

A DAY ON GAUNTLET.

BY

CHAS. PEARS.

"GAUNTLET AHOY!" Four paid hands and a tall man in a blue suit transferred their attention from the cut of a jib, that had just been set for criticism, to myself.

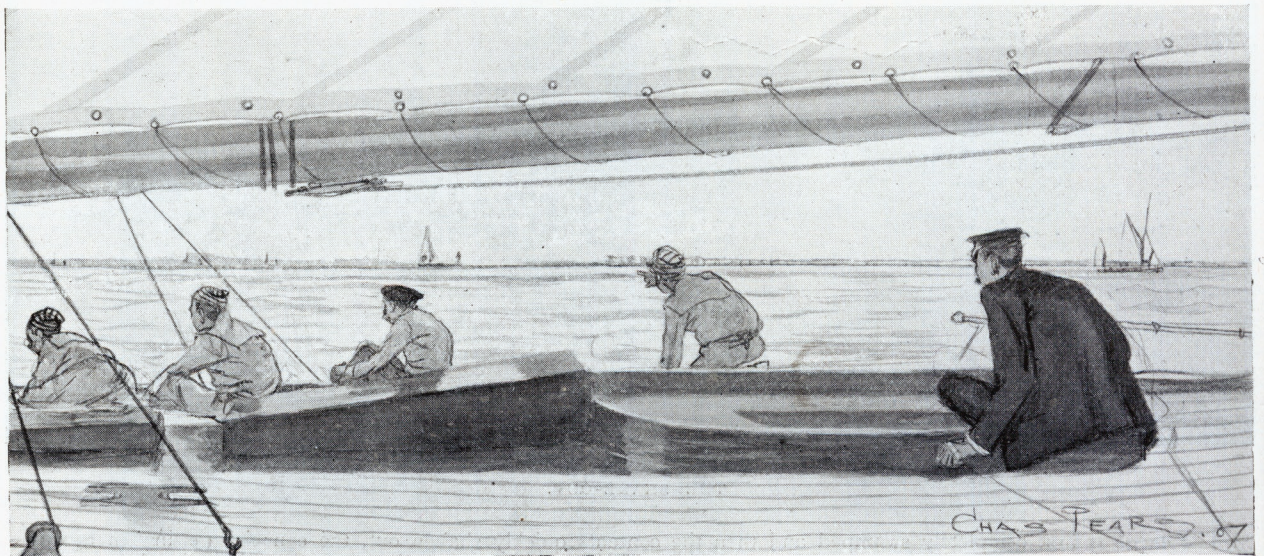
As I approached in the dinghy I feasted my eyes on the graceful lines of the famous boat, her topsides shining like polished ebony. I had been cruising single-handed for a week in Dorothy, and joined Gauntlet for the opening race of the New Thames Yacht Club on the following day. "Well, I like the look of your kit, anyway!" was the first greeting of Gauntlet's part-owner and skipper. "I hate the sight of a portmanteau," he explained. I may say that my kit consisted of what I stood in and an oily.

Gauntlet has eight bunks abaft the mast, and if anyone complains of the accommodation of a 52-footer I am sorry for him. In one of the eight bunks I slept like a top, and certainly the sailor-man has nothing to complain of in such a boat as Gauntlet. It is true that the chandelier in the saloon is not a work of art, and, for obvious reasons, there is no piano, but there is a violin, for, to quote the old song, "Johnny plays the fiddle," the

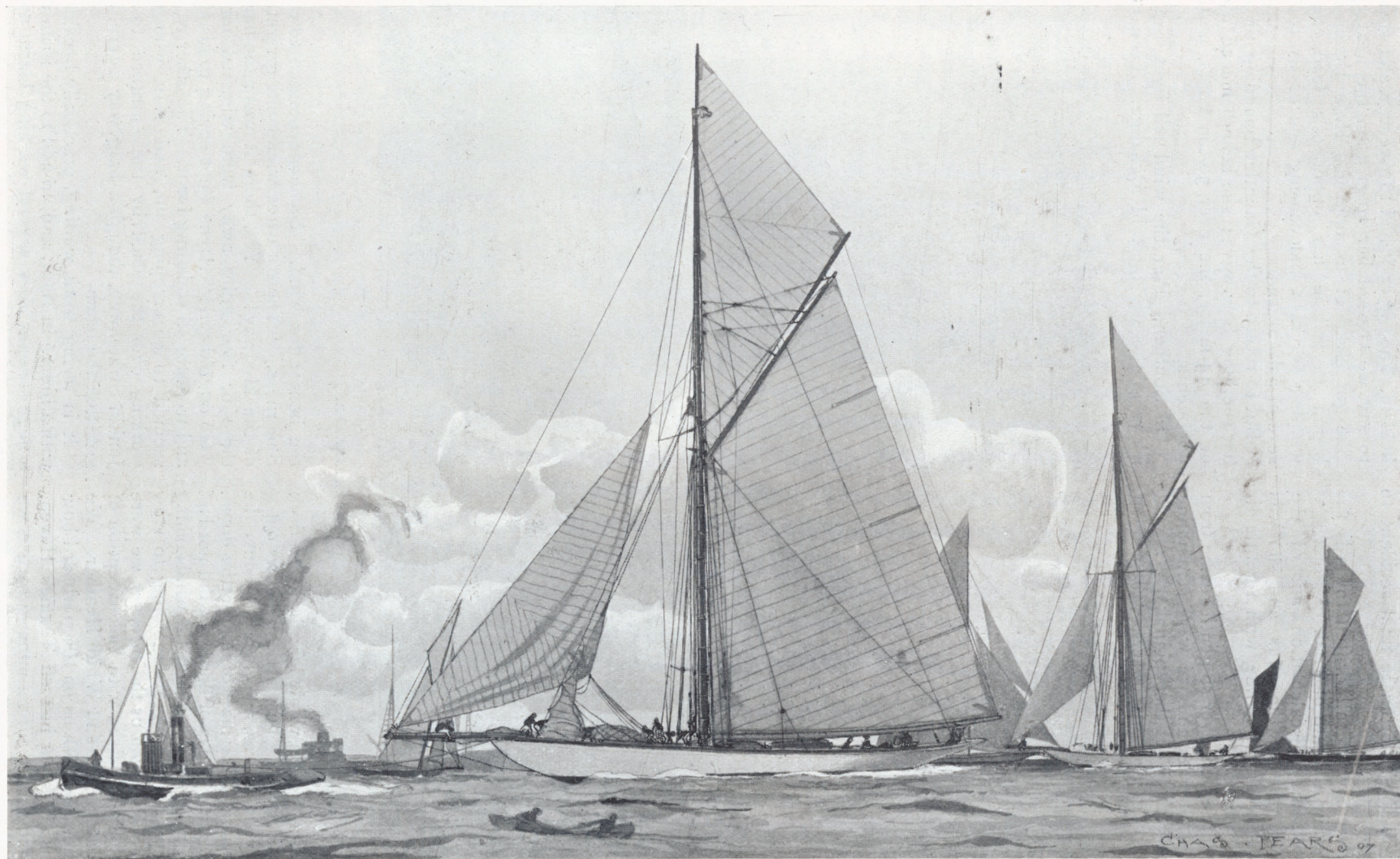
instrument being, I imagine, the only "gadget" aboard.

Upon the following morning we were under way about 10 a.m. Gauntlet carries a paid crew of four hands and three or four amateurs, Mr. Payne steering. She has the reputation of being about the best-sailed boat of the 52-footers, Payne "keeping his hand in" through the winter by cruising in all weathers when Gauntlet is laid up.

It was a grand sight to see the cracks getting under way. The big event was, of course, the 23-metre boats and Nyria. It was the first testing of the new rule, and much speculation was in the air as to what would happen. Presently a tug came steadily down towards the Ovens, with Nyria, White Heather, and Brynhild in tow. One had to crane one's neck to note their distinguishing flags as the stately procession passed. Indeed one gets absolutely no idea of the size of these boats from photographs, and it was quite a revelation to me as they passed within a stone's-throw to compare the thickness of the mast, for instance, with the width of a man's body. Presently we saw the tug returning with Brynhild, who had struck her racing



WIND-HUNTING.



White Heather.

Nyria.

Brynhild.

TOWING THE BIG BOATS TO THE LINE.

colours owing to the unfortunate fatal accident to one of her crew.

It is old news how we all drifted towards the mark with scarcely a breath of wind.

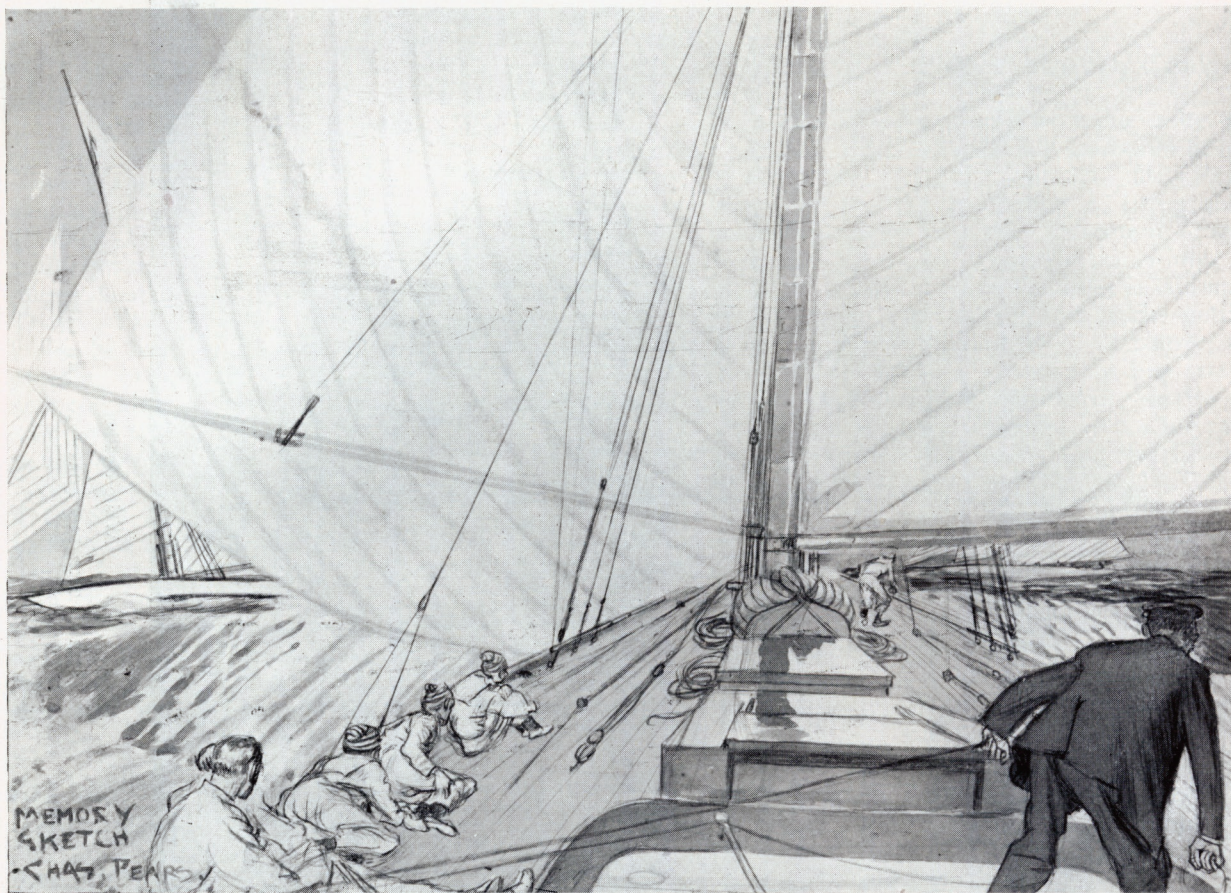
There was some miscalculation aboard the Gauntlet with regard to the guns, and she was amongst the last to cross the line, with a gentle air upon her starboard bow.

Presently a little puff, ever so gentle, came from right aft. A quick order and we were scrambling about the deck getting out the spinnaker. A wild effect—the hauling cries of the crew, the sudden

held on. The big craft had to give way, and, strange to say, we crossed her bows upon the next tack. She got clear of us opposite Hole Haven and began to reduce her opponent's lead, finally winning her race and causing one of us to lose several half-crowns.

But to return to the Gauntlet bounding through her seething bow wave; she held her lead ahead of the 15-metre, the over 50-ton boats, and her opponents.

Off Southend Pier the wind fell light, but the wisps in the sky foretold a change. Then came



UNDER SPINNAKER.

rush, pell-mell, along the whole length of the deck with the outhaul, and the beautiful sail blows out.

"Back to your places, me lads!" shouts the skipper, and a scrambling mass of men settles down, immobile as so many sacks of flour. It did not last long—three minutes at most—and, the wind coming from the old quarter, we were scrambling to stow the spinnaker. That won us the race, for we were well clear of the whole fleet, with the exception of the two big boats, Nyria and White Heather. We were taking the wind with us on the starboard bow and footing it so fast that just off Thames Haven, although she had started fifteen minutes earlier, we caught White Heather upon the port tack. Payne

the hunt after wind. Someone pointed towards Sheerness. "There's a free wind coming right out of the Medway!" Yes, there it was; the barges three or four miles away were trimmed for it. "Go on, old girl!" Payne kept saying to his ship, and we were all whistling for it. The other yachts seemed to be creeping up, and Nan, who was working over the slack by the entrance to the Jenkin Swatchway, though a long way astern, had got it on the beam.

It is trying work waiting, practically becalmed, with a breeze in sight, and, to add to the irritation, a huge steamer blew several warning blasts upon her siren to indicate that she would keep her

course. Payne held on. More buzzing from the steamer. Payne still held on, and the steamer sheared off, leaving us dancing in her wash. Looking along her wake there were sandy-coloured patches. She had stirred up a bit of the Nore Sand, the dread of which no doubt was the cause of her anxiety for us to give way.

Guns from the club steamer indicated a shortening of the course. White Heather and Nyria were round and bearing down upon us under spinnakers—a fine sight. Here Maymon caught us.

Soon came the time for rounding the steamer, and, by way of proving that to err is human, Gauntlet did not fetch the mark when put about. I mention this because it seemed to me so curious that a man who sailed a boat as well as Payne sailed the Gauntlet upon that day, and enjoying such a reputation as he undoubtedly and deservedly does, should make the error of attempting to round a mark before it bears abeam. In this case I made special note of the bearing because I wished to compare the performance with that of my own boat and see how far it tallied with the theory set down by Dixon Kemp with regard to over-reaching marks.

Another tack and bang went the gun. Then came the rush for the spinnaker and the setting of the Yankee. When all was square for the run home I went to the end of the counter. The glorious spread of the spinnaker squared off, the rushing bow wave, the crouching figures of the crew, the glistening deck fittings created an effect such as one is lucky to have seen.

"In with that spinnaker—there's a rare breeze coming up on the beam! Hurry up, my lads!" Another scrimmage with the spinnaker—by now all a-shake—and while we were stowing the boom the breeze was on us. "Get in that Yankee, some of you, or we'll have the topmast out of her!"

Spinnaker and Yankee stowed and jib topsail reset, "Back to your places, lads!" "Pears, you get out to windward as far as you can—I know you small-boat people think it doesn't matter on these craft, but every ounce tells!" Someone else was asked to stow himself 6in. nearer the weather back-stay, which was straining and twanging away until it seemed ready to squeeze all its wire strands into one solid bar of steel. It was a light wind, no doubt, but with lee-rail just awash and the crew hiked out to windward it was just sufficient to feed one's imagination.

Well, we saved our heavy handicap with several minutes to spare, and, of course, had the additional delight of seeing the remainder of the fleet cross the line.

Gauntlet is a wonderful craft, as her record will prove. There is nothing of the spick-and-span about her crew in appearance; their black-and-yellow-striped brewers' sweep caps are stained with salt water, and when racing they are not particular about the centre crease asserting itself down their white duck trousers—but they can work.

It is a rollicking, roving kind of game this class racing, but give me my little Dorothy and my sentimental cruising in and out of the creeks and small havens of the estuary—those anxious moments, the ever-delightful romance-weaving, wherein

"She is a clipper
And I am her skipper,
With nothing around us but sea,"

and those ambrosial nights when she splutters along, casting phosphorus from her bows. Your racing man knows not these.

THE LATE MR. H. M. RAIT.

WE were unsuccessful in obtaining a good photograph of the late Mr. Henry M. Rait to accompany the memoir in our June number. We have now, with the kind assistance of Mr. Robert Steele, obtained a photo-



Bassano.

graph of the late owner of Fiona, which many of the well-known yachtsman's friends will be glad to see. In his will Mr. Rait bequeathed his famous cutter to the Royal Thames Yacht Club.