

first duty is to stay at home, whatever your inclinations.

To push inclination before duty is to pass out of that rank of noble women that their protestations make us believe they belong to. But there are many ways by which you can assist others outside your own home without entering the wage market, if you are certain your *duty* calls you from home. There are poor children that need teaching, needy business men who would bless you if you aided them in their book-keeping.

They do not understand it, nor can they pay for a clerk. There are hundreds of ways by which a girl can show her love for

humanity without making humanity worse, if she is of the spirit.

The crush to-day is terrible, and the cries of bitterness horrible to listen to. Woman after woman is falling in the struggle. Domestic peace and comfort are getting more and more impossible in certain directions, and one great cause of so much ruin and bitterness is the thoughtless selfishness and mistaken notions of very many girls of comfortable homes and means crowding into the labour market.

In the spirit, not of Socialism, but of the Good Samaritan parable, which teaches we must not hurt our neighbour nor allow others to do so, we say to these ladies, "Don't."*



A BARGEMAN'S VILLAGE.



HE village is not inhabited by the bargee, but it is the home of the bargeman, who belongs to quite a different race of man.

The bargee is familiar enough to us: on the towing paths of our rivers, on the banks of our canals, and in the pages of our literature, both light and serious—the

magazine and the official report. He is popularly associated with a short pipe, an ill-used horse, wife, child, or other domestic possession, and a vast store of "language."

He may be a much-maligned person. I am inclined to think he is—at least, in some instances; for I no more believe in drawing up an indictment against a calling than against a nation, provided the said calling is not, in itself, dishonest.

The bargeman, on the contrary, is such an unfamiliar figure, that it is doubtful whether one person in ten among educated people—say the ordinary inhabitants of a London drawing-room—would be able to differentiate him from the bargee.

The passenger who stops, as he crosses over London Bridge, to take a look down the Thames, may admire the stately barge, with

its brown-red sails, its black hull with its touches of emerald green, and the high-piled load of softly-tinted hay. He may watch her gliding through the water with an easy motion, recalling the graceful carriage of the Hindoo woman as she balances her water pitcher on her head, and presenting almost as great a contrast to the bustling, tossing, puffing life around her.

But the chances are that the onlooker will scarcely notice the inconspicuous little figures who man the Dutch-looking craft—far less ask himself who they are and whence they come.

It was quite by an accident that we discovered the home of the species, and that the bargeman's village revealed itself to our delighted eyes.

We were walking along the top of the sea-wall, by the side of one of those wide-mouthed rivers which are the most interesting feature of the eastern half of Essex.

There are five, at least, of such rivers, but this one was our favourite among them all. On one side of us the salt water was lapping in little wavelets against the miniature beaches, and into the lilliputian bays and creeks, which lie between the sea-wall and the river. On the other side the gold-green marshland meadows, dotted with white and brown groups of cattle, stretched towards the shaggy hedges, where long lines of elm-trees were outlined against the soft blue sky.

Straight ahead, where the river seemed to take a bend to the left, a bit of rising ground tempted us forward, with the attraction that clings to the unknown.

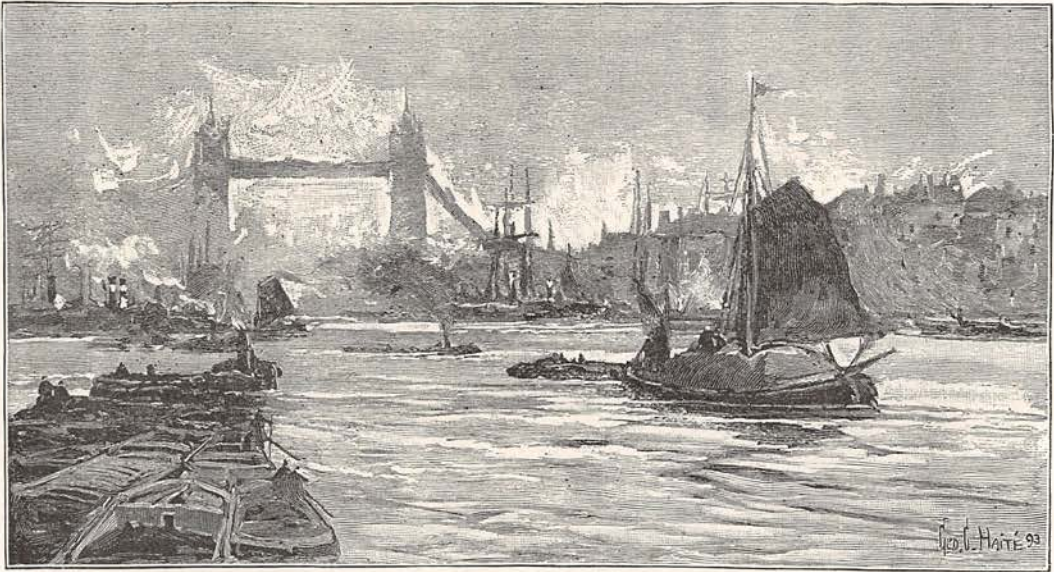
I don't know why one always climbs a hill,

* The author is alone responsible for the views expressed in this article.—Ed.

hoping to see a fairer prospect than from the eminence one has lately left ; or why the next bend of a river should be expected to prove more interesting or harmonious than the last. Perhaps it is because we are wrong in defining man as a reasoning animal, and should rather describe him as a hoping one. Perhaps it is because those rare moments, when Nature unexpectedly spreads her

roughly-fashioned landing-stage projected into the water. A tall barge, with loosely-furled sails of an Indian-red colour, was taking in her load of hay, brought across the landing-stage in great country waggons by the noble-looking horses, which are the pride of our eastern counties.

The bargemen in their blue jerseys, and the countrymen in their light-coloured shirts,



" GLIDING THROUGH THE WATER WITH AN EASY MOTION " (p. 609).

loveliest scenes before us, are so vivid and unforgettable, we hanker after a repetition of her favours, forgetting that it is only by her wise economy we retain an unjaded appetite for her displays.

One such moment was before us when we reached the rising ground and peeped through an opening among the low-growing pollards, which had been hiding the bargeman's village from our eyes.

A long reach of the river stretched away from our feet towards the distant hills, where the varying tints of field and foliage were blended into the softest shades of blue and green and grey ; and the tower of a village church contrasted its straight lines and sharp angles with the rounded tree-tops on either side.

The banks, brimming full with the advancing tide, were rounded with many a gracious curve, and the gently-lapping sound of the incoming water fell softly on our ears.

One of these curves lay just below us ; the tiny bay which it formed was ended off by a row of weather-beaten, timber cottages, and a

brightened here and there by a touch of scarlet at their throats, gave an air of cheerful labour to the scene, and completed a foreground full of life and colour, whose homely beauty enhanced the soft loveliness of the distant view.

The river, with those gleaming reflections which lend a grace to the commonest object, did not fail to double the charm of a scene which had hardly seemed to need such enhancement.

I turned to my companion for sympathy in my admiration ; but though her appreciation left nothing to be desired in its intensity, it took an unexpected and not wholly convenient form.

She wasted no words in eulogy, but briefly remarked—

" We must instantly look for rooms in this place."

I always know, when Anna sets her affections upon a spot, that, sooner or later, it will be my fate to go there ; so I meekly yielded to the inevitable, and we walked up the village street.

A double row of little irregular houses ran upwards from the river bank, to merge itself presently in a country road, where single cottages peeped out between the wayside elms.

On the brow of the hill, the scattered trees gathered themselves together into one of those leafy avenues which adorn so many of the Essex roads, and through the narrow opening at its end, we caught a glimpse of a distant hill, crowned with the church and windmill of a little town some three miles off.

The place was everything we could wish for, except in the matter of accommodation.

An old-fashioned, timber-built inn held out a delusive promise of shelter, but a closer view proved it to be impossible for a lady—we had it on no less authority than that of the landlord himself.

He was civil and obliging enough, and called in his pretty little wife to the council we held upon the situation. She looked regretfully at Anna, shook her head with a world of meaning, and said she couldn't undertake the responsibility.

By this time we were having tea in her own little parlour, and she expressed her regret that she could not give us the use of that apartment. As we should have had to share it with herself, two babies, and a little maid, it would hardly have suited us for a permanency; and we proceeded to inquire into our chances of getting rooms elsewhere.

At last our hostess suggested that there was a Mrs. Elder living close by, who might be willing to take us in; and after sundry negotiations and delays, and the lapse of many months, we at length, on a bright spring day, found ourselves established in the bargeman's village.

It was Mrs. Elder, most amiable and obliging of landladies, who introduced us into the social life of the village.

Most of the men seemed to be her brothers, and the women were her sisters-in-law, or brothers' wives, as

she termed them. The people in the place seemed to be generally known by these relative terms; it was like reading the last page of one's prayer-book, or an exercise on the genitive case.

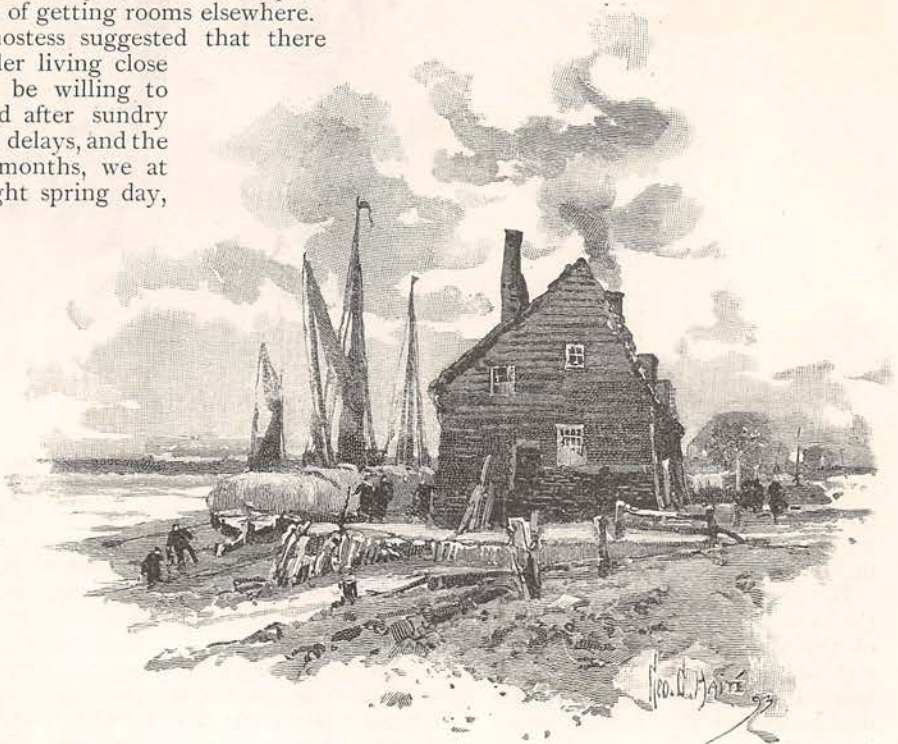
There was Mrs. Elder's brother's son, Mrs. Lock's husband's father, Mrs. Guy's sister, and Mrs. Guy's sister's husband.

These latter were our opposite neighbours, a comely and trimly-dressed little woman, with a blue-jerseyed husband, who, as we discovered later on, answered to the name of Daniel.

Daniel was the skipper of the *Mersea*, one of the smaller barges navigating the Crouch. The other man employed on the barge—the entire crew consisted of this pair—was known as Daniel Hardy's mate.

It was a little suggestive of the army in *Bombastes Furioso*, but the term was probably used in the sense of fellow or companion. We noticed that the children who played at the river-side used the word in that way, "Come along, mate!" being a frequent expression among them, and used indifferently by boys and girls.

Nearly all the men of the place were "on the water," as they phrased it; the agricultural labourers being described as "on the land," or more briefly, as "landmen."

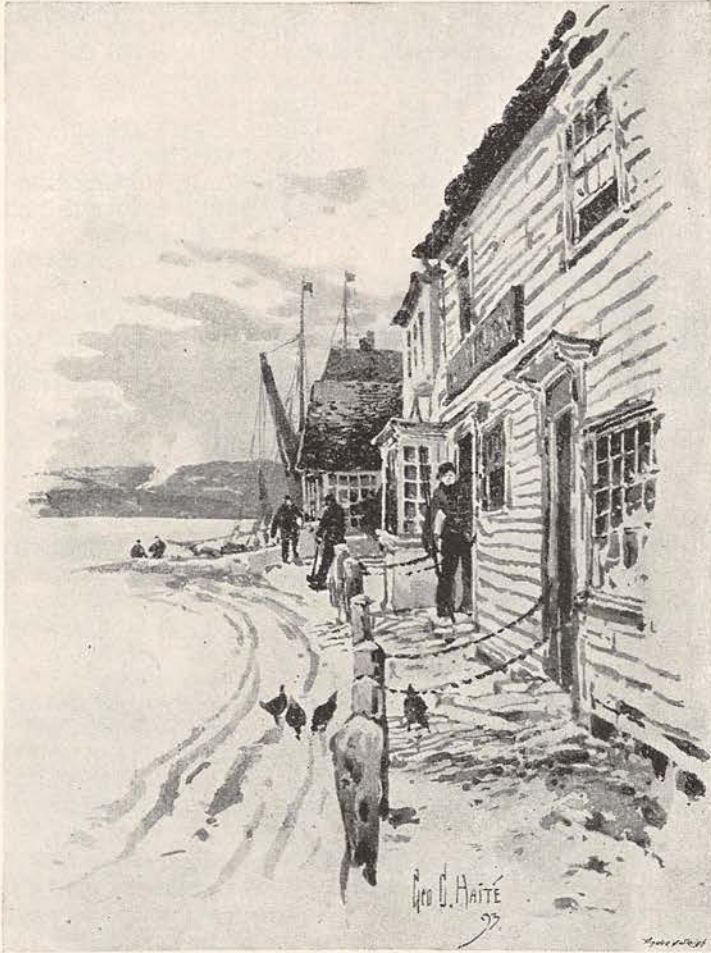


"A ROW OF WEATHER-BEATEN, TIMBER COTTAGES."

To be "on the water" was to belong to a distinctly higher class than the landmen's; higher in physique, in intelligence, and in manners. I should have added, in social position; but that is thorny ground for an outsider to trespass upon.

On the one hand, I could notice some

which hid the distant windings of the stream; and he gazed with the same indulgent toleration—as of the professional for the amateur—upon the jaunty little yacht for Burnham or Southend, with its snowy sail, its smart red flag, and the white-flannelled lads making holiday, after the fashion which was first



"A DELUSIVE PROMISE OF SHELTER" (p. 611).

intercourse between those "on the water" and the neighbouring farmers and their wives; but, on the other hand, there was no exclusiveness exercised towards the landman.

He came down on an evening to join in the village game of quoits, or formed one of the group upon the landing-stage who watched the ferry-boat cross the river. He speculated with them upon the name and destination of the barge, whose tall mast was visible afar off across the level meadows,

suggested by Fielding a hundred and forty years ago.

So far, however, the yachtsman has not discovered our village. He sails past it in blissful unconsciousness of its charms, and it has thus retained its primitive simplicity.

It is a self-contained and sociable little community, but it cares for nothing for what is beyond its borders. The bargeman goes out into the great world, he sees Maldon and Rochester and London itself; but after his longest flight he returns, like the stork, to



THE FERRY.

his old nest—a mariner who has only one port.

There is just one other link between us and the outer world.

At nine o'clock in the morning a shrill whistle brings most of us to our doors, and all heads look up the village street, when the figure of the postman can be seen coming towards us from beneath the avenue.

When the sun is not blazing too fiercely, one walks out, hatless and slippers, to meet the modern messenger of fate—a pleasant, kindly old man, a little bothered by the complications of the postal service, and apt to let the stamps flutter through his knotted fingers, when a passing gust from the river interferes with our open-air transactions.

It is a moment when the social activities are astir. One exchanges greetings with the neighbours and shares the latest bit of news. One hears how Mrs. Guy and her baby are getting on, or what sort of a night poor old Mr. Peters has passed, or Mr. Rumball comes across the road to let Anna know when a fresh barge is expected.

The coming and going of the barges brings more correspondence than is usual in so small a place, especially towards the end of the week, when the men try to spend their Sundays at home.

Mrs. Elder's face brightens as she opens a letter from her sons, and on Saturday evenings the place is aware of the cheerful return of husbands and sweethearts.

My little neighbour over the way looks

beaming with pride and happiness in the presence of the stalwart Daniel, and when I lift up my eyes from my paper, I see Will Elder and his brother gathering the roses, which cluster round our windows, and giving them to the young girls, who pin them into their light-coloured gowns.

A little bit of dialogue accompanies the scene, and the choice between pink and white roses gives occasion for a little rustic coquetry. But it is all open and innocent, the girls' manners are free from boldness, and those of the men have that touch of deference which makes a good specimen of a seaman so attractive to women.

The good manners here, no doubt, are partly due to the soberness, which is one of the bargeman's characteristics. To take these barges along the difficult and tortuous channels of the rivers, and to guide them safely past the flats and sands of the North Sea coast, requires more nerve and judgment than are to be found in the man who drinks.

On the one or two occasions when the peace of the village street has been disturbed by a drunken man, the offender has been a land, and not a sea, man.

On Sunday morning the village street is quiet; the children are off to Sunday school, the young women have vanished indoors; a group of men are talking together, seated on an anchored barge, while others are enjoying themselves in their back gardens, playing hymn tunes on concertinas or accordions.

Happily, we are not sufficiently musical

to be incommoded by our neighbours' performances.

Presently Mrs. Elder comes into our sitting-room, and fetches out the hymn-books, which lie upon the little table between the windows.

The sounds of the concertina have ceased, and the young men pass up the street to the little mission chapel, where the Wesleyans hold a meeting, while Anna and I set off across the fields to service in the parish church.

My companion always shows a staunch devotion to the parish churches, which I suspect is not unconnected with her passion for Gothic architecture, and her prolonged study of the pages of "Rickman."

At any rate, when we lose our way among the fields, she is not above making the profane suggestion that we should sit down under a hedge, and read the service for those "at sea."

But I am not to be beguiled from the path of duty: we regain our other path, to find, after all, when we reach the church, that we are too early instead of too late.

The door is not even open, so we rest in the churchyard and study the old gravestones, which are sure to have something interesting among them.

There are the quaint local names, the rhyming epitaphs, the long-continued series of some particular family, by which you piece out the history of a household, with its hints of pathos or tragedy, or quiet homely prosperity.

This particular churchyard was memorable for a tombstone to that much-injured woman—the mother-in-law. But, true to the peculiar phraseology of the place, she was described as "Susan Hart, *Mother of the wife of John Ford.*"

There was a second name on the stone: "John Ford, son-in-law of Susan Hart," and that was all. The humble little headstone stood rather apart from the other graves, and neither of its names appeared on any of the surrounding tombs.

There was nothing to show what had become of the wife who had linked the two together; or how these solitary members of their respective families had come to be each other's sole support.

Perhaps some old inhabitant of the place could have told one the rest of the story. I have known a chance question about a village grave to call up a romance or a tragedy, such as Hardy himself might describe.

More than one churchyard near our barge-

man's village has its inscription to those who have been lost at sea; and in Mrs. Elder's little rooms alone there are memorials of two of her relations—a brother and a son—drowned at different times off different barges.

The life must be a dangerous one, and perhaps herein lies part of its charm. To a strong and daring nature the danger that quickens the pulses brings with it a certain excitement, which is not without its pleasure, and the love of hazardous adventure is an inheritance from the old Danish blood so largely intermixed with that of the population of our eastern counties—a combination to which we owe Nelson and Cook, and many a brave companion of their combats or discoveries.

Two men are employed to manage the smaller barges, and the larger ones take a boy in addition. There is a third, and still larger variety of barge, which the people call a "billy-boy;" but, like the scarcer sea-fowl, we know it by repute alone. The billy-boy only visits our village at rare intervals, and one has not happened to come up during our stay.

Trusting, as they do, entirely to their sails, the varying length of their passages reminds us of the Channel crossings in the old days.

Evelyn tells us in his Diary of one passage accomplished in seven hours and another lasting three days. In our village we hear of one barge reaching London in eleven and even ten hours; but that is an exceptional case, and the journey may drag out a week or more with contrary winds and rough weather.

In the winter frosts these voyages tax the courage and endurance of the men to their uttermost. Mrs. Elder dwells with pride upon her son Jack.

"He's such a hardy lad. Never had on his mittens but twice last winter, though his hands were sore with the cold from the icy ropes."

And then she goes on to tell me of her own fears during those winter nights, when she dreads what may be happening to her boys in the dark.

We hear a good many quaint local words when talking with the villagers. A turnstile is a "clapgate;" the lane leading to a farm is a "chace;" and a landing-place is a "hard."

I was just going to mention the village by its geographical name, but after all I have said I will be discreetly silent.

My readers can easily find the place if they look for it; or if they don't they may find something better; for, after all, no beauties are so great as those we discover for ourselves.

E. CHAPMAN.