

CHAPTER IV

*The River Medway - Sheerness - Port Victoria
Stangate Creek - Colemouth - Long Reach
Cockham Wood - Chatham - The Upper Medway*



WHEN ONE'S LITTLE VESSEL has safely crossed the dangers of the Grain Spit, and is running into the Medway with a fair wind, there is time to take a look round, and feast one's eyes upon the moving panorama of shipping.

On the east side there is the fort on Garrison Point, and the dockyards, and the big iron sheers towering high above all the buildings; on the west side there is the old Martello tower, with Cockleshell Hard and Port Victoria beyond. In the middle, the guardship *Duncan*, a screw frigate of the early days of steam, used to swing to the tide at her moorings until quite lately. Round about there lie other men-of-war, some large and some small; a liner, or swift cruiser, or a torpedo catcher, and a training schooner flying the pennant; then there is the Chatham steamer alongside the pier taking in or discharging passengers, and a fleet of barges coming out or running into the river in procession from the Medway to the Thames, or from the Thames to the Medway; a Norwegian timber-laden brig or schooner, and a ketch or two from some of the ports on the east coast, are usually to be seen brought up off Cockleshell Hard.

To the southward can be descried the beacon which marks the entrance to the Queenborough Swale, where the Flushing steamers lie, and in the distance beyond are the hills of Kent.

The Medway in its lower reaches is a splendid cruising ground for small craft, certainly there is no other place at once so accessible from London and so convenient for small-boat sailing. From Rochester Bridge to Sheerness there are nearly fourteen miles of water, all open except in the neighbourhood of Rochester itself, where the hills and houses make the wind come rather puffy. For the rest of the distance the banks are low, so that the winds blow true and without squalls; there is soft bottom everywhere, so that no harm can follow from any accidental going ashore, and for a large part of the distance, in fact for nearly the whole way from Gillingham to Sheerness, there are a series of side creeks and channels, along which the man who is fond of exploring expeditions can penetrate into no end of quaint corners, and can find plenty of quiet anchorages for the night without alarms of any sort. The view of this part of the Medway from Brompton Lines, or from the top of Chatham Hill, shows a vast expanse of water, more like an elongated lake dotted with islands than the course of a river; and the absence of steamboat traffic lends a further charm to the Medway for the amateur boat sailor. Practically there is none; an average of about one coasting steamer per diem representing the business of the port, and this is a very different state of affairs from that which is found upon the Thames, where the steamboats, large and small, form a continuous procession up and down the river, keeping the

yachtsman in a state of constant apprehension, as they bear down towards him yawing from side to side till he hardly knows whether to stand on or tack about. Then the tides do not run so hard in the Medway, and there is a capital train service between London and Chatham.

Sheerness, at the entrance to the river, does not afford much of a harbour to little craft, for it is exposed to westerly winds, and indeed we have heard of bawleys foundering there at their anchors in bad weather; but when it is fine and during the easterly winds which prevail in the spring and early summer, it is often a convenient place to bring up at. There is room close to the northward of the jetty for a few craft, but much more room on its south and better side, along the edge of the Lapwell – a mud bank which extends from Sheerness to Queenborough, and dries out at low water nearly to the end of the pier. By anchoring close inside of the head of the pier one can be out of the way, and handy, if one wants a waterman for a put ashore, or to look after the boat while the crew goes up into the town.

Most necessary stores can be bought at Sheerness, and there is a very fair hotel, the Fountain, close to the pier, if the Corinthian wants a change of diet after a few days of victual of his own cooking, or hankers after a freshwater bath to wash away what Dana calls the “sea black.” It is a commonly accepted belief that in small boats everything is kept bright and clean, save and except the crew, but this is a libel; all the same a fresh-water bath is doubly delightful after a few days of salt-water washing, and it is quite the correct thing to do, for we are told that Ulysses always went in for a fresh-water bath first thing, and warm too, when-

ever he put into a friendly port during his long cruise home from Troy.

In the summer time Sheerness is full of London holiday makers, but they chiefly congregate about a mile further on, outside the fortifications and the moat. Here the shops are rather better, and there is more variety in the way of fruit-shops and pastry-cooks, if the ship's stores need a new supply. This part of the town has a slightly better claim to the title of Sheerness-on-Sea, and boasts of a beach fronting the Thames. At low tide there is more beach than sea, and it is very flat, and cannot be approached from the sea without great caution, except at high water; there are also posts which stick up here and there, to the terror of the navigator; to say nothing of volunteers, who fire shot and shell all over the place on Bank Holidays. Opposite Sheerness Pier is Cockleshell Hard, and close by it is Port Victoria, at the point where the river bends to the north-east on its way to the sea, and this is used to a certain extent as an anchorage by yachts; two or three may be seen there on Saturday and Sunday in the summer. For little craft it is a roadstead rather than a harbour.

Cockleshell Hard is a very nice quiet spot to anchor in to wait for the tide; it is fairly steep-to, and there is a pleasant patch of shelly beach to walk upon. A few barges and schooners may always be seen at anchor near there; we have never stayed in this berth all night, from an idea that vessels coming in at night to bring up might run into us in the dark, but we often stop to land there. At Port Victoria the South Eastern Railway have a forlorn sort of terminus, and there is a weatherboard hotel, suggesting the backwoods,

where one can get food and drinks and stores. There is also a steamboat to ferry passengers across to Sheerness.

It is reported that jetties are to be built here for coaling purposes; if this is so, the place will become altered from its present peaceful and slumbering condition. We suppose that jetties will take the place of the two or three picturesque old hulks which now lie moored off here in Saltpan Reach. One of them, the *Dido*, is said to have been once a ship of Nelson's.

The railway officials at Port Victoria seem to be keen sportsmen, for we have seen them all thrown into a wild state of excitement by the sight of a flock of geese flying over the river. One bitterly cold day in January, we were standing at the station waiting for a train, and talking to the station-master, when some birds appeared flying along in the distance; he saw them, and dived into his office for a field-glass, and after a prolonged gaze at them said, "They are geese, sir." In a moment, train and steamer both forgotten, all hands and the cook were busy watching the birds, speculating, most probably, upon the chances of getting a shot at them that night after dark.

From Port Victoria, on the north side, the bank of Saltpan Reach is steep until Colemouth Creek is reached; on the south side there is the entrance to Queenborough, marked by a beacon on a spit which goes adry, and further on there is Stangate Creek entrance, marked by a buoy at the end of the spit which lies on its west side.

Stangate Creek is nearly opposite Port Victoria, and runs in a southerly direction from the Medway for over a mile; it then divides into three arms, the central one going on to

Lower Halstow, the other two winding and branching until they are lost in the marshes. There is deep water (three or four fathoms) right down to the point where the creek divides; beyond that the water shoals, and before Lower Halstow is reached the channel ebbs dry at low water. Long ago, Stangate Creek was full of hulks, and was used as a quarantine station, and at the time of the Crimean war there was a large number of Russian prisoners kept there. When any of them died they were buried on the island, between Stangate and Queenborough, which has the name of Dead Man's Island. Tradition says that the fishermen used to dig up the coffins for the sake of the oak planks of which they were made; and Benson says he once picked up on the shore there a hollow thing which he used for a bailer for some time, until he discovered that it was a piece of human skull, and hastily threw it overboard.

There is an old gentleman in Rochester who has many, though vague, recollections of Stangate Creek; when a lad he lived there, on board one of the hulks, where his father was medical officer, and he and the other lads seem to have had fine times, with boating expeditions to Sheerness or to Chatham, to relieve the monotony of their existence. Long after these hulks had been removed their moorings were still there, but they have been taken up, and there is now nothing to be seen in the creek except one buoy just inside the entrance, and a few floating spar buoys, a little further on, to mark the limits of the oyster grounds, which occupy much of the shores of this creek and of its branches. The great charm of the creek is its peace and quiet, with nothing on the move, except when now and then a great barge goes

stealing along to Halstow, or when one of the dilapidated old boats from Twinney Creek makes a start with trawl or dredger; but these only emphasize the general calm of things; generally one can slip in through the entrance, and have this lovely expanse of water all to oneself, and I have spent entire days there.

One of our first serious expeditions from Chatham was into this creek, which looked so fine on the chart, and appeared so entirely a "mare incognitum" to the yachtsmen of the Medway. There were many who said they knew it, and that it was a fine place, but none had any details to furnish; accordingly, one hot day in August, the *Wild Rose* was victualled for a two days' cruise, a blanket was put on board, and she left Chatham at high water, with a passenger bound for Queenborough. There was a light easterly breeze. The dockyard sheds were quivering in the haze, and the barges were just drifting slowly along in the tide off Upnor, as we crept down; at length we anchored at Queenborough about five p.m.; the passenger went ashore to catch his train, and I felt for the first time the pleasure of being out alone in my own craft, and set to work to cook supper, then smoked a pipe, and turned in to sleep on board. The sleeping accommodation was limited, but what of that? There were jibs to lie upon inside the cuddy "foward," and a blanket to wrap oneself up in; and although it was necessary to creep into the cuddy feet first, and to lie like a hermit crab, with one's head just inside the cuddy door, yet the novelty of the situation was a joy that left no room for thoughts of discomfort, even though the luff rope of that jib would persist in finding out all the tender points of the small of one's back; and so

to sleep, the kind of sleep which belongs to single-handed cruising, with a sort of dog's watchfulness for the approach of other vessels, for the swinging of the boat when the tide turned, and generally for any sound of alarm by night. However, next morning the *Wild Rose* was still in the same place, and had not dragged her anchor; the day was fine and calm, and the crew ready for a swim, and then an hour of ebb was left for getting out of the Swale into the Medway. She drifted out, and slowly began her way towards Stangate Creek, and the day grew hotter and hotter, until at last another swim was resolved on, and the subsequent dressing went no further than the putting on of shirt and hat, in which appropriate garb we slowly slipped into the creek. Nothing was moving, except a few people on shore digging mud for a barge, and along the edge of the water were herons, standing still like fakirs at their prayers, and the young wild ducks swimming about would hardly deign to get out of the way of the boat, as I stood quite quiet at the tiller and steered for them. So entirely jolly was it that it was not till three o'clock in the afternoon that I began to realise how the time was going, and that the chances of getting up to Chatham that night against the ebb were pretty slender. As the wind was north-east and very light, it was time, to wake up and face the realities of the situation, so setting up the halyards, and trimming sail carefully, the *Wild Rose* at last crept out of the creek, and turned her head for home; by-and-bye the easterly air died away, and a south-west wind sprang up instead; though it was foul, yet she slipped along faster, and by a diligent working of the slack water we got up to the forts below Gillingham, and there met the *Teal*, run-

ning merrily down on the ebb to Colemouth Creek. Turning a deaf ear to the syren voices on board of her, we stood for home, but when under Cockham Wood the wind failed altogether, and there was nothing for it but to come to anchor, and postpone the return till the next day. By this time I had had enough of being all alone, and began to feel that I had heaps to say, if only there had been anyone to say it all to; and also, I began to wish that I had not forgotten the salt before leaving home. According to the boys' books, one should use gunpowder as a condiment when salt is scarce, but there was no gunpowder on board either; however, I had supper without salt, and resolved to get up early in the morning to take the last of the flood to Chatham, in order to be in time for some friends who had arranged to come down for a sail that day. I slept so soundly that I did not wake until very nearly high water, and only just managed to get to the Sun Pier against the first of the ebb, when I clambered on shore, to find everybody fast asleep, and several hours to wait before breakfast-time. In those days, it used to be the custom for two or three faithful friends from London to turn up at Chatham by the early train on certain Sunday mornings, in time for breakfast, and go for a wicked sail afterwards, and this was a day when I expected some of them down, and by 9.30 the faithful Simpson was putting us on board; he had soon discovered that the *Wild Rose* had arrived home. I remember we had on that day a first voyager of thirteen or fourteen stone, valuable, as it turned out, as well for ballast as for genial qualities of mind, for there was a strong wind all day. He had lately come back from a cruise in Norfolk Waters on board a pleasure wherry. Af-

ter watching all the manoeuvres that the amateur crew were put through, of getting under way from a crowded anchorage, bringing up, and tacking and wearing ship, in silence, but with close attention, he at length grasped the meaning and value of the head sails, and was heard to murmur, "This is something like sailing. A wherry is no more good than a water-omnibus."

And here it is necessary to relieve my mind, and perhaps bore my readers, by firing off some views upon Stangate Creek as a place for the head-quarters of a yacht club. The question where to keep one's vessel is one which deeply vexes the soul of the London boat sailors, and especially of those whose boats are small, and who cannot afford the luxury of a paid hand for the season. Many a man is kept from becoming an owner by this difficulty, and there is no place up the Thames or Medway which can be considered free from objections. Leigh is bad enough, because of the short period of each tide during which there is water over the flats; the river above Gravesend has always seemed to us intolerable because of the crowds of shipping, and because of the time wasted before open and clean salt water can be reached. At Chatham there is no room, and the same may be said of Gravesend and Queenborough, and at Sheerness there is no shelter. Stangate Creek is the very place, but at present is inaccessible. What is wanted is a combination of the London yacht clubs and owners of small craft into one large and wealthy association; they could then afford to create superb head-quarters in Stangate Creek, and set free their members from the many and grievous inconveniences under which they now labour up t'other river. All that is

wanted to make Stangate Creek accessible is a launch to ferry men over from Port Victoria station, and to take them aboard their own craft; an old hulk might be easily bought at small cost (they are ridiculously cheap), and fitted up as head-quarters afloat in the creek. The Medway alone offers a field for a whole year of Saturdays to Mondays, and there is the Swale available as well, for the days when the Corinthian might not care to venture out into the vasty deep outside the mouth of the river; besides, what an advantageous starting-place it is for journeys to the Essex rivers and coast. This scheme is really practicable, and would be worthy of a combination of London small craft sailor men, if only somebody with enterprise and enthusiasm would take it fairly in hand, and now is the time to do it. Soon it will be too late, as anyone can see who has noted with horror the appearance in so many creeks of an eruption of signboards threatening all manner of legal proceedings against those who may anchor there, and damage some Mr. Snook's oyster grounds. Let the London boat sailors take the matter seriously in hand, and success is assured.

There is another jolly little creek on the north side of Saltpan Reach, called Colemouth Creek, or the South Yantlet, which corresponds to the North Yantlet opposite on the Thames side. These two creeks together cut off the Isle of Grain from the Hundred of Hoo; it is not now possible to get through this way in a boat, but formerly it must have been much wider, and was used as a regular route between the two rivers. In fact, it appears that the vessels of former days, when outward bound, used to come from the Thames to the Medway through the Yantlet (or Yenlade,

as old maps spell it), and then proceed by the Swale, joining the Thames again at Whitstable, a course which seems wondrous strange in the present state of these channels, and for vessels of modern size. In the time of Edward the Third a body of six hobelers was appointed to watch the Yenlade; they seem to have been a sort of horse-coastguardsmen, for they had boats and also horses – hobby-horses, from which their name was possibly derived. The hobelers remain to this day in the hufflers, whose business it is to assist barges through Rochester Bridge; they sail about Chatham and Rochester in little lug sail craft, as handy as tops, and go aboard the barges and assist in lowering away the mast and sail, and in getting it hoisted up again when the bridges have been threaded. Many of them have a device upon their sail for the bargee-skippers to know them by. One of the finest events in the Rochester Regatta is the Hufflers' Race, for they are past masters in the art of handling small boats. There is also the verb to hovel and the noun hoveller, words signifying people who render assistance to vessels in distress, with a sort of second meaning of extorting salvage money at the same time; and the Deal boatmen who act as unlicensed pilots in the English channel are called hoblers by seamen.

Colemouth Creek may be discovered from afar off by the Watch vessel which is perched high and dry beside it, for the modern analogues of the hobelers of King Edward. There is a sand spit across the mouth on its west side; the entrance, therefore, is on the east, fairly close in, much like the entrance to Hole Haven on a small scale. There is sometimes a small beacon on the end of the spit, but sometimes,

on the other hand, there is not. Once inside this, the water widens out into a little sort of lake for a hundred yards or so, and then bends to the left and becomes narrow. The anchorage is anywhere in this first portion, which usually is occupied but not filled by the Coastguard boat, lying in the middle in solitary state.

Once in here, one may sleep peacefully, however rough it may be outside, with no disturbing thought, save that one must not expect to tack out against the first of the flood unless there be a fair slant of wind; luckily, the wind does not often blow right into the entrance, which runs south-east, with a curve. An enormous board has lately been set up on the shore of this creek, warning mariners against damaging the oysters laid inside, and threatening penalties, but I believe I am correct in saying that the shellfish in question repose round the first bend, and may accordingly be disregarded by those who go no further than the Coastguard ship. The excellent Coastguardsmen here are very friendly, and can replenish the ship's larder with bread, or fresh eggs, or fresh water.

Having ventured one evening to indulge in some light chaff at their expense, because they had got their boat stuck on the spit at the mouth of the creek, we were ourselves landed in the same quandary next morning, and the tables were effectually turned. However, we all suddenly then and there discovered that we were rather glad than sorry, and, accordingly, we started off over the marshes to Port Victoria, to enjoy the pleasures of the land on shore at Sheerness (it was Easter Monday!), returning to our retired anchorage in the evening, by which time the *Teal* was once more afloat.

In the bight where Saltpan Reach joins Kithole Reach, there is another creek which we have not yet explored, because there are wide flats all round it, and these being unknown are terrible; but the masts of barges in search of mud are usually to be seen inside, and it appears to run some distance inland.

The point opposite, Sharpness Point, is fairly steep-to, and one may hug its shore, but when round it into Kithole, the flats begin again, and the stranger must keep the hand-lead or sounding-pole going. There was a steam launch ran ashore on these flats right merrily one day as we were passing. Occasionally a fine specimen of a hollow sea will be met in Kithole. Once, in a heavy rain squall from the northward, we almost lost our way there, for it came on so thick that no shores at all could be seen, and the water came tumbling on board over both bows of the little *Wild Rose* in a manner most alarming to behold.

From Kithole there is a large creek, Half Acre Creek, running away southward to Rainham, near by which place is Upchurch, the happy hunting ground of those that love Roman pottery, with a wide mud flat, called Bishop's Ooze, between it and the main channel. On this and on many of the other outlying points in the Medway, it has been our fate, at one time or another, to spend a bad quarter of an hour, sometimes a good deal longer. It happened that I was taking a friend out for a sail, just to show him the river, and had forgotten all about Bishop's Ooze, until the *Wild Rose* suddenly stopped, and we saw where we were; and to make things worse, off went my cap while getting the sails down, and there was nothing to be done but to watch it slowly

drift away to leeward over the ooze. An old friend it was, of the cheese-cutter pattern, and it had been the companion of a voyage from London to Melbourne and back in a comfortable, though leaky and ancient, clipper ship.

There is a strong tide out of Half Acre Creek on the ebb, very useful when it shoves one up to windward in tacking down the Medway with an easterly wind. Then is the time to keep the flats in one's mind, when she goes merrily along, doing a good board, lest suddenly a change come o'er the spirit of the dream, and one finds, in the words of the poet, that "the boat is still there, though the waters are gone," and ten to one, as soon as the boat is hard and fast aground, the weather begins to look threatening. One of my mathematical friends would say that this was an instance of the Law of spite, an universal natural law, which brings on rain when people go out with their best hat on and have forgotten their umbrella, and which makes it thaw as soon as you send your skates to be ground.

The course up the river through Long Reach is all plain sailing; there is deep water on the south side, and a line drawn from Okeham Ness to the forts clears the flats of the north shore. There are two red buoys at the upper and lower ends of the Mussel bank, and the shoal itself is said to go dry at low water springs, but we have never seen it so. To make quite safe, one may keep to the southward of them. When one is tired of the main channel of Long Reach, it is a change to go up Half Acre Creek and through Yantlet Creek, at the back of Darnett Fort; there is six foot least water at low tide, and snug lying for a belated wanderer on his way to Chatham, with the chance of a shot at some wild

fowl early in the morning. It is also possible to sail behind Hoo Fort at high tides, but it is as well to have a leading wind and a flowing tide the first time the attempt is made. This creek is sometimes used as a short cut, and we have seen the Medway pilot cutter, *Tom King*, of twenty tons, going through, but to get stuck there with a falling tide is no joke, as it means eight or nine hours in what is, at low water, nothing but a muddy and forlorn ditch, with an amount of list which would be extremely inconvenient, not to say dangerous.

The Reach between the forts is called Pinup Reach, and is full of small buoys, which mark a torpedo mine field; many of these are small and not easily seen, but it is necessary to keep a good look out for them, as they are of iron, to say nothing of the risk of being blown up by accident in case the dynamite down below should be feeling rather more irritable than usual.

Off Hoo Fort there is a spit of stones, almost the only stones in the Medway, forming apparently an artificial causeway. It is marked at the end by an iron beacon, which usually shows signs of collisions with barges, being bent about in all kinds of ways. It is best to keep outside this always, although there may be six feet of water inside at high tide. The deepest water through Pinup is on the opposite or eastern side, but there is plenty everywhere for all but big ships, and there is slack water on the western side under the point, which is useful when working up against the ebb tide. The view of the Kentish shores from Pinup is very pretty, especially in spring, when the cherry orchards about Rainham and Gadshill (not that of Falstaff and of Charles Dick-

ens) are in full bloom. On the top of the hill there is a great building, looking like a huge biscuit tin; this is the temple of the tribe of Jezreel, a mysterious sect of these parts which was founded by a baker of Chatham.

At Gillingham the river widens out into a bight, with flat, muddy shores, where various craft lie at anchor or at moorings. Here there are more torpedo buoys, and hulks for raising and lowering them, and the yachts of the Royal Engineer Yacht Club, the *Buccaneer*, and others, lie here. At low water there is a good deal of mud laid bare on the Gillingham side, but this does not greatly concern the passer by, for there are so many craft, hulks, buoys, lighters, and so on, that it is better not to venture in among them, but to keep in the middle of the stream. Gillingham would be a very convenient place in which to keep a yacht if it were more accessible, and the same applies to Upnor, higher up the river. It is interesting to know that, in the days of Good Queen Bess, Gillingham could boast of four quays and twenty-seven ships, most of them small craft, the largest being of twenty tons, and seventeen others of only one ton each. The dockyard basins have an entrance at Gillingham, and there is a huge crane near the entrance, which can lift hundred-ton guns and run away with them. The whole of the piece of ground from here to Chatham Reach, formerly St. Mary's Island, and now known as the Dockyard Extension, is still in process of reclamation from its original wildness, and gangs of convicts are to be seen there, with warders standing on platforms, armed with rifles to shoot at any who might try to escape by swimming across the river.

The reach above Gillingham leads past Cockham Wood to Upnor, and is the prettiest part of the river. Its north shore is steep and wooded, and out in the stream lies the old hulk *Leonidas*, red painted, and full of gunpowder. There is a gravel beach, and a wood full of nightingales. The sun mostly seems to shine here, and it is a good place to anchor in for the night, always remembering to have the riding light burning brightly, and to keep close in to the shore, on account of the barge traffic. A year or two since, three of us sailed up to Chatham, to assist at the opening cruise of the Medway Yacht Club, and also at the opening dinner to follow, finding our way back eventually to the Sun Pier at eleven p.m. After being carefully deposited on board the *Téal* from a shore boat, for it hardly seemed the time to trust one's fortunes in a seven-foot Berthon, we set jib and mizen, and with an ebb tide and a soft and gentle breeze, we soon dropped down to Cockham Wood, to find another yacht anchored there for company, and the nightingales tuning up their best, and we promptly voted it a far better berth than any among the slimy and not too fragrant mud banks and sewers of Chatham, and looked forward to a swim and a run ashore before breakfast in the morning. Another point of advantage is its freedom from morning callers. Once, when we were anchored near the Sun Pier, about five in the morning, an enterprising young ruffian thought the occasion a good one for coming alongside to prospect for moveables, little reckoning that as he touched the little vessel's sides there would emerge, Jack-in-the-boxlike, a half-dressed and dangerous looking figure from the fore hatch and another from aft, with a truculence

of aspect heightened by a pair of gold spectacles; and that both, in well drilled chorus, and in accents bland, would demand an explanation of the unexpected visit. The double-barrelled apparition proved too much for our young friend; his jaw dropped, he hastily withdrew, murmuring by way of apology for his intrusion, "I say, d'yer stay out all night in that 'ere?"

It may be worth mentioning that in the lower part of Cockham Wood Reach there is a mud flat over against the village of Hoo. It begins to run out from the shore near a curious sort of patch of red brick wall, which is, as a matter of fact, the remains of a fort built in Queen Elizabeth's time, and once proudly mounting twenty-three guns, for the benefit of the adventurous Dutchmen, who were much too fond of expeditions up the Medway, which they enlivened by cannonading Sheerness, burning the fleet at Chatham, and other desperate behaviour. De Ruyter, for instance, came up in 1667, and burnt a fleet at Gillingham, and also went on to Upnor, where, perhaps, Upnor Castle may have stopped him, but for details the reader may consult Mr. Pepys' diary. I once made a visit to the old fort in Cockham Wood Reach, to see if it really was anything more than a ruined brick-kiln, as had been stoutly maintained by a Rochester friend of mine, and although there were no doubloons, nor pieces of eight lying about loose on the ground, yet there were other evidences of high civilisation in the shape of ancient broken bottles, of coarse glass and broad squat shape, such as the buccaneers of those days might have used to carry their *rhummi succus* in. "Rhummi succus" is the "orsepital name" for rum, at any rate among the initiated.

To proceed in the manner of the guide-book, the next place of interest is Upnor, which is a very pretty straggling village, unfortunately spoiled by the Stygian smoke and fume of a large cement factory at the bend in the river, which must be a great nuisance "when the east winds do blow;" and when the south or west wind takes its place, the unhappy village is again hardly out of range of other equally Stygian cementworks, for the whole Medway valley is full of them. The cement is made by grinding together three parts of chalk with one of Medway mud, and roasting it in a kiln, and the banks of the river are being dug away wholesale in places for the sake of the mud, leaving huge lagoons and making worse the already desperately bad condition of the saltings of the lower reaches of the river.

At Upnor there is a stone pillar like that at the entrance to the North Yantlet, and that one called Crow-stone, between Leigh and Southend, and here Chatham Reach opens out, running nearly north and south, and full of interesting sights. First and foremost the huge mooring buoys, almost as big as five-tonners, which must be carefully avoided, as they surge to and fro in the stream. Well do I remember coming back late one night, after my first cruise alone in the *Wild Rose*, how she came sliding home with a light air and a strong flood tide, and how I peered into the darkness, expecting every moment to go full butt into one of these monsters, but managed to escape, more by luck than cunning, and reached the anchorage by the Sun Pier in safety about eleven p.m. In those days she used to lie at anchor just on the edge of the mud above the pier, and nervous work it was for a beginner to get under way from there

single-handed, under the scornful eye of all the long-shore loafers on the pier, and to scrape out clear between the boats and barges that constantly filled up all the room outside of the little craft. It is not so very long ago that this part of the river was full of old hulks moored in mid-stream, but, with the exception of two or three which lie just off the marine barracks, they are happily departed. There is still to be seen the hulk of the *Challenger*, laid up in ordinary since she came home from her scientific expedition of sixteen years ago or so. She was first pointed out to me by the trusty Simpson, dockyard labourer and ex-North Sea smacksman, who used to look after the *Wild Rose* in those days. He said: "That's the ship what 'as been further round the world than any other;" the bearings of which remark became gradually clear on learning that her name was the *Challenger*. Then there are the dockyards, with perhaps a man-of-war fitting out, and torpedo boats, and opposite is a strange looking hill, where the Royal Engineers play at engineering, with mines, and counterscarps, and fascines, and gabions, and a fortified house, and all manner of things.

But the joy and delight of the Medway is in its barges, as they sail in stately procession up and down the river; there is but little other traffic, save a few fishing bawleys, with over-grown topsails and tiny jibs; and an occasional collier steamer. Once there came a fine Greek steamer, and behold her name was *Ulysses*, from the port of Ithaca. She had not come to carry off another Helen from Troy town, but merely to bring a cargo of wheat to her consignees; and although the modern screw steamship is a very different sort of craft to that in which the god-like son of Laertes used

to meet such heavy weather in the Ionian Sea, yet, after all, in a fishing craft of to-day there is very little in the way of tackling but what was well within the reach of the ancients. Replace by good rope the wire shrouds and the chain cable, which are merely innovations of yesterday, and there you are. The Homeric ship seems, from the best authorities, to have been a lug-sail craft, with forestay, backstays and a lowering mast, and probably was very much like a modern Scotch fishing lugger.

The greatest trouble which a stranger meets with on his arrival at Chatham is to know where to bring up. Yachts flying the blue ensign have the privilege, it is said, of anchoring in the Gun Wharf water, or of making fast to a buoy there, but the million are warned off by a notice, "No vessel to moor to the buoys, nor to anchor off this wall." Still we believe that strangers, who can find room, and only wish to remain a short time, may anchor there unmolested if they will call and leave their cards at Gun Wharf House. Then the bight on the east side of the Sun Pier is all taken up by the Chatham bawleys when they are at home; so, although it may look a convenient spot when they are away fishing, they are certain to turn up ere long and crowd one out, to say nothing of the town sewer running in just there. There is a little room on the west side of the Sun Pier for a small craft, just near the edge of the mud, and, indeed, for one summer season the *Wild Rose* lay there at anchor. Since then the space at this point has been partly taken up by a new piece of wharf, and is not much of a berth for a stranger. There is room to be found near the new pier at Blue Boar Hard, or one may anchor

further up, in the bight opposite Gas House Point, on the north or Strood side, but this is rather far away, if there is any shopping to be done. Taking all these things into consideration, the neighbourhood of Blue Boar Pier is perhaps the most convenient and quiet place to anchor in for the night.

The south or town side of the Medway as it runs through Chatham and Rochester consists largely of mud, littered up in the usual way with balks of timber, and with yachts and other craft in the various stages of decay, and having more or less rudimentary wharfs and jetties at intervals. There is no public wharf or quay, but the houses reach right down to high-water mark, Some day all this will be changed by the building out of frontages to an uniform line at low-water mark according to a prescribed scheme. A few of these have already been made, or are now in course of construction, but it will be a long time before vessels will be able to go alongside to discharge or to load their cargoes, and at present this has to be done by means of lighters.

Just below the Sun Pier there is a bight, which looks as if it were silting up more and more, and a good deal of the Gun Wharf frontage is filled up with mud, so that at low water there are twenty or thirty yards of mud left uncovered. Where the Gun Wharf stands was formerly a dock for the ships of His Majesty King James the First. At the Sun Pier there are two families of brothers, whose spare time is largely taken up by rivalry and strife; they let row boats for hire, and are very willing and obliging in looking after one's yacht, or in putting one ashore or aboard. Their names are Moore and Adams.

There are some very nice-looking tiny lug-sail boats on this part of the river, rigged with brown-tanned main and mizen; the latter a tiny pocket handkerchief shipped on the rudder post. They are about fourteen feet long, strongly built like barges' boats, and belong to the hufflers. There is another ancient type of boat still in use at Rochester, the Peter boat, which seems to be essentially a craft with stem and stern alike, and with a little deck and coamings at both ends. They are mostly rigged with a good big spritsail and foresail, the mast without shrouds, in order to unship easily. They are used for netting smelts, and the little decks are for coiling down the net, without letting a lot of water, fish and rubbish into the bottom of the boat. The fishermen at Leigh used these boats largely about sixty years ago, and there is still an inn at Leigh with "Peter Boat" for her sign, but they are a vanishing type. The boat in Turner's picture of the "Bligh Sand" is a regular Peter boat, and no doubt hailed from Leigh. They have a deep keel, running right fore and aft, and they keep a pretty straight course, even when rowed by an oar on one side only. The bawley boat, which has taken their place, is much bigger and more powerful. Bawley is possibly a corruption of Bartlemey or Bartholomew, the companion of Peter. The Rochester bawleys have their mast rather further forward than those of Leigh, and can work under extremely little head sail; a tiny jib and a small foresail seeming to balance their mainsail and topsail quite well. The Chatham bawleys anchor in the bight near the Gun Wharf when they are at home, and the Rochester fleet bring up in a tier just beside the pier at Strood, where they can be inspected with advantage.

Very few salt-water craft, except the barges, venture above the bridges at Rochester; the barges, however, penetrate ever so far, even beyond Maidstone. There are three bridges, all side by side, two being for railways and the third being the renowned Rochester Bridge, which, like London Bridge and Bideford Bridge, is a landed proprietor, and gives good dinners and dispenses much money in charity. It has lands in Sheppey, in several parishes in Kent, and also a town house in London. In the time of Henry I the repairs of the bridge (then a drawbridge) were parcelled out as follows: The first land pier on the east side to the Bishop of Rochester, the second to Gillingham and Chatham, the third to the Bishop, the fourth to the King, the fifth to the Archbishop, the sixth to the tenants of Hollingbourne, the seventh and eighth to the men of Hoo, while the ninth and last on the west side was assigned to the Archbishop; this was apparently a wooden bridge. Richard II built a new stone bridge, and endowed it with lands to form the Bridge Estate, and failing that source the cost of maintenance was to devolve upon certain parishes each to be responsible for so many feet and inches of the bridge.

There is a height of about twenty feet under the centre of the arches at high water, and forty at low, and anyone who decides to explore the upper reaches will find good anchorage just above the bridge on the north side, out of the way of the traffic.

The trip up to Maidstone is worth doing, and can well be managed in a small sailing boat. The chief difficulty is found in the narrowness and emptiness of the river at low-water time, which compels one to anchor either on the soft

mud, or in the middle of the stream right in the way of everything. However, there is very little traffic up there, except at tide time; from a little way above Snodland there is a towing-path. The best method of seeing this part of the river is to take the tide up from Rochester, and when sailing is no longer possible, to tow up to the lock at Allington, and stay there for the night. The island and lock-house are very pretty; there is an inn handy; above the lock, of course, the mud-banks of the tidal part come to an end, and the boat can lie alongside the meadows in clean, fresh water. There is a bridge, a very low one, at Aylesford, two miles below Allington Lock, and here the mast must be unshipped and lowered. At low water the Medway for several miles below Aylesford, and up to Allington Lock, is a deep and dreadful ditch, though it is very pretty at high water. Above Maidstone the river is rather a "terra incognita" but those who have penetrated say it is very pretty. For the first few miles out of Maidstone it looks a delightful river, peaceful and lovely. The barges manage to sail up to Wateringbury; so little yachts should also be able to do so. We have long cherished a determination to go up from Maidstone one day, armed with luncheon-basket and camera, and see whether it does not offer attractions of a quieter kind than those of the upper Thames. Maidstone, however, has very few express trains to London, and travelling by slow train, bad enough at the best of times, is particularly virulent on Sunday evenings after a tiring day on the water.

The views of the Medway Valley from the hills round Rochester are very fine, for at this point the river cuts right through the high chalk hills, and from either side the wind-

ings of the Medway, in its course between Aylesford and Rochester, can be seen as though in a map, with brown-sailed barges dotted here and there between the meadows, and with blurred masses of steam and smoke from the cement works to provide atmospheric effects, which are unfortunately for the most part too intense.