philosophically, but quickly, to stop down the spanker with end of mizzen sheet and let the staysail

alone be the cart horse. Barometer 29.98 and still dropping. We speeded on our way and at 4 A. M., altered compass course to South East, log reading 577 miles. On the E. x S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. course we had steered since 4 A. M., July 20th, we logged 365 miles.

The Commander's special lullaby, rendered *en route* without instrumental accompaniment, was "Watch below—ten to go!" Gee, how that used to shatter some of our mirages! There was no use praying for total deafness, either! Old Hard Luck visited us again at 8 A. M., when the forestay suddenly wrenched free from the bolt in deck. DeWolf rescued the swinging end, but being unable to locate a nut, made stay fast by bending on a monkey-wrench. That same monkey-wrench was still doing its bit when we left the ship at Burnham two months later!

We now set the storm staysail in recognition of the hefty Nor'wester, the wind having gradually hauled to that direction. At noon the log showed 602 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Variation 30 West. True course N. 75 East. Compass course E. x S., barometer 30.16. Wind moderating.

During the afternoon the old Nor'wester put his foot upon the soft pedal and at 4 P. M. the log read 614 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

At six bells of the same watch we experienced a new and very acceptable experience. The wind went out, and so did we. That is, we didn't exactly carry out Mark Twain's fond desire, when on board ship at sea, of stepping ashore upon an accommodating and beautiful flowery island, bordered with feathery palm trees and burbling waterfalls, but we did the next best thing, to wit, trimmed in sheets, lashed wheel, stowed away some grub, and all hands turned in, as was, and went to sleep, being guilty of a breach of good form in not even wishing each other "sweet dreams"! It would have been a vain wish, anyway, as there was nothing resembling any old kind of a dream that night.

Just to show you how good we felt the next morning, July 23rd, at 8.25 o'clock, we set the spinnaker in regular old racing style, and rang out a challenge to anyone to beat us, albeit the breeze was only a gentle and fickle one from West by South.



The crew of *Neith* were evidently not worrying before they left Halifax. Left to right, Bell, Commander Houghton, De Wolf and Willard.

Compass course E. x S. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., variation 30 West. True course N. 80 E. The old reliable log still registered 614 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles as it had when we layed her to for the night. Barometer 30.12.

We had logged 659 miles at 4 P. M. Breeze W. S. W. Had a kick, and to show there was no hard feeling we doused spinnaker. Still foggy.

At 6 P. M., the wind shifted to N. W. We had logged 675 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles at 8 P. M., and the old Nor'wester was feeling his oats, good and plenty. At midnight we deemed it advisable to take in the jib and reef the main, as it was blowing very hard out of the North West.

On July 24th at 4 A. M., changed compass course to E. S. E. Log 734 miles. We had logged 158 miles on our last course. The gale had not abated much and the seas were running unusually high. The Skipper set the example of driving her, and the different watches were not backward in following suit.

It was a weird and exciting sensation to be hurled through the impenetrable darkness, which could almost be sliced with an axe. That fog sure formed a solid wall all about, and it seemed to be there to stay forever and ever, amen! Everything aboard was slippery and clammy and, believe me, a fellow had to watch his step to prevent a back flip overboard. At the take-off we acquired the habit while on deck of not letting go with one hand until the other had gripped something tangible. Our skipper, Commander Houghton, may not have felt the continuous and everlasting fog as keenly as the rest of us, but I had been brought up in a land of unadulterated and sparkling sunshine, and that blooming fog was

beginning to get to me, and then some. Only the Lord alone knew what was ahead of our smashing, rearing, rooting, foaming bow. We had eyes, it is true, but that didn't count for very much. In short, we did not have a whole lot on the poor, unfortunate individuals who were *sans* sight, *sans* hearing and *sans* speech. One thing proved more or less of a blessing, in a way. This was, that on account of lack of sleep and the constant tired feeling which left us mechanical at times in our actions, our sensibilities were not quite so alive to the possible danger. However, such was life on the ocean wave!

At eight o'clock that morning: compass course East South East, and we had rolled up 762 miles on the log. We had added 26 more miles at midday.

On July 25th at 3.30 A. M., we had piled up exactly 868 miles by the log. As there was a heavy sea rolling, but no wind, we hove-to and all hands hit the hay.

At 9.30 A. M., we had made no more distance, as we had been without wind for five hours.

Noon materialized but still we had no sun. It seemed as if we had bid Old Sol a pathetic farewell when we shoved off from Trepassy on July 19th, and the fog was beginning to get everybody's goat.

All of a sudden, out of the sea, off the starboard quarter, our attention was called in a most astonishing manner to a large number of rapidly moving objects, in perfect military formation, headed directly for us. To all intents and purposes, they were resenting forcibly our occupying space on the same ocean with them. Judging by their business-like and formidable approach, there was not a shadow of a doubt

in our somewhat worried minds as to their destructive powers. We did not know exactly what we were up against, not having had any previous encounter to guide us, and naturally waited in keen suspense. When nearly upon us their commander must have issued a "Column Right" order, as they wheeled with beautiful precision. I had never seen so many porpoises in my life!

The log showed only 903 at 4 P. M., or only 35 miles in the last 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours. True course N. 80 E. At 6 o'clock that evening the log had ticked off 918 miles, showing we were picking up. One hour and twenty minutes later we had annihilated another 10 miles. Boy, we were on our way!

Then, the following morning, July 26th, the eighth day out of Trepassy, which seemed like any other old morning such as we had been having, but wasn't, at 8 o'clock we landed in the middle of the Atlantic, our half way mark, the log showing 998 miles and the same distance ahead to go! Someone had swiped the mid-ocean buoy, but subsequent events proved that our reckoning was all right, in spite of that serious handicap!

At noon, we had added another 24 miles. The wind was N. N. E., and stiff, but by night it had dropped to a light breeze.

On July 27th, we had light winds and heaving sea. At 6 o'clock that evening we hove-to, and revelled in a swim. Even had the nerve to try our luck at fishing, but the fish must have been out on a strike. At 9 P. M. 1,153 miles were logged, and we ran into our only windward work in the ocean for some half hour, bucking a fresh breeze from E. S. E.

At noon on July 28th the log showed 1,255 miles. This was only 106 miles from our noon position the day before, which was not as good as we had been doing.

At 10.30 P. M. it was blowing up great guns from the Sou'west. This was too much like work, as we were getting lazy, so we lowered mainsail. Even so, at midnight we had reeled off 74 miles since noon. The next morning at 4 A. M. we decided to set mainsail, as the Sou'wester had abated a little. It kept on dropping and at 8 A. M. was only a light air.

Then we hailed, at last, with a great shout the glorious and scintillating sunshine, which spread ingratiating warmth and good cheer. Gee, how good it felt! All hands were smiling and happy, and forthwith began to act as human beings again. The glittering sunlight was dancing merrily, giving a dazzling

whiteness to wave crests as they rippled and broke, and it was a rare delight to be able to look all 'round, for miles and miles, and see a horizon line and blue sky. An occasional fish jumped, and seemed to wiggle his tail with glee and joyful appreciation. It was for all the world like shooting out of a tunnel, to look all about and see things clearly again. The old seas looked different, the atmosphere we breathed was different, *we* were different, and every breath was freighted with pep and joy of living. The little ship went singing along on her course, keeping time to our heart beats. The barometer was down, but our spirits were way up!

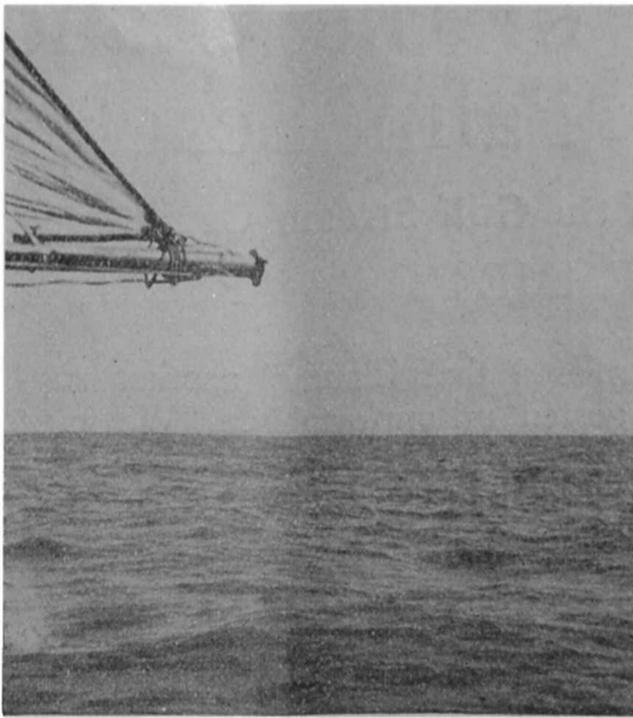
At twelve noon, the old reliable recorded 1,375 miles. This was 120 miles from our previous noon. We were sailing on our way rejoicing and thinking what a wonderful ocean we were giving the once over, when from far astern we picked up a smoke smudge and, later, could make out an Atlantic liner forging up. She proved to be the *Celtic*. As she steamed past us our skipper semaphored a message to be sent by wireless to his wife in London, that all was well with us. The passengers lined the starboard rail and honored us with a number of hearty cheers. A friend of the Commander was aboard the *Celtic*. We met him at Burnham Race Week later, and learned that orders had been given out at headquarters of the Line, that a small sailing yacht was crossing the Atlantic, and for all steamers to watch for her. This interesting meeting at sea further gladdened our lives that day.

At 6 P. M. we began to pay dearly for our short respite as the old "mist" set in once more, and not content with that, it started in to rain to beat the band.

At 8 P. M. changed our course to E. x S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. per compass. True course N. 83 E. 1424 miles. Barometer 29.78. Varying breeze.

July 30th: 4 A. M. Logged 1471 miles. Wind sou'west. Barometer 29.67—dropping.

It might be stated right here that, notwithstanding the many trying conditions which naturally attended a trip of this kind, all of us aboard the *Neith* got along together in fine shape. The Commander was a good disciplinarian, which is undoubtedly the secret of success of any undertaking where men are thrown together, and this applies more especially to an ocean voyage in a small sailing craft such as this. Each hand had his work cut out for him, and every individual was



The spinnaker was carried a good part of the way

right there on the job. In a way, it is somewhat to be wondered at, considering that most of us had never even met each other ten days before leaving Halifax. "Ding" Bell deserves all the credit in the world for his gameness, in view of the fact of his admitting beforehand that he knew nothing of ships and their ways. He acquired a useful working knowledge rapidly, and did his trick throughout. We had one good one on "Ding." He had brought a big bath sponge aboard with him, and the Commander threatened to hang it over his bunk with a dainty pink ribbon pendant. He was a regular fellow, however, and one could not have wished for a better shipmate.

Our First Mate, "Tas" De Wolf, although only 21 years of age, had had considerable experience at sea, on square riggers, etc. His judgment was good, and he was a dandy chap to work with.

Commander Houghton, was a capable skipper and possessed a redeeming sense of humor, which helped a lot in view of the young crew he had the bad taste to select. He had two sons of his own at home, which may have accounted for his fortitude in standing for our company. We tried to make him feel at home! At any rate he was a fine leader, and each of us thought a great deal of him and would have shipped to the North Pole, or any old place with him. He always did more than his share of the work, he was fearless, and at all times showed consideration, patience and good nature. His cheery smile and happy disposition made him a real companion. He saw the *Neith*, admired and purchased her, and had the sporting blood to sail her to his English home, after failing on his first attempt.

Our colored Barbadian cook, Jordan, was right there with the chow, albeit the heavy weather did not agree with his constitution. He kept the "Shipmate" working overtime, however, and he never failed to produce a good hot meal. While I was the only American aboard, "Ding" and Tas" being Canadians, we got along as if we had known one another all our lives. They say there is a great deal of good-fellowship in a ham sandwich, but it has nothing on being shipmates on a real cruise.

On this day, the 30th of July, at 8 A. M., we changed course to N. 88 E., true, and the number of miles logged was 1498. We had registered 57 miles on the last course. Wind W. S. W. Barometer 29.64—going down still more. We had, of course, been sailing a great circle course, which made necessary a change in the true course every few degrees, while the constantly changing variation meant constant changes in the compass course.

At midday, New Foundland was 1523 miles astern. Variation 23 West. True course N. 88 E. Changed the clock to two hours ahead, as we had not been changing it daily during our eastward run.

A strong west wind was making things interesting during the afternoon and cleared away the fog, while it increased our speed.

At 6 P. M., the log showed 1552 miles, or 29 since noon. Barometer 29.78—rising.

Once again we hailed the blessed sparkling sunlight and warm weather. It would not have taken very much of a line of talk on the part of some walking delegate at that time to win us over to the noble band of the Sun Worshipers Union.

(To be continued)