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BOATING LIFE ON THE UPPER THAMES.
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“Up the river” is a phrase most felicitously significant to the Londoner conversant with the charm and romance of boating life on the summer Thames. It means an almost idyllic phase of outdoor existence which, in manifold fascinations and picturesque surroundings, is indigenous to England and peculiar to this river. What fox hunting is to Britain boating is in its season to the Londoners—a pastime for the people of the metropolis. The scope of the Thames includes many diverse opportunities for aquatic recreation.

There is the simple pleasure of a day’s punting. Sturdily poling against the current, thence to float idly downstream, with a charming companion or two and well-filled hamper, past the ever shifting shore backgrounds which change the while from beautiful examples of landscape gardening, with glimpses of far woodland reaches through the dells of some vast estate, to the lush, cattle-dotted meadows. Then come the well-kept grounds of neat, antique-looking boating inns, their landing stages bright with many-hued costumes of boating men and women. Or the sunshine glints on the “featherings” of a two or three pair oared skiff as it glides—a blocking of color, variegated by white or striped rowing flannels, symphonies in muslin, or the low lights of some girl’s terra-cotta gown in the stern sheets, seen against the greensward sweep of an upland lawn—past an ivy-grown church or angular-winged, red chimney topped villa. In the soft tones of the distance the individualities of the occupants of the boat melt into a merging blur of tints as it runs by an ochre colored bank. Then there is the crowd and crush of regatta days at Henley or Molesey, or the furore of the ’Varsity races. Again, week after week is sometimes passed by fashion’s votaries and river enthusiasts on some luxuriously appointed houseboat, in watching the ever-changing panorama of river life, and visiting its riparian pleasancess—the Roebuck at Tilehurst, Medmenham Abbey and many another historic inn, or creeping along the silent backwaters and reed-banked by-ways of the almost disused canals.

“Up the river” is under the supervising care of the Thames Conservancy and its natural attractions are fostered and permanently enhanced by the beauty of the well-kept shorelands, which are owned for the most part, luckily for the preservation of their refined loveliness, by a few estated proprietors. Acknowledged class distinctions and pecuniary barriers enforced by the time and expense of attainment restrain, in a measure, ’Arry and ’Arriet from invading the more exclusive portion of the stream above Maidenhead. To those unacquainted with the suburban life of West Londoners the Thames is only known as a broad, sluggish, muddy, brown flood as seen from the embankment or London Bridge, thickening as one nears

the region of the docks, with a forest of masts, yardarms and rigging of the craft of all nations. And not, as known from Twickenham to Oxford, as the jolliest, "larkiest" and, at the same time, most poetically beautiful river, in its blending of historical association and rural loveliness in the world. Here no boarded advertisements flaunt their empirical wording, and vulgarly colored lettering, over the sweep of the riverside landscape; whatever be the evils of political and social influences, artistic harmony of detail in land and buildings is preserved. Nearly every example of woodwork and masonry is in architectural accordance with the relation of its surroundings. The right to do and, moreover, the money and the taste wherewith to do it have kept this historic old waterpath like a cherished ribbon winding about and binding together pictures of mediæval lands whereon lived the romances of the past, and along the shores of which glides the gay life of the present. As before mentioned the river has begotten unto itself social barriers. The populace of the Mile End road portion of the town hover on a Sunday above Vauxhall Bridge, but below Richmond, with a predilection for the neighborhood of Pope's Villa at Twickenham, the ferry made historical by the ballad of its "Jolly Young Waterman." Hampton Court is the Bohemian meeting place, so to speak, of the Strand and Pall Mall, with a little of Piccadilly thrown in. It is most enjoyable to lounge there, at Molesey Lockside, of a Sunday afternoon, watching the multitude of boats, steam launches and punts with their great diversity of occupants passing through the lock. Its popularity with the masses is due to the broadness of the stream thereabout and the facility of access by railroad to Hampton Station. Then a short walk or drive in any of the many waiting traps through the grand old oaks of Bushey Park brings in sight the castellated tops of Hampton Court seen against the Middlesex side of the river. On regatta days the river-facing balconies and wide windows of the Greyhound and the Mitre are generally filled with people who derive much amusement from the antics of the mixed element on the bank-like street below them; or in watching the crowd of boats pushing up toward the lock through which they must pass before entering the sweep of water where the races are to be rowed. Many of the loungers have come down on the top of the regular Hampton coaches, which stand unhorsed before the door of the Greyhound. "Nigger" serenaders are about in great force with twanging of banjos, rattling of bones and vocalizations of "Sister Mary Walked Like That" or "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab." The taproom of the inn is filled with men in boating flannels, old, middle aged and young, chaffing the jolly and, in almost every instance, good-looking barmaids over split sodas and brandies or foaming half and half. A bank holiday at 'Appy 'Ampton is the most happy-go-lucky place, outside of the Derby, to study the singularities of manner and individualities of the outing masses. From Maidenhead—Boulter's Lock—to Marlow is the portion of the river most affected by the best boating sets. The importance of this sphere of sporting diversion among the upper classes of London is shown by the prosperous maintenance of a ripplingly bright illustrated weekly—a veritable journal exclusively of the Thames—which may be purchased at any lockside from Teddington to Oxford and all railroad stations. Its success is due to its repleteness of information anent the doings of boating people, dress, fashion and "form" on the river, social personalities, location and movements of houseboats and everything of interest to the river habitué.

From Boulter's to Marlow for luncheon and back is generally the length of course covered in a day's outing, while days may be spent in drifting, sculling, canoeing, poling or steaming from Oxford down by that great, gray old pile, Windsor Castle, or even into the heart of London itself. In that case one dines and sleeps—unless one is habitant of a houseboat—at the cosiest, quaintest of cottages and glides day after day through the heart of a beautiful country side where nature never becomes monotonous, for it is the constant meeting place of all sorts of craft and people. Yes, it is the people who afford much of the unique fascination possessed by the upper Thames for society, Bohemia, the church and the stage. Boulter's Lock has been happily and aptly named the "Ladies' Mile of the Thames." As in that world-famed stretch of Hyde Park roadway the best of London people congregate, so on the waters and

lounging about the lockside and towpath of Boulter's they assemble likewise. It is here new comers are criticised and pronounced "good form" before the approval of the exclusive



MEDMENHAM ABBEY AND THE HOTEL

sets is given to one's mere presence, to say nothing—unless properly vouched for—of the social entrée being extended to the aspirant for boating recognizance. Vulgarity of action or word, offensive clumsiness when in contact with other boats or horseplay of any kind will be indelibly marked against the aggressor.

A gorgeous July morning's sunlight is flooding one of the wide and well-paved streets in South Kensington and streaming into a breakfast room looking out on the Cromwell road, with that cheery light only fully appreciated, on account of its rarity, by the resident of London. A group of men are lolling over their after breakfast coffee and cigars. "Let us go up the river to-day" says Beautiful Jim, expectantly addressing the occupants of the room. "That's the fit thing for me," says little Pasha, opening wider one of his suspiciously weary and heavy-lidded eyes by the insertion of the monocle he had been industriously polishing. "There'll be a jolly crush on a day like this. What say you, Sholto?"—this to a tall, fresh-colored lad in an Eton jacket. "Like to awfully," answers the boy, "but I just promised the *mater* I would join her, after service, at Hyde Park Corner, to walk her and the girls in the church parade." "Three of us go, then," says Jim, making a simultaneous grab for watch and time table. "Where shall it be? to famous old Medmenham Abbey or to Marlow? Train leaves Paddington at 10:45. Can just make it if we look sharp. Into your river things, boys, and look here, Clements [to the footman], bring up the best-looking hansom you can find at the court! Make haste! and Pasha," rattles on Jim, who is a stickler for good form anywhere and an especial authority on river matters, "I hope you have saddle-stained those new yellow shoes of yours; they looked too awfully new for anything last time we went up." And thus the beautiful one has us all scampering off to our respective dens. Fifteen minutes later sees us white flannel or serge clad, low shod in tan leather or white pipe-clayed buckskin, piling into a wide, rubber-tired "S. T." hansom, rolling off to Paddington Station as fast as a fair-stepping horse and the promise to

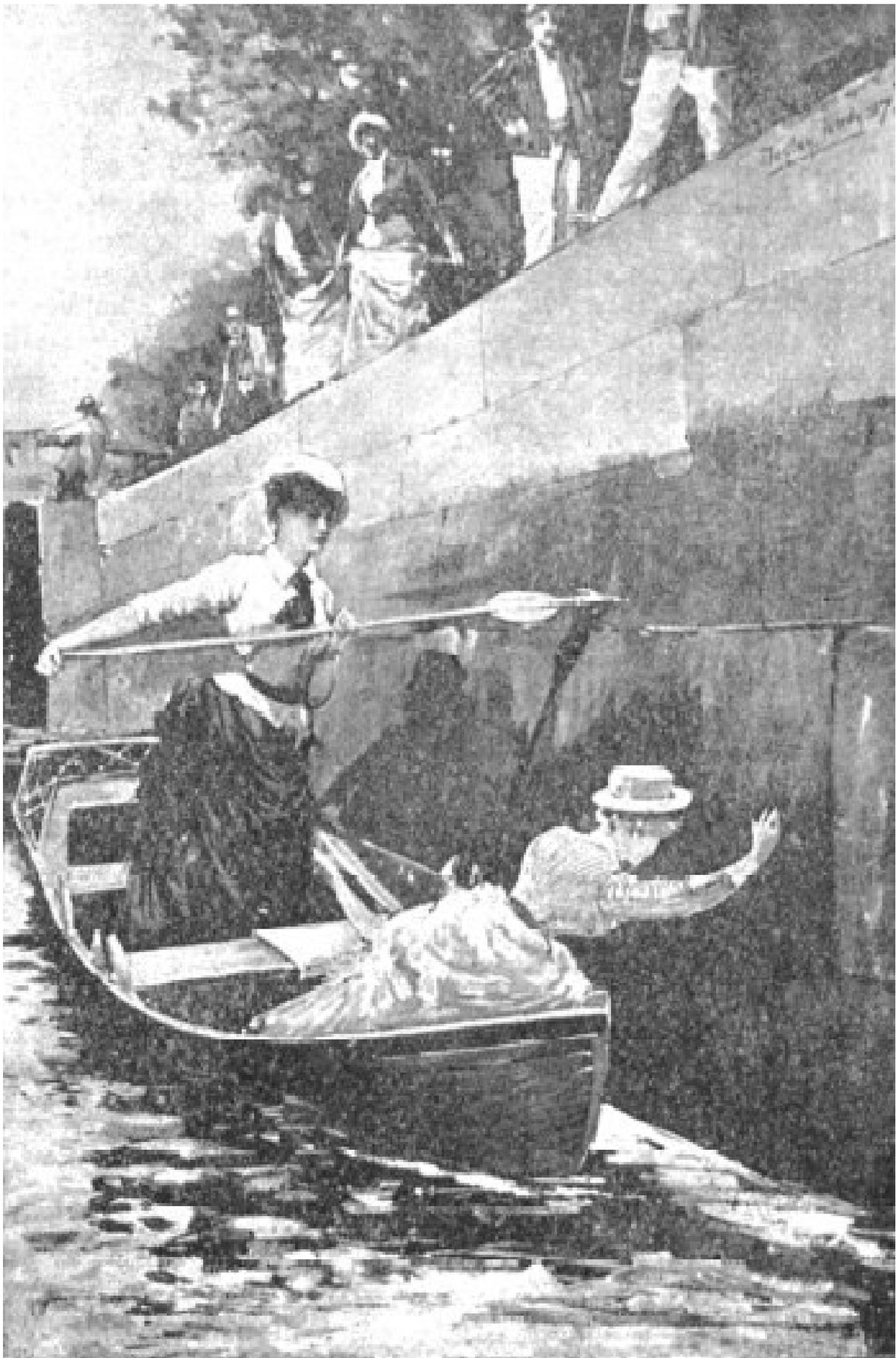
cabby of an extra shilling if he will “look sharp” can carry us. Taking tickets to Taplow and return we are soon ensconced in the rather crowded precincts of a carriage having “Smoking” labeled thereon. The compartment is filled with fellows in boating dress; indeed, in almost all the carriages are men and women in river costume. The girls are mostly in white muslin—cotton gowns they call them there—and men’s white Oxford straw hats, wide white ribbon banded. Some have black or dark-blue jerseys, and many have dainty, light-colored covert coats, or masculine-shaped shooting jackets of fluffy homespun or checked tweed, as an extra wrap. Luncheon hampers, bulldogs and fox terriers complete the grouping, for this is one of the specials running “through” for the accommodation of the boating people. At Taplow we engage a “fly” to carry us over the dusty mile of road to the Maidenhead Hotel on the Thames, and shortly our skiff is heading up for Boulter’s Lock.

By “skiff” in England is not meant one of those flat-bottomed monstrosities which are designated by that name in this country, but a light bottomed, elegant craft, built on lines similar to what is known here as the Whitehall boat. It is often made of cedar and varies in length to accommodate from one to four pairs of oars, and is arranged with bottom carpets and cane-woven stern seats and back rest.

The punt is another essentially English river boat, flat bottomed, square ended, veritably scow shaped. The pleasure punt of the Thames is built and furnished with more or less regard for the luxurious comfort of its owners or hirers, a long, roomy, jolly tub in which you can potter along the shore with the aid of the punting pole quite easily—if you know how to do it. In it one can loll along the cushioned bottom—the punt has no seats—read and eat and smoke, and under the willows on the Bucks side of the river you can always, for a consideration, get a pot of tea or hot water from one of the keepers’ cottages on the Duke of Westminster’s extensive place, Cliveden, the mansion of which rises, a beautiful pile, beyond the hanging woods, on one of the rolling hills of the back country. Passing amid such craft, filled with people intent on doing such like things, we near the gates of the lock, only to find them shut and a jam of boats awaiting their opening. Getting impatient for the lock to empty we run our skiff over the rollers with the aid of one of the attendants, noticing the while in passing along at the towpath’s side, in pushing toward the reach of water above the upper gate, the occupants of the few boats coming down. It is too early yet to see the crowd or the river at its best. We want to get up to Marlow as soon as possible in order to insure ample time to float down, after luncheon, amid the crush of fashion and of literary and artistic lights, all under the golden sunshine of this rare July afternoon. Above Cookham we engage a “tow,” who, with our line yoked about his stalwart shoulders, is making his bobnailed shoes do good service along the towpath for a half crown, with the possibility of additional beer money to refresh his thirsty throat after pulling us along four miles under the noonday sun. And thus for an hour, beautiful Jim at the rudder cords we have nothing to do but smoke, talk and criticise the passing boatloads.

At 2 o’clock we are docked, with a multitudinous convoy, at the Complete Angler Hotel, Marlow—a beautiful village, with picturesque streets threading between old cottages, modern stucco dwellings and cunningly tree-hidden riverside villas.

On our way to luncheon we pass through the wide, low hall hung with rare old colored sporting prints, fishing pictures and outlined drawings of some big trout or pike caught in the neighboring waters.



PASSING BOULTER'S LOCK

Groups of boating men are lounging on the tow chairs or window side seats overlooking the willow-hung, quaint, cottage banked river, with a little steeple or two rising above the massed foliage of distant trees on the opposite shore.

From the crowd of “swagger” men whose looks, intonations and obvious breeding stamp them as native to the best sets in London, it is evident that white flannel coats and trousers—not knickerbockers—are always in good form. The striped flannels are rather going out and although solid grays or pale lavender serges are worn by some of the ultra-fashionables it is doubtless but a passing fad. The blazer, unless one is a member of some prominent boating, college or tennis or cricket club, is generally left to Johnnie wherewith to emblazon himself. Flannel shirts, even of white, though the most comfortable and sensible, are not much worn by those “in the swim.” White linen shirts, with all the glory of stand-up collar and white four-in-hand tie in silk or duck, are seen, a mass of dazzling white along the unbuttoned coats, for the wearing of vests is tabooed on the river.

When leaving the landing stage an hour hence, and dropping his pair of sculls into their respective notches, the regular river habitué is revealed; coatless, his shirt sleeves rolled up to elbow, his white trousers snugly held about the loins by a large folded bright-colored silk handkerchief or sash passing through the waist loops, and the turned-up bottoms showing an inch or two of black silk clad ankles above his pipe-clayed buckskin rowing shoes. A little modest-colored cricket cap or flat-brimmed straw hat complete the picture of cool, immaculate freshness both in dress and person, the boating man out for a day’s gentle exercise and the various distracting sights of the river.

In a big recess forming the taproom, from whose widely-opened diamond-pane windows one can see the constant passing of the crowded boats, we stop to have a handsome girl behind the bar mix us something refreshing in the way of soda and Scotch whiskey. The lunch room has its lattices flung open to the river breeze and the lawn of the Angler is bright with many-tinted groups of boaters; the white, cool dresses and red parasols of the women, people strolling or lounging on chairs or benches, smoking, flirting or heeding as they may the ever-beautiful, though hackneyed, song from “Dorothy,” “Queen of My Heart,” as rendered by an itinerant Italian band. It is a wonderful kaleidoscope of moving color on the velvet greensward, backed by the rippling blue of the sun-brightened Thames, with a constant stream of pleasure craft outlined against the terraced farther shore and red-tiled roofs and angular gables seen between the gaps of the encompassing tree tops. The room is noisy with the clatter of dishes, popping of corks and hum of conversation. The tables are crowded, and my lady and chorus girl may have to sit *vis-à-vis*. No one remarks, no one cares. Sunburnt-looking fellows are slicing up beef and ham at the buffet and securing accompaniments—the force of waiters is insufficient to attend to all at once—for the ladies of their respective parties who are mixing the salad at their table places. Most of the men get up to help themselves. It is the custom of the place. Three shillings pays for all one wants to eat of any and all the courses. This social atmosphere of the boating hotel is a peculiarly English phase of life.

In the late afternoon, with dozens of accompanying crafts, we proceed leisurely Londonwards. Under the Quarry Woods, with the lovely ancient Marlow lying in the purple haze of distance, we pass the houseboat *Viola*. Many a punt is seen moored to the overhung reaches of shore foliage, and attended by the ever-voracious, foraging swans. Hampers empty, and a stray bottle or two drifting away down stream, bespeak luncheons passed *al fresco*.

Now a naphtha launch glides noiselessly and swiftly by us, its band playing to a well-dressed crowd lounging about the deck or stern sheets indolently surveying the occupants of the different boats, whom in their passing they have crowded shoreward, to nod to some one or to say “How d’ye do” to a group in a near skiff.

Some of the most charming bits of river scenery are to be found here, between Marlow and Kay Mead, and their appreciation by the artistic world is annually attested on the walls of the Academy and the watercolor societies.

The river on Sunday is hardly as nice as on other days. Yet representatives of the highest society are here. We have just passed, among the notables, Lady Lenox on board the houseboat *Esmeralda*, and Lord Deerhurst on board the *Sportsman*. There is Sir William poling that punt along, lolling in the end of which, under a red coaching parasol, is Lady Cull. Now we meet a face known to the Hyde Park lounge, skillfully handling the sculls, while her father, in white flannels and with still whiter moustache, is seated in the stern, handling the rudder cords and puffing away at a brown muzzled pipe. Golden-haired pets of the opera bouffe are out in full force and, with few exceptions, accompanied by very thoroughbred-looking men whose faces are familiar adjuncts to some of the best club windows.

In the long, soft twilight we round the bend by old Cookham church and the sweet scent of meadow hay steals over the river. In Bisham reach is moored quite a colony of houseboats; the *Rudder Grange*, *Maud*, *Ye Marye*, *Queen of the Brent*, and others. Their construction and usages must be in a measure familiar to many Americans from the perusal of Mr. Black's delightful series of pen pictures: "The Strange Adventures of a Houseboat." Many of them are most magnificently appointed, the upper deck or roof frequently being converted, by potted palms and flowering plants, into veritable floating gardens, and this hanging conservatory, awning shaded, forms a delightful, half-concealed field for observation and flirtation. On many houseboats the elegances of shore life abound, even to the good old form of dressing for dinner. Canadian and sailing canoes abound.

We row rapidly by beautiful Kay Mead in order to reach the lock before the crush get to the sluices. The banks are crowded by those who have already gone down and disembarked at Maidenhead and then strolled up again along the towpath to watch the crowd come through and exchange "How d'you dos" with those who are known in boat or launch. They then stand, sit or stare and chat—a peer and a Johnnie sitting side by side, perhaps, on the lock steps. Bohemia still lives along the upper Thames.

Maidenhead Hotel again: we will go in and get Mrs. Woodhouse to send us out some tea on the veranda. It is surprising to note how many men drink tea in England during the afternoon. Whether taken mostly because it is a capital antidote or simply for its gently stimulating and soothing qualities, I do not know. Perhaps both. Nevertheless one will hear more tea called for during late afternoon in any town hotel smoking room or country boating inn than any other drink, and with those dainty, thin slices of buttered bread, hardly known outside of the "tight little island," it is really delicious. The excitement and crush of regatta days like the Oxford-Cambridge and Henley are attractions in themselves. They form the fascination of the river to many denizens of London and the neighboring cities. They are some of the most potent allurements, but are not necessarily included in boating life on the upper Thames.



POPE'S VILLA, TWICKENHAM