

AN AUGUST RAMBLE DOWN THE UPPER THAMES.

By REGINALD BLUNT.

With Illustrations Engraved from Photographs taken by the Writer.



LAST August a friend and I determined to spend a week or two on the upper Thames, but we were a little doubtful how best to see the twenty odd miles between Thames Head and Lechlade. Boating was out of the question in the slack water month of August; towing-path for tramping there is none, above Inglesham; while the roads seem to have a perverse way of carrying you well out of reach of your river as soon as they have crossed it. We were helped to a decision by the proffer of hospitality at Castle Eaton, a little village about five miles below Cricklade; and having sent our dinghy, the *Dabchick*, thither by rail and road, and ascertained the impossibility of getting her any further up the river we concluded to make headquarters there, and work the upper reaches as best we could on foot, starting hence downward on the voyage to Oxford.

FROM THAMES HEAD TO CASTLE EATON.

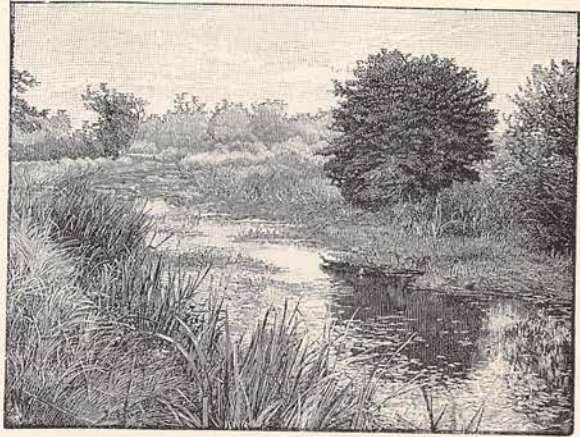
Driving from Castle Eaton by Down Amney to Cirencester along the grand straight stretch of the Via Erminia, we paid a passing visit to the beautiful old church of St. John, with its fine porch and lofty clerestoried nave, and then boarded the branch train which connects the town with the Gloucester line of the Great Western Railway at Kemble Junction. Crossing the railway, and taking the road towards the little hamlet of Ewen, a half-mile of dusty lane brought us to a low arched causeway; to the left is a weedy dyke, with a hedgerow on one side and a rush-bordered meadow on the other. That is the Thames. A few miles further up, among beds of cress and thirsty weed, the mother-springs well fitfully up. In summer drought the pumping engine sucks the water away as it rises, to feed the neighbouring canal, which reaches its highest altitude not far from here, and the baby Thames is thus robbed of his birthright and natural nourishment.

After a mile or so the stream reaches a mill, charmingly framed under sheltering elms. A bit further on, a footpath across a meadow to the left tempted us from the river to a gray church and manor house nestling cozily amongst sheltering elms, with the great silent barns and



UPPER SOMERFORD MILL.

sleepy cots of the village of Somerford dotted around them. Cattle we saw everywhere, grazing over the rich pasture land, or crowding down to the cobbled drinking places made for them in the banks of many of the fields; sheep, too, though far less frequently, and lordly swine, and great bony farm horses were dotted here and there about the meadows; water-hens bobbed in and out among the rushes, or skimmed noisily over the surface when caught napping round a bend; fat water-rats ran cunningly along the bank edges to their holes or flopped unseen into the water at vibration of a footfall; scared peewits uttered their peevish cry overhead; twice or thrice we put up a great lanky heron from his feeding ground among the flams; and once we just caught the blue flash of a disappearing kingfisher. But of humankind, scarcely a solitary soul. Even in the villages and about the scattered cots and homesteads the dogs seemed in sole charge, their owners probably at work in the harvest-fields. Wood-pigeons cooed and chattered in the elms; frolicsome little fish threw themselves head over heels out of water in the shallows; mighty dragon-flies hung and sped from bank to bank; but one might tramp mile after mile before meeting any one of whom to ask one's way, except at the occasional mills which still dot these upper reaches.



ABOVE ASHTON-KEYNES.

After passing the third mill, a very bald affair of blank brick, the river grows clear and enters a charming wood, leaving the church and manor of Ashton-Keynes to its left, and boasting, for a little space, an excellent path along its right bank. As



MANOR HOUSE, WATER EATON.

we emerged from the stretch of overshadowing woodland, a sharp turn to the right carried us across a meadow down to the village street, where the stream is spanned by a dozen tiny bridges connecting the cottages with the roadway. We passed down the quaint, delightful village, with its many bridges and crosses, and thence by a stretch of red road whose gorgeous side dyke carries a by-way of the river to Waterhay Bridge. Hence, onward for a while, the river, now a lively and unmistakable stream, shows a laudable resolution to advance itself and eschew the roundabout. After tramping down another reach or two, a blank brick wall across

the river, embanked on either side, seems to bring young Thames to an ignominious full-stop. Climbing the bank one finds one's self on the aqueduct of the North Wilts Canal, the river humbly burrowing through a submerged arch below the wall. But the stop is only a comma, after all. Following down the right bank of the canal one soon reaches a quaint old lift-bridge, with upraised weighted arms, and crossing this, the tow-path carries one pleasantly on. The mighty tower of St. Sampson's church has long been our landmark, and another reach or two leads us into a pretty willow-lined stretch, from which a path, skirting one or two cottage gardens, carries us into the street of Cricklade town.

Just below Wayland's bridge a brook trickles into our river on the left. This is the Churn, one of two or three pretenders to the birthright of King Thames.

Starting again on our downward way, we skirted Rose Cottage, which forms a pretty picture from below with its porch and embankment wall, and found ourselves on the plank bridge which marks the first step in engineering advance from the tree-

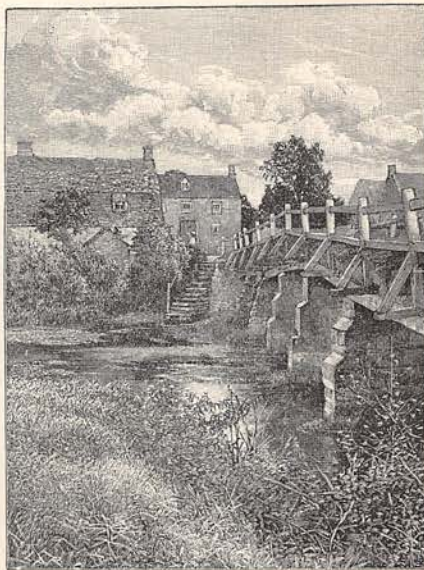


CASTLE EATON BRIDGE.

log of Somerford Mill. Two tall trestles and three pairs of stout planks complete its fabric; and though it might fare badly if not chained in a heavy flood, it is a very adequate and picturesque foot-way. To the pool just above it, the mothers of Cricklade used formerly to bring their little ones for baptism. This good old custom has been discontinued in favour of St. Sampson's font, but while I was photographing the trestle bridge I witnessed another employment of Thames' young waters which was not less interesting in its way. A milk-cart rattled jovially down into the middle of the stream, and the driver began bucketing the water into his cans. Much tickled at this suggestive procedure I was assured, in answer to a chaffing question, that the water was merely for washing and not for dilutive purposes; and further that the good folk of Cricklade drew hundreds of gallons daily from this pool for farm and household use. Remembering that there were several farms and villages higher up the stream which assuredly drained into it, I suggested that the water could hardly be good for drinking; but my driver scouted the imputation, declaring it to be considered the best of spring-water, and assuring me that the Ashton-Keynes stream "ran the other way altogether and not by here at all!" At this astounding statement, I wisely said, "Good morning."

The question of Thames pollution—interesting, more or less, inasmuch as London drinks from the river at Sunbury and elsewhere—is a complicated one. But it is evident that it is of little use for the Conservators to enforce stringent regulations as to drainage on the lower reaches within their control, while villages above Cricklade, and others on tributary streams such as the Churn, the Windrush, or the Evenlode, pour their waters—indisputably contaminated—into the river on its way. Leaving Rose Cottage, and keeping the right bank downwards, a half-mile of meadow-tramp brought us to Eisey footbridge, one of the new, straight, substantial, but unlovely spans with which the by-no-means-conservative Conservators of the river have replaced the quaint old structures of the past. A little below, on a hillock to the left, stands Eisey Chapel; a solitary little pseudo-Norman sanctuary.

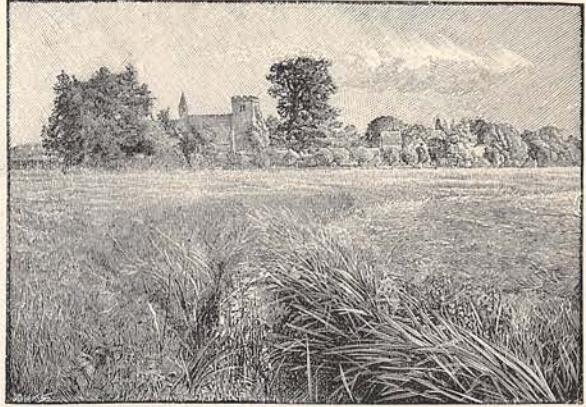
Following a footpath from the chapel-moat, we had just reached a thatched cottage or two, when a mysterious voice from above hailed us. The owner, whose head only was visible, gliding bodiless along a raised embankment to my right, proved to be in a boat on the Canal, which his mate was towing towards Cricklade. From a little arch beneath the Canal, a pretty little stream issues, to join the Thames above



CASTLE EATON BRIDGE, FROM THE ROAD.

the footbridge. It is not marked on the maps, but an old gentleman who toddled forth from his cottage at sound of voices told me they called it "Galileo's Brook." I can well imagine that any luckless voyagers who had ploughed their way up to Eisey in slack water time would hail with rejoicing the chance of transferring their craft here to the still and even depths of the Canal. This same Canal accompanies the river more or less all the way from Cricklade Wharf to Inglesham Round House, where a lock unites it with the Thames, which is thence downward navigable for barges up to seventy tons.

It is in parts indeed an extremely pretty waterway with a still, placid beauty of its own, especially at the twilight hour when the reflections of its overhanging foliage and its little arched bridges here and there, grow marvellous sharp upon its glassy surface—seldom broken by the broad, black bows of its long barges. Here at Eisey, and at Dudgrove, six miles further down, there are locks which the navigating bargee works himself through; while at a bridge near Cowneck, and at Inglesham, rise those quaint, round tower-houses, built for the lock-keepers and benighted bargemen, in the busier days before the Great Western Railway



CASTLE EATON CHURCH AND VILLAGE FROM THE MEADOWS.

decayed away most of the water-traffic. Those who meditate a downward voyage from Cricklade will do wisely and well, especially after July, when the weeds are cut and water is low, to take the Canal route to Inglesham, unless they are prepared, for the sake of a few delightful bits here and there on the intervening river, to undergo much grounding and grinding over flams and old weir-sills, much punting and paddling, and much aimless meandering that is picturesque, but very slow going for anything larger than the lightest of canoes.



CATTLE IN THE RIVER, KEMPSFORD.

Keeping a path on the left bank from the little chapel on the knoll, our way wandered on through cattle-dotted meadows till another prim footbridge was reached and a gray old manor house fronted us across a rising field to the right. This was Water Eaton House. Approaching the back door (the house fronts away from the river) I gained the attention of a busy little maid and asked for leave to photograph the house. Mary disappeared to consult the master, and soon returned saying, "That'll do, thankye," as she quietly closed the door in my face. This ambiguous oracle was somewhat dis-

heartening, till a further appeal for enlightenment discovered that I was presumed to be "the fellow from Cricklade" calling for an order, and that the master was not desirous of buying copies of an original of which he was in sole possession. Our colloquy brought him to the door, and on ascertaining that I was merely an amateur asking a favour, his house was generously placed at my disposal, with the intimation that I might take as much of it as I liked, fore and aft, sideways and anyway; a liberal permission of which my small stock of plates did not allow me to take full advantage.

Returning to the river again from the quaint old Elizabethan manor, and keeping

the right bank, another mile of pleasant but featureless wandering brought us to a horseshoe-shaped backwater, once probably the mainway of the stream, but now silted up and abandoned to a gorgeous overgrowth of rush and teasle, purple loosestrife, and snowy convolvulus, between towering ramparts of nettle and thistle; another mile of uneventful progress brought us opposite the queer, long creek with overgrown entrance and deep pools beyond, known as Cowneck, but whose genesis is mystery; whence onward, our little river carried us by gentle windings, till the charming old span of Castle Eaton bridge was reached, and our second day of downward pilgrimage leisurely ended.

CASTLE EATON TO RADCOT BRIDGE.

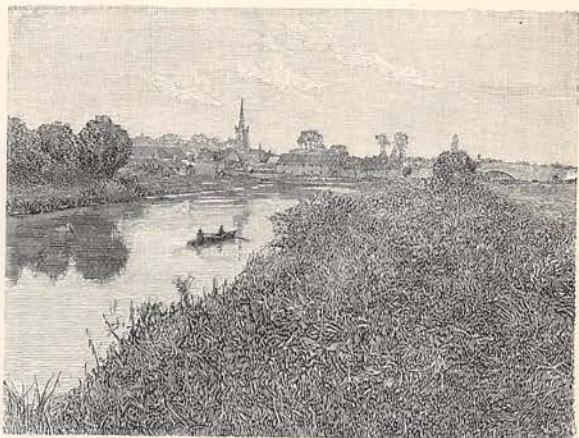
At Castle Eaton our voyage proper began. A straggling line of poor cottages, a farm with a great milking barn behind it, a comfortable vicarage with a charming veranda and plentiful kitchen gardens, a nice little church with a quaint spirelet for the *sancte* bell over the choir, a carved pulpit of well-toned oak, and an interesting half-vanished fresco of the Virgin and Child over a piscina on one of the pillars; that is all Castle Eaton has to show. And yet my friends seemed to find their month's



INGLESHAM WEIR POOL.

sojourn all too short for the things they found to see and do there. Perhaps it was that they were of those who have discovered the fascinations of penetrating a little within the charmed circle of some one or two of the thousand life-dramas which one touches at a tangent in our path through this beehive of a world. To most of us does it not come almost as an astonishment when some accident—a chance word, a street scene, a station farewell, perhaps—lifts the curtain for an instant and reveals to us that these beings against whom we brush as we pass by, and who for us are just “people”—labourers, porters, lock-keepers, village folk—are each and all centres of a little life-history? Comedy it may be, or tragedy, or oftener a strange blending of both, with its laughter and tears, its perplexing vicissitudes of fortune; perhaps with its cupboard skeleton, its cloud of impending fate, its dash of cruel irony or mute pathos. Anyhow, my friends found plenty of interests, even within the bounds of the tiny parish; to say nothing of pilgrimages to the glorious Fairford Windows, drives to the somnolent townships of Lechlade or Cirencester or Cricklade, and punting of the *Dabchick* through the flams towards Kempsford tower; nor anything of a fair in the meadow across the river, for which a special one-day bridge is erected from the inn garden. This punting practice formed the overture to our downward trip, when, at ten o'clock on the morning of their final Monday our bags and camera were carried down to the “harbour” and stowed in our stout little craft, in which a comfortably-backed stern seat had been rigged; and with a generous shove off that detracted from the dignity of our adieu we started gaily off for Oxford. It was a capital set-off, and our merry progress lasted for fully fifty yards, when an ominous grinding brought us speedily to a standstill on a sandy flum. Profiting by former experiences of this kind we were armed with a fine young firpole fresh from the copse, and this, by judicious pricking, set us afloat again. But before we had gone much further we reached a series of these fateful shoals, and the boat grounded with a determination that defied punting. There was nothing for it but to get overboard and tug our refractory craft by the nose, walking down mid-stream; and to this undignified method of locomotion we had to resort two or three times before reaching Hannington Bridge, after which we managed—with occasional assistance from our firpole—to progress without deserting the ship.

At the end of our first mile we passed Kempford, with its beautiful church tower and the river wall and window of the mansion of the Dukes of Lancaster just above. Kempford Church is striking in its proportions, its height and narrow width giving it an imposing semi-cathedral aspect from the west end. The renowned Woodford (afterwards Bishop of Ely) was some time rector there, and the church bears various memorials of his stay; but the gem of the interior is the perfect Norman arch on the south side leading into the vestry. The horseshoe cast by the steed of Henry, Duke of Lancaster, when he was riding sadly away from Kempford, hateful to him after his son had been drowned in the river there, hangs still on the church door, a relic which—despite a duplicate elsewhere—may well be authentic. Furthermore, it is at Kempford, beyond the pale of reasonable doubt, that on the stretch of velvet sward between the old mansion wall and the towering hedge behind, walks, after dusk, the Lady Maud, his ancestress; seen only by womenkind, whom she sometimes calls by Christian name; and so beyond the power of sceptic man to disbelieve.



LECHLADE, FROM ABOVE.

Just before we passed Kempford, with a heavy beating of wings and water, a pair of magnificent white geese rose from a rushy bend below us and sailed away with huge wings gleaming snowy-brilliant against the sunlight and the blue above. About half a mile lower down are chronicled the "remains of a weir"; a note often occurring on maps of the upper Thames. To the wayfarer these vanished weirs are only identified by a sudden broadening of the stream which once formed the weir pool; but in a boat at slack water time one is informed of them in more unmistakable fashion.

Here, for example, our laden *Dabchick* grounded resolutely on the old stone sill; and the pole proving incompetent to stir her, we had to wade and drag for a few paces. So we poled and paddled and plodded down to Hannington Bridge, a substantial but uninteresting roadway; and then a series of pretty bends and reaches carried us, passing Ham Barn on our left, to where, on the right the "river" Cole contributes its pretentious mite to our stream, and the quaint little church of Inglesham



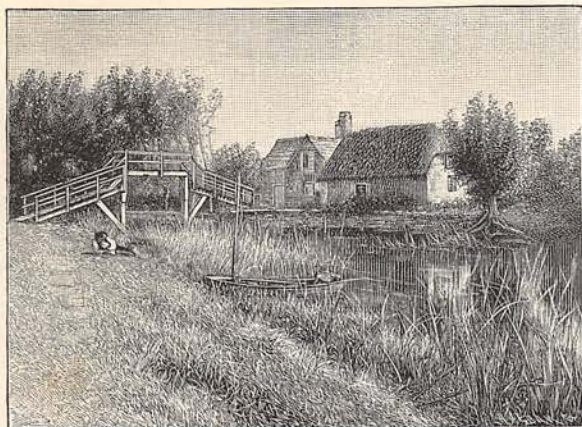
BUSCOT.

comes in sight between the trees. A farm, a fine elm-shaded old weir-pool and a sharp bend to the left brought us to the towing-path bridge, with the quaint Round House and back entrance to the canal beyond; while just below, the bright little Colne (beloved of fishermen) but far narrower here than at Fairford, clatters merrily into the Thames on the left.

Henceforward to Lechlade, a short mile down, the river is broad and deep, and the old town and church with its "pratie pyramis of stone" as Leland called its graceful spire, shows happily beyond the deserted wharf. The bridge is a single span, with a little side-arch for the towing path, new looking, but not

ungraceful, which brings in the road from Highworth. The town is triumphantly dull, and the church has little of interest within, having been recently swept and garnished, and its dear fusty old pew-boxes and galleries "renovated" out of existence.

Three-quarters of a mile below the bridge, a cut to the right introduces us to the first lock on the Thames,—St. John's,—and the lock-keeper presents us with a couple of his pink tickets, as we shall have to work ourselves

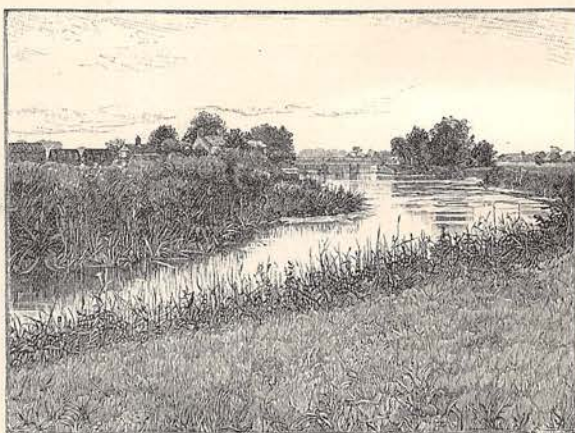


FEN FOOTBRIDGE AND COTTAGE.

through the next one, at Buscot. Paddling down the long reedy lock-way below and turning up the main stream again to St. John's bridge, which is wholly blocked by the weir, we landed just below it. Re-embarking, our river led us a merry-go-round of staggering contortions till in fulness of time Buscot church was sighted at the end of a pretty reach, and a little further on we made the island, between the lock and weir. Landing here, we found the all important winch¹ hung upon its bracket, and worked our way through in masterly style, to the slow thudding beat of the mill wheel beyond the weir. Buscot reach is a lovely bit of pure river scenery, the best to which we had

as yet attained, and sharing with Rushy and a bit or two about Newbridge the honours of the Upper Thames.

Resuming our paddle, a comparatively straight reach or two brought us in sight of Hart's Weir, the first of the weirs without locks now remaining on the river. To the passage of this much explained obstruction we had looked forward with great interest, not unmixed with a spice of wholesome trepidation. The day before I had carefully conned the instructions given on our map directing the boatman to "pull up two or three of the paddles and then the rymers that hold them would lift out;" and as we neared the great white barrier, I tried hard to correctly repeat this, "pull - the - bobbin - and - the - latch - will - fly - up" formula, but with doubtful success. However, as we approached we found that some of the paddles on one side were already out, leaving an easy passage-way for our craft. Shipping oars as we reached the bridge bar, we sat tight, prepared for the downward plunge. Now for it! we inwardly ejaculated as the top-beam passed some three feet above us . . . Hulloo? what's this? We have slid easily through, and are gliding along by the side wall below. But where is the fall? Looking back at the weir from below, it was just perceptible as a tiny undulation of the water in the opening—four inches at the very outside.

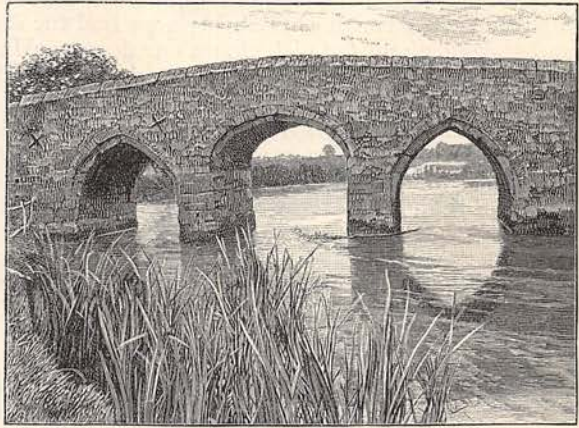


HART'S WEIR.

A series of quiet uneventful reaches, following this "somewhat dangerous" weir, restored our placid equilibrium, till buried among the trees on a knoll to our right we caught a glimpse of the quaint, lonely little church of Eaton Hastings, as solitary as

¹ The key of the lock.

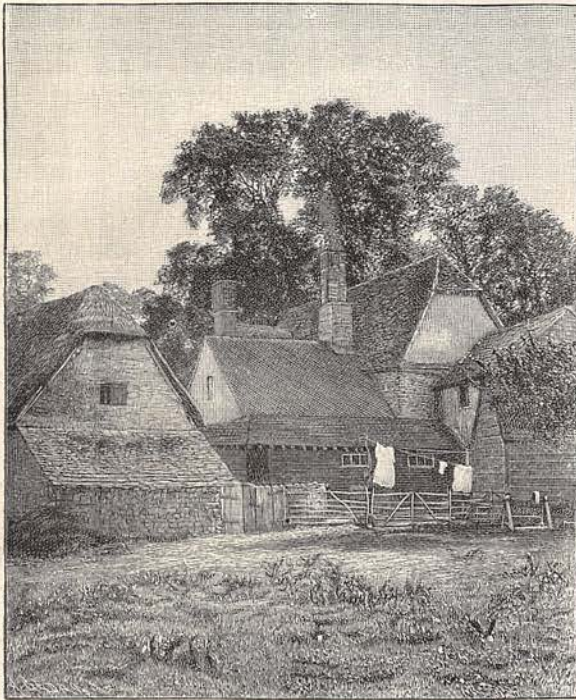
the Eisey chapel, but more picturesquely posed. Hence onward the river flows more straightforwardly, and masses of whispering rushes, undulating banks fringed with glorious feathered grasses or gigantic downy thistles, and delicate growths of water-weed overlacing the surface or trailing in wavy tresses through the stream, made our way very much prettier than many of the earlier reaches, which, sooth to say, were sometimes dreary, and often dull and monotonous. For this it would seem we have the Conservancy rather than Nature to blame. She has been more sinned against than sinning, poor dame! The Commissioners, in their river cleansing zeal, have done their best to make the Upper Thames as like a big dyke as might be. They have scoured the flams and shallows, and heaped the dredgings along the bank-sides in hideous mounds, which effectually shut off the view from a boat, and whose nakedness



OLD RADCOT BRIDGE, SIDE STREAM.

Nature strives valiantly but imperfectly to clothe in such verdure as they will support, which seems to be principally thistles and nettles. They have straightened the banks and scooped away the thousands of little bays and forelands, nooks and islets, with their green foregrounds of rustling rushes. They have cut the reeds and weeds, and swept away the ancient weirs, leaving some of the upper reaches unnavigably shallow; they have removed many of the picturesque old bridges, replacing them by stiff structures which at best are inoffensive, and are not often that.

All this may, or may not, have been necessary in the interests of the riparian landowners and of the general regulation of the river; the results are merely noted here as a fair warning to those who may come to the Upper Thames expecting to find a pure untrammelled stream. The damage—artistically speaking—is only very partial, happily; and it must of course be remembered, *per contra*, that the tumble-down locks and weirs, and the towering overgrowths of rushes and weeds of earlier days, picturesque as they were, made locomotion at least as difficult, though lovelier, than the low ebb of slack-water times to-day.



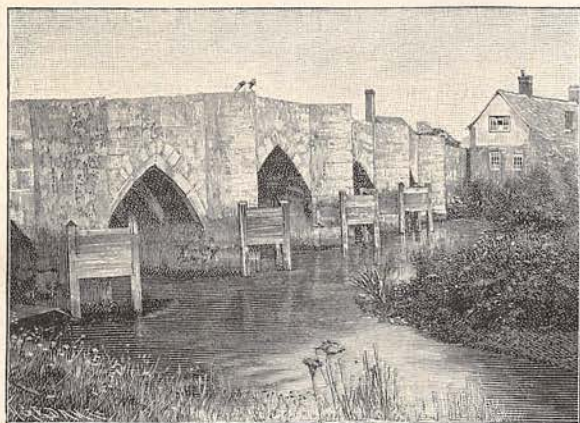
DUXFORD FARM, FROM THE RIVER.

Hastings we sighted Radcot Bridge, and keeping the left-hand stream where the river divides we passed under the tall single arch, leaving the island to our right, and landed in the roomy boat-house of the Swan, whither we had written for dinner and beds, a necessary precaution in these small riverside hostels.

A couple of miles below Eaton

RADCOT TO NEWBRIDGE.

The next day gave promise of hot weather again. After breakfast and a stroll across the island to the side stream, where a big sheep-washing was in progress just below the three-arched span of the bridge, we had the dinghy baled out and the cargo stowed, and started, about ten o'clock, on our downward way, bidding adieu to the old bridge of battles, where De Vere saved his neck from Richard's warriors by plunging into the river and swimming across. The first feature of our course was Old Man's Bridge, a quaint crutched footway,—once a weir, and evidently raised a step, half-way over, to give headway for laden barges. This passed, came a region of wearisome twists and windings, where one could never see more than fifty yards of river at a time, while here and there, in shallows on the right, grew little beds of watercress which had been spared by the all-devouring dredger. After a couple of miles or more of this giddy meandering we sighted Rushy Lock, a welcome and charming picture, with its wooded island in the middle, its picturesque weir and cottage to the right, and the old shadowy lock entrance on the left, through the small fall of which we worked ourselves with the nominal assistance of the keeper's wife and little boy. Paddling out of the lock



NEWBRIDGE, FROM MOUTH OF THE WINDRUSH.

cut, a delicious breeze on the river suggested the happy thought that we were carrying a mast and sail, which had not so far worked their passage. They were soon hoisted, and the wind, though fitful and fickle, proved good enough to carry us down many a lazy reach, while we smoked the pipe of peaceful enjoyment and listened to the musical babble of the water at our bows. Tadpole Bridge, a mile below, did not greatly allure us. It is built much on the lines of that at Lechlade, and wants a few centuries of toning and lichen growth to soften off its trim facings and edges. A somewhat dreary half-hour, featureless and monotonous in form and colour, awaited us on re-embarking. Indeed it should be confessed without demur, for the benefit of those voracious "sightseers" who dread a little dullness more than many plagues, that here and there for a while a genuine monotony reigns over this upper river—a silver gray streak creeping silently through gray-green meadows, from which it is divided by dredger-heightened banks high enough to screen such landscape as there might be from the boat, yet too low to give a feature to the stream. To the philosophic pilgrim these undistracting interludes give welcome opportunity for quiet meditation, undisturbed by possibilities of anything to look at. But querulous artists cast back regretful glances to the good old pre-dredger days of pools and shallows, rush-grown ins and outs, and banks where cattle huddled down to drink or cool their legs knee-deep at noon; of punting laboriously mast-high in reeds, and startling dace and bleak by hundreds from the sandy shallows; the days of old Joe Skinner's and a dozen other quaint weirs and mills and bridges, now things of fading memory only. Even the upper Thames, though as yet in truth not greatly vandalized, is not what it was. A couple of miles of this "plain" sailing and Ten-foot Bridge was reached, another of the queer old footways which have so far escaped replacement by the structures of station platform type which the Commissioners love; and my camera gave an excuse for running the *Dabchick* in among the rushes a little above its square framework and thatched cottages, and enjoying a stretch upon the cattle-cropped turf.

Of the "red-letter days" of a holiday, one can make but a sorry record in black and white; and of river travelling this is perhaps particularly true. Sailing, paddling, towing by turns, the river a little more or less tortuous or pretty, the weather invariably delicious—so our day and way wore on. Passing the hamlet of Chimney on the left, we reached Duxford farm and ferry about five o'clock. The old house

stands charmingly across a field rising gently to the right of the river, and boasts a delightful medley of roofs and gables.

About half a mile lower down we noted the first plants of the white-flowered, round-leaved water-lily which we had yet seen. But here, for a change, the neglect of the towing-path brought us to frequent standstills. Thick blackthorn bushes and willows have been allowed in several places to grow up over-head high, between the path and the bank, making it an impossibility to get a light boat tow-line over. In more than one instance the planks carrying the path over dykes have disappeared, leaving the luckless tourist the choice of a leg wetting or a *détour*; elsewhere again the path retires so far from the river as to inevitably pull the boat ashore; posts are badly wanted at several of the sharpest bends to help the pull of the tow-line past the corner.

The surmounting of these various little obstacles enlivened our afternoon, as we took turn about at the towing-line, or, hoisting sail, drifted deliciously down some propitious reach, till the inevitable bend arrived; the breeze took us aback, down came the sheet, and a spell at the oars brought us back, a reach lower, to our wind again. In such leisurely progress it was already past six o'clock when the fine old span of Newbridge came in sight, and a halt was called. Our enquiries *en route* about inns for to-night had left us undecided, as no one knew anything about the two little houses at Newbridge, and the Ferry House at Bablock Hythe, three miles further down, was generally considered the first feasible stopping place; but as our getting in at Bablock Hythe was entirely problematical, and as twilight was already upon us after a longish day, we plucked the white feather of doubt, and agreed to make Newbridge our resting-place.

NEWBRIDGE TO OXFORD.

We had another glorious morning for our final stage, and paddled downward through prettily-wooded reaches towards Bablock Hythe. In the intervening three miles there is nothing particular to remark, though enough of quiet beauty to enjoy. The ferry at Bablock is worked by an overhead iron rope, and connects the roads from Stanton Harcourt on the left and Cumnor on the right, to which lovers of *Kenilworth* make steep pilgrimage to discover, in the florid epitaph on Tony Fire-the-faggot's tomb in the church, an eulogium of that gentleman's virtues which is difficult to arrange with Sir Walter's version of the history.

Pleasant as the river always is for those who appreciate its pleasantness, we were inclined, when we had completed the last seven miles of our voyage, and landed at last on Folly Bridge, to think that the boat journey might better have ended at Eynsham, whence twenty minutes of train covers the distance which took us over three hours of somewhat toilsome and uninteresting rowing. Passing through the new and open weir just below the bridge, the river skirts the Wytham Hills and woods on the right, and rounding an island, reaches King's Weir, where we had to land and tug our craft over the roller path. The great chimney of the Wolvercot paper mills looms long in sight as the river winds sluggishly along; and another featureless mile brings Godstow Bridge, with its Trout Inn to the left, its ruined nunnery to the right, and the lock further on. After King's Weir and its roller slide the whole aspect of the river changes, and one feels instinctively that one is within the precincts of a big town—the very metropolis of boating. A dim, gray haze ahead hangs over its famous domes and towers; boats of all rigs and builds begin to multiply: and behold, on the broadened towing-path, a smart nurserymaid with a perambulator. Our sojourn with Nature is over; we are entering once more the haunts of men. After Godstow the river widens greatly, skirting the great Port Meadow and growing shallow and full of weeds except just under the towing-path bank. Passing Binsey village, Medley Weir is reached, and again we bump our poor little *Dabchick* over the wide spaced rollers, after taking her down the wrong stream to the left past the boat-houses, and nearly fouling her mast in the towing-path bridge. And still the end is not yet. Railways to left of us, gasworks to right of us, Oxford in front of us, seems ever receding like a will-o-the-wisp. Osney Lock is reached and passed, and still we paddle on through the dreary outskirts of the town, under the railway bridge, behind rows and rows of hideous little houses, till a welcome turn at last brings Folly Bridge in sight, and, shooting under it we run alongside Salter's landing-stage, and our voyage is over.