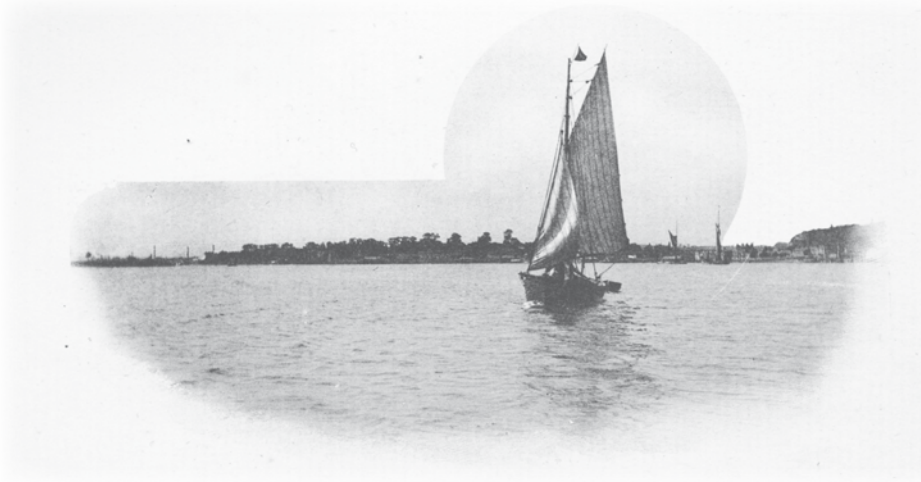
Swin, Swale & Swatchway

The Teal Ashore

SWIN, SWALE & SWATCHWAY

or

Cruises down the Thames,
The Medway and the Essex Rivers



by

H. LEWIS JONES, M.A.

assisted by

C. B. LOCKWOOD

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

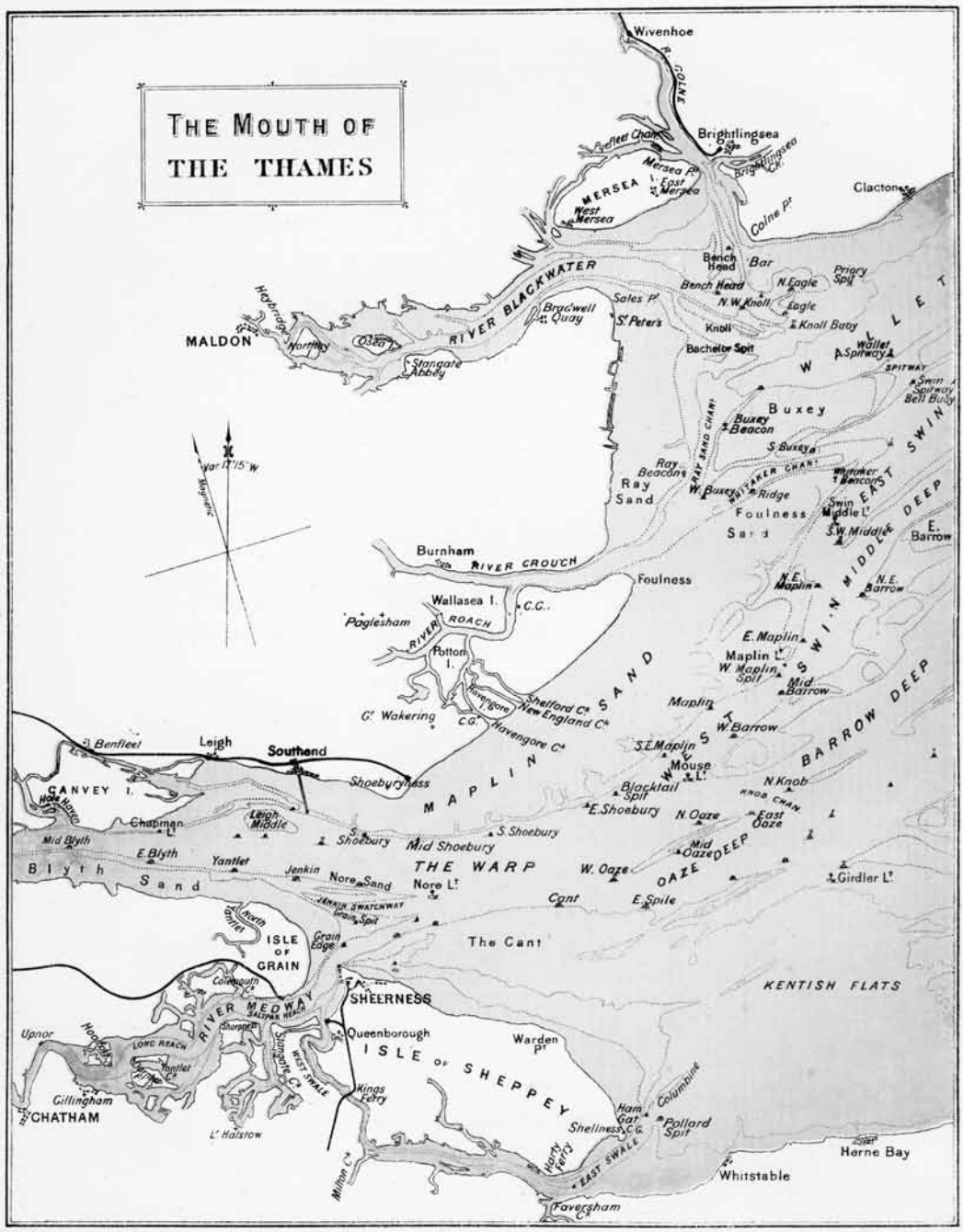
THIS LITTLE BOOK HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER from recollections of various cruises in and about the Thames Estuary, most of them in the little *Teal* of 3½ tons, with my partner, Mr. C. B. Lockwood, who has contributed many of the "yarns" herein related, who led the way as pilot in many of the more distant trips, and whose help in the collection of materials for the book I take this opportunity of acknowledging. Dr. C. E. Shelly has also been so good as to assist by writing a Chapter on the River Deben and Woodbridge.

The amusement which our voyages have afforded to our friends as well as to ourselves, and the pleasure with which we recall all the incidents of our early experiences afloat, have led to the composition of this short record of our adventures.

I am indebted to the kindness of the Editor of the *National Observer* for the reference to Dr. Jessop's *Lives of the Norths* which is given in Chapter I.

The illustrations are from photographs taken on the cruises. With three exceptions they were all done with the very convenient "Eclipse" Hand Camera made by Mr. Shew, of Newman Street, Oxford Street.

H. LEWIS JONES.
UPPER WIMPOLE STREET, W.


THE MOUTH OF THE THAMES
Wivenhoe
R. COLNE
Brightlingsea
Clacton
MERSEA
West Mersea
East Mersea
Colne Pt
Bench Head
Bar
N. Eagle
Priory Spit
N.W. Knoll
Eagle
Knoll Buoy
Knoll
Bachelor Spit
Wallet Spitway
SPITWAY
Swin Spitway Bell Buoy
RIVER BLACKWATER
Bradwell Quay
Sales Pt
St Peters
MALDON
Northey
Osea I.
Stangate Abbey
Buxey
Buxey Beacon
S. Buxey
RAY SAND CHAN.
Ray Beacons
Ray Sand
W. Buxey
Ridge
Foulness Sand
Swin Middle L.
S.W. Middle
E. Barrow
EAST SWIN
SWIN MIDDLE DEEP
Burnham
RIVER CROUCH
Foulness
N.E. Maplin
N.E. Barrow
Wallasea I.
C.G.
Paglesham
RIVER ROACH
Potton I.
E. Maplin
Maplin L.
W. Maplin Spit
Mid Barrow
MAPLIN SAND
Shelford Cr.
New England Cr.
Havengore Cr.
G. Wakering
C.G.
Maplin
W. Barrow
WEST SWIN
BARROW DEEP
S.E. Maplin
Mouse L.
Benfleet
Leigh
Southend
CANVEY I.
Hole Haven
Shoeburyness
Blacktail Spit
N. Knob
KNOB CHAN.
E. Shoebury
N. Oaze
East Oaze
Chapman L.
Leigh Middle
Mid Blyth
E. Blyth
S. Shoebury
Mid Shoebury
Yantlet
Jenkin
Nore Sand
THE WARP
Mid Oaze
W. Oaze
OAZE DEEP
Girdler L.
Blyth Sand
Nore L.
Cant
E. Spile
JENKIN SWATCHWAY
Grain Spit
North Outfall
ISLE OF GRAIN
Grain Edge
The Cant
Cockmouth
KENTISH FLATS
SHEERNESS
RIVER MEDWAY
MALTPIN HEAD
Upnor
Hoo Ness
LONG REACH
Yantlet
Stangate Cr.
WEST SWALE
Queenborough
Warden Pt
ISLE OF SHEPPEY
Gillingham
CHATHAM
Kings Ferry
L. Halstow
Ham Gat
Columbine
Shellness
C.G.
Pollard Spit
Harty Ferry
EAST SWALE
Herne Bay
Whitstable
Milton Cr.
Faversham

CHAPTER IX

To Burnham and Wivenhoe, through the Creeks

THE WINTER SESSION HAD DRAGGED its tedious length along, and a few signs of returning spring were beginning to shew themselves, when one Thursday before Easter I reached the platform at Fenchurch Street Station, laden with handbags, blankets, Brittany butter, chutney, and other necessaries of life, just in time to catch the 12.8 train for Leigh, and there discovered the partner buying newspapers and looking about anxiously for me. "Hillo! Captain," he cried (we always talk like that when we go sailing), "I thought you must have been took up on a bit of a spit, and were going to lose your train. Have you remembered that cherry-brandy, and the cawfee, and those other things we've heard so much about? I've brought a fine piece of cold beef, enough to last us a week, almost. And we mustn't forget the mint bullets for the medicine chest when we get to Leigh." The mint bullets are pepper-mints—bulls' eyes—of globular shape, black streaked with white, and of the strongest flavour, which are invariably carried with us on a cruise for their medicinal virtues, and to ward off the dyspepsia which is likely to arise when one is living on food of one's own cooking, because that inevitably leads to a reduction of the cookery to the lowest possible terms.

The *Teal* is victualled upon unusual, but, we venture to think, highly scientific lines. We both hate cooking, and so provide a large piece of good boiled beef as a *pièce de resistance*; we take lots of oranges and ginger-beer, for their anti-scorbutic qualities, and the mint bullets aforesaid for a medicine chest, and chutney, which is both condiment and sweetmeat, and then just fill up with some sausages or kippered herrings, and trust to renewals at the ports we may chance to reach; and when opportunity arises we seize it and dine ashore, highly enjoying the return to such a luxury as a clean table-cloth.

Cooking, and, what is worse, washing up of plates and dishes, is the burden which sooner or later wears out the endurance of the amateur crew; they gradually come to shirk the hateful business, and we have at last been forced

to adopt a strict rule on the *Teal* that each shall wash up his own plates and mugs and knives and forks, as soon as he has done with them, and to this *modus vivendi* we manage to adhere. Cruising on a small boat soon teaches a man what are the actual necessities of life, and what are mere luxuries, and the latter are quickly discarded if they cost any trouble. Of course, all small-boat sailors are not of one mould. Some spend their time in holystoning the deck and scraping the chain cable, and care but little for sailing. Others, again, use their boat for fishing or for shooting, while others take their pleasure in sailing and making passages, and in getting fresh air and exercise. If one lives near the water and has plenty of spare time, it is possible to attend to all the small details of refitting, and to keep the boat very smart, and when we are old, and retire to live quietly in our sea-side cottages, with a flagstaff in the front garden, we will do so too; but when one hurries from London to snatch a holiday between Saturday and Monday it is imperative, if one means cruising at all, to hoist up sail as soon as one gets on board; even then half the holiday is consumed in getting from home, and the other half in getting back again in time to catch one's train. We have, therefore, been forced to leave everything in the way of fitting out to the somewhat casual Benson, although we might find any amount of delight in that side of yachting which includes scraping, varnishing and splicing, if there were time and leisure for it. A Leigh bawley man, who gave us a help into Leigh one evening up the creek, asked us: "Who fits you out? She looks a bit rough." "Why Benson; you know him, don't you?" "Yes; I thought she looked a bit in his style, with those old lanyards."

Well, we got down to Leigh and victualled the vessel, and put on board the beds, the fresh water, spirit for the stove, and paraffin for the riding light, and started off with a very light easterly air. The partner took first turn to be common sailor, and I took the tiller. We set the sails and let go the mooring, but after sitting aft for several minutes and working that tiller about, I began to think all was not right, for though answering her helm she did not go through the water at all; so I called out to Benson, who was rowing by after putting us on board, that she was not sailing very fast, and he replied: "Well, you ain't let go your mooring yet." The common sailor had dropped the mooring buoy

West Shoebury Buoy

overboard without looking after it, and it had gone foul of the bobstay, and was holding us. After getting clear we tacked down quietly to Southend Pier, bringing up inside the Leigh Spit Buoy in the lower part of Leigh Swatch. The partner then said he was going ashore, and did so, bringing back with him some more oranges and a tin to keep the coffee in, and a lobster; while we were going down a bawley went by with spinnaker set, and holes in his ragged old topsail. He greeted us and said we wanted more wind. So we told him his topsail didn't seem to want much more wind. He grasped our subtle meaning, but promptly explained that they were only "air 'oles."

We decided to go through the creeks next day, so after breakfast took the ebb down with a south-westerly wind, as far as the West Shoebury Buoy, searching for a gatway that we had been told to look for by Benson, which runs into the sand for a mile or more, and opens out into a lake-like basin, where one can lie afloat at low water, with sands all round. A place very well to know of, if one could be sure of finding it, in case of being becalmed in that part of the world on the ebb tide, or in any other way prevented from getting up to Southend for the night. When we got down to it there was the entrance plain enough, and boats inside, and people on the sand gathering cockles; so we stood in for the opening in the sands, but shoaled our water so fast to three feet that we did not like it, and hauled out again. There was a fresh breeze, and we were moving along rather too fast to care to take the ground, especially on a lee shore, so brought up just outside, wishing we could get in to the desired haven, but at dead low water the bar at the mouth seemed to have only about three feet best water, and we did not know the entrance very well, so anchored for an hour's flood. While we were waiting two light barges came in and plumped themselves at the entrance; they both stuck fast but kept their sails up, and with the wind aft the one nearest the middle of the channel slowly drove through it and anchored inside, and we could see her skipper get into his boat, and go for a walk on the sands; the other one was too much to the westward and stuck fast, so he hauled aft his mainsail and forced her off again, and made a little trip out, and then came back and went in successfully. A bawley, too, had arrived by this time, and brought up close to us, and the

Havengore Creek: The Entrance

hour soon passed, and having had a lead from the barges, we tried her in and found plenty of water, sounding with the boat-hook as we went over the bar, and having got in we brought up again.

This Swin Way is a good place to wait in before going in over the sands to Havengore; the stream of flood sets strongly through it, and over the Maplin from south-west to north-east, that is, in a direction opposite to that in the main channel, so that small craft, bound down, can get along with a fair tide over the Maplin, and if they draw only about three feet, can cut across the Whitaker Spit, and get into the Burnham River by the Ridge Buoy, at a place where the sand is low, thus saving a long round, and dodging a foul tide. There is another Swin Way of the same sort close at the back of the Maplin Lighthouse, where a boat drawing three feet can go in and find a fair tide on the flood to the same low way over the Whitaker. The only risk is a wreck on the Whitaker Spit, about two miles inside of the Whitaker Beacon, which is covered and hidden from sight at half-tide.

The tide made up very fast, and soon we weighed and started for Havengore over the sands, but the sight of a horse and cart crossing the entrance of the creek shewed us that we were too soon to get in; we therefore brought up again, and by-and-bye one of the light barges made a start and stood in under foresail and topsail. We watched her, and thought that we should do best with plenty of sail on, as the creek's mouth ran almost dead to windward for a short but critical part of the course, so we set the mainsail and jib, which had been hauled down while we were going over the sands and shoal water. The wind had been freshening all the morning, and there was a slashing breeze. We weighed anchor, having about four feet of water, where we were on the flat to windward of the creek, and bearing up we ran down to the beacons, sounding as we went with the boat-hook, ready to run her off if the water shoaled too much, and standing by to flatten in the sheets as soon as the water deepened, and we reached the creek. The old barge had got into the channel between the beacons all right, but having little way on, and no mainsail set, she was all the time sagging to leeward, and at last she stuck fast on the lee side of the channel, just on the point of the bend. Then our turn came; the water deepened

as we slipped into the fair way, and sheeting home the sails smartly, we just clawed along through, though we barely had our water as we passed the spit, and there was the old barge's anchor sticking up out of the water a yard or two off; but we helped her along with vigorous shoves of the oar against the bottom. Once past that point we were able to bear up for a short distance, and could just lie along the first reach past the Coastguard vessel, and then kept away, going at a rattling pace, with sheets slacked, right along to the River Roach. For a long time we looked back and watched the barge hanging on the point, and pictured the crew still shoving and shouting, as they were revealed to us during the tremendous moment of our own lucky shoot past them, and rejoiced at our escape from drifting down there, too, with them. The entrance to the creek is very narrow, and is beaconed by posts. Those to the north are strong and high, those to the south are slight; the deepest water is midway between them. On the shore are two beacons like those marking the channel, but stouter; stand on boldly, until quite close to the first one, for the best water, as there is a spit opposite which is very treacherous, and runs out a long way, and the channel takes a curve round it; after passing these, keep in mid-channel. There is a small horse opposite the Coastguard hulk, but it is not important. After passing the watch vessel the creek divides, with a considerable spit of mud on the point, and as the stream sets strongly inland from one hour before high water until low water, there is risk of getting on to it, especially in tacking, unless one is careful. The barge got to leeward through want of sail, and we should certainly have done so too, had we tried to get in under jib and mizen. After we had reached the Roach, we could see that the two barges and the bawley had succeeded in getting through all right at last.

Mr. Speed, in *Cruises in Small Yachts*, gives a capital account of these inside channels, and a glance at a chart will shew that there are several islands to be circumnavigated by the curious explorer at high-water time.

The channels, which are bank full at high water, present at low water a very different appearance; their sides are extremely steep, and composed of soft mud; the water ebbs entirely away from the part between the entrance at Havengore and the point off Shelford and New England Creeks, but from

there onwards to the Roach and Crouch one can lie afloat anywhere, care being taken not to take the ground on the edge of the cant, for fear of a headlong plunge at low water into the gulf beneath.

Scattered along the last reaches are the oyster boats, little carvel built craft of about six or seven tons, with remarkably yacht-like overhanging sterns, and having a peculiarly Dutch look when under sail, due partly to their short gaffs and long vanes, and partly to their being without topmasts, in place of which they have a small flagstaff only. They are wonderfully handy, and some of them have nice roomy cabins, as we know through having been aboard of one of a rather better style, which was used as a watch boat. Many of these vessels are built at Paglesham, on the River Roach, and a few at Burnham.

On reaching the River Roach it can be seen to run westwards towards a clump of trees, which mark the position of Paglesham, and eastwards, round a bend known as Devil's Reach, past a large Coastguard hulk, the *Lucifer*, to join the Crouch or Burnham River, about two miles below Burnham. We ran quickly through Devil's Reach, gybing over as we entered and again on leaving it, with a strong wind behind us, and began to make things snug and tidy below, in expectation of a wet thrash to windward up to Burnham. The flood was by this time done, but we hoped by the help of the strong wind, to stem the tide, which runs down in a most uncompromising manner between the straight banks of the river. As there are no headlands or slack waters, there is no possible chance of cheating it. Our first few tacks were very good ones, though rather wet in the hollow seas in mid-stream, but soon, the ebb making down strong, and the wind at the same time falling light, we found more sail was wanted, so hauled out the mizen and set the big jib, and at last, after many boards, succeeded in getting up to Burnham, and anchored below the Coastguard hulk, close to the edge of the mud, having just our water at dead low tide. Two Coastguard men were soon alongside, and undertook to put us ashore, and to take us back again, if we wished, later in the evening.

Burnham, as seen from the river, is a picturesque little place, with its red brick houses and its fleet of oyster dredgers; it subsists mainly upon its oyster fishery, and a little in the way of boat building. The 'pardner,' in a most de-

Oyster Boat, Burnham

generate way, insisted throughout this cruise on dining and sleeping ashore, regardless of the fact that this was hardly playing the game; and I joined him in decay so far as the dinner ashore was concerned, but preferred to sleep aboard, as it enabled me to change plates each evening in readiness for next day's photographing.

At dinner our spirit of enterprise began to assert itself once more, in spite of cold and wind, and we decided to go on next day to Wivenhoe, if there was anything like decent weather; so in the morning, at seven, I went to fetch the Skipper in the Berthon, taking his sea-boots along for him to wade through the mud with, and we were soon off with a fine breeze on starboard quarter, breakfasting under way. It was a grey and cloudy morning, and after leaving the river we began to peer out for the West Buxey Buoy, the Ray Sand Beacon and the Buxey Beacon. The West Buxey is on the south-west corner of the Buxey Sand, and marks the point between the Whitaker Channel and the Ray Sand Passage. It is the first buoy made on the outward passage from the Crouch, and the line from it to the Swallow-tail Buoy marks the north side of the Whitaker Channel, and the line from it to the Buxey Beacon and North Buxey Buoy marks the east side of the Ray Sand Passage. The distances from mark to mark are all rather long out here among the sands, and we ran along some little time before we made out the buoy, but having picked up both it and then the Buxey Beacon, we came to the conclusion that the Ray Beacon was *non est*. After coming up to the Buxey Beacon we stood nearly due north, sounding as we went, and expecting to find water over for us inside the Bachelor Spit, which would have shortened our passage a little, but the water shoaled in a way we did not like, and we hauled our wind abruptly and stood off into the channel, and there, under our lee, could distinctly see the highest part of the Bachelor, awash with breakers. We had very nearly put her ashore there, and but for the careful use of the sounding pole, and the Skipper's good look-out, we should have had her bumping on the hard sand a few minutes later; and there was enough sea on to make that a serious matter. The whole of the bay off the Mouths of the Crouch, Blackwater, and Colne is rather awkward and tiresome, demanding the utmost attention to soundings,

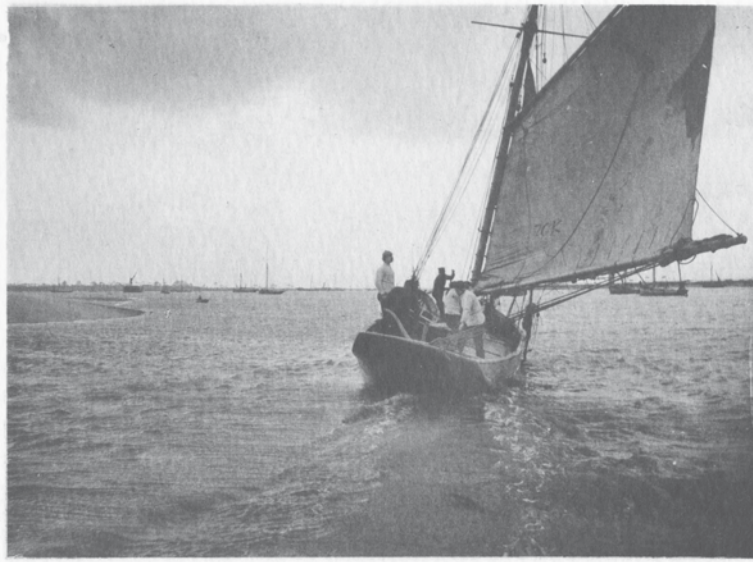
buoys, and general look-out; and as there is generally plenty of wind, and often a haze which makes it hard to see the buoys, the navigation of these parts is difficult, and this makes it a good training ground. An acquaintance of ours slept on the top of the Buxey one night in a three-tonner, feeling jolly anxious as to the weather he was to have on the flood in the morning, and we have ourselves had, in a calm, to row hard to avoid being set on to the south-west edge of the same sand, by the ebb sweeping over it out of the Burnham River. After getting back into the channel, we steered the proper course to the North Buxey Buoy, and then to the Knowl, which serves as a mark for the entrance to both Blackwater and Colne, and from there stood in to the mouth of the Colne, keeping between the buoy on Bench Head and that on the Bar. The wind was fresh and the sea was breaking over the Knowl as we went flying past with second jib and main tack triced up; and when well inside the Colne, and passing the entrance to Brightlingsea, we stowed mainsail, and went on to Wivenhoe under jib and mizen at a fine rate. We shortened sail because the Colne was almost strange to both of us, and for the same reason kept fairly in the middle of the river, passing a big steam yacht, *Lady Torfrida*, which was at anchor there, flying the same burgee as ourselves—the Medway Yacht Club, to wit—and with the American ensign over her stern. We avoided the points where spits seemed likely to be lurking, and kept her well over in the hollow bights of the different reaches. We just scraped over the top of the shoal in the reach below the bend into Wivenhoe, and rounded the little black buoy on the spit which runs out so far at that point. When we got to Wivenhoe we took up a berth near the Ferry Hard, but finding it rather inconvenient, we shifted over to a buoy nearly opposite, where we were less beset by small urchins in punts. There are lots of mooring buoys at Wivenhoe, made of huge chunks of water-logged wood, rather unwieldy, but still convenient for strangers. We changed our things and went on shore to look round, and see the yachts fitting out, and I took the opportunity of sending off by post the photographic plates which had been already exposed, for fear lest the sea air might be bad for their highly delicate constitutions; and then we asked some yacht hands who were loafing on the quay to tell us the name of the best hotel. They mentioned one

we had already looked at, and so we said it did not look much from an outside point of view, whereupon one of the three began to snarl and growl at us, saying it was "good enough for the dukes, earls and markisses wot came there," and how Lord So-and-so habitually used it, in preference to his own country house, until we mildly pointed out that we were ready to take his word that it might be all right within, and that he need not make such a fuss about it. We decided to try the inn in question, and found it first-rate inside. Moral: Don't always judge by exteriors. After a walk round the shore to see all the big yachts fitting out, we discovered a vessel we thought we knew, a barge-yacht, built by Gill, of Rochester, for winter shooting on the Norfolk Broads, and we held a parley with her genial and rotund skipper. She was a queer sort of a craft, like a huge box, but with any amount of cabin accommodation, judging again by exteriors; we noticed that she had discarded her sprit, and her skipper told us that it rolled about so in a sea way that they had been obliged to give it up, and have a gaff mainsail instead. He said she splashed about a lot in rough water, and wanted more canvas. We also saw a novel kind of dry dock there, made out of an old vessel's hull, and having a little steamer berthed snugly inside it.

We then went on to Rowhedge, where there are more yachts laid up, both old and new; and after dinner on shore we retired on board to sleep; we took the ground at our mooring for about an hour at low water, as the river runs nearly dry at that time; and next morning we made an early start soon after half ebb. It was an unpromising sort of day, cloudy, and looked like bad weather, so we jogged along under jib and mainsail, down the mouth of the river, and brought up under the weather shore of Mersea Island, opposite Brightlingsea, to wait and see how the day would turn out, and whether we could venture to try her back to Burnham, but it came on to blow so hard that at midday we had to run into Brightlingsea to wait for finer weather. There were three or four other yachts anchored near us, off Mersea Island, also waiting for better weather. The owner of one had his family on board, and by-and-bye the children all went ashore, in charge of one of the sailors, to run about and play, and we thought we couldn't do better than follow their example, as sailing was out of the question. This was Easter Sunday, and the little harbour at

Brightlingsea was crowded with yachts and craft of all sorts, and as we came in under jib and mizen we wondered where we should find a berth, but managed to pick a good one just inside by the ferry, close under the sand bank on the south side. This is the best place for holding ground, and it is more convenient for getting out again than any place further up the harbour. At the entrance to Brightlingsea, off the north shore, there is a long spit, conveniently marked when we entered by a barge aground on the point, and there is a mud flat opposite. There were lots of yachts in there that day, and all through the afternoon it blew harder and harder, so that we congratulated ourselves upon being safe in harbour, where we were well off, and were not trying to push her down to windward in the Ray Sand Channel, against the strong south-south-west wind; and it was fine fun to see the big yachts coming in or running up the Colne under small canvas, and to see how the crews of every yacht already inside were on the *qui vive* to see each new comer arrive; and how, when she was safe in and anchored, they once more all vanished below, out of the wind. A big North Sea dandy, from Grimsby, the *Protrude* (what a name!), came in and spent most of the afternoon in warping herself into a good berth, with ropes and anchors out in all directions; then a smack of about forty tons, with two fishermen and a party aboard, showed signs of making a start. As they lay quite close astern of us, with other vessels all round, we began to wonder how they would get out without going foul of something, for we lay close to the bank, and there was a biggish yacht, not far off, on our port quarter, and another on our starboard beam. However, with two reefs down, and spitfire jib set, they weighed anchor, and down they came towards us, their anchor only just off the ground, and two hands working frantically at the capstan, steering between us and the weather shore, where there was precious little room for them; we felt sure that their boom must go foul of our mizzen-mast, or that their anchor would pick up our chain, or that we should lose our bowsprit; but the man at the helm was on the watch, and sang out to his crowd to get in their mainsheet smartly, which they did only just in time to clear us, and soon she was beyond the shelter, and smashing out against wind and tide, with spindrift flying off like smoke all along her weather quarter.

The wind took off a good deal at sunset, but it was rather anxiously that we contemplated a tremendous westerly bank of clouds as we were turning in, for we wanted to make an early start next morning. However, the day broke beautifully fine, and the first to get out was a barge, laden with a haystack. We awoke just as she went slipping past us, in the grey of the morning, with her red sail gleaming in the early sun, and this was the signal for us to rouse and bitt, and we were very soon turning out in company with quite a fleet of fishing boats, all offering most tempting pictures for the camera. The crew of the *Teal,* however, were far too busy with making sail, stowing the Berthon in the cabin, coiling down spare warp, and cooking breakfast, and generally getting ready for a dusting outside, to think of snap-shot photography. Our thoughts were rather whether we should make our passage into the Crouch before it began to blow, as the mares' tails, interlaced all over the sky, threatened would be the case before the day was half over. However, with a nice south-south-west breeze, we tacked along past the Knowl Buoy into Swire Hole, and on by the North Buxey Buoy, into the Ray Sand Passage; judging it best not to try the Swin Channel, but to keep inside, and go home by the route we had followed on the outward journey. In the Ray Sand Passage we kept the lead going, and felt a glow of wicked satisfaction when we saw another little yacht, which had started from Brightlingsea with us, get ashore on the Ray Sand, just where it runs out flattest and farthest by the beacon, to stick there for an hour through neglect of the same precaution. Soon after getting into the Burnham River, there were some strong puffs from the southward, which gave us all we cared for under jib and mainsail, and when we neared the mouth of the Roach, we brought up under the weather shore for lunch, and to wait for water through the creeks, while a heavy squall came up and passed over. Up it grew, black as ink, with lightning and heavy rain, and hailstones; but we were in harbour, all snug under the weather shore, so could scramble below out of the rain, and peep out to enjoy the prospect, and see our consort catching it like fun out in the middle. By-and-bye, at half flood, we weighed again, and went on through the creeks to Havengore, with finer weather, doing the last mile in a heavy shower of hail and rain, but without much wind,



Smack Leaving Brightlingsea

and there we anchored against the shelf for the night. We had company that evening, for a Bawley boat, belonging to Benfleet, arrived soon after us. They had been with a cargo of cockleshells for the oyster grounds in the Roach, and were on their way home again; and, in the morning, we both started away together, and soon the *Teal* was once more trying to squeeze up Leigh Creek against an ebb tide, with the usual result of sticking fast half way. Benson was soon down on us, though; he was out rowing his punt in the creek with two small boys, and spied us, and came down to welcome us back after our stormy and squally, but capital cruise.

"Halloo, Benson, we couldn't manage the creek this time, you see; we took the wrong turning, I think."

"Ah! I'm werry glad to see you safe home again, this squally weather. Where were you yesterday, when that bad squall came over?"

"Oh ! we were all right. We had just got inside the Burnham River. Will you take the *Teal* in next tide? We want to get home; we haven't had breakfast yet, for we finished all our food last night." "All right, sir."

So we waded over the mud in our sea-boots, and were soon snugly anchored at the table of the Ship Inn, combining breakfast and luncheon in one solid, square meal, before starting back to town.