



MY FIRST INTERNATIONAL YACHT RACE.

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THE first yacht race I ever sailed in foreign waters was back in the sixties, when I was serving on board *H. M. S. D—*, one of the ships forming the East Indian squadron.

We had seen six months of arduous duty in the southern part of the Red Sea, during which we had taken part in the Abyssinian war; and on the fall of Magdala we were ordered to Suez to effect some

slight repairs in the engine room and to give our ship's company a rest, with a few days' liberty ashore.

At this time the Suez Canal was completed between the Mediterranean and Lake Timsah (or the Lake of the Crocodiles). This is a shallow depression in the Egyptian desert, situated about half way between the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and is now well known to the world, since all the vast traffic of the canal passes through its placid waters. On its western shore is the town of Ismailia, which then consisted of comparatively few buildings.

Soon after our arrival at Suez, the officers of the *D—* received an invitation from Mons. Lesseps to take part

in a regatta, organized by canal company officials. The races were to be sailed on Lake Timsah, and the proceedings to finish up with fêtes and a ball.

Several of us accepted this invitation, and we soon found that two small yachts belonging to officials of the P. & O. Company at Suez, were going to represent England. Their owners, whom we happened to know, kindly offered us a passage to Ismailia, and asked us to sail with them in the regatta. So, early one fine morning we found ourselves outside the town of Suez, on the banks of the fresh water canal, which, running nearly parallel to Mons. Lesseps' great work, led to Ismailia Zag-a-Zig, and finally to the Nile.

Our hosts were waiting for us, and in a few minutes we embarked on the two "racers," cast off the lines which secured them to the banks, and were soon under way in tow of the queer-looking machine that navigated this narrow strip of water by winding in a chain stretched along the bottom.

The distance from Suez to Ismailia was about a hundred kilometers, and as our progress did not exceed five per hour we were in for a journey of a day and a night through the heart of the Egyptian desert.

And here I may as well describe the little vessels which we hoped to carry the "Meteor Flag" to the front, in the midst of the burning sands of the land of the

Pharaohs. How the racing yachtsmen of the present day would laugh at them, with their patched sails, well worn gear and rigging, masts and spars bleached white, showing many a gaping crack caused by the dry air and fierce heat of more than one Egyptian summer.

Neither of them had been in use for many months, and both had been hastily fitted out for this occasion. The larger of the two was a cutter of some six to eight tons (Thames measurement), a regular old-timer, built in the days when the cod's head and mackerel tail model embodied the highest ideas of yacht architecture. She was of small displacement, her draught did not exceed five feet, and the deck was cumbered with a large trunk, or "booby hatch," which extended from the cockpit to the mast. Her outfit of canvas contained no balloon sails, and the entire sail plan was of such modest dimensions that it seemed to us it would require a gale to drive her fast enough to get out of her own way.

The other was a little center-board cat-boat, after the American model, of the type generally known in England as a *Una*. She measured about seventeen feet on the water line, and her sail spread was considerably less than boats of her size usually carried in English or American waters. Yet, in spite of all these disadvantages we never doubted for a moment our ability to show the Frenchmen the way round sand-girt Bahr-el-Timsah.

Our party consisted of five, exclusive of a couple of Lascars who formed the paid-hand contingent, and a merry one it was, we *D's* feeling like school boys out for a holiday, after the monotonous confinement of so many months on the shores of the Red Sea.

The brown, mud-built, flat-topped houses of Suez soon grew smaller and beautifully less, and before very long nothing was visible except the great mountain range of Jebel Attakah to the southward, and a boundless waste of sand, broken here and there on our star-board hand by the tall funnels of the dredgers and elevators marking the line of the great maritime canal, which before many months passed by would unite the waters of two hemispheres.

Although progress was slow, the time passed quickly, for our hosts had not forgotten to provide a goodly stock of creature comforts, including several hundred weight of ice, which was

stowed away in the "*Una*." This last was a great and unaccustomed luxury to poor devils who for more than six months had been roasting in one of the hottest spots in the habitable globe, and the number of well frappéd bottles of Bass' and Médoc which we emptied would have filled the disciples of Sir Wilfred Lawson with wonder and dismay.

The cutter's cockpit, shaded by an awning, held all of us comfortably, and in spite of a temperature of some ninety odd degrees in the shade, and the uninteresting nature of our surroundings, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The margin of the canal was in many places fringed with bushes of tamarisk, and wherever the water had percolated through the banks, the sandy desert was covered with small patches of vegetation, showing plainly the wonderful fertilizing powers of the waters of the Nile.

Towards evening we came to a shallow section, and the cutter began to drag, so hailing our tug to stop, we explained the situation and then all hands set to work to shift ballast, trimming her by the head until she floated with water to spare, and at the same time we lightened her up, by discharging some hundredweights of pig iron into the "*Una*." Thus job finished we resumed the voyage, and arrived at Ismailia early the following morning and made fast alongside some native boats which had just arrived from the Nile.

We then went on shore to the comfortable quarters which had been provided for us, and after breakfasting with our host, returned on board to prepare the yachts for the coming fray. We re-shipped the ballast, and then descending through a lock, were once more on salt water in the Lake of the Crocodiles, the sandy shores of which were laved by the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

The lake appeared to be about four to five miles in length and about nine in circumference. It was surrounded with low sand hills, and on its western side upon a slightly rising ground, stood the straggling town of Ismailia, which, from the water, looked quite imposing. The palace of the Khedive, the handsome villa of Mon. Lesseps and those belonging to the contractors and engineers of the Canal Company, were most conspicuous. Many of the buildings stood in their own enclosures, in which young date palms were growing, together with

a few flowers, struggling for existence and out of place in their beds of arid sand.

A broad wooden wharf projected into the lake, and upon it were erected tribunes, or tiers of seats for the accommodation of the élite of both sexes; and numerous Venetian poles, gaily decorated with flags and pennants, flung their bright hues against the cloudless sky.

Moored a short distance off was the *Bateau de Juje*, or committee boat, and a fleet of French yachts and boats, which were preparing for the coming contests. Their crews were busily employed in overhauling balloon canvas and running gear, and were seemingly in the best of spirits, shouting, singing and gesticulating after the manner of true Frenchmen. The majority of these little vessels belonged to the officials and workmen employed in the construction of the canal, and many were of the type and rig known to the Marseillaise as *Houari*. These were shallow, hollow-bowed craft, from twenty to thirty feet in length, low in the water, and broad in the beam, veritable skimming dishes, some of them fitted with center boards while others had deep triangular fin keels made of boiler plate or some such metal. The rig was a sliding gunter mainsail, with one enormous headsail, and their balloon canvas consisted of squaresails, jib topsail and a save-all or watersail, which set below the main boom. It was evident from the length and size of the spars that any lack of speed would not be due to the want of driving power.

The general appearance of the two English boats excited the curiosity and mirth of the Frenchmen, and I must confess they did not show to advantage. Their rusty weather-beaten hulls, small spars and sails, contrasted strongly with the trim hulls and lofty well-cut canvas of our antagonists, and the most sanguine of us began to lose hope.

The principal events of the day were a race for yachts exceeding twenty feet on the water line, and another for those under that length. The first prize in each class was 1500 francs and 1000 francs, respectively. The course for the larger class was twice the round of the lake, and for the smaller once round, leaving all marks on the port hand. The cutter was entered for one event and the "Una" for the other.

The time to start had almost arrived before the cutter was ready, for the re-

stowing of the ballast had been a tedious job, but in the "Una" there was nothing to do except to set her solitary sail.

The committee decided to start both classes simultaneously, and the flotilla, numbering in all some twenty sail, were anchored in a line abreast, with head sails lowered according to law. An officer in the P. & O. service and the writer formed the crew of the "Una," the remainder of the party manned the cutter. Steam launches were buzzing and puffing around, and everything that would float was requisitioned, and crowded with enthusiastic sightseers.

The wharf and adjacent shores of the lake were densely thronged with a motley gathering. Staid and dignified well-dressed Arabs were jostled by half-starved swarthy Fellaheen. Stalwart woolly-headed Nubians of both sexes, with velvety skins, black as the ace of spades and shining, like a new dollar, rubbed shoulders with Greek Jews, and villainous looking Levantines, most of whom had come from stations along the canal.

The tribunes or "grand stand" and reserved enclosures on the wharf were filled with the officials and their families and friends. There was a large contingent of the fair sex, many of whom were attired in the latest Parisian fashions, making a very gay scene, doubly attractive and novel to us, so long exiled.

At last the starting-gun was fired, and with much shouting and gesticulation the anchors were got up, head-sails hoisted, and, in spite of a few collisions and fouling matches, the fleet was quickly under way.

It was a dead run before a light westerly wind to the first mark, and although the "Una," thanks to her light, and easily handled gear, managed to get away with a good lead, she was quickly overhauled and passed by all the Frenchmen, so that the two Englishmen soon became the whippers-in. It became very evident that, upon that point of sailing, in a light wind, they stood no chance against the *Houaris*.

But a totally unexpected piece of good luck befell the representatives of old England, for while the leading yachts were still some distance from the lee-mark boat great pillars of whirling sand and dust arose as if by magic in the western sky, casting a lurid glow over the surface of the water, and causing the sun, which hitherto had been shining

with dazzling brilliancy, to appear like a great copper-colored globe.

Soon the town of Ismailia and the windward shores of the lake became obscured in the fast advancing storm-cloud. There was no time to lose. "Lower away the mainsail, and look sharp about it" was the order. The sail came down by the run, was quickly stowed, and, under bare poles, we were ready to scud before the squall, which was now almost upon us. The cutter, too, was prepared to meet it, and the Frenchmen were taking in their flying kites. Astern of us a dark line, fringed with white, marked the course of the overtaking simoom. Then came a gust of burning-hot air and a choking sensation as, enveloped in the driving sand of the desert, the little "Una" was swept before the fiery blast, half smothered in clouds of spindrift. In a moment everything was obliterated by the whirlwind of dust, but as we were still fully two miles from the mark-boat and had plenty of sea-room, we kept her running dead before the wind.

In less than ten minutes the squall had passed, the sky became comparatively clear, and the wind settled down to a stiff westerly breeze, which already had raised a short, choppy sea.

A glance showed us how matters stood. Away to leeward lay our French friends, disabled or crippled, for several of their masts and other spars were broken or sprung. More than one vessel had run ashore on the lee side of the lake, some had anchored, and others had hauled to the wind, and were busy reefing sails and repairing damages. All were in a state of more or less con-

fusion. The cutter, however, was about to round the mark-boat, and, under a double-reefed mainsail, was footing it merrily, "in pride of place," leading the scattered fleet. We quickly close-reefed "Una's" sail, set it, then started in pursuit and rounded the lee-mark third boat in our race. From there to the next mark was a dead peg to windward, and upon hauling sharp up the Yankee model soon showed its superiority over the French rivals, all of whom were carrying too much sail for the wind.

In a couple of tacks we had crawled to windward of everything except the cutter, which was pounding and frothing along in grand style, flinging showers of spray half-way up her mainsail, and giving her crew a good salting. The "Una," too, was shoving her nose into the short seas, for we were driving her hard, and a good deal of water found its way into the cockpit; but, barring accidents, both prizes were in the Englishmen's lockers.

The race from henceforth became a procession, and was devoid of incidents. The "Una" turned the weather-mark with a lead of nearly half an hour, and finally won by some thirty-three minutes. She was vociferously cheered as she crossed the winning-line. The "wee boat" at that time was nearly half full of water, and her crew was as wet as the proverbial "Shag."

On landing we were warmly congratulated, and the committee expressed their admiration of the sailing qualities of "La petite Americaine." Champagne flowed, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the band struck up. This was my first international yacht-race.

