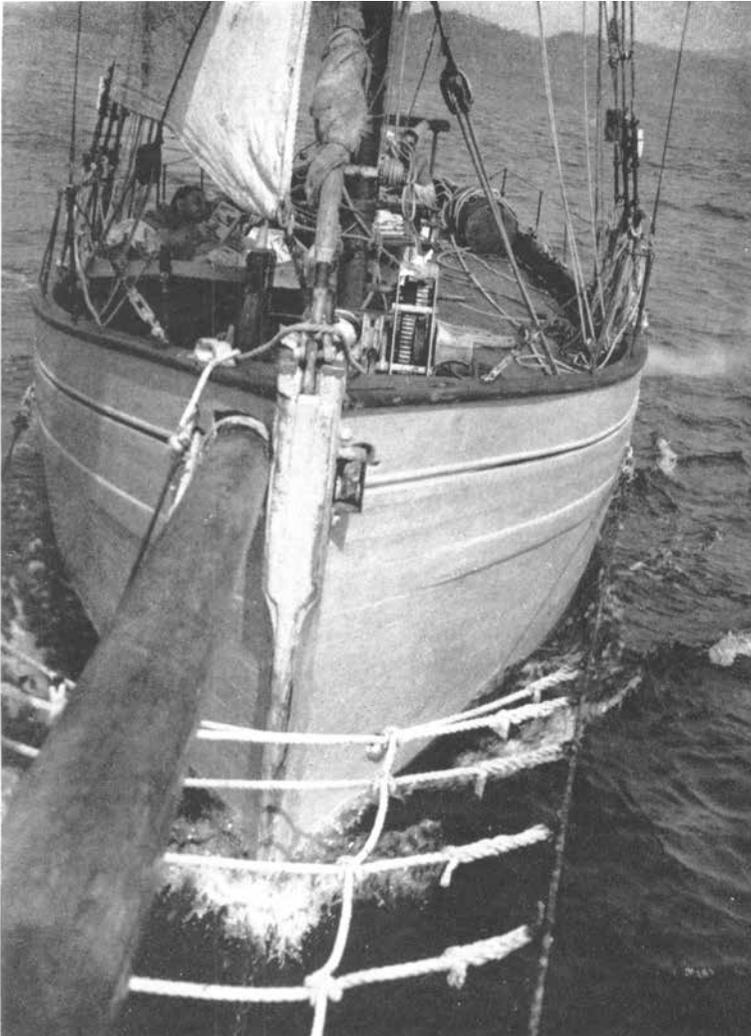


MISCHIEF
IN PATAGONIA

H. W. TILMAN



A picture of *Mischief* taken from the bowsprit: The oil drum on deck and the hills in the background seem to indicate that it was taken in the channels; on the other hand it is unlikely that in the channels one would see the prone figure (Procter) under the foot of the staysail sunning himself on deck

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TILMAN

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Foreword

Sir Robin Knox-Johnston

MAJOR HAROLD WILLIAM 'BILL' TILMAN CBE, DSO, MC and Bar, is without doubt one of the twentieth century's greatest adventurers. War hero, coffee planter in Kenya, mountaineer and eventually a sailor, he led a full life anyone with an adventurous spirit can only envy.

He was born in 1898, and as for so many of his generation, life after school was an immediate posting to the trenches in France where the Great War was raging. Despite winning two Military Crosses for gallantry by the time he was twenty years old, he survived the slaughter that killed so many of his young, teenaged contemporaries, and such awards are a clear indication of a courageous person who is willing to take risks.

The war eventually ground to an end leaving a young man, barely twenty years old, who had already lived a lifetime of experience, with the question of what to do with a future he had not fully expected to have. In his first book *Snow on the Equator* Tilman wrote:

To those who went to war straight from school and survived it, the problem of what to do afterwards was peculiarly difficult. A loss of three or four years upset preconceived plans, and while the war was in progress little thought was devoted to such questions. Not that there was no opportunity for such thinking, for there was ample time for that through solitary night watches at observation post or gun line; during periods of what was euphemistically called resting behind the lines; or, where most of us went sooner or later, in hospital. No, the reason was because making plans seemed rather a waste of time. Either the war would go on interminably, in which case one was already arranged for, or, in the other alternative, consolation

might be found in the philosophy of Feeble, that 'He who dies this year is quit for the next.'

Fate made the decision for him, as he won a square mile of British East Africa, now Kenya, in a lottery for ex-servicemen. He settled down to coffee growing for the next twelve years, and might have continued if he had not met Eric Shipton, another coffee grower in that country, and was introduced to mountaineering. Over the next eight years the two made some of the greatest climbs of the decade, and in 1936 he achieved the first ascent of Nanda Devi, without oxygen, at 7816 metres the highest mountain yet climbed.

Tilman volunteered in the Second World War, spending time with Albanian and Italian partisans behind enemy lines, and earning a DSO for his services, but was back climbing with Shipton in Tibet by 1947. But by now the Himalaya were becoming crowded with expeditions of younger men who could reach greater heights than was possible for him as a fifty-year-old. However one suspects the real reason he looked for pastures new was that the Himalaya no longer appealed to a man who enjoyed the challenges of the wilderness, and exploring areas off the beaten track away from the crowds. He was a natural pathfinder and had always sought the excitement of seeing and climbing something for the first time. He decided to look further afield.

It was a conversation with a friend that led him towards the Patagonian Ice Cap at the foot of South America. Areas marked *Inexplorado* would have been irresistible to a man of Tilman's temperament—and he did not resist. His first problem was how to get there. He investigated taking a ship to Buenos Aires and crossing Argentina but discovered that was not possible for two or three years. And so he discovered the sea:

There is something in common between the arts of sailing and climbing. Each is intimately concerned with elemental things, which from time to time demand from men who practise those arts whatever self-reliance, prudence, and endurance they may have. The sea and the hills offer challenges to those who venture upon them, and in the acceptance of these and in meeting them as best he can lies the sailor's or mountaineer's reward. An essential difference is, perhaps, that the

mountaineer usually accepts the challenge on his own terms, whereas once at sea the sailor has no say in the matter and in consequence may suffer more often the salutary and humbling emotion of fear.

Tilman decided to marry the two sports to achieve his objective. He bought a dinghy, sailed in it and on friends' boats to build up experience, and then bought a 1906 Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter called *Mischief*. These sturdy boats, built for racing to ships to provide pilots, are not the most manoeuvrable, but they were strong and cheap compared with the cost of a new yacht at that time. He refitted her in Palma, and arranged that the previous owner would sail her with him to South America, although he insisted on bringing along his wife. Tilman, who never married, gives the strong impression of being a misogynist, and an insult to the wife's cooking led to husband and wife leaving in Gibraltar, along with two other crew members. Now dangerously short of crew he realised that by the time he had found replacements it would be too late to sail to South America, and so resolved to sail to England and await the next sailing season. A wise decision as you don't go near Cape Horn in the southern winter in a small boat. He found a scratch crew who mutinied off Oporto and then with one or two friends who came out to join him he made a safe passage to Lymington. It was not the best introduction to voyaging and we will never know what caused crew to abandon the boat in such numbers, but crew can be difficult unless they are willing to give and take, and picking up bodies just to make up numbers is far from an ideal way to gather in a good crew, unless they are outnumbered by competent sailors to support the routine and discipline that is essential to the safe and happy running of a boat.

His voyage the next year to South America to cross the ice cap is one of the great sailing and exploration adventures. He describes the passage through the Magellan Strait in straightforward terms but, as those of us who have sailed in those channels know, it is a dangerous route with almost constant, cold adverse winds for the west-going vessel, of Force 7 or more. Despite this he achieved his objective and returned via the Panama Canal, a voyage of some 20,000 miles. In his amusing style of writing he describes the vicissitudes in a casual way that belies what he really achieved.

I have never been sure whether Tilman was particularly hard on his crews or he just chose them badly. Such comments about a crew member as 'felt that a man with the unseamanlike habit of wearing gloves at night in summer in the Atlantic would not prosper on a voyage of this kind' indicate a rather unsympathetic attitude toward his crew's comfort, even if one might share his surprise.

The bars of the waterfront and the yacht clubs are full of people talking about their experience and planned adventures, but all too often these appear to be imagined more than achieved or achievable. There is a harsh difference between the imagined demands of a voyage to high latitudes and the reality of working a boat in cold and clammy or gale conditions in the days before satellites, when navigation and the boat's exact position were never easy or precise. Sailing in old boats does make greater demands on the willingness to accept discomfort, or deal with recurring equipment failures that sap sleep and stamina, and many of Tilman's crews appear to have found this reality more than they could accept.

The loss of *Mischief* off Jan Mayen Island in 1968 has often been put down to Tilman's poor seamanship and in a way it is hard to put it down to anything else. A proper lookout, although appointed, was not kept, and he should have hove to further away from the coast, but it is easy to be wise after the event. The Arctic is an unforgiving place to sail and this was a bad year for ice. Once the boat had been put ashore, where the necessary repairs could be made, she was at the mercy of the weather conditions, and strong winds and ice floating into the bay eventually caused further damage that made the planned tow to Norway a forlorn hope. The strenuous effort for more than two weeks after beaching the boat, to patch her up, get her afloat again and sail to Iceland where repairs could be made would discourage most people. It is in his efforts to repair and re-float his boat that Tilman is at his best.

Sea Breeze's wreck off Angmagssalik on the east coast of Greenland is one of those nightmares every skipper wishes to avoid. In ice, engine failed, no wind, and the currents that push along the coast drifting the boat inexorably towards the rocky coast with no hope of rowing off: the conclusion was inevitable. Anchoring in that area is almost impossible. I tried it within the same fjord on one occasion but the drifting ice soon pushed our yacht so the anchor became trapped beneath

an ice flow, from which we extricated ourselves, using the motor, with great difficulty.

Baroque, yet another Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter, nearly suffered the same fate close to Angmagssalik in 1975. She survived but all but one of the crew abandoned the vessel at Reyjavik. Tilman got her back to Lymington the following year and sold her and that was his last voyage north.

It is a part of his restless character that Tilman actively sought the unfrequented areas of the world. He relished the opportunity to explore, and the dangers that are inevitable to the pathfinder just brought added spice to his life. That Tilman completed so many of his voyages successfully is a credit to his determination and his seamanship.

The arrival of GPS has closed forever the heroic era of expedition travel, whether on land or at sea. It has deprived the modern sailor of the satisfaction of making a good landfall by use of the sextant or dead reckoning, and of the hours spent nervously watching out for a landfall in thick fog with just a lead line to indicate a possible position. So it is perhaps hard for the sailors of today to imagine the extra care and doubt that were a part of the navigator's lot until the 1980s. Tilman's voyages have to be seen in the light of small elderly boats, reaching out to Polar areas infrequently visited and not accurately charted, and with crews of varied experience, and without any of the modern aids that are now taken for granted.

I first heard of Bill Tilman whilst at the same school in Hertfordshire, Berkhamsted Boys School, which he had attended forty years earlier. He was a famous Old Boy who was still mountaineering at the time. To me his attractions were the adventures he made in far off places, which distracted me as I studied and dreamed in the same buildings in which he had been educated. Sadly we never met, one of my great regrets, so I know him only through his writing. But his writing is so amusing and comfortable and its subject is the real classic adventure that is not readily available to us today.

RKJ

May 2015

Preface

THE APPROACH TO ONE'S CHOSEN MOUNTAINS is sometimes as interesting as the mountains themselves. Our approach to the mountains of Patagonia, by way of a sea voyage of some 10,000 miles, for the sake of traversing fifty miles of glacier, may seem a little long. So long that some readers may think there is an intolerable deal of sea, as it were, to but one halfpennyworth of mountain.

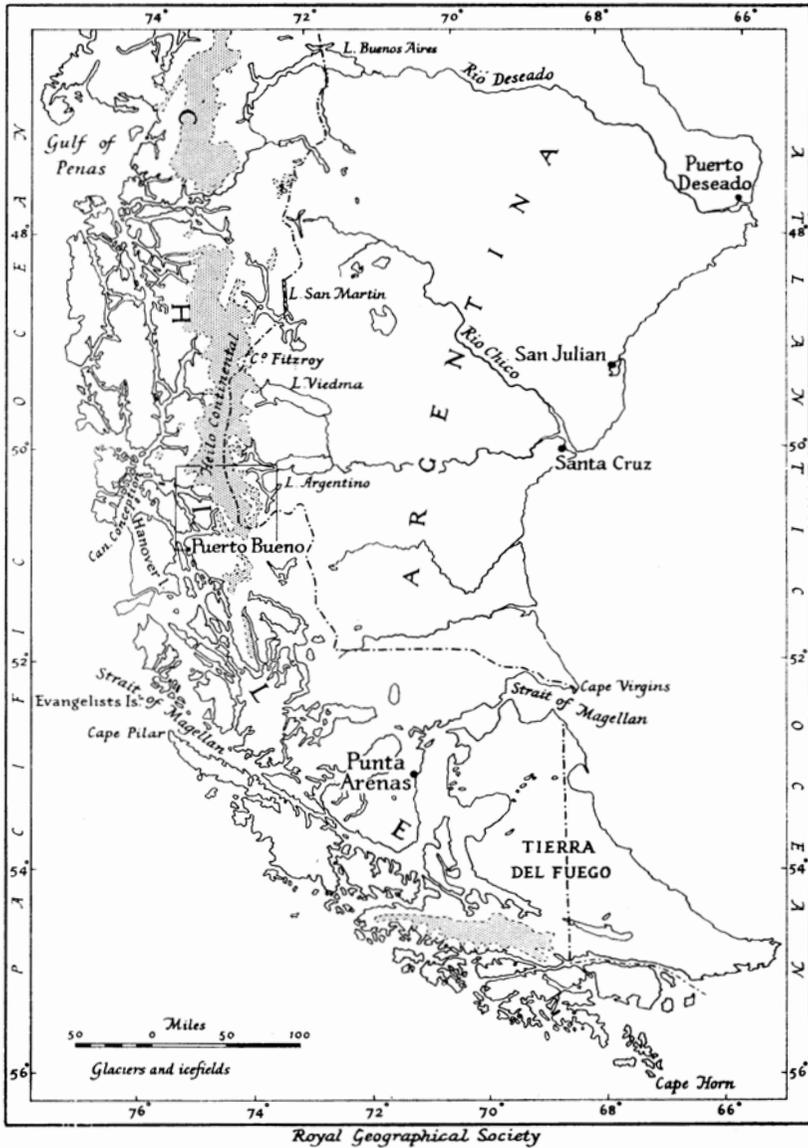
Once again I have to thank my old friend Dr R.J. Perring for criticising and correcting my slovenly writing. Those errors in grammar or good taste that remain may be confidently attributed to the author who, like other men, sometimes takes advice in order to do the contrary.

On behalf of the crew as well as myself I should like to acknowledge here the kindness of those many friends in South America whose names are not mentioned in the text.

H.W.T.

Barmouth

November 1956



Map 1: General map of Chile and Argentine Patagonia
 (Reproduced by permission of the Royal Geographical Society)

CHAPTER I

A FALSE START

We were a ghastly crew

THE ANCIENT MARINER

PROVERBIALY IT IS NOT EASY to blow and swallow at the same time. So also it is not easy to combine mountaineering and sailing. There are, however, one or two places where such a thing can be done. In the Lofoten Islands a man can sail to the foot of his chosen rock face. On the southernmost coast of Chile, where the high Andes begin to dwindle, there are glaciers reaching down to the sea where a mountaineer can step from his boat and begin his climb at sea-level. A region such as this has an irresistible attraction for a mountaineer who, late in life, catches sea fever and aspires to making an ocean voyage in his own boat.

These Chilean glaciers have their origin in the Patagonian ice-cap (Hielo Continental as it is known there). This covers some 400 or 500 miles between 44° and 51° S., and varies in width from twenty to fifty miles and in height from 6000 to 10,000 ft. I first heard of its attractions in 1945, just after the war, from a friend who had learnt of it while a prisoner in Germany. For the most part the ice-cap was unexplored. No one yet had crossed it, and its glaciers, besides coming so conveniently down to the sea, had other strangely attractive features. Trees grew upon them—one felt this must be an exaggeration. Humming birds and parrots nestled in their branches and penguins paced the ice beneath. On the Argentine side of the range—the accepted way of approach—there were great lakes and forests, and beyond those to the east there were the rolling pampas where millions of sheep roamed, attended by gaucho shepherds, wild characters who lived on meat and maté tea, and rode down ostriches with whirling bolas. The more prosaic details of this glowing account were confirmed by the best map then available, the 1 to 1,000,000 sheets of the American

Geographical Society. This showed two white, blank spaces bearing the magic word *inesplorado*. On these two blank spaces, the northern and southern parts of the ice-cap divided by the Rio Baker, were shown numerous glaciers descending to the Patagonia channels on the west, and to the great lakes of Argentino, Viedma, San Martin, and Buenos Aires on the east.

This dazzling picture of a new field for mountain exploration had its blemishes and the chief of these was the weather. Indeed, without some such factor, there seemed little reason why such a large and comparatively accessible region should remain not only unmapped but also unvisited. A little had been done from the Argentine side, for the most part by those interested in its geology and glaciology, and since the lakes offered the readiest access most of the glaciers descending to them had been named. As the prevailing wind and weather are from the west, the Argentine side is more sheltered and therefore drier and less windy than the Pacific side. Even so, of the numerous attempts to reach the summit of the ice-cap or to cross it (the first was in 1914) all except the most recent (1954) had been repulsed by bad weather. The Pacific side, where the weather is worse and where there is nothing but rock, ice, and tangled rain-forest, is for nearly a thousand miles uninhabited and inaccessible except by boat. This had scarcely been touched.

Neither my friend nor the fellow prisoners with whom he had discussed this exciting region were able to follow their ideas up, so that I had to act alone. I must lose no time in getting to Buenos Aires whence I could travel south and west by rail and bus; for there are roads or dirt tracks across the Patagonian pampas serving the numerous estancias some of which lie within fifty miles of the glaciers. At that time I had no notion of crossing to South America in anything but the orthodox way, but a round of the shipping companies soon showed me that there was no getting there at all; or at any rate within the next two or three years, by which time, perhaps, the claims of a multitude of would-be travellers, all with prior or more urgent reasons, might have been met. I forgot Patagonia and went back to the Himalaya.

In the decade after the war, thanks to the opening up of the Nepal Himalaya, to the successful use of oxygen, and to the consequent scramble to be the first upon one of the giants, the tempo of

Himalayan climbing became fast and furious. In this decade the year 1949 was almost as noteworthy as 1953, the year in which Everest was climbed, for 1949 marked the throwing open of the Nepal Himalaya. That year one small and not particularly successful party went to the Langtang Himal. The next year saw a similar party in the field as well as the first big post-war expedition, the French party which climbed Annapurna I, the first twenty-six thousander to be climbed. In the autumn of the same year a party of four Americans* and the writer were the first outsiders to visit Namche Bazaar, the home of the Sherpas, and to traverse the Khumbu glacier at the foot of Everest. As if this was the ringing of the bell for the last lap the pace then quickened. With little or no encouragement from our account of what we had seen of Everest, European climbers, or rather nations, began to file their applications to attempt the ascent from the Nepal side; and at the same time numerous private parties set out for this wonderful new field. By 1953 the second applicant on the list (fortunately the British party) had climbed Everest. By 1956 not only had it been climbed again but the six next highest peaks had been, in the classic phrase, 'knocked off', and there were some forty expeditions afoot, eleven of them, employing 5000 porters, in Nepal.

The Himalaya are extensive, no less than 1500 miles in length, but a quiet man might well shrink from going, say, to Katmandu, the starting place for the Nepal Himalaya, if he thought he was likely to meet there eleven other parties with their 5000 porters. Moreover, if he had the misfortune to find himself travelling in the wake of one of these parties he would find food hard to come by, and local transport either unobtainable or at a premium. Such inhabitants as did remain would all be wearing climbing boots and wrist-watches and would drive uncommonly hard bargains. Added to these considerations is the undoubted fact that the Himalaya are high, too high for those who are not 'in the vaward of youth', and though the ageing mountaineer will assuredly find rich solace in its valleys and upon its glaciers he is not likely to resort to them when he knows there are peaks in other parts of the world still within his feeble grasp. So I began

* Dr Charles Houston of K2 fame, his father Mr Oscar Houston, Anderson Bakewell and Mrs E. S. Gowles.

thinking again of those two white blanks on the map, of penguins and humming birds, of the pampas and of gauchos, in short, of Patagonia, a place where, one was told, the natives' heads steam when they eat marmalade.

Before this line of thought had led me anywhere I had acquired a stout 14ft. dinghy as a first step to venturing upon the sea. There are a number of mountaineers whose devotion to mountains is not entire, who own and sail boats; but there are few sailors who also climb. Of these, the best known was the late Conor O'Brien. He was a celebrated yachtsman who had designed his own yacht *Saoirse*. Having been invited to join a climbing party in the New Zealand alps for Christmas in 1923 he thought a voyage there an excellent opportunity for trying her out. Going by the Cape and running his easting down in the Roaring Forties he reached New Zealand. He arrived too late for any climbing so he sailed home by way of the Pacific and Cape Horn. One feels that his devotion to the sea came first and that in his eyes the loss of a climbing season was nothing to the accomplishment of such a tremendous voyage.

There is something in common between the arts of sailing and of climbing. Each is intimately concerned with elemental things, which from time to time demand from men who practise those arts whatever self-reliance, prudence, and endurance they may have. The sea and the hills offer challenges to those who venture upon them and in the acceptance of these and in the meeting of them as best he can lies the sailor's or mountaineer's reward. An essential difference is, perhaps, that the mountaineer usually accepts the challenge on his own terms, whereas once at sea the sailor has no say in the matter and in consequence may suffer more often the salutary and humbling emotion of fear.

The sea's most powerful spell is romance; that romance which, in the course of time, has gathered round the ships and men who from the beginning have sailed upon it—the strange coasts and their discoveries, the storms and the hardships, the fighting and trading, and all the strange things which have happened and still do happen to those who venture upon it. For the professional sailor this romantic veil has no doubt become threadbare, but for the amateur there is endless fascination. As Belloc says of the amateur sailor 'In venturing in sail upon

strange coasts we are seeking those first experiences and trying to feel as felt the earlier man in a happier time, to see the world as they saw it'. With the mountains there is no romance. Man's association with them is relatively recent and perhaps artificial. With the sea it is as old as himself, natural and inescapable.

From the dinghy I graduated to a friend's four-tonner. In this we twice crossed the Irish Sea and these crossings had given us nearly as much satisfaction as if we had crossed an ocean. Even on those short passages we learnt a lot. We made unexpected landfalls; we lost a dinghy, we were sucked into and finally flung out of the Devil's Tail race near Bardsey Island—a chastening experience—and once in a thick mist we discovered in Cardigan Bay a buoy which no one else had ever seen before or has seen since. My apprenticeship was interrupted for eighteen months while I was in Burma but on my return I was lucky enough to be able to sail from Portsmouth to the Mediterranean in the 17-ton cutter *Iolaire* which then belonged to one whom, in seafaring matters, I have always thought of as the maestro*. Upper Burma is 500 miles from the sea and except near the Tibet border has no real mountains, so that on quitting it my unsatisfied longing was equally poised between mountains and sea. Naturally, therefore, it occurred to me to marry the two by sailing a boat to South America and landing on one of those remarkable glaciers to astonish the penguins and humming birds. Of course, I should miss the long and no doubt enjoyable approach over the pampas in the company of gauchos, ostriches, and whirling bolas, but one can't have everything.

This far-reaching decision was easier to make than even to begin to carry out. I had no boat and not much idea of what sort of a boat I would need. On that, no doubt, advice could be had, but had I a boat I had not the essential experience to handle it. The more I read, the more discouraging was the prospect. There were the gales in the South Atlantic and fierce tides in the Magellan Straits. The channels of Patagonia were beset with strong currents and stronger winds accompanied by incessant rain, sleet, or snow. The shores were uninhabited, inhospitable, iron-bound, and with more or less bottomless anchorages. It seemed wiser to buy a steamer ticket than a yacht.

* Robert Somerset Esq. D.S.O.

The first and essential step was to find an amateur skipper who not only knew all about boats but who also would regard such a voyage, with its manifold difficulties and discomforts with eager enthusiasm. There were no doubt many such but would any of them have the necessary time? And how was I to find one?

However, in January 1954, I was put in touch with a man who was not only a competent and experienced sailor but also owned a boat of the right type. *Mischief*, built at Cardiff in 1906, was originally a Bristol Channel pilot cutter, 45 ft. overall in length, 13 ft. beam, and drawing 7 ft. 6 in. aft. Her register tonnage was 13.78 (by Thames measurement about 29 tons) and her displacement was about 55 tons, which meant that she was heavily built. Her only history known to me was what can be learnt from the entries in her certificate of registry. The first entry was in 1927 when presumably her life as a working boat came to an end and she was bought for conversion into a yacht. Since then she had had nine owners and her latest had bought her in Malta in 1953.

March had come by the time we had arranged for her to be hauled out for survey and, provided she proved sound, for subsequent fitting out. She was lying at Palma, Mallorca, where there was a good yard well used to building and repairing wooden ships. Another month passed before a slip was vacant. Time was short for if we were to reach the Patagonian channels by midsummer (southern summer), enjoy two months on the ice-cap, and be clear of those boisterous regions before the southern autumn, we had to be ready by the end of July. Everything turned on what the survey showed, for unless the hull was sound it was no use going on with the venture. To examine the outside planking the copper sheathing had to be stripped off. When this was done it was not worth putting back, but copper was so scarce in Palma that the yards and scrap-metal merchants fought for it and we got a very good price. The outside planking was mostly sound. Inside she had a foot of concrete ballast which filled the bays to the top of the floor. No doubt it had been put in when the boat was built and it seemed probable that if water had seeped beneath it the planking would be rotten. On the question of cement in yachts it is instructive to note the contradictory opinions of two experts. Claud Worth: 'The bays of *Tern* were filled with Portland cement which made her enormously strong and precluded decay in this region.' The Lonsdale Library *Cruising*:

‘Cementing ought to be strictly avoided in a boat built of wood. The evils resulting from cement in the bilge of wood boats have been too often experienced. Moisture gets behind it and may result in dry rot.’ *Mischief*’s cement had been well and truly laid. Amongst it were lumps of iron pyrites and the whole was almost adamantine. It took two men two days to chip out a hole a foot square in order to expose that small area of the bottom planks and keelson. Sure enough there was water. Overnight quite a pool collected and our hopes fell accordingly; but the yard foreman, who had spent a lifetime with wooden ships, having done some probing, declared the wood sound. In fact it was almost as hard as the concrete.

I bought the boat and we told the yard to go ahead with the refit. The several pages of our requirements had already been made out by my friend the late owner, to whose knowledge, thoroughness, and hard work I should like to pay tribute. As well as the work on hull and deck—new planks, recaulking, the doubling of all fastenings and keel bolts, new rail cap, stanchions for life-lines, and a hundred and one lesser jobs—all the standing and running rigging had to be renewed. In addition there was a mass of work to be done below—alterations to berths and lockers, the fitting of extra tanks for water and petrol, not to mention galley fittings, lockers for vegetables, sails, and bos’n’s stores, rewiring, and so on. The mast had already been taken out for scraping and overhaul, as well as the inside ballast for chipping and painting. This consisted of about a hundred and twenty iron pigs of about 100 lb. each, vile things to have to handle and stow without the help of a professional weight-lifter. Inside ballast conjures up for most owners the dreadful vision of a ship on her beam ends with iron pigs cascading about the cabin. Happily *Mischief*’s ballast never shifted.

In May, after another cruise with the ‘Master’ in *Iolaire* to North African ports and Malta, I returned to Palma to live on board until we sailed. It was hard lying, for *Mischief* was still on the slip and as the ballast was still out there was no floor to the cabin. Work went on steadily but slowly. There were frequent interruptions for *fiestas*, but on the whole the Spanish shipwrights and carpenters worked well and the cost was half what it would have been in a home yard. At last the time came for her to go back into the water. We slapped on the blue anti-fouling paint with a will and when she was afloat she was moored

alongside a floating crane where the mast was stepped and the rigging set up. There were still hundreds of small things to be done before she was ready for sea, but now she was looking like a ship, and a deep sea ship at that, with the after shrouds and the topping lifts swathed in baggywrinkle. The shrouds were the admiration of all. Later they raised many a laugh in yachting harbours, for they were of unyachtlike dimensions, 2½in. wire with bottle screws to match. The forestay was 2¾in. wire and the rest of the standing and running rigging was proportionately sturdy. It paid handsomely. We never need have anxiety about the mast, nothing ever carried away, and we returned to England in 1956 using the same main sheet and jib sheets we had fitted at Palma. Altogether one felt that she was 'fit to shunt ice' as the old whaling captain remarked to Slocum of his famous *Spray*. Though we did not encounter any storm such as drove *Spray* back willy-nilly into the Magellan Straits, we did in fact shunt a great deal of ice, something which *Spray* never had to do.

The new suit of sails having arrived from England, the mainsail was bent on, and at the end of July, late but not too late, we left Mallorca bound for Gibraltar where we had to pick up sea stores sent there from England. These consisted of food for six months. A like amount had been sent to Montevideo to await our arrival. In contrast to my subsequent experience a crew had been found without much effort on my part. As they dispersed with equal facility there is no need to name them. When agreeing with the previous owner that he would skipper *Mischief* for me, an ineluctable condition (on his part) was that his wife should be one of the crew. She was a modern Grace Darling who could hand, reef, and steer, as the phrase goes, and she shipped as bos'n. I had had misgivings about this, not that I questioned her ability but I had at the back of my mind the remark of some sage from China, a country prolific in sages, to the effect that discord is not sent down from Heaven but is brought about by women. But it was both or nothing; no song, no supper.

We made a slow passage of ten days to Gibraltar where we had no sooner tied up than I learnt that the skipper and his wife were going no farther. On passage, relations between Grace Darling and myself had been strained although I had been self-effacing, as an owner should be, and as silent as usual. Perhaps one of the few remarks I ventured

had not been well chosen. We took it in turns to cook and the day after Grace Darling's turn, when one of the crew who knew how to cook was officiating, I thanked God aloud for having on board one whose presence ensured our having good meals on at least one day in five. Besides a clash of temperaments there may have been other factors; we were late in starting, were bound for a rude climate, and in spite of all that had been done we were not in every respect ready for sea. With a mind fully occupied with all the implications of this miserable, unlooked-for, and abrupt ending to a promising venture, I could yet feel for the skipper whose hard work in fitting out now went for nothing. But he had no option—a wife's counsel is bad, but he who will not take it is mad.

The other two crew members adjourned immediately to the Yacht Club to celebrate our safe arrival, and it soon became clear that they had no intention of continuing. Neither would they help take the ship back to England although one of them was well able to take charge of a yacht. I could not leave her at Gibraltar where there are land rats and water rats who prey upon laid-up ships, so the only thing to do was to sail her back with a scratch crew. To add to these embarrassments I had to explain to the admiral who had honoured the venture by asking the crew and myself to lunch that we were no longer on speaking terms. On the other hand it was pleasant to be joined the same day by David Drummond, lately an instructor at the Outward Bound Mountain School, Eskdale, who had hoped to be one of the ice-cap party. He knew nothing about the sea but being a mountaineer he would stand by me and not desert like the yachtsmen.

September was well advanced before we cleared from Gibraltar with a scratch crew—the exotic fruits of an advertisement in the local newspaper. The only two who counted were a sergeant and a corporal from a R.A.S.C. Water Transport unit who had obtained a month's leave in order to come—a month, I thought in my innocence, being ample allowance for a voyage of 1200 odd miles. They had been to sea but knew nothing about sail. They soon picked it up, were a likeable pair, and failed only in staying power. A private from the Duke of Wellington's, and a Scottish youth from the dockyard who had come out three weeks before and now wanted to go home, completed the motley crew and irritated beyond measure the novice who was now skipper. In summer strong northerly winds prevail along the Portuguese coast.

By late September these should have weakened and have become less steady. I counted on having at least a small proportion of fair winds, but having rounded Cape St Vincent in good style we met with constant, strong head winds with which we battled for the next eighteen days. By going out a hundred miles from the coast we fared no better and succeeded only in demoralising the crew, who would have much preferred noting our progress, however slow, against some land. Having no sextant I was navigating by dead reckoning but thanks mainly to a very friendly Union Castle boat, the *Roxburgh Castle*, I had a pretty good idea where we were. The incessant beating into wind and sea, with one or two nights spent hove to, told on the crew who began to murmur loudly. Unwisely, perhaps, I had told them we were about the latitude of Oporto, whereupon the two N.C.O.s declared that unless I put in and landed them they would no longer stand their watches. In fact, mutiny on the high seas. The situation called for a bucko mate and a belaying pin. I had plenty of belaying pins (there were half a dozen each side in the fife-rail) but no bucko mate. I was too old for the role and David was too good-natured. Having little confidence in myself and none in the crew Oporto was the last place I should have picked upon. At the entrance is a bar, the tidal streams attain a rate of seven knots, and during freshets the ebb in the river has been reported to run at sixteen knots.

There was nothing else for it so I headed her for Oporto where we made a good landfall. By sundown we were off the bar. A swell was running and we had no information as to the state of the tide. On board were Tide Tables for all the ports of the South Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Mediterranean, but none for the coast of Portugal. As we motored slowly in we were startled by the report of a cannon. Were the natives hostile or was it an old Portuguese custom thus to salute the setting sun? A moment later a man appeared on the jetty beyond the bar excitedly waving a newspaper. The sergeant assured me he was beckoning us in whereas I was quite sure he was waving us out. Even as I put her round she bumped twice on the bottom. We anchored for the night well outside the bar.

In the morning a pilot came off, took us up the river and moored us below the city with warps, springs, and our heaviest anchor. He said they had fired the gun to warn us and that had we attempted to

cross the bar we would surely have lost the ship. The R.A.S.C. men departed, leaving me with three weak hands, two of them unwilling. I had to choose between the cheap but doubtful step of recruiting two unknown Portuguese sailors, with whom I should not be able to exchange a word, or the expensive step of calling for professional help from home. Lying in a nearby yard with a professional skipper on board was the English yacht *Iyruna* which had left Gibraltar just before us. She had met heavy weather, been damaged, and had put back to lay up for the winter. Her skipper was not able to come but he gave me the name of a likely amateur, W.A. Procter (of whom more later) who at that time, however, could not leave England. At length Humphrey Barton and a friend flew out and we sailed the same afternoon.

By now, late October, our old enemy the north wind had given place to south-westerly winds with drizzling rain. Although the wind was not strong we managed to break the gaff. This decided us to put into Vigo. We were off what we thought was the entrance to the bay. It was dusk, the weather thick, and we attributed to low cloud the fact that we could not see the light, which, as in many Spanish lighthouses, is sited too high. *Mischief* had now a skipper of very different calibre, so we stood boldly in and once inside the narrow entrance picked up the buoys marking the channel. For two hours we motored on towards the bright lights of a large town and having closed the lights and duly noted the wharves where, I was assured, Atlantic liners tie up, we began searching for the Yacht Club. Although we went in close enough to take the ground, we failed to find it. We drew off a little and anchored in disgust.

The Yacht Club proved to be as elusive by daylight and the reason became clear when, having hailed a man in a dinghy, we learnt that we were not in Vigo Bay but in the next bay to the north. Still, in this delightful cruising ground we had a very pleasant sail round to Villagarcia where, although it was a Sunday, we had the gaff repaired. Off Finisterre it broke again, but under trysail and headsails with a brave southerly wind we made good time across the bay until we ran into fog. Out of this a huge French battleship appeared and vanished like a wraith. While we were remarking this apparition the Scottish youth—his one active contribution to the voyage, for which I forgive him all—drew our attention to a pillar buoy on the port bow and breakers

ahead. Having put *Mischief* about and brought the buoy on to the star-board hand we passed close enough to discover that it was the Ar Men buoy marking the reef of that suggestive name for which we had been confidently heading. This was the last of our misadventures. Two days later, on 5 November, we tied up at Lymington town quay where I was left alone to clear up the mess below and to lick my wounds.