

# Across the Atlantic in Neith

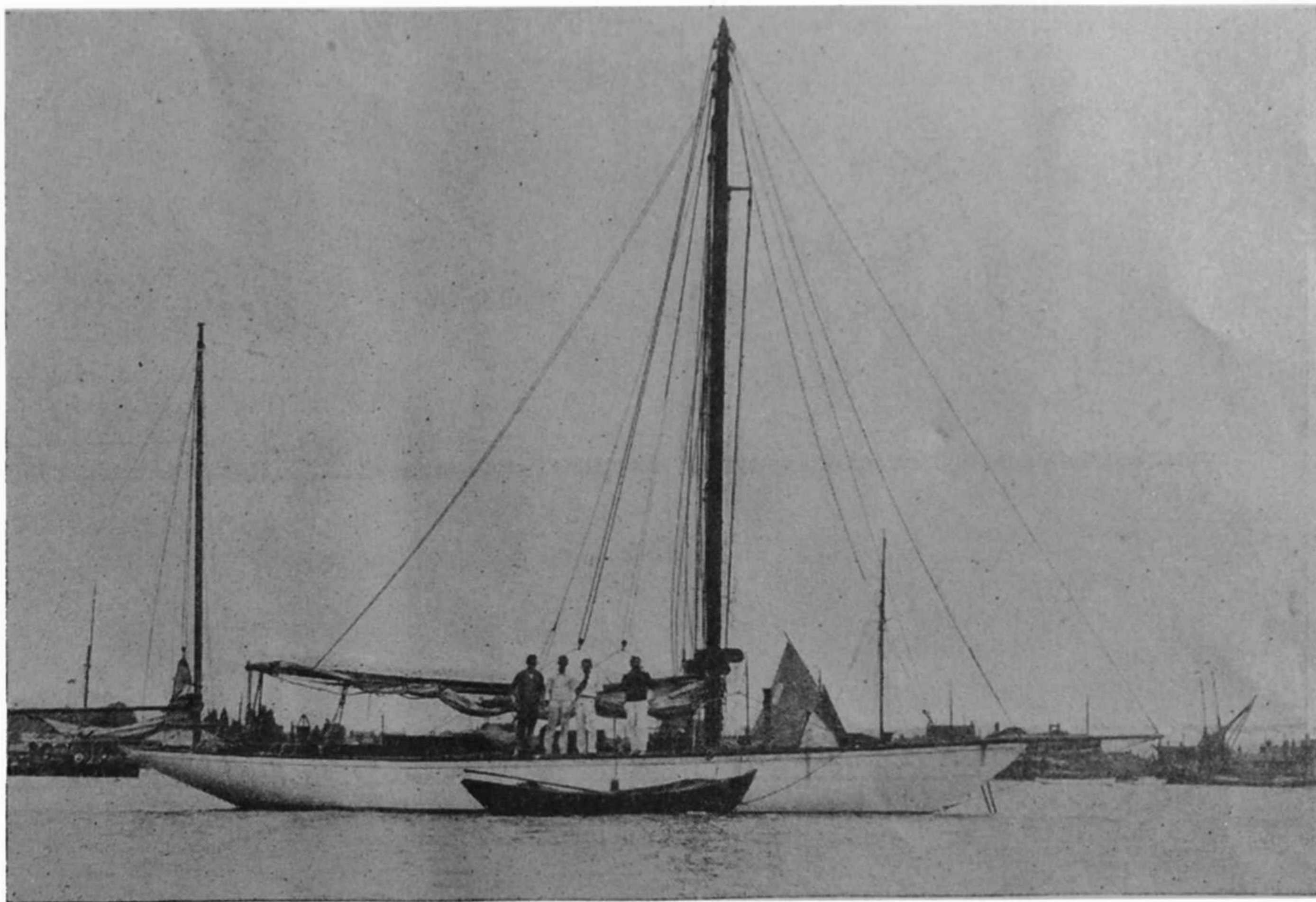
By CLIFTON D. WILLARD

## PART IV

OUR eleventh day out of Newfoundland, July 30th, was a memorable one on account of the fine and clear weather, which acted on us like a cooling drink of water to a desert-tired man dying of thirst. We didn't exactly die of thirst, though, as the Commander had been to sea before, and that old grog he served up now and then, piping hot, stole lingeringly through our anatomy and saved our lives many a time. In fact, after awhile, a fellow didn't mind having his life saved!

At eight o'clock that evening the log read 1,567 miles. Variation, 22 West. True course, due East. Ran 21 miles with a strong, fair wind.

Night sailing is always interesting, especially when the luff of the sails cannot be seen and when, added to that handicap, the rolling seas and fog shut in everything. The headsails did considerable flopping ever and anon. Also, when running before a strong, fair wind, the main boom occasionally would swing amidship, and sometimes jolly well jibe all the way over. But we were becoming salty and this did not disturb us much. The thought occurred to me more than once that



*Neith*, on her arrival at Burnham-on-Crouch, with her paint not even discolored after her long voyage across the Atlantic

if we had been racing we would not have had such an easy voyage of it. Just the same, it would have been great to have seen how much time we could have cut off our record of fifteen days and a half from land to land.

By midnight the *Neith* had piled

up 1,594 miles. Compass course E. S. E. True course East. Ran 16 miles on last course. The wind was able bodied, out of the S. S. W.

At 6:30 P. M., July 31, we sighted a large steamship closing in on us. As she cut the water to within hailing distance it was evident that her skipper was one whom experience had made wondrous kind, as he gave us our true position without our asking for it. The name of steamship, as near as we could ascertain, was *Wintard*.

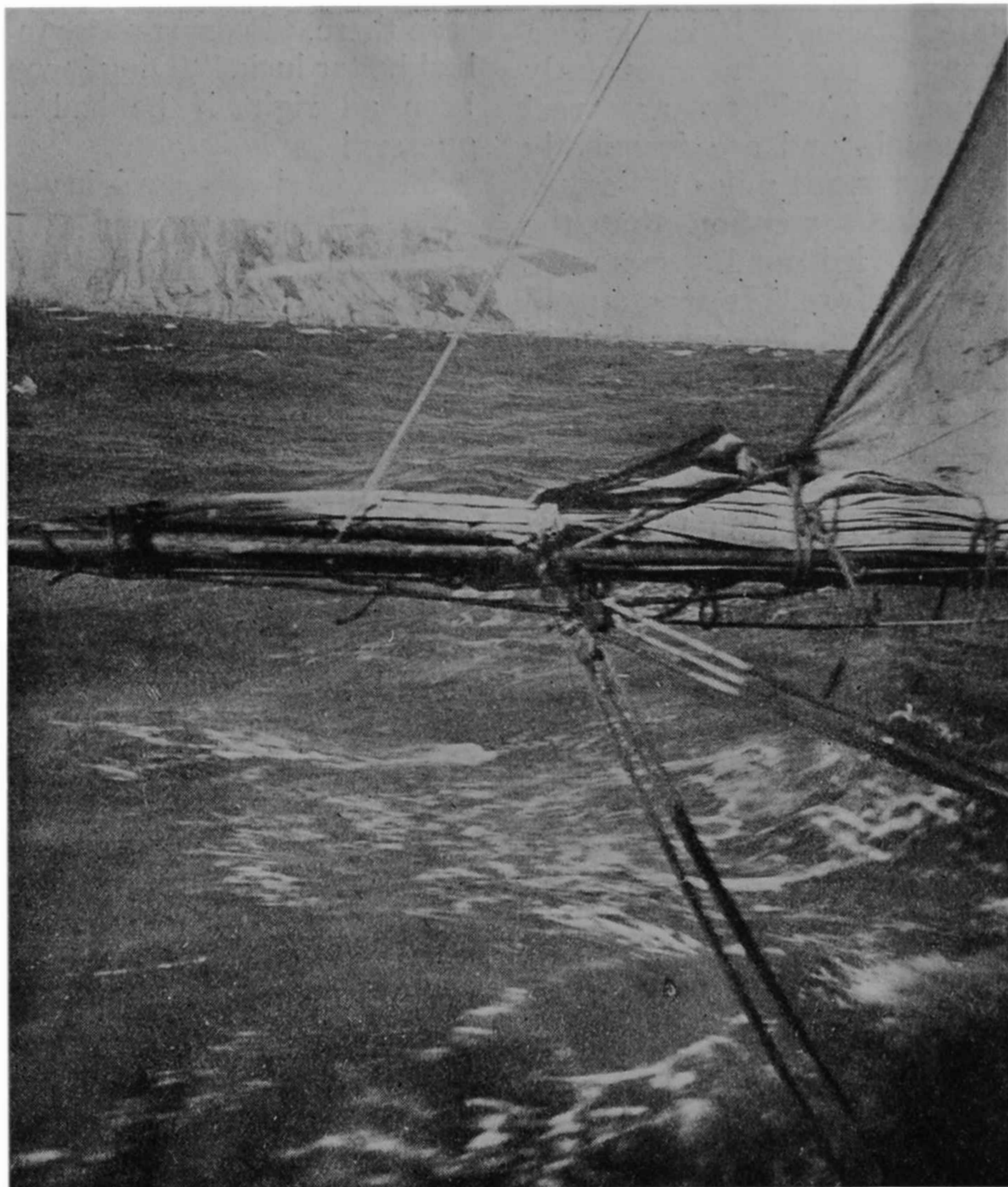
Our true position was then, according to the steamer  $48^{\circ} 50'$  North,  $17^{\circ} 50'$  West. Bishop Light, Scilly Islands, only 449 miles away, bearing N. 83 E. Praise be, that was good news!

August 1, at 4 A. M., we changed log and set it back according to steamship's position, 118 miles. Fine, fair breeze, but high seas.

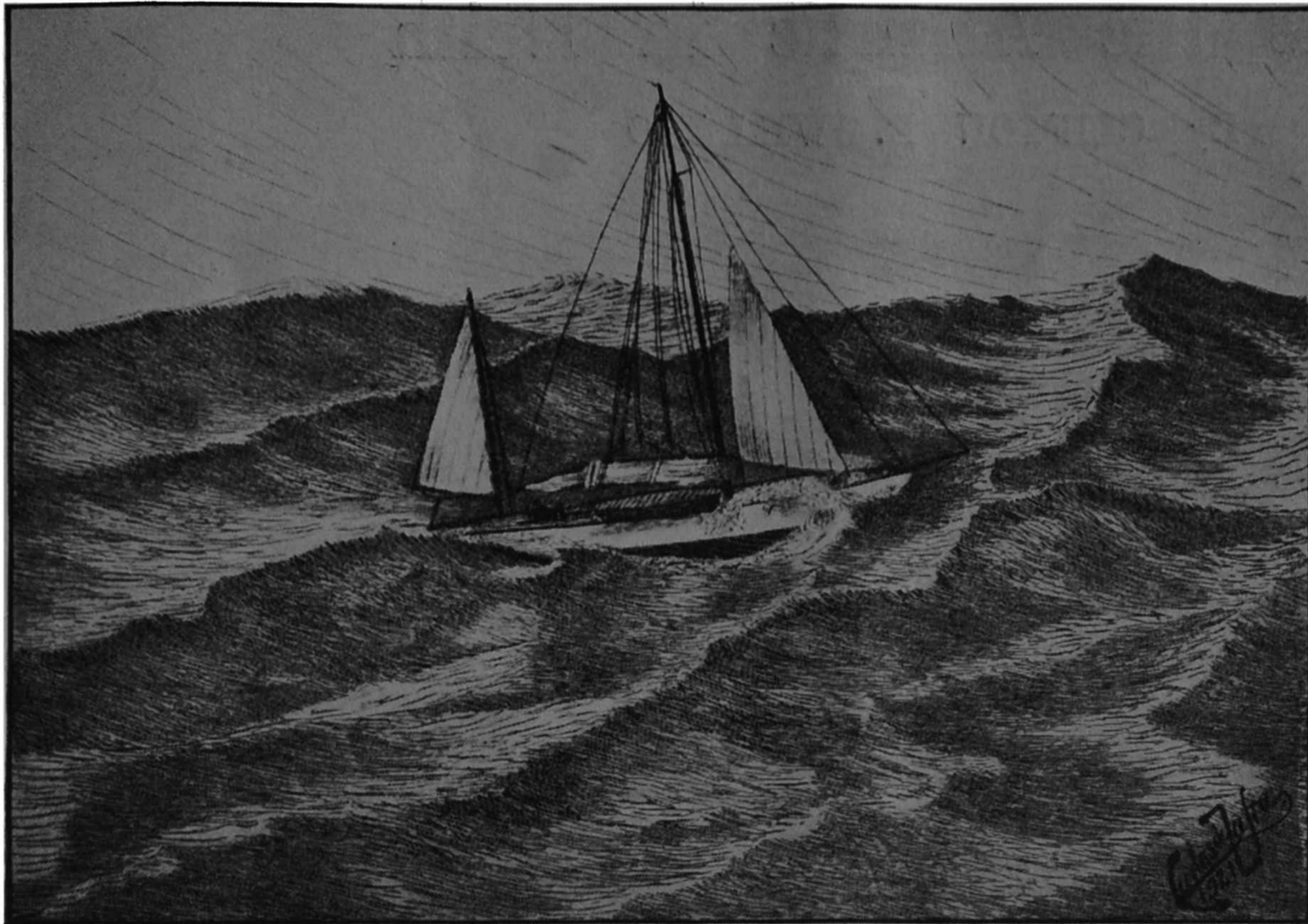
Noon. Compass course S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  E. Log 169 miles. Variation 21 West. Barometer 29.80.

At 6 P. M. on S. E. course. Log 216 miles. An accommodating fresh, fair wind from the sou'-west. For some reason our log was useless after setting it back on receiving true position.

8 P. M. Course S. E. x S. 232 miles. Variation 20 West. The strong west wind was too fair, and consequently we were forced to sail off our course. We had no kick coming, however, as most of the sailing was with the wind off our quarter, or abeam, which, of course, is the fastest leg of all.



Beachy Head and the chalk cliffs of the English Channel, seen over *Neith's* main boom



Hove-to in mid-Atlantic

At midnight a heavy cross sea was running. S. W. to W. x N. wind. Barometer 29.91.

At the uncanny hour of two in the morning on August 2, our fourteenth day out, we had a little excitement, as the mainsheet carried away. The banging of the main boom placed an unequal strain on the galvanized eyes which had been put through the deck on the port and starboard sides, forward of the wheel, and bolted on the inside. The eyes of the bolts were  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch iron, but the strain of the banging twisted the port one off short, so that the blocks holding three parts of line slid up to the bridle on the boom. The starboard sheet had been made fast with a rolling hitch, which slid up with the break to the block on the bridle of the main boom. If it were not for the jamming of the starboard sheet the boom would have been without control. All hands turned to and doused the mainsail, P. D. Q. This sheet was a man's-sized one— $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches in circumference.

Anyone will be able to understand our condition when they realize that it was blowing hard and raining. Barometer 29.92.

At noon, August 2, our log read 333 miles. At 2 P. M. we were headed E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  N. Owing to a howler from the W. N. W. we decided to take it easy under mizzen and jib; also the view was better this way, if such a term can be applied to the "misty" conditions.

At 8 P. M. we sighted a French fishing smack, and later indulged in some praiseworthy oral exercises in an endeavor to make ourselves un-

derstood. But we did not "savey" each other, except the "*Bon voyage*," which we exchanged with smiles and grins, which latter are the same in all languages. We kept on our course. A fish, evidently grown tired of its watery domain, hopped aboard the *Neith*, so we decided it must be good fishing hereabouts. We also saw other fishermen, with picturesque red and other colored sails. The French fisherman rarely uses any other power except God's wind. It is his idea of economy. His time apparently means nothing. They are real sailors, though, and are frequently seen 700 to a 1,000 miles at sea.

I omitted to mention that the Commander tried out his sextant a day or two before. It was an old apparatus he had had with him in the British Navy, but he did not have much luck, for two very good reasons—one because the sun was clouded, and the second—well, the darn old ocean wouldn't keep still!

August 3. 4 A. M. Log 448 miles. Variation 19 West. True course N. 66 E. On last course we had made 115 miles.

Noon, 468 miles. A fresh nor'-west breeze was blowing us along merrily. Barometer 30.78.

Midnight, 532 miles. Wind falling.

August 4, at 8 A. M., we had added another 40 miles in the eight hours since midnight.

10:20 A. M. Log 587 miles. Started in to blow hard from the sou'-west. At 2:30 P. M. the sou'-wester continued to pipe right along with us, good and plenty. Our heavy 14-ounce duck and rigging

were standing up in good shape.

At midnight we were still logging six knots on our course. The phosphorescence on the water was unusually strong, and where the tops of the seas broke could easily be mistaken for lights on a ship. Our log line looked like a live streak of fire trailing astern. We could even read the *Neith's* name on the transom in the glow.

The next morning we were treated again to an exceptional selection of thick, juicy fog. At 8:20 A. M. we received our position from *S. S. Tartaine*, a Scandinavian freighter, and the bearing of the old Start Light, which was only seven miles away.

During the last day or two interested members of the crew had been inquiring when land was likely to show itself. The

Commander finally remarked, with a twinkle in his eyes, "Well, there is land somewhere," and this day, August 5, was a crimson-colored one in our calendar, as our expectant hopes were made a hilarious realization. At 8:25 A. M. "Ding's" pleasing baritone piped up to the Commander below, "Land away, away, to starboard!" The Commander hopped on deck and naturally cast his orbs to starboard, but there was nothing which looked like land to be seen there. Peering away to port he had better luck. "Ding" would have been all right if he had had two guesses!

That land was a mighty welcome sight, I'll tell the world. The terra firma in question was Salquan, which sported a river of the same name. It is near Plymouth, England, and not far from Start Point.

The Commander signalled at Prawle Point, and message was relayed to Mrs. Houghton, that we would arrive at Burnham-on-Crouch, England, about thirty miles from London, on Sunday afternoon, August 7, three days from that time. It will be seen that our skipper had his confidence with him in making such a promise, in view of the long distance we had still to sail. That was his nature, however, and nothing ever robbed him of his sporting proclivities. During moments of intense excitement, when it was possible that anything might happen—moments when the average man's judgment would have been shaken—he would start the example of doing the practical thing, and then remark, "Well, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen." Kipling must

have been thinking of him when he wrote:

*"The game is more than the player  
of the game,  
And the ship is more than the crew."*

It is readily apparent that Kipling had only windjammers in mind. It was a glorious feeling to be winning out, with our destination only a short leg ahead.

We had entered the English Channel some time during August 3, but were unable to see land owing to the fog. Now that we had made a good landfall the average skipper would have put in for supplies and overhauling when near a good port, especially if he were without wood and coal, as we were. The Commander just showed his individuality and staying powers by keeping on.

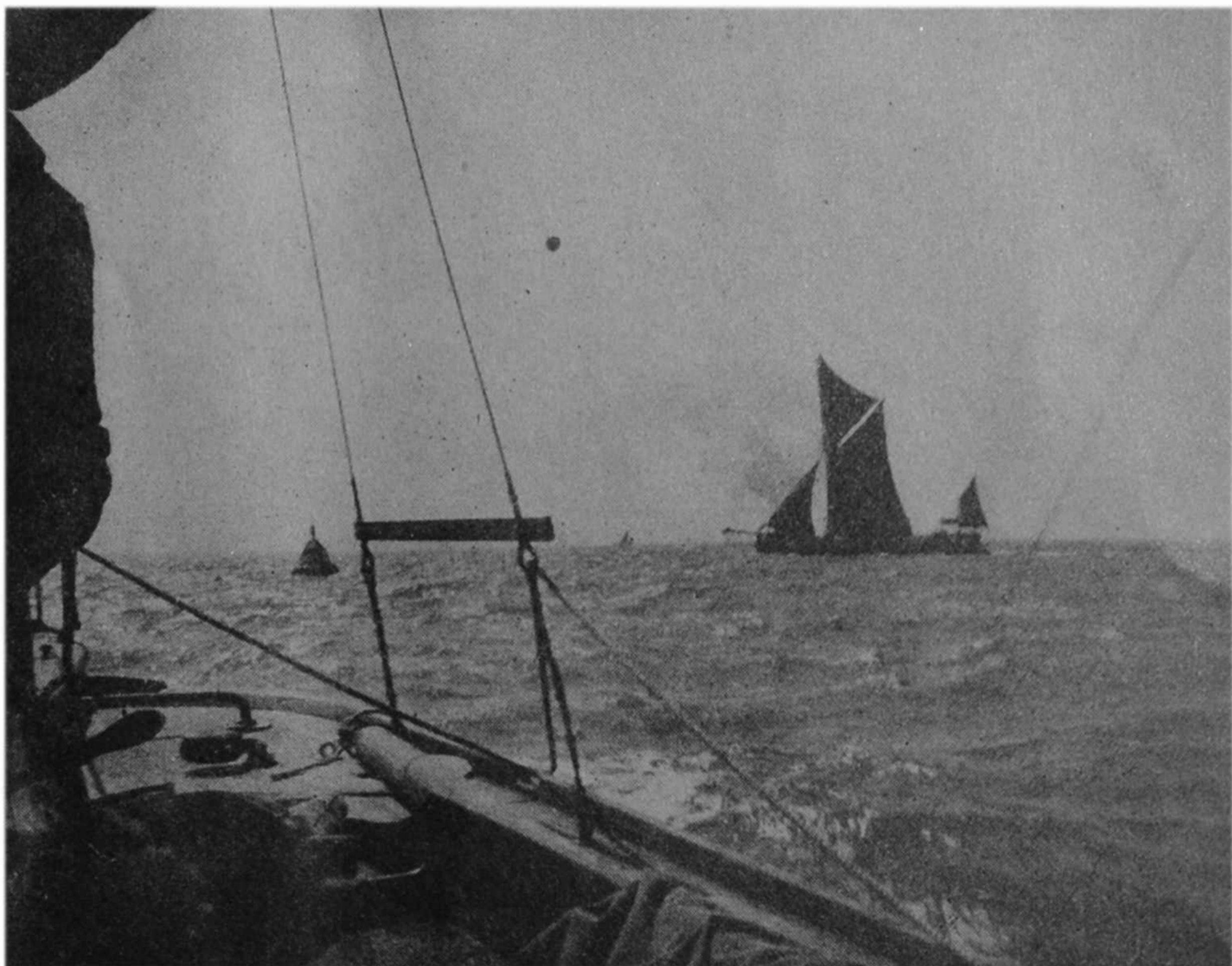
I have omitted to mention that the weather conditions the latter part of the voyage were more acceptable after we ran into the Gulf Stream, on the seventh day out of New Foundland. It was less cold and penetrating and the water was tinged a deep blue. The old icebergs that were brought down by the Labrador current eventually melted when they swung into the Stream.

At 10:50 A. M. we were headed E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  S., with 708 miles registered on the log. Abeam, to port, was the old historic Start Light. We kept on up Channel at better than  $7\frac{1}{2}$  knots, with our sou'-west wind still with us, blowing strong. The water through which we were sailing had now changed color to a light green from the dark blue of the open sea.

6 P. M. Courst East. 764 miles. We could see land fairly well, making out chimneys, etc., and shortly thereafter we had Portland abeam.

At 11.45 P. M. St. Catherines was abeam to port, and we were approaching the Isle of Wight, anchorage of the famous Royal Yacht Club, and where our six-meter sloops raced last summer off Cowes.

August 6th, 4 A. M., Log 823 miles. On account of the hard blow we were plowing ahead under mainsail and staysail. During the night, owing to the heavy fog, we lost St. Catherines Light and, bowing to the heavy wind, our mainsail was doused and we headed due South, to keep clear of the strong current, which was making every effort to set us ashore. I realized then the truth of some of the things I had heard about the English Channel, with its choppy seas, heavy currents and fog—it had all of those. We were watching our step now as never before, as it is quite different



"We beat up past the Thames estuary." Thames barge in background

being out in the roomy ocean to navigating in our present waters, with the knowledge of rocky shores within crashable distance.

As the forenoon advanced a full-grown Channel squall paid his respects, and in reciprocation of the compliment we doubled reefed the mainsail. It was a case of "No rest for the weary," and a sleepy crew, who would have donated their shirts for a good snooze, did not enter into the spirit of the work at all. Sometime later we passed Owers Lightship and shook out the reefs.

At noon we were sailing by summer resorts. First came Worthing, and at 3.40 P. M., Brighton, the Atlantic City of England. Clear, sunny weather now beamed upon our endeavors, and our trim little ship shook herself most gratefully and gurgled, "We'll show 'em, old dear!" Even old Beachy Head, abeam to port, grinned a good-natured welcome.

About eight-thirty that evening it started in to blow to beat the band, and we raced by Dungeness, where the well-known air-plane bombing station is located. Midnight found us passing the famous chalk cliffs of Dover, one-quarter mile off our port beam. The light house on top of the cliffs shot revolving rays around which lit up the cliffs in a startlingly attractive manner. The wind had staged his last performance for our benefit, however, and was now dropping most gracefully. We picked up the lights of Calais, France, but they possessed no charms for the Skipper, who was bound for and was at last near his home.

On Sunday, August 7th, at 3 A. M., we had the North Foreland Light, near Ramsgate, abeam. The

old *Neith* poked her nose inquiringly into the Thames estuary and tacked all day long monotonously across the "sands" (shallow water), and late that afternoon picked up moorings at our journey's end, off the Crouch Yacht Club, Burnham, England, of which the Skipper was Commodore, amid the roar of cannon, whistle salutes, cheering and waving of hats. It was a royal welcome, and, strange to say, all our tired feelings vanished and we were keen for going ashore immediately.

This was at 5.25 P. M., and the sun was shining brightly! The three yacht clubs here, the Royal Corinthian, the Burnham and the Crouch, had been notified of our anticipated arrival and were all dressed with flags, etc., in honor of the conclusion of our successful voyage.

The Commander's wife and some friends were the first to step aboard and then those gathered ashore insisted that we make the rounds of the three Clubs. We were not even allowed time to shave or spruce up, but—we were among friends! It would be expressing it but mildly to say that the English yachtsmen are an enthusiastic breed, and they were certainly hospitable. It was late that night (or, rather, morning) when we turned in, at the Commander's cozy summer home.

The following day we carried our gear ashore. There were reporters from the London papers, photographers, and moving-picture men galore, who let us have it fore and aft, in rapid fire order. Later we saw ourselves in the "movies," which was interesting if not elevating. The following week we took it easy and lived a lotus-eating life, every courtesy being extended us.