

# THE THAMES: FROM OXFORD TO ITS SOURCE

BY PAUL BLAKE

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## CHAPTER 1

Some of you will, I hope, remember that, in 1881, we, in fancy, travelled down the Thames together from Oxford to Richmond. I hope that not a few have made the journey in fact since then, and found that I did not exaggerate the beauties of our river or the pleasures to be derived from boating on it.

But now we are to take a far different journey – from Oxford to the source – new ground (or water), I expect, to nearly all of you, for not one boatman knows Eynsham or Lechlade for a thousand who are well acquainted with Medmenham or Marlow.

Let us suppose ourselves to be one of a small party met on the lawn at a house in Streatham one evening in last July. We know all who are present; they are the crew of the *Swan*. There lolls Figgis, the tall captain; that small fellow who is sitting just out of the captain's reach and flipping cherry-stones at him is Budd, the irrepressible; Charlton and Martin are standing near, having just finished a match at tennis.

"Now you fellows", begins Budd, "it's time we came to a decision of some sort. This is a regular meeting. I'll be in the chair, as I'm the only one who has taken one. The question is 'Where are we going to take the *Swan* this year?' Is it to be up the torrid Niger, down the historic Seine, or once again on the never-sufficiently-to-be-explored Father Thames?"

That was the question, but it was not easy to answer. Some wanted to explore a fresh river, some to stick to the Thames. At last Charlton proposed a compromise. "Suppose we do the Thames to its source for once?" he suggested. "No fun above Oxford, I've heard", put in Martin; "open your locks yourself, and all that sort of thing." "No towns, no boats, no nothing", added Budd. "All the more fun", said Figgis. "Let's do something that all the world doesn't do. I once went up to Eynsham, and it was very decent. I should rather like to see the end of the whole business."

"Well, let's go." In a few minutes it was settled, and the practical part of the arrangements began to be discussed. "First and foremost", said Charlton, "how about provisions?" "Yes; never mind the boat, that's a secondary matter", remarked Budd. "We must carry provisions to last us for several days", said Figgis; "I believe there are very few villages on the banks. Take lots of tinned things; we can lay in a store at Oxford." "And the staff of life?" asked Martin. "Trust to fortune; we are sure to find houses, and the people will surely spare a crust to wandering, starved travellers!"

"About sleeping?" "I vote for camping in the boat", said Budd. "Inns don't seem to abound, and it would be jolly awkward to find ourselves without shelter after a hard day." "We might camp when fine, and manage to get a bed indoors when wet", suggested Charlton, practically. The amendment was carried.

Duties were assigned to each one as regards provisioning, etc., of the *Swan*, and the crew separated to meet at Oxford on the following Monday at midday to commence the voyage.

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## CHAPTER 2

"Here we are again!" was Budd's greeting as the crew met at Salter's, at Folly Bridge. The Swan lay ready in the water, resplendent in a new coat of varnish. On the other hand, they had determined to take old sculls, as they knew they should have some rough work. In addition to the usual complement of fittings, they had an extra long boathook and a very long and strong towing-rope. There was no knowing what they might encounter, and there would be no boathouse handy for repairs in case of damage.

"She rides very low", remarked Martin as he put the last bag in. "These tinned things weigh a tremendous lot." "Never mind, they will be lighter in a day or two, by the time we reach shallow water." said Charlton. "Are you sure you've forgotten nothing?" asked Figgis before stepping in; "we shan't have many chances of replenishing our stock." Everything was there, from the salt to the extra boathook. There was nothing to delay them, so they pushed off and the voyage was fairly begun.

Years ago Folly Bridge was surmounted by a tower known as Friar Bacon's Tower. Tradition said that if any one passed under it who was more learned than the friar, the tower would fall on his head. This was the reason of the advice formerly given to the undergraduates not to go too near the Friar's Tower. "Lucky for me", remarked Budd, complacently, "that it isn't standing now. "Don't talk so much", said the captain; "wait till we're a little farther out.

Oxford, however, lasts some time; the new part of the city lies beyond Osney and extends in a scattered way up to Medley. Osney Lock is an ordinary one, and is practically in the city; around it is generally gathered a large collection of barges. "Why, there's actually a lock-keeper!" exclaimed Budd; "we're not outside civilisation yet." "Nor now", added Charlton, some time after, as they passed the two railway stations. "This is scarcely the first time that a human footstep has trodden these parts."

Tumbling Bay was soon passed: they did not stop for a bathe in the inviting waters. Just round Oxford there is a seemingly endless number of streams, but there is no difficulty in finding which one to follow. Just by Tumbling Bay is the lock leading to the Oxford Canal.

It is very plain sailing up to Medley Weir, from which a capital view of Oxford is obtained. Medley is known as the Richmond of Oxford. From Medley there is a fairly straight piece of water to the next lock, Godstow. On the right lies extended the lengthy Port Meadow, on which in winter there is glorious skating when Jack Frost is kind enough to be severe. The river invariably floods the meadow in the winter, sometimes rather too thoroughly, as was the case last year. However, at present the water was shallow enough; there was no fear of its overflowing its banks just then, in fact a considerable mud-bank showed its existence pretty plainly.

"Don't keep in so near shore", cried Figgis, "or we shall get aground." "The boat draws such a lot of water", said Martin who was steering. "Better have tea soon and lighten her", suggested Budd. If it's going to be like this all the way it will be easier to get out and walk." "The stream is slow enough, fortunately", said Figgis. "Yes, and wide enough", added Martin.

The river, however, soon became deeper, but again grew shallow about a quarter of a mile below Godstow Lock. It is very advisable to fight shy of the ground in a voyage above Oxford – the geological formation changes from the London clay which forms the bed of most of the lower part of the river, and there is danger of finding your keel grinding a hard rock instead of soft mud or comparatively harmless gravel.

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## CHAPTER 3

Godstow is one of the historic sites of the Upper Thames. The ruins stand on the island formed by the branch of the river running through Wytham, and are worth a visit. It was here that the celebrated Fair Rosamund lived, and here that (according to tradition) she fell a victim to the Queen's jealousy. King Henry II seems to have done his best to protect her from injury. He built her a house with a hundred and fifty doors, so curiously arranged that no one who was not in the secret could enter. But by accident the clew of thread which guided the authorised visitor was dropped, and by its means Eleanor found the way to her rival's bower. Whether she poisoned her, or whether Rosamund lived to end her days in Godstow Nunnery is uncertain. According to Stow, she was buried at Godstow, and these lines were engraved on her tomb:-

*Hic jacet in tumba Rosa mundi, nor Rosamunda!  
Non redolet, sed olet, quae redolere solet*

Not much remains of the nunnery, which is not surprising in view of the fact that the neighbouring seat of the Earl of Abingdon is said to be partly built from its stones.

Godstow Lock stands in the cut, and, according to Taunt, there is no lock-keeper. The crew however found a man there who was fulfilling the usual duties of a lock-keeper, and they felt aggrieved. "How long is this to go on?" asked Budd; "we might as well be at Marlow. There's very little of the country in its native savagery so far." "I don't object to a lock-keeper in the wildest of country", said Figgis; "it's a nuisance to have to get out of your boat. However, you'll have plenty of that, by and by."

"How much farther are we to go today?" said Martin. "About four miles; we will take it easy the first day. I think we had better have something to eat soon, and do the rest at our leisure in the evening." "Of course, there's a good inn here", remarked Charlton, "because we don't want anything!"

They found a very convenient spot on the right bank a quarter of a mile above the lock, and there they had their first meal. The kettle was boiled by means of their spirit apparatus, which was now brought to a high state of perfection by means of a perforated iron cylinder which surrounded it and kept the flame from being blown about too much; the macintoshes which covered the bow and stern luggage were spread on the ground; Charlton laid "the table", whilst Budd cut bread-and-butter, and Figgis took a tin of meat between his knees and struggled at it with the knife. (Libby, McNeill, and Libby's corned beef is a good brand to eat cold with Worcester sauce. Cut it thin with a sharp knife.) Budd finished his work first, and began singing a song "to try and make the kettle join in the chorus", he said. It soon did, and, with the sun still well up in the heavens, they had their first meal.

"Now is there anything we want?" asked Figgis, when they had finished; "because if so, now is our chance, the Trout Inn being not far off." "I've forgotten one thing", said Budd, gloomily. "What is it?" "I forgot to make my will before coming this adventurous voyage into an unknown country, where you only meet a barge every five minutes, and don't see more than forty people every quarter of a mile." "You had better make it now", suggested Figgis. "All right! My will is that you fellows wash up whilst I look on. Figgis you shall be sole executor." But his will was not witnessed properly, and for want of this trifling legal formality he had to take his part in cleaning plates and cups.

After a rest they again started, pulling steadily along to King's Weir. The river was very "wiggly" as Budd called it; it seemed to have been unable to make up its mind which way to go. "A regular weir at last!" exclaimed Charlton. "Now then for adventures!" "Wait a bit", said Figgis, "there will be plenty of weirs by-and-by for us to smash the boat in. We'd better take the rollers here." "Rollers!" exclaimed Budd; "why this is the very height of civilisation! Next time I want pure, unalloyed country I shall pull from London Bridge to Westminster. "Rollers are, however, an immense convenience, especially at places like King's Weir, where the weir apparatus is not particularly easy to manage. Just after the barrier is passed there is a stream to the right

which leads to the Oxford Canal, which runs parallel to the Thames from this point to Oxford. Large boats and launches find the canal the easier means of progression.

There is not much to remark in the scenery after Godstow is passed. Cassington Church spire can be seen on the right soon; then after passing Hagley Pool there is a nearly straight course to Eynsham Weir, close upon which is Eynsham Bridge.

This was the stopping place for the night. The weather looked rather threatening, so the crew resolved to spend the night at the village half a mile off and leave the Swan in the charge of the man at the bridge cottage. This resolution was speedily carried out, and sleep did not fail to visit their eyes at an early hour.

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#### CHAPTER 4

"Where are we going today, skipper?" inquired Budd, as they started next morning about half past seven. "Tadpole Bridge", was the reply. "How far is that?" asked Martin. "About fifteen miles – an easy day's work again. Now for a bathe and then breakfast."

These two pleasures over, they took the sculls and pulled through country of a rather uninteresting character until they reach Pinkhill Lock. Here they encountered some "character" of an interesting nature in the shape of the lock-keeper – evidently a new institution since "Taunt" was written. The old man did not know the meaning of the Conservancy pass screwed on the stern of the boat, and insisted on payment or knowing their names. The latter were given, together with some good-humoured instructions as to his duties.

The river from Pinkhill to Skinner's Weir is very winding – "like an eel in convulsions", according to Budd. That worthy sailor was pulling, and, finding the work hard, suggested they should try their new towing rope. This was done. The path was a fairly good one, so Figgis and Budd took the rope, whilst Charlton and Martin sat in the boat, one steering, the other ready with the boathook to shove off when necessary.

Towing on the Upper Thames is not the simple work it is lower down. Pollard willows are not infrequent along the path, and it is aggravating to have to pass the rope around these; you lose way, time, and sometimes temper. Cuttings and ditches have sometimes to be jumped over. When this is the case, be sure to give yourself plenty of rope before beginning to jump, or you will end your leap in the ditch. Then the very sudden curves of the river necessitate a great length of line, as the banks are sometimes marshy. Often the tower is pulling at right angles to the boat, which is very hard work. Still, it is advisable to tow sometimes; it is a change, and is often the best mode of progression. Let your towmast be a high one.

The path to Ridge's Weir is fairly good. Farther on, as we shall have occasion to point out, the path can only be discerned by the mental eye. Up to Lechlade towing is fairly practicable. After that ---.

Skinner's Weir is a quaint, picturesque old place. The old inn, kept by the Skinners for generations, had a certain sort of celebrity, but recently it has been pulled down.

Stanton Harcourt is about a mile away; most easily reached by road from Bablock Hythe. It was the seat of the Harcourts, and is interesting from its association with Pope, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and other celebrities. In one of the rooms of the old house Pope finished the fifth volume of his translation of Homer. The pane of glass on which this fact is noted is still preserved at Nuneham Courtney, the present seat of the Harcourts.

At Bablock Hythe, where there is a ferry, the river becomes narrow. There is an inn, the Chequers, where *one* bed is to be obtained. It was fortunate, then, the crew did not want to put up there. The water hereabouts is fairly deep, and progress was not difficult, though at one spot, where the river divides for a time and the

remains of an old weir obstruct the towing, it was necessary for all to enter the boat. Then the path was all right up to Ridge's Weir, below which they landed and had an early dinner.

Let us take this opportunity of describing an Upper Thames weir, and how to get through it. It is an institution unknown below Oxford except in conjunction with a lock, but in the parts we are exploring a weir often exists by itself. It forms a breakwater right across the stream. There is a bridge running along the top, on which you must take your stand; then one by one you must pull up the "paddles" which run between the "rymers". These rymers are fixed at regular intervals in the "sill", which is under water; they too must be removed. You then find you have a clear space through which to pass your boat.

Two men should stay in the boat; one should take the towing-line and mount the bridge, pulling the boat gently towards him, those on board taking care to keep it off the sides. The stream runs swiftly through the opening, so sometimes considerable care is required. When the boat is half way through, the tow-rope is passed to the man on the bank, who pulls the head gently round, whilst those in the boat keep her clear. Do not ever attempt to pull the boat completely through from the bank or it is sure to stick against the side beams.

With care and a little practice there is no great difficulty in negotiating a weir, though sometimes the rymers give some trouble, the weight of the water keeping them tight in their places. Give them a push upstream before attempting to raise them.

In coming down the work is easier, as the boat goes with instead of against the stream, but great care must be taken to keep the boat clear. Another danger is that unless you bend low your head may strike the bridge. "which may damage the structure", as Budd remarked.

"Splendid rushes here", observed Charlton, as they sat resting after dinner. "We shall have too much of them by-and-by." said Figgis. "Yes, boating is dangerous when the bulrush is out", remarked Budd, reviving the good old joke which has served generations of river-side folk. "Now then, pipe all hands to attack the weir!"

This obstacle was soon overcome, and a tow of a mile or so brought them to Newbridge, with its pointed arches and projecting buttresses. "I don't see anything very new about this", said Figgis. "Probably not", remarked Charlton; "it's about six hundred years old – the oldest bridge on the river. It's called Newbridge on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, I suppose. "Yes", added Budd: "or else on the *sic vos non vobis*; I don't know what either means."

"At any rate, we must knock off towing", said Figgis; "so jump in. The stream is pretty strong through those narrow arches; we shan't have too much room. You must pull hard, Charlton." The line was taken aboard, together with Martin, who had been towing alone. Charlton was seated on the stroke thwart, and gave way lustily, whilst the captain steered carefully for the centre. "Put you back into it!" shouted Figgis. Then in a much louder tone, "Back water! Hold her up!" It was too late! The towing-mast struck the arch of the bridge and snapped off, in spite of Charlton's backing water as hard as he could. They drifted to the bank to inspect the damage.

"Who on earth would have thought they would build their stupid bridges so low?" asked Martin. "It's evident this was the first they built", said Budd. "It's an experimental one." "It isn't quite such a bad job as I feared", said Figgis, who had been examining the fracture. "The split is pretty long; I think we can splice it. Who has any string?" There was not a piece in the boat, as they all confessed with shame. The best substitute was a few yards of the towing-rope, which was partly unravelled to give better hold. This little accident detained them sometime, and they felt it was fortunate they had an easy day's work.

The next attempt to pass the bridge was successful, but they found that the current of the River Windrush, which joins the Thames just beyond Newbridge, necessitated a good pull to counteract it. They determined now to abandon towing for a time, as the bank was high and bushes frequent. The Windrush contains a large

amount of nitrous matter, to which the Witney blankets are supposed to owe their superior quality. Budd proposed rowing up to Witney and getting a few, as they had determined to camp out that night, and evening breezes were chilly. But no one knew how far away the town was, or had even heard that the Windrush existed until Taunt informed them.

Duxford Farm, a picturesque spot, was the only noticeable feature in the landscape till they reached Tenfoot Bridge. From this to their resting-place for the night was only a mile and a half, which they did after tea, in the dusk of a summer evening, which made even the ordinary fields look romantic. They had decided before starting never to pull after dark, as the remains of old weirs need caution and daylight to pass with safety, so before the sun had fairly sunk they had securely moored their boat just below Tadpole Bridge, and, scorning the accommodation offered by the "Trout", arranged things snugly in their boat before going ashore for an hour's ramble. Charlton stayed behind in charge, reading a pocket volume of Shakespeare by the light of a lantern till the others came back, Figgis with some botanical specimens, Budd carrying a fresh loaf – the first they had purchased since starting.

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## CHAPTER 5

Tadpole Bridge, if not decidedly pretty in the early morning light, is at least useful. The road across it joins Bampton and Farringdon, both about two miles away, and both provided with stations from which it is possible to return to town if necessary.

There is fine bathing at the remains of the old weir close by: so good a dive is not often to be obtained, and the crew took advantage of it. They pulled up to the next weir to breakfast, pushing the Swan amongst the beds of rushes which invest the side streams and give the place its name (Rushy Weir).

It was a most charming spot; the old lock house is most prettily situated, there is no lack of trees, and (better still, as Budd said) there are fine beds of watercress, which forms an excellent addition to bread-and-butter. Fresh bread and fresh watercress, what more could man want?

The stream divides at Radcot, three miles farther up. The stream on the right hand should be followed, leading up to the Swan Inn. The bridge is celebrated as the scene of several battles, including one in the Civil War. The towing-path changes sides at Radcot

Then straight on again the river runs, past more remains of old weirs, past Eaton Hastings till Hart's Weir is reached, the approach to which is half covered with rushes. Those who tow must be careful at Hart's Weir. The fall is the highest met with; the stream is consequently strong and will test the strength of your line; it is best to double it if long enough. The bank too is awkward.

Kemscott [sic], a village on the right, has a church of some architectural interest.

Buscott Lock is the next stopping-place – the only lock at which the crew did not find a man. However, the winch was lying close at hand, and by this time they felt equal to overcoming any difficulties in the way of natural barriers or artificial ones either.

*[Paragraph repositioned]*

Near Buscott Lock is a factory, and the lock was built by the owner. This may account for the incident that took place here:

*Figgis (at upper gates).* - I say, you fellows, don't these gates leak!

*Budd.*- Hurry up or the place will be full again. You stick in the boat, you two; Figgis and I can start this little trifle, I fancy.

[ *When Budd said "place will be full again" he meant "lock will be empty again" they were going upstream and having entered the (empty) lock they had closed the bottom gates and filled the lock and were now trying to open the top gates! The leaky gates which concerned Figgis were the bottom gates. ]*

*Figgis (after several struggles).*-I don't know what's up with this wretched gate, I can't move it.

*Budd.*- Let me help. (*fearful struggles; he gets black in the face*)

*Charlton (from boat).* - Come you two, are you going to keep me here all day?

*Budd (still pushing).*- Bother the – (*puff*) – thing – (*puff*) – it – sticks like [ --- ] Oh, let the thing have its way and stop in its place till the next earthquake!

It needed three of them to move the beam. Martin promised to write to the builder if he could find out his name and address.

"Don't excite yourselves too much", said Figgis soon after, "we are not far from St John's Bridge. "What of it?" asked Charlton. "Only that it is the last lock on the river." "That's right", said Budd, "then tomorrow we may hope to enjoy at last the pleasures of want of civilisation, to stem the unconfined torrent, and –". "I suppose we put up at Lechlade?" interrupted Martin. "Yes, only half a mile beyond St John's Bridge". Budd subsided into his seat disgusted.

Lechlade church spire is a prominent object for some miles before the town is reached. For Lechlade is a town, the first since Oxford; navigation ceases just beyond; it is the Ultima Thule of the hardy barge man.

Here the crew resolved to spend the night and lay in their final stock of stores, for several things were running low, especially jam and sugar.

The Swan was put up at the wharf on the right just beyond the bridge; there are coal stores there. A man was found who told them where the boat could lie in safety, secure in the possible event of the arrival of an unwieldy barge. After this they put themselves into the hands of Mrs Humphries, of the New Inn, and have not yet regretted doing so.

## CHAPTER 6

"Ha! Lechlade is the sleepest old town I've ever seen", was Charlton's comment as they took a hasty run through the place before embarking next morning. The object of the exploration was provisions, of which they needed a fresh supply. Possibly Lechlade wakes up later on in the day, but at 8.30 the inhabitants seemed still half asleep, not even the rather rare sight of a "crew" rousing them to anything approaching interest.

There is no doubt now that the stone-country has fairly begun. All the houses, bridges, mills etc., are built of it, and look curiously grey after the brown, yellow, and red of the towns lower down.

Less than a mile from Lechlade stands the Round House, as the lock-house is called which guards the entrance to the Severn and Thames Canal. The River Colne chooses the same spot to effect a junction with the Thames, so that there are three streams meeting. The tower-like erection has a novel appearance to strangers, and, backed by tall poplars, has a striking effect.

The river now turns sharply to the left under the towpath bridge, and the navigable part is over, at least as regards barges and large boats. Soon after a turn to the right brings the stream and canal nearly parallel.

At Inglesham there are the remains of an old weir, long the highest on the river; but there are now no more locks or weirs to be passed, though the ruins of the latter are pretty numerous. The stream by this time has narrowed to about forty feet, and often becomes very shallow.

Passing the church of Inglesham – which has a curious bell-tower, and an ancient piece of carving of the Virgin and Child in the wall – the river runs uninterruptedly on, past the junction of the Colne, past the remains of another weir, till we reach Ham Weir, just below Hannington Bridge, which is a picturesque spot, and a capital place to have dinner.

They had been towing a good part of the last stretch under manifold difficulties, but the approach of Hannington Bridge obliged them to stop. “We shall smash the mast again here if we don’t take it out”, said Figgis; “This bridge looks lower than ever.”

“We only have eleven miles to do today”, remarked Martin; “let us lie up for an hour; this last three miles has rather taken it out of me.” “I feel as limp as an eel”, said Budd. “We have had the undiscovered-country sort of feeling at last. I didn’t know boating on the Thames could be so exciting.”

There was plenty of cause for these remarks, for nothing could be more different from the steady swing of the sculls on Henley Reach than the mode of progression which has to be adopted above Lechlade. Speaking in the rough, it is advisable to tow most of the way, or at least to have a tower on the bank. The word bank is scarcely accurate, for an expanse of mud and rushes hardly merit that title. You must always keep rudder lines, sculls, boat-hook, and tow-line within instant reach, and cultivate the skilful touch of the compositor in passing from one to the other as occasion demands.

Now and then there is a clear stretch of water which can be rowed or towed over without difficulty, but just as you are congratulating yourself on it there suddenly appears a bed of rushes, six feet high, stretching right across the river. There is no way back round, so selecting the most vulnerable part you begin your attack rushing at it like on a lion on his prey. Swish! Go the sides of your boat as the rushes divide at your attack, bending under the keel sometimes and hampering your progress badly. The first rush (I mean the rush of the boat) takes you perhaps twenty feet into the opposing mass. After that you must adopt a different mode. Standing up in the boat, you must bring the boat-hooks to bear on the rushes; the sculls too are useful, as their broad tops do not sink so deep in the mud. Push against the roots of the rushes, or the rushes themselves, and be careful that the blade doesn’t slip and send you toppling into the water.

Budd generally straddled the bow with his shoes and stockings off, and catching hold of the most distant rushes he could reach pulled them towards him. A yard and a half a minute is not bad racing time under such circumstances. You emerge suddenly into a swiftly-flowing and terribly weedy stream that swings your boat completely round, unless you are quick enough to seize the sculls and pull hard. Then the towing-line is again thrown to the man on the bank, who all this time has been cooling his heels and shouting derisive remarks, and the crew settle down for a few minutes’ rest.



Vain hope! In twenty yards there is a bend of the river so sharp that the tower is actually pulling the boat backwards. Shouts bring him to a not unwilling stop, and someone has to take the sculls again and pull round the corner with the assistance of a man punting with the long boat-hook, for the rudder is no good, there is not enough way on for it to take much effect. Every few hundred yards the towing fails owing to trees, or bushes, or more rushes, or something or other; then the line has to be wound up (an awful nuisance) and the tower taken on board, unless he prefers to find a cross-country route to where there is a semblance of a path again. This is what boating on the very Upper Thames is like, and I hope you will enjoy it.

Kempsford is a village a mile and a half farther on; the square tower of the church is conspicuous for some time. It was built by Henry, Duke of Lancaster, in the fourteenth century; a piece of wall and a window are the only remaining portions of his mansion.

"I suppose it's the same sort of thing all the way up now", remarked Martin, as they left Kempsford behind them. "Yes, the varnish will have all departed from the poor old Swan by the time we reach Cricklade", said Figgis ruefully; "this smashing through rush beds and dragging through shallows doesn't improve a boat much." "Never mind, captain, only six miles more", said Budd, "on you go."

They went on, the river becoming narrower and shallower as they progressed. Even below Kempsford it can be crossed at low water on the stepping-stones laid on the sill of the old weir; so it is plain that the end of the journey must be near.

Castle Eaton Bridge was next passed after a long struggle with some cantankerous rush-beds with weeds intermingled. The village contains some curious antiquarian remains, but the crew were too anxious to end their day's work to stop to examine them.

Before arriving at Eisey the crew stopped for tea, for they were only two miles from Cricklade now, and they felt safe even if they had to carry their boat overland. Eisey is a good fishing-place, but of very second-rate character as regards boating. It is a healthy locality for rushes – in fact from here to Cricklade the boat was fixed as often as floating.

Then came the old plank bridge, prettily situated between wooded banks, then Rose Cottage, then Cricklade.

"Well!" exclaimed Figgis, as they landed at Rose Cottage, "that's over at last. I never did such a piece of river in my life." "What a pace we went, too!" said Budd – "a mile an hour at least. I should like to put the winning eight at Henley on that stretch with the tallest rushes." "But this isn't the actual source", said Martin; "where is it?" "About ten miles away", was the captain's reply, "but we shall have to walk it; we can't take the boat unless we carry her." "You don't mean to start tonight?" asked Charlton. "Not quite. I feel like a good night's rest, though we have done only eleven miles today."

It is possible for small boats to be pushed and dragged on till Water Hay Bridge, some miles above Cricklade; but those who have any regard for their craft will not attempt it. The simplest way of reaching Thames head itself is to walk to Purton and take the train to Tetbury Road or Kemble Junction, but probably those who read this will prefer to walk.

The head-spring is situated in Shrewsbury Meadow, which is overlooked by the castle. There, close to the canal embankment, rises the celebrated river. It is rather a disappointment to find that in summer-time the head-spring is dry, the water being absorbed by the pumping-machine of the canal. This pumping-station with its great beam engine, is a prominent and not very welcome feature of this landscape. The bed of the river can be seen, and that is all; it is fed by four or five clearly-marked springs; the surrounding ground is spongy with the rising water. The rapidity with which the stream gains volume is astonishing. At Ewen, a mile and a half away, it is a good sized and very clear brook; and at Somerford, another mile or so on, it turns its first mill, and a very charming mill it is. In winter the flow of the water is so great that the canal pump ceases work, the head of the river is a running marsh, and the road bridge is too narrow to carry away the water.

The crew had now fulfilled their object – they had traced the river to its source. They each drank a few drops of water from the highest running spring, and then turned towards Cricklade where their boat lay. The voyage had been a pleasant one enough, though so different from their previous experiences; and there was not one dissentient voice when Budd stated as his opinion that “the Thames was good all the way through from one end to the other.”

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