

## ***AMONG THE YACHTS***

**From ‘*In Highland Harbours with Para Handy*’ by Hugh Foulis (Neil Munro) – an eyewitness account of a Clyde Fortnight yachting duel**

MACPHAIL was stoking carefully and often, like a mother feeding her first baby and driving the Vital Spark for all she was worth past Cowal.

"She hass a capital turn of speed when you put her to it," said the Captain, quite delighted. "We'll easy be at Bowlin' before ten," said Dougie, consulting his watch. "You needna be so desperate anxious."

The engineer mopped himself fretfully with a fistful of oily waste and shrugged his shoulders. "If you chaps like to palaver awa' your time," said he, "it's all the same to me, but I was wantin' to see the end o' the racin'."

"Whatna racin'?" asked the Captain.

"Yat-racin'," said the engineer, with irony. "Ye'll maybe hae heard o't. If ye havena, ye should read the papers. There's a club they ca' the Royal Clyde at Hunter's Quay, and a couple o' boats they ca' the Shamrock and the White Heather are sailin' among a wheen o' ithers for a cup. "I don't see much in aal their yat-racin'," said Para Handy.

"Yonder the boats; we're in lots o' time----" said Macphail and he dived again among his engines.

"Anything wi' Macphail for sport!" remarked the Captain sadly.....

"Give her a point to starboard, Dougie, and we'll see them better. Yonder's the Ma'oona; if the duvvle wass wise he would put aboot at wance or he'll hit that patch o' calm."

"There's an aawful money in them yats!" said the mate.

.... "There's the Hera tacking; man" responded the Captain " she's smert! smert! Wan o'them Coats's boats; I wish she would win; I ken a chap that plays the pipes on her."

Dougie steered as close as he could on the racing cutters with a sportsman's scrupulous regard for wind and water. "What wan's that?" he asked, as they passed a thirty-rater which had struck the calm.

"That's the Pallas," said the Captain, who had a curiously copious knowledge of the craft he couldn't see the sense of. "Another wan o' the Coats's; every other wan you see belongs to Paisley. They buy them by the gross, the same ass they were pins, and distribute them every noo and then among the faimely. If you're a Coats you lose a lot o' time makin' up your mind what boat you'll sail to-morrow; the whole o' the Clyde below the Tail o' the Bank is chock-a-block wi' their steamboat-yats and cutters. "I sometimes wish, mysel', I had taken to the yats," said Dougie; "it's a suit or two o' clothes in the year, and a pleasant occupaation. Most o' the time in canvas slippers."

"You're better the way you are," said Para Handy; "there's nothing bates the mercantile marine for makin' sailors. Look at them chaps sprauchlin' on the deck; if they saw themsel's they would see they want another fut on that main-sheet. I wass a season or two in the yats mysel'--the good old Marjory. No' a bad job at aal, but aawful hurried. Holy smoke! the way they kept you jumpin' here and there the time she would be racin'! I would chust as soon be in a lawyer's office. If you stopped to draw your breath a minute you got yon across the ear from a swingin' boom. It's a special breed o' sailor-men you need for racin'-yats, and the worst you'll get iss off the Islands."

"It's a cleaner job at any rate than carryin' coals," remarked the mate, with an envious eye on the spotless decks of a heeling twenty-tonner.

"Clean enough, I'll alloo, and that's the worst of it," said Para Handy. "You might ass weel be a chamber-maid--up in the momin' scourin' brass and scrubbin' floors, and goin' ashore wi' a fancy can for sixpenceworth o' milk and a dozen o' syphon soda. Not much navigation there, my lad!...If I wass that fellow I would gybe her there and set my spinnaker to starboard; what do you think yoursel', Macphail?"

"I thocht you werena interested," said the engineer, who had now reduced his speed.

"I'm not much interested, but I'm duvellish keen," said Para Handy. "Keep her goin' chust like that, Macphail; we'll soon be up wi' the Shamrock and the Heather."

"I wish the wind would fresh a bit, for there's the Shamrock, and her mainsail shakin'." The engineer dived below, and the Vital Spark had

her speed reduced to a crawl that kept her just abreast of the drifting racers.

"Paddy's hurricane--up and doon the mast," said Dougie in a tone of disappointment. "I would like, mysel', to see Sir Thomas Lipton winnin', for it's there I get my tea."

Para Handy extracted a gully-knife from the depths of his trousers pockets, opened it, spat on the blade for luck, and, walking forward, stuck it in the mast, where he left it. "That's the way to get wind," said he; "many a time I tried it, and it never fails. Stop you, and you'll see a breeze immediately. Them English skippers, Sycamore and Bevis, havena the heid to think o't. We'll stand by here and watch the feenish, if it's any time before the Gleska Fair."

Shamrock, having split tacks off Kilcreggan, laid away to the west, while White Heather stood in for the Holy Loch, seeking the evening breeze that is apt to blow from the setting sun. It was the crisis of the day, and the crew of the Vital Spark watched speechlessly for a while the yachts manoeuvring. For an hour the cutter drifted on this starboard leg, and Sunny Jim, for reasons of his own, postponed the tea.

"It wants more knives," said Para Handy; "have you wan, Dougie?" but Dougie had lost his pocket-knife a week ago, and the engineer had none either.

"If stickin' knives in the mast would raise the wind," said Sunny Jim, "there would be gales by this time, for I stuck the tea-knife in an oor ago."

"Never kent it to fail afore!" said Para Handy.... "By George! it's comin'. Yonder's Bevis staying!"

White Heather, catching the wind, reached for the closing lap of the race with a bone in her mouth, and Para Handy watched her, fascinated, twisting the buttons off his waistcoat in his intense excitement. With a turn or two of the wheel the mate put the Vital Spark about and headed for the mark; Macphail deserted his engine and ran forward to the bow.

"The Heather hass it, Dougald," said the Captain thankfully; "I'm vexed for you, considerin' the place you get your tea."

"Hold you on, Peter," said the mate; "there's the Shamrock fetchin'; a race is no' done till it's feenished." His hopes were justified. Shamrock, only a few lengths behind, got the same light puff of wind in her sails, and rattled home a winner by half a minute.

"Macphail!" bawled the Captain, "I'll be much obleeged if you take your place again at your bits of engines, and get under weigh; it's any excuse wi' you for a diversion, and it's time we werena here."



The White Heather –  
Clyde Fornight

Captain Charles Bevis



Shamrock III believed  
to be the Shamrock  
version in the story -  
Clyde Fortnight -  
Captain Sycamore –