

UNDER THE CROWN AND ANCHOR.

A NORTHERN YACHT RACING REMINISCENCE.

“ND what sort of wind are we going to have, or are we going to have any at all?” asked our brown-bearded bronze-faced skipper, as he held water with his oars in the little dingy which belonged to our craft, of a hard weather-beaten Loch Fyne herring fisher, who, with his hands in pockets and pipe in mouth, looked complacently down on him from the stone pier at Campbeltown, that town ever dear to lovers of Scotch whisky from the number of its distilleries; and well known as the capital of Kintyre, the southern portion of the dominions of the MacCallummore.

“Ay, ay! it iss wind you will heff, and no mistake. It hass been making up ferra hard for a breeze all night, and you’ll find it come away hard from the nor-west. Ay, as hard as you would wish whateffer before the night. The glass is comin’ down shust a little, and the wind hass been backin’ too, and maybe you would be as wise as your necbors as you would start with a reef down in your mainsail.”

The reply to the latter caution was a loud “Ha, ha!” in a deep bass voice, for our captain was by no means afraid of getting too much wind, his anxiety was, indeed, all the other way; he was afraid of getting light airs or none at all, and there is nothing a genuine lover of yacht racing dreads more than a drifting match or a dead calm.

Old Duncan’s assurance that there would be plenty of wind before the day was over was all that he wanted. He had known the old Lochgilphead man for many a day, and knew that there was not a better judge of the weather inside or outside the whole Kintyre Peninsula. As to reefing, there was plenty of time for that when the wind did come, and at the time the old man hailed him there was scarcely enough to carry the smoke of the galley fires clear of the stove pipes on the numerous yachts which comprised the fleet of the Royal Northern Yacht

Club, the crown and anchor burgee of which was fluttering gaily at the mastheads of about forty vessels of all sizes.

"Ay, ay, then, captain, you wass always heff your own way," said the old fellow after him, "but you keep the Kintyre side o' the shore at any rate, for it will all be from the westward till Skipness."

"Thank you, Duncan," was the reply, as the dingy drew alongside, and the speaker jumped on to the fore-castle head, while two of the crew lifted the little tub on deck.

"Yes," we heard him mutter to the mate, "Duncan's right. We'll have lots of wind before night, and the more we can have of it the better for us, for she doesn't like dawdling about in a light air, like a dandy."

Scarcely had he spoken when the sound of a gun began to re-echo throughout the glens on each side of the loch, and as the bluish grey smoke floated away from the club yacht, on which was flying the pennant of the acting commodore, we could see three flags being run up to the mast-head.

"Owners to assemble on board Commodore," was the call of the captain, who read it without the aid of a binocular. "Come, men, Cutter away! sharp!" and in less than half a minute more we were doing our best to answer the signal.

There are few pleasanter forms of yachting, it may be said, than cruising in convoy, since, like hunting, there is a certain amount of sociableness in it, and none of the selfishness which characterises shooting and angling, where the sportsman likes to be alone. No doubt, with a pleasant party on board, a safe craft, a steady pilot, a well-filled locker, and a leg of mutton and some fat capons or grouse hanging under that yachtman's larder, the overhang of the counter, anyone, with good companions, can enjoy himself thoroughly; but in the opening and closing cruises, which mark the beginning and end of the season of the Royal Northern and Royal Clyde Yacht Clubs, one can have all the pleasure of good sailing with the best of company and lots of amusements at the awkward *contretemps* of the craft of one's neighbours. Indeed these cruises, very much more than anything on the water, resemble happy hunting days, with pleasant hours by the covert side and a hard gallop across country, for there is always some racing in order to keep up the excitement. Then how pleasant it is to reach down along the edge of the

soft woodland shores of the island of Bute, and in beneath the bold cliffs of Garroch Head, on which the yellow furze is crackling in the sun ; then in answer to signal follow Commodore into Brodick Bay, or the scarcely less picturesque Lamdash, and there let go the mud-hooks for the evening, which is whiled away with a cigar on deck beneath the moonlight, as the band of the Cumberland ship plays a selection of soft music. How happy, too, is it in the morning to rush on deck into the clear " caller " Scotch air, and, as the sunrise gun is fired from the Commodore, watch the burgees being run up to the mast-head in response, while the band strikes up " Rule Britannia." Perhaps the anchorage may be Inverary, the residence of the Duke of Argyll ; perhaps it may be the lovely little bay of Black Farland, in the Kyles of Bute ; but, no matter where, all is healthy jollity and mirth-making. On the occasion of our story, the fleet, which numbered between thirty and forty sailing yachts of all sizes, besides half-a-dozen or more steamers, found their way, the wind having been northerly and fresh, down the Sound of Kilbrannan, which divides Kintyre from Arran, on the evening previous. The big ones had got in early, and, of course, those on board had plenty of time for taking a stroll on shore and inspecting the ancient stone cross, or a drive to the picturesque bay of Macharohanish, which is right open to the Atlantic, and has a grand institution, all golfers will say, a capital golfing course, and a very comfortable hotel on the edge of it. The ten ton fleet stole in with the dusk, their Corinthian owners and crews as merry as crickets, singing lustily, or shouting jokes from boat to boat. Then there were crew serenades, happy visitations, and " hot water and Campeltown," mixed, till far " ayont the twal," each owner in returning to his berth vowing that he would win the prize which was to be sailed for next day, or " run the old hooker ashore."

It was to arrange the course and conditions of sailing for the prizes which were presented for competition in the different classes that we had been called on board. A merry and a strange group, too, we formed, as boat after boat came up to the gangway, the man-of-war-like cutters of the bigger vessels, manned by smartly-dressed crews, being followed by diminutive dingies, filled by their jaunty, jolly, Corinthian owners, who, with short pipe in mouth, old jerseys roughly drawn on, and

balmorals, looked like young herring fishers out for a little diversion. While the numerous boats fall astern and wait for their passengers, there is a hurried consultation on deck, and then come suggestions wide and varied. "Round Arran and into Lamlash," shout some; "Round Ailsa Craig and into Brodick," shouts another; "Stranraer," comes the call from one, and "Bangor in Belfast Loch," cries a young salt who has happy memories of joyous days and nights with the Royal Ulster men at regatta times. The older and the wiser counsels prevail, however, and with the announcement of the decision, "Straight for Ardrishaig, Loch Fyne," there is a hurry-scurry to the gangway, as comes the further shout, "the third class at half-past ten, and the forties and first-class boats at quarter-of-an-hour intervals afterwards." As the boats hurry off in all directions, crews are heaving short, and in the big schooners the men are merrily dancing round the windlass to some favourite sea shanty. Then comes the long *creak, creak* of the hoops on the mast, as like bees the men rush up the rigging and fling themselves on to the halliards, riding down which, one by one, the mainsail is gradually seen ascending. Some minutes more and the calls of "Yo! *he hoe*," are heard all round, while they are swigging away at the peak purchase, the ten-tonners by this time dancing across the bows and sterns of the heavier craft, with everything drawing, and waiting anxiously for the start. Lord Ailsa's little new boat, the *Beagle*, is there, on her maiden voyage, with Allan Fife, most skilful of pilots, at the tiller. Alas! on the second, the week afterwards, she was sunk, and now lies thirty fathom deep in the Kyles of Bute; and there, too, is Watson's new ten-tonner, *Verve* (not the present *Verve*, however), his biggest vessel as yet, also on first trip; and there too, is the then invincible *Florence*, so well known long afterwards on the Thames. Soon all are aweigh, and filling first on one side and then on another, scethe about like a shoal of little fishes in some sun-lit pool; the fresh morning breeze, which we think may be the first of Duncan's strong nor-wester, raising a strong curl on the smooth water as it comes gently sweeping down from the green and purple Highland hillsides.

With the last of the five minutes of "the warning" slowly ticking out, the tens go ramping down to the line—for on the Clyde punctuality is strictly observed, five minutes meaning 300

seconds, and not from 450 to 500, as with some clubs in the south—and ere the smoke has risen from the second gun as high as the rigging, are stemming it, all drawing. Ere they have disappeared out of the loch, the forties are sent after them, and then comes our turn.

“Give us good time, men,” calls the skipper, “and let’s get out the loch as soon as we can; there’ll be a nice jam at the mouth, if I’m not mistaken. There’s the gun! now call them off as they fly. One gone! you say, and four we have, and the breeze freshening; lots of time yet. We’ll run down and across the loch and back, and then the gun will be about ready.”

Down we go and try our run, and, as the cry goes, “Ready about,” the call comes again, “Two gone.”

“Two gone!” repeats the skipper, glancing back at the Commodore; “good time yet, men.”

“Three gone,” follows as we come back across the loch and is followed by “Four gone” as we fill on the right tack for a start well placed 100 yards above the imaginary line. “Four and a half,” is the call again as we tear down, running through the lee of one and past the weather of another, whose skippers are afraid of letting their boat gather way. “Three quarters gone” is scarcely out till we get “the gun” and are away, though not alone, for others have been as smart as ourselves and are bursting up the water alongside. The wind freshens a little, we find, as we draw clear of the hills, and with sheets eased we rush along at a great pace, though not so fast as we would have, had we been allowed to set spinnakers. Single-winged sailing is, however, quite as pleasant in another way, insomuch as you can see what’s doing ahead, while if you are in the last boat and spinnaker up you might nearly as well be at home with the blinds down.

As we close on Devaar we all come together again, for the tide is low and we can see the white breakers curling on the sand-bank of the false sound to the southward. There is not so much water in the north sound as some would like, and the passage is narrower. So, afraid of the “overland route,” those to leeward crowd in till we are all jostling like hunters at an awkward but only gap. “Keep your luff!” is the call on one side; “Where the deuce are you going to?” is the call of another, as one’s bowsprit sweeps across another’s taffrail and almost catches hold of the main sheet, while the boom of the boat behind is right across

our rail a couple of feet ahead of the rigging. "If the leading boat goes aground what a nice muck we'll all be in," whispers someone; but there's a sweet little cherub somewhere that takes care of the whole of us, and in a few minutes we are all trying reaching matches with one another up the Sound of Kilbrannan. But what? Can we really believe our eyes? The ten-tonners and the forty-tonners are all lying in the doldrums, just abreast of Carradale, the beautiful summer residence of Colonel Buchanan, the popular master of the Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Foxhounds. Steadily we sail into it, the ripple at our stern gradually falling away to nothing, while the boom begins to creak uneasily, and we come to even keels all of a heap. "Where has gone Duncan's north-wester?" is the call. "Has it passed overhead, or has it gone south to round the Mull of Kintyre?" Anxious crews are whistling away in the bows like curlews, but still there is no response, and a long, dreary, drifting passage is promised with anchor lights in the rigging to Ardris-haig. Under the sombre hills of Arran there are, however, streaks on the water which bespeak an easterly air, and with the light zephyr barely making itself felt we head across for it, heedless of the old fisherman's warning to keep "well to the west'ard." It is only a "glen breeze," however, and has to be nursed carefully near the shore, tack and tack, so as to have the best made of it. But what is that we see as we are coming off on starboard, with the big Selene away ahead of us? Duncan, the fisherman's, squall coming down over the Kintyre hills like a close pack of hungry wolves, slow and steady, and driving before it a fleeting shower. See, yonder, the leading ten-tonner is bending to it already, and hurrying along the edge of the land, one sees now the others catch it up and are off in pursuit. Anxious eyes on the big schooner are watching them. Slowly she catches it, and now you can see the luff of her mainsail shaking as she has it more strong; now again her head comes round as she gets it more free. We are e'en beginning to smell the first of it ourselves, when the big vessel heels to it, and, through a shower which burst over her, goes away like a startled stag in pursuit of the smaller vessels ahead.

"By St. Mungo, boys, *it's a race*, after all," says our captain, the Viking light gleaming in his eyes. "Stand by the topsail halliards, and be ready to ease sheets, for it's coming down all

smoking. Good heavens! how the big schooner is travelling now!"

Scarcely had he spoken than the gathering wind made the boat heel over to starboard, and, amid the hissing of the squall, the rattling of the blocks, and the booming sound of the wind in the rigging, came the cry, "E-ease sheets!" followed by the call again of "Ease off mainsheet yet!" To windward, all was a long sea of white, mixed shower and spindrift, tearing along before clouds of black, which came over the hill in a scowling manner, like a body of artillery following in the wake of an advance guard to deliver volley after volley. To leeward, however, the sun was shining out clearly, and lighting up the granite peaks of Arran, and the foaming streams which burst down their mountain sides; the last patch of snow on the peak of grim, grizzly Goatfell gilded by the solar rays into a crown of purple and gold.

"Duncan was right, after all, boys," says the captain, with eyes occasionally glancing to windward, and occasionally to the racing flag at the mast-head.

"We'll have it hard from the nor-west, and a long dead thrash up Loch Fyne; just what'll suit us."

With the rail sometimes churning the water into a mill-race in our lee scuppers, we tear on in pursuit of the big schooner, soon passing the ten-tonners, which have brought up to the wind to take in a reef. Behind us come cutters, yawls, and schooners, all mixed up; some lowering topsails quickly, afraid of the topmasts: some with topsails and topmast lowered without their consent, and dangling wreckage to leeward of the mainsail. Gradually the squalls steady down into a fresh westerly breeze, though occasionally at times it gathers in the gullies and sweeps across our bows, tearing up the spindrift till it resembles drifting snow. All we pray for is that the gear will stand. At times the mast is bending and buckling dangerously beneath the force of the wind-blows; but the good pine of Oregon has bent its head to many a forest blast in the Far West to save its own loved branches, and is true to the core, tossing back its head victoriously as we lift to a more even keel again, and tear *on—on—onwards*. Masses of spray burst over us at times, and form a rainbow over the bow with the sunshine which strikes out from beneath the passing clouds; yet the men as they crouch with

red-cowled heads under the rail and watch the fleeting schooner ahead, like our British seaman in chase of some French corvette in the days of old, think only of victory. Like greyhounds stretching after a hare we gallop onwards. Sturgess has painted such a picture of the turf; the straining heads, the almost bursting veins, and the distended nostrils; so let someone give us such a delineation of a genuine yacht race. As we open Loch Fyne we find the wind drawing down the loch, and the cry comes to get in our sheets.

"Mainsheet again, my hearties," is the call of our captain; "now that we have our nose to it, we'll hold the schooner at any rate, if we don't make on her."

Gradually we are headed off, and with everything drawn flat hold off on our old tack across the loch; for a hard beat the whole way to Loch Gilp is promised. With the wind piping strong, we point our bowsprit for Laird Lamont's Bay, on the far-off shore, to meet the big schooner, with every stitch drawing, coming off on starboard tack like a thing of life, the sun shining at times on her canvas till she is a blaze of white.

"Ready about," is now our call, and with a "Lee helm, round she comes, men," we are off for the Kintyre shore again, passing to windward the hurrying crowd behind.

Into the very shore we hold till we can almost tear the branches from the rowan trees, and then fling round again for the other side, down by which is steaming the stately Iona, known to people all over the world, her black smoke drifting away to leeward as hard as it rises from the funnel. Tack and tack, we cross and recross, in by the Skate Island on the one side, then back to Tarbert Loch on the other, sometimes getting a favouring start of westerly wind from the hills when holding off on port, sometimes meeting a heading squall flying north with the shower as we come off on starboard. From heather-clad shore to heather-clad shore our beat is hard and long, and the men, whose beards are white with salt from the spray drying on them in the glimpses of sunshine, are tired with the weary working at the head sheets. At last we fetch up Loch Gilp for home in the wake of the schooner, which allows us some time. All near we have beat we know, but have we beat the flying Selene? Flying along with a free slant, which comes across from Crinan Bay, we cross the buoys of Commodore Lord Glasgow's Valetta,



"hurray, we've won!"

R.M. Alexander

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and—hurrah! we get a gun. Bearing up again we luff up to know the result.

“Commodore ahoy! Who’s won?”

“The Condor!”

“How much?”

“*By one second only!*”

And so it was, the Condor won by the cracking of the cap on the gun, after one of the hardest and most exciting races that was ever sailed in full, let alone plain canvas; and though the Vanduara won many prizes for the Condor’s owner afterwards, she never won nor did Captain Mackie ever sail any that was more hardly contested than that which was sailed from Campeltown to Ardrishaig, and was won by one second.

From the first to last after the breeze came, it was a case of—

Wage away, rage away, blow away breeze,
Stand by your halliards, sheets my boys, ease.
Flare away, tear away, wear away, squall,
Get it all in again. Sheets my boys, haul!
Waste no wind, boys, lose no way,
And the old boat will win to-day.

Blustering Boreas, blow your wild blast;
Buckle and bend, but stand, my good mast;
Grumble and growl and rage may the gale;
Stout be good rigging, and stiff be good sail,
Strain not, strand not, stand, good stay,
And the old boat will win to-day.

Crash away, splash away, through it we’ll thrash,
Bold be the bowsprit, and into it dash:
In, till the stem is smashing it through,
Throb away, bob away, bobstay, be true;
Spindrift may drive, and lash may the spray,
But the old boat will win to-day.

So come now, be ready, my good commodore,
Be steady, and time us, the race is near o’er;
Mind now the minutes, and stand by your gun,
There goes the smoke of it! hurrah, we’ve won;
Hats off, my hearties, hip, hip, hooray,
For the old boat has won to-day.