

# THE AMERICA CUP:

ITS ORIGIN AND HISTORY.

BY G. F. LORIMER.

*With illustrations of the "Shamrock" and "Columbia," the rival yachts entered for this year's race.*

IN the latter part of the year 1850 it began to be rumoured in English yachting circles that the recently formed New York Yacht Club had determined on building a clipper schooner yacht to cross the Atlantic and to compete during the year of the Great Exhibition with the crack yachts of this country, in order to show the owners of British boats of what the Yankee fast-sailing yachts were capable.

In the days before the laying of the first Atlantic cable news from America filtered but slowly through the channel of the comparatively infrequent transatlantic mail-boats, and although from time to time reports, more or less authentic, had been brought to England by eye-witnesses of the splendid sailing qualities of Yankee yachts generally, but little credence was attached to the statements that "they were the fastest boats in the world," and but scant respect paid to the opinions that the best Yankee-built boats could "show their heels" to any British-built boat afloat.

However, on the truth of the rumour of the building of such a clipper yacht for the purpose aforesaid being to some extent confirmed, Lord Wilton, the commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron, in February, 1851, addressed a letter to Mr. John C. Stevens,



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[West & Son, Southsea.

SIR THOMAS LIPTON'S "SHAMROCK," CHALLENGER FOR THE COMING RACE.

the commodore of the New York Yacht Club, mentioning that he had heard of the building of the new boat and of the proposed visit to English waters, inviting all and every member of the New York Yacht Club who should come over to witness her performances to be visitors to the Royal Yacht Squadron clubhouse at Cowes, offering them a cordial welcome, and ending up with the expression of opinion that yachtsmen in this country would gladly avail themselves of "any improvement in shipbuilding that the industry and skill of your nation have enabled you to elaborate."

The upshot of a courteous and unassuming reply to this letter of Lord Wilton's was that at a very numerous attended meeting of the Royal Yacht Squadron, held at the Thatched House Club on May 9th, 1851, "it was unanimously agreed to give a cup of



the value of £100, open to yachts belonging to the clubs of all nations, subject to the sailing regulations of the Royal Yacht Squadron, the course to be round the Isle of Wight."

This Royal Yacht Squadron Cup of £100 is the trophy which we now style the America Cup, but which by some curious mistake is usually termed in America the Queen's Cup. It was not a Queen's Cup at all, for, as will be shown later in this article, the *America* never sailed for a Queen's Cup.

During the spring and early summer of the year 1851 there was a good deal of more or less unreliable gossip afloat concerning the new clipper yacht which was going to "lick creation," and as to her wonderful sailing powers, and

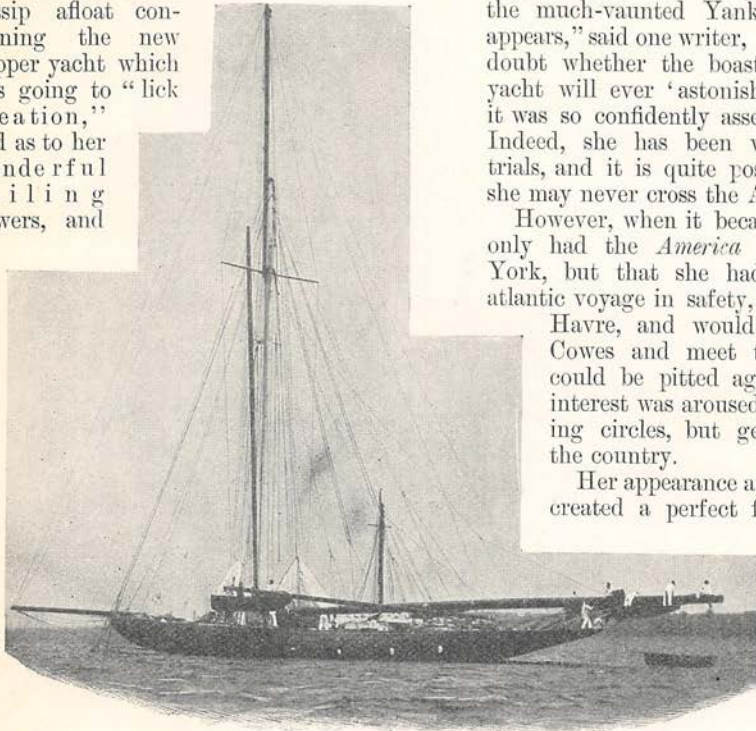


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THE "SHAMROCK": BENDING THE MAINSAIL.

[West & Son, Southsea.

to, and in fact did not, purchase her. Nevertheless, she had proved herself so fast in her trials that Commodore Stevens and a few friends bought her on their own account, and sent her across the Atlantic to Havre, there to be completed and made ready to take part in the Royal Yacht Squadron Races, at Cowes, in August.

When, at intervals, the news came to this country that the *America* had been beaten time after time by the sloop *Maria*, there was naturally a good deal of jubilation, and to some extent depreciatory comment, in the English press on the presumed failure of the much-vaunted Yankee boat. "There appears," said one writer, "to be considerable doubt whether the boasted Yankee clipper yacht will ever 'astonish the Britishers,' as it was so confidently asserted she would do. Indeed, she has been well beaten in her trials, and it is quite possible that, after all, she may never cross the Atlantic."

However, when it became known that not only had the *America* started from New York, but that she had made the transatlantic voyage in safety, and had arrived at Havre, and would certainly come to Cowes and meet the best boats that could be pitted against her, immense interest was aroused, not only in yachting circles, but generally throughout the country.

Her appearance at Cowes, on July 31, created a perfect furore. Thousands of spectators were on the look out for her arrival, and, as described by a special correspondent of a leading journal, "the graceful and easy way in which the

*America* slipped through the shipping at once proclaimed her to be an exceptionally fast vessel." From the time that she made her advent in the Solent there were no more scornful observations made as to the capabilities of the "Yankee clipper." There is no doubt that she came as a complete revelation to the British shipbuilder, who at the same time was not slow to recognise the immense advantages for speed which she possessed. Indeed, on her first appearance in British waters it was at once brought home to unprejudiced judges that no British-built schooner then existent could possibly stand

what she would do if she came up to the expectations of her designer and builder. Mr. Wm. H. Brown, a well-known and, by reputation, extremely skilful shipbuilder, of New York, had undertaken to build a schooner that would outsail any other vessel at home or abroad, and had, indeed, agreed to make the purchase of her by the New York Yacht Club contingent on her success. His offer was accepted by the Club, and the *America* was built; but when her capabilities were put to the test, she failed in repeated trials to beat Commodore Stevens's yacht *Maria*, so that the Club was not bound



the least chance with her. For, as stated by a prominent yachtsman of the day, English schooners of that time were not built for match sailing. "We have some very creditable schooners, but have not now, nor are we likely to have, any large vessel built for match sailing on the most modern and improved principles. In fact, our schooners have all high bulwarks and standing bowsprits, and are built and rigged more for comfort than for match sailing."

During the three weeks that the *America* was at Cowes, prior to the R. Y. S. Regatta, she gave in various trial spins such evidence of her sailing capacity and of her ability to defeat all possible competitors, that for a long time there was



GETTING UNDER WAY.



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[West &amp; Son, Southsea.

THE "SHAMROCK": A FAIR BREEZE.

not found one to take up the trumpet-tongued challenge which "the New York Yacht Club, in order to test the relative merits of the different models of the schooners of the Old and the New World," put forth, in which they offered to sail the yacht *America* against any number of schooners belonging to any of the yacht squadrons of the Kingdom.

One scarcely need state that the race fixed for Friday, August 22nd, 1851, the Royal Yacht Squadron Cup for yachts of all nations, was the one absorbing event of the Cowes week in that year. The Queen's Cup was sailed for on the Monday, and Prince Albert's Cup on the Wednesday, while a Subscription Cup was the race fixed for and sailed on Thursday. But for none of

these three events was the *America* qualified under the conditions to compete; but to show that interest centred in the specially organised Royal Yacht Squadron Cup, no fewer than eighteen boats were entered for the event. These were—

	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.		
<i>Beatrice</i> ,	161	<i>Titania</i> ,	100	<i>Bacchante</i> ,	80
<i>Volante</i> ,	48	<i>Gipsy</i> ,	160	<i>Freak</i> ,	60
<i>Arrow</i> ,	84	<i>Alarm</i> ,	193	<i>Stella</i> ,	65
<i>Wyvern</i> ,	205	<i>Mona</i> ,	82	<i>Eclipse</i> ,	50
<i>Ione</i> ,	75	<i>America</i> ,	170	<i>Fernande</i> ,	127
<i>Constance</i> ,	218	<i>Brilliant</i> ,	393	<i>Aurora</i> ,	47

In the actual race, however, *Titania*, *Fernande*, and *Stella* did not start. Of the fifteen competitors who did get under way seven were schooners and eight cutters. The fifteen yachts were moored in two lines, and on the gun being fired the *America* purposely lagged behind and allowed all the others to get away in front of her. It was not long, however, before the Yankee clipper gave evidence of her sailing powers. In a quarter of an hour she had passed all but three, and coming round No Man's Buoy a bare two minutes behind the leading boat; off Brading Harbour she was only led by the *Volante*. Her steadiness and speed were

wonderful. "Whenever the breeze," says a writer of the time, "took the line of her hull, all her sails set as flat as a drumhead, and without any careening or staggering she 'walked along' in admirable style, and at twenty-eight minutes past eleven she contrived, without any seeming difficulty, to slip by the *Volante* as she had done the rest, and away she went, keeping close to the Island." After this the *America* was never again headed, winning with the utmost ease, though owing to the wind dropping altogether at sundown she had to drift home for the last hour and a half. Owing to some blunder in the printing of the conditions of the race a protest was entered against her on the ground that she had not sailed the stipulated course, but it was eventually withdrawn, and the commodore of the N.Y.Y.C. was duly presented with the Cup.

While the race was in progress the Royal yacht, *Victoria and Albert*, with the Queen and other members of the Royal Family on board—including the Prince of Wales, a little boy in his tenth year, dressed in a white sailor's suit—steamed out to the Needles, accompanied by the *Fairy*, with Lord Alfred Paget on board.

The yachts not being in sight, the *Fairy* was deputed to go round the Needles and to signal to the *Victoria and Albert*, which had returned and lay to in Alum Bay, how the race was going. When at length the signal was made that the competitors were in sight, the question was put, "Who leads?" the answer being returned, "The *America*." To the further question, "Who is second?" came the reply, "There is no second"—a summing up of the situation which recalls

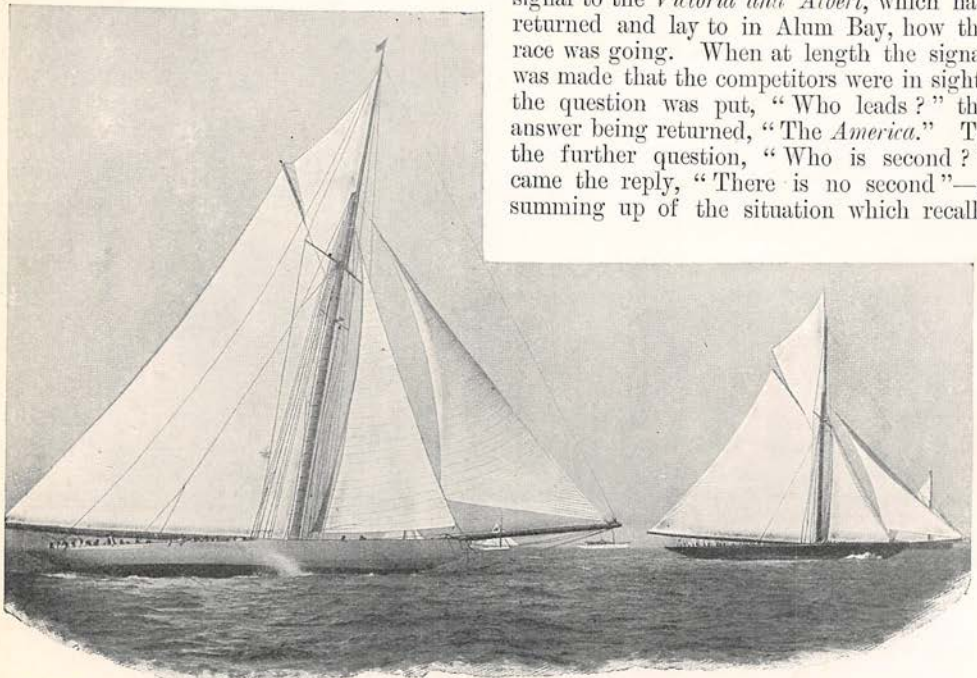


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[West &amp; Son, Southsea.

THE TRIAL RACE BETWEEN THE "SHAMROCK" AND THE "BRITANNIA," THE LATTER LEADING.



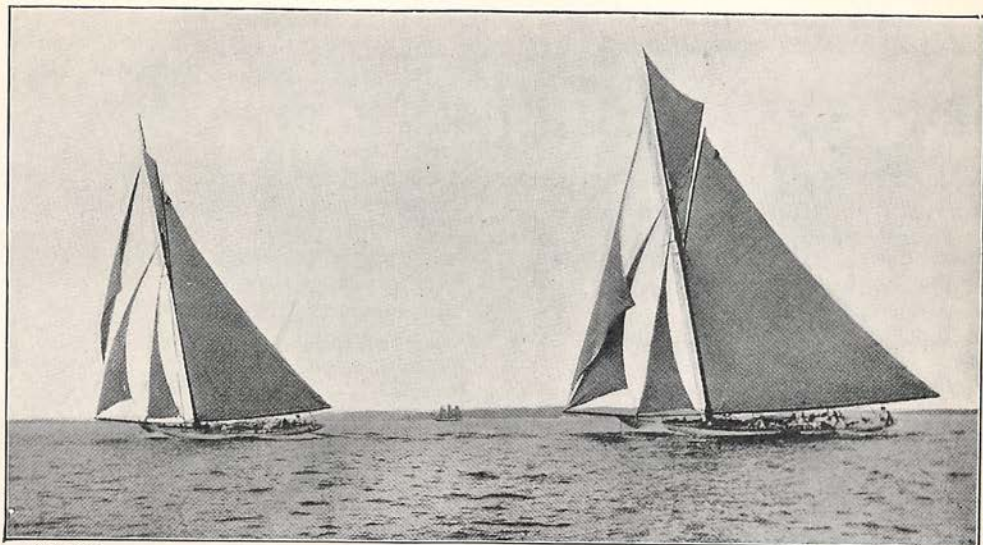


Photo by]

[N. Lazarnick.

RECENT TRIAL RACE BETWEEN THE "COLUMBIA" (THE AMERICAN YACHT THAT WILL RACE THE "SHAMROCK" FOR THE CUP THIS YEAR) AND THE "DEFENDER," THE LATTER LEADING.

the famous old-time placing—"Eclipse first, and the rest nowhere."

As is not infrequently the case under similar circumstances, all sorts and conditions of ridiculous rumours were put in circulation to account for the tremendous speed of the American boat, some persons even going so far as to seriously assert that she had a screw propeller under her keel which was worked by the crew. Curiously enough, having been commanded to Osborne for inspection by the Queen on the Saturday—the day after she had won the Royal Yacht Squadron Cup—she grounded on a bank off the harbour and carried away about thirty feet of her false keel, so that she had to go into dry dock for repairs, and thus was effectually able to dispose of the silly suggestion that her speed was to be accounted for by the use of a screw propeller.

While the great thing that struck Englishmen was the extraordinary speed and sailing power of the Yankee boat, the Americans appear to have been equally as much, if not more, impressed with the enthusiastic way in which their victory was received by their opponents. Subsequently, on the return of Commodore Stevens and his friends to America, Colonel Hamilton, one of the party who had brought the boat over to Cowes, in relating the circumstance of victory at a dinner of the New York Yacht Club, given to celebrate the event, speaking of the impression left on the Americans by the way

the Britishers took their defeat, said, "The return of our vessel, far in advance of all the Squadron, was greeted with as much warmth of acclamation as if it had been in our own harbour; and it is only fair to say that fair play and a manly acknowledgment of defeat were never more honourably exhibited."

So interested was her Majesty the Queen in the American boat that she gave a Queen's Cup of £100 to be sailed for by the yachts of all nations on the Monday following. For this cup the *America* was entered, but did not compete owing to the lack of wind on the morning of the race-day, her owners not caring to risk the reputation of their boat on what might, from weather indications, eventually terminate in a drifting match.

But, nevertheless, on this day she accomplished her most astonishing performance in English waters. After the yachts had been started fully an hour, or more, a good breeze sprang up, and the *America* got under way and sailed after the competitors to give those on board of her an opportunity of seeing her race. She was not long before she caught them up, one after the other, and sailing over the prescribed course in advance of them all, came home 41 minutes before the winner, the *Alarm*, thus really defeating them all by 1 hour and 41 minutes!

On the following Thursday she sailed a match against Mr. Robert Stephenson's *Titania*, the only schooner that would meet



her challenge, but the *Tilania* was outsailed at every point and beaten "all ends up!"

This was her last race in American ownership, and thus, to quote a leading journal of the time, "the match terminated in favour of the *America*, which, had anyone ventured to foretell a few weeks ago, he would have been looked upon as a fit candidate for a lunatic asylum; but even the most sceptical have now to admit the complete superiority of the American yacht over anything seen in these waters."

The *America* was not taken back to New York, but was sold to the Hon. John de Blaquiére for 5,000 sovereigns, but Commodore Stevens and his friends took the Royal Yacht Squadron Cup back to New York, and in memory of the famous victory of the *America* presented it to the New York Yacht Club as a perpetual challenge trophy, open to the yachts of all nations, to be held by no individual person, but to remain for the time being the property of the Club to which the yacht that last won it belongs, and when challenged for to be sailed for on the water of the club then holding it.

The second race for the America Cup took



Photo by]

[Walery, Regent Street.

SIR THOMAS J. LIPTON.

Owner of the "*Shamrock*."

place on August 8th, 1870, in American waters. There were seventeen competitors, the *Cambria* being the only English yacht;

all the others were owned by members of the New York Yacht Club.

The *Cambria* was a schooner of 188 tons, and was built by Michael Ratsey, of Cowes, for Mr. James Ashbury. The *Cambria* had won many races, and in July, 1870, she beat the *Davntless*, a Yankee schooner, in a race across the Atlantic to New York. She failed, however, to win back the America Cup. The course for this event was through the Narrows, round Sandy Hook Lightship, and return. The *Cambria* was much impeded by other vessels. With one or two of these she came into collision, and as some of her canvas was carried away she



THE AMERICA CUP.

lost all chance of winning the race. The winner was the *Magic*, a small schooner of 93 tons; the *Cambria* came in eighth.

The next America Cup Competition was in 1871. Mr. Ashbury was determined to have another try for the much-coveted Cup, and he accordingly commissioned Michael Ratsey to build him a schooner specially for the purpose. This was the *Livonia*, of 265 tons. She went to New York to compete for the Cup, and had a stormy crossing, but arrived without damage.

After the *Cambria's* effort in 1870 against seventeen American schooners, the New York Yacht Club decided, owing to numerous appeals, that only one vessel should in future matches for the Cup compete against the challenger. The Club, however, reserved the power to select the defender of the Cup on the morning of the race, according to the state of the weather. Needless to say, this arrangement did not find favour with English sportsmen.

In the 1871 race five matches were arranged, and the Club named four yachts as competitors—the *Sappho*, the *Davntless* (keel boats), the *Palmer*, and *Columbia* (centre-board schooners).

On the day of the first match the wind was very light, and the Club selected the *Columbia*, "a light-weather centre-boarder," as the *Livonia's* opponent. The former won by 25 minutes. The second race gave



the challenger no chance, the American boat arriving at the winning post 3 hr. 7 min. 32 sec. ahead of the *Livonia*. In the third race the *Davut'ess*, *Palmer*, *Sappho*, and *Columbia* were all disabled, and it was thought that the *Livonia* would have a "sail over." Mr. Osgood, the owner of the *Columbia*, however, determined to start his vessel, and the race came off: the result was a win for the *Livonia*, but it must be stated that on the

The result of the five matches was that the Cup stayed in the States. It is stated that Mr. Ashbury's effort to win the Cup cost him in all £22,000. It may be mentioned that this was the last occasion on which an English schooner competed for the Cup. In subsequent contests the competitors were cutters.

Five years elapsed before England made another attempt to bring back to its shores the America Cup, but in 1876 the competitors

Mr. William Fife, jun.  
Designer of the "Shamrock."

The Hon. Charles Russell.  
Representing Sir Thomas Lipton.



Mr. Hugh C. Kelly.  
Hon. Sec. and Treasurer, Royal  
Ulster Yacht Club.

Major Sharman-Crawford.  
Vice-Commodore, Royal Ulster  
Yacht Club.

Mr. H. M. McGildowny.  
Royal Ulster Yacht Club.

THE "SHAMROCK" CHALLENGE: DEPUTATION FROM THE ROYAL ULSTER YACHT CLUB AND SIR THOMAS LIPTON TO THE NEW YORK YACHT CLUB, SEPTEMBER, 1898.

return something went wrong with the *Columbia's* steering wheel, the clew of her main-topmast staysail, fore-sheet, and her fore-gaff topsail split, and shortly after she lowered her mainsail and gave up.

The fourth match was between the *Sappho* and the *Livonia*; the former won by over half an hour. In the fifth and last match the *Livonia* and the *Sappho* were competitors, and the victory lay with the latter, which ended the race twenty-six minutes ahead of *Livonia*.

were the Yankee schooner *Madeleine* and the Canadian schooner *Countess Dufferin*. The former was built by David Kirby, of Rye, New York, and launched in 1869. In her original form of a "sloop" she was a failure; and in 1870 she was changed to a schooner, and became a very fast racer, too fast indeed for the *Countess Dufferin*, which was proved to be quite her inferior.

After 1876, the next race for the Cup was held in 1881. The representative of America



was the *Mischief*, while the *Atalanta* was a Canadian sloop. The victory fell to the American yacht. The next race was held in September, 1885, the competing boats being the English cutter *Genesta* and the American cutter *Puritan*, the latter proving the victor.

In the year 1886, the competitors were the English yacht *Galatea* and the American cutter *Mayflower*. The latter was built by Burgess, and was considered a speedier boat than his *Puritan*. At any rate, she succeeded in holding the Cup for America.

In the year 1887 several of the most prominent Scottish yachtsmen joined hands in a determined endeavour to recover the America Cup, and one of the most hard-fought battles in the history of yachting was the result. When the *Thistle* left home she carried eleven winning flags, but she did not succeed in accomplishing the purpose for which she had been built, for she was defeated in both matches by the centre-board sloop *Volunteer*. After the 1887 struggle, the greatly coveted Cup enjoyed a season of rest until 1893, when the Earl of Dunraven, greatly to the delight of all Britishers, determined to see if he could not carry off the Cup.

In December, 1892, Lord Dunraven's challenge for his new *Valkyrie* to sail a series of races for the America Cup was accepted by the New York Yacht Club. At the same time that the *Valkyrie*, *Britannia*, *Calluna*, and *Satanita* were being built in England, the Americans were building four new yachts, the *Colonia*, *Vigilant*, *Jubilee*, and *Pilgrim*, and great was the rivalry between the last four. The *Vigilant* was at last chosen as the "Defender of the Cup," and justified her country's faith by winning after a magnificent struggle; and thus the Cup remained in American waters.

In 1894 Lord Dunraven, having built a new yacht, *Valkyrie III.* (210 tons), sent a challenge to the New York Yacht Club for the America Cup, and races were arranged to take place in 1895. The other competitor was the *Defender*, a cutter of 202 tons, and five races were arranged.

The first took place off Sandy Hook on September 7th, when the *Defender* won by 8 min. 49 sec. Great annoyance was caused to both boats by the fleet of excursion steamers which accompanied the race and persistently hampered them, the stewards of the New York Yacht Club being unable to hold the steamers in check. The second race took place on September 10th, over a triangular course of thirty miles.

In the manœuvring before the start, the

two vessels came into collision, and the *Valkyrie's* gaff struck and carried away the starboard top-mast shrouds of the *Defender*. Both, however, continued the race, the result of which was that the *Valkyrie* finished 2 min. 18 sec. ahead.

A controversy arose as to the foul, and the Regatta Committee of the New York Yacht Club, after going into the matter, adjudged the race to the *Defender*, on the ground that the *Valkyrie* had broken the racing rules, and was therefore to blame for the foul.

Lord Dunraven, immediately after the race, sent a letter to the America Cup Committee declining to sail his boat any more under the circumstances which prevailed during the first two races, on the ground that it was exceedingly dangerous to attempt to start two such large vessels in so confined a space and among moving steamers and tiny boats, and that the crowd of these vessels made it impossible to see the mark-boats, and hampered the competitors all along the course. In response to this appeal the Committee decided that no start should be made in the next race until the excursion boats were half a mile distant from the yachts.

This concession did not satisfy Lord Dunraven, who asked for a postponement of the race in order that arrangements could be made for the boats to race in clear water. This request the Committee were unable to grant.

In the third race, therefore, on the 12th, Lord Dunraven brought the *Valkyrie* down to the mark, but after crossing the line to give the *Defender* a start, he withdrew from the contest. Into the long and bitter controversy which ensued it is not necessary to enter.

On September 24th, 1895, Mr. C. D. Rose, a member of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, appeared as a challenger for the America Cup. He proposed to build a yacht to be called the *Distant Shore*, but after a good deal of correspondence, the challenge was withdrawn, and it was left for the enterprise and public spirit of Sir Thomas Lipton, acting in unison with the Royal Ulster Yacht Club, to make a fresh struggle for the prize in the current month with the specially built *Shamrock*. At the present moment the eyes of not only the yachting world, but also of that far larger public which takes a keen interest in all questions of healthy and inspiring international sport, are fixed upon the *Shamrock* in her plucky attempt to rout the *Columbia* and bring this historic Cup back to British waters.