

CHAPTER 7

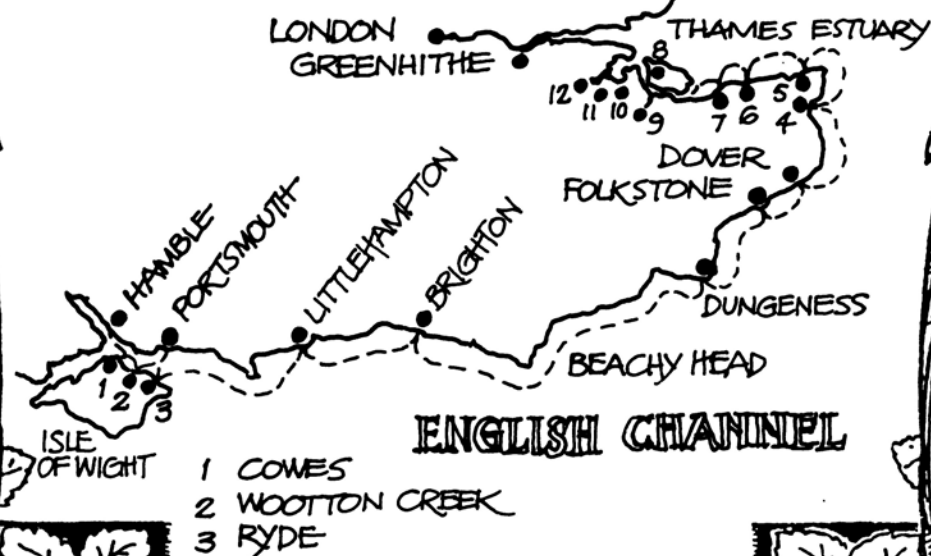
‘My Last Cruise in Cherub II’

ALBERT STRANGE HAD A GIFT for what might be styled ‘companionable writing;’ the ability to take the reader with him, in imagination, on his voyaging reminiscences. One of these experiences is related here, a cruise in the *Cherub II*, “My most beloved boat” as Strange described her in the article, which first appeared in *Yachting Monthly* in 1911.

We join the little yawl in the Solent, then set off up the Channel to round the Foreland and enter the mouth of the Thames, then into the Medway. Strange recalled his youthful pleasures on board the Gravesend sailing bawleys, one of the most revealing passages in his writings and one which is all the more interesting in that he had made a stowboating trip after sprats, in winter, which says much for his determination to see something of fishing under sail and its hardships. But why delay enjoyment? Let Strange tell the story.

- 4 RAMSGATE
- 5 MARGATE
- 6 HERNE BAY
- 7 WHITSTABLE
- 8 QUEENBOROUGH
- 9 SITTINGBOURNE
- 10 GILLINGHAM
- 11 CHATHAM
- 12 ROCHESTER

MY LAST CRUISE IN CHERUB II



PER MAKE PER LUMEN

My Last Cruise in Cherub II.

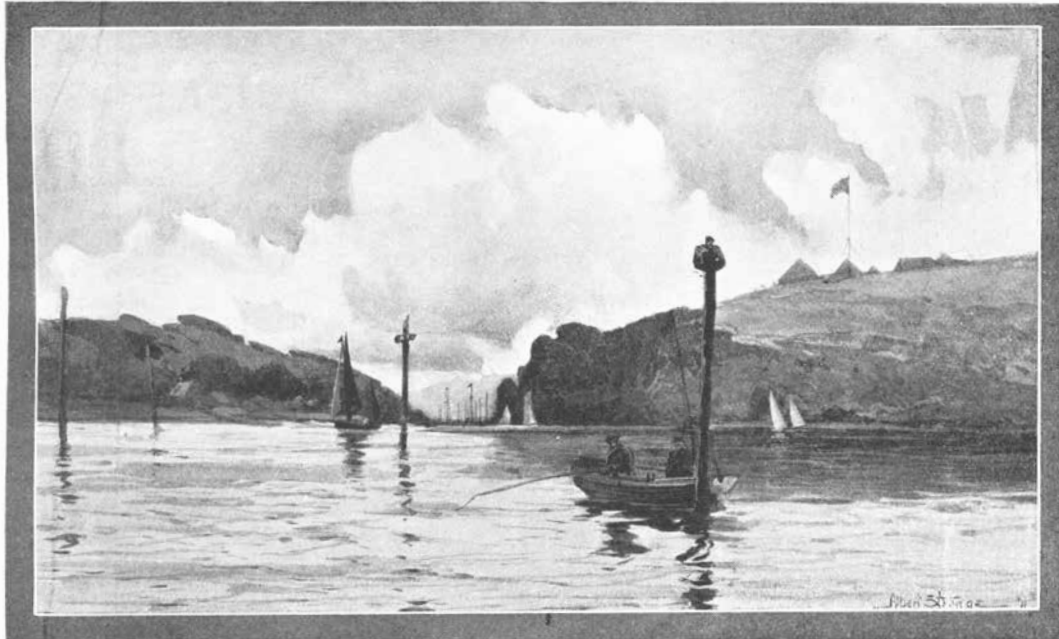
BY

ALBERT STRANGE.

WHEN a man has owned and parted with a good many different boats, each one leaves in the memory its own particular stories which are never forgotten. To turn over their old logs brings back vivid recollections of the days and nights spent happily in them at sea, and no ship that I have ever owned has left

only the shining hours remembered, there is no doubt in my mind that she thoroughly earned my affection and has thoroughly kept it.

I still wonder how I brought myself to part with her, even though my work compelled me to spend several successive long vacations on shore and away from the call



ENTRANCE TO WOOTTON CREEK.

more or happier memories than the little Humber yawl, whose doings in the North Sea have already been chronicled in these pages.*

She was such a good, dependable little creature, such a sea-boat for her inches, and, if you did not want to walk about below, gave such comfort and ease when the toils of day were over, that the affection she compelled has never been obliterated by her successors, and whatever allowances one has to make for the glamour of past days, in which all discomforts are forgotten and

of the sea. I suppose the truth was that I could not endure the idea of chartering her, and equally disliked the thought that she would have to spend several years in a shed, drying her life out, if I didn't, so she had to go, and not being of the same disposition as the Arab in the poem, who sold his steed and then sold the purchaser by running off with steed and purchase money too, I tore myself away from her charms and some other fellow made himself happy in her company.

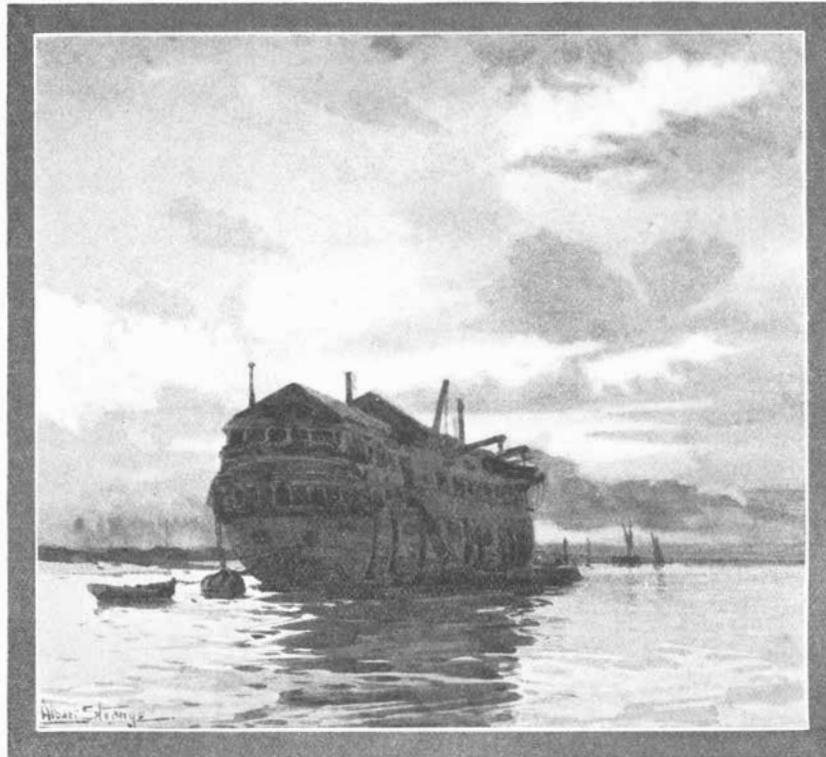
On this occasion, being bound to "the Wight," and the winds of Heaven being light and from the westward—time also

* February, 1908.

being precious—we sailed from Greenhithe (where Cherub had spent the winter in the Pier Master's shed) to the London Docks, and hoisted her on board the Lady Martin, bound for Ireland, but touching at Portsmouth on her way. Here we were put "over side," and as her ladyship's captain was in a vast hurry, all Cherub's ballast and belongings were dumped hastily on board, and we were left made fast to a buoy in a state of exasperating confusion which took some time to reduce to order.

until we could get our mooring. There is no doubt that in cruising in out-of-the-way places legs pay for their carriage, and enable one to attempt all sorts of spots in comfort that would otherwise not prove good berths. There were lots of little boats of a cruising type at this meet, as well as some that could only be called cruisers by stretching the truth to breaking point.

One in particular, a canoe called the Yankee, had exactly the same accommodation as a large meat dish—no more and no



A RELIC OF THE PAST.

As I had a real good shipmate for a "deckie" who was thoroughly *au fait* in all the details of canoe yawl work (did he not own one himself?) an hour or so put us all square, and with a light wind and a good ebb tide we were not long in getting over to Wootton Creek, where the B.C.A., now moribund, I think, if not quite dead, were camping and holding their annual meet.

We had been promised moorings, but they were not ready for us, so we put the yawl on shore on a sort of slipway. As she possessed legs she sat up quite comfortably and remained there for a couple of tides

less. The happy owner sat outside the boat on the end of a long plank when he was sailing, and with great agility shifted plank and himself to the other side of the canoe when she went about. The trick did not always come off, especially before the wind, and then the crew came off instead and performed other tricks of quite a protracted nature in the water before the voyage could be resumed.

I believe this sort of craft is now extinct, but it could sail at extraordinary speed so long as the skipper could keep himself on board. This gentleman, an American of

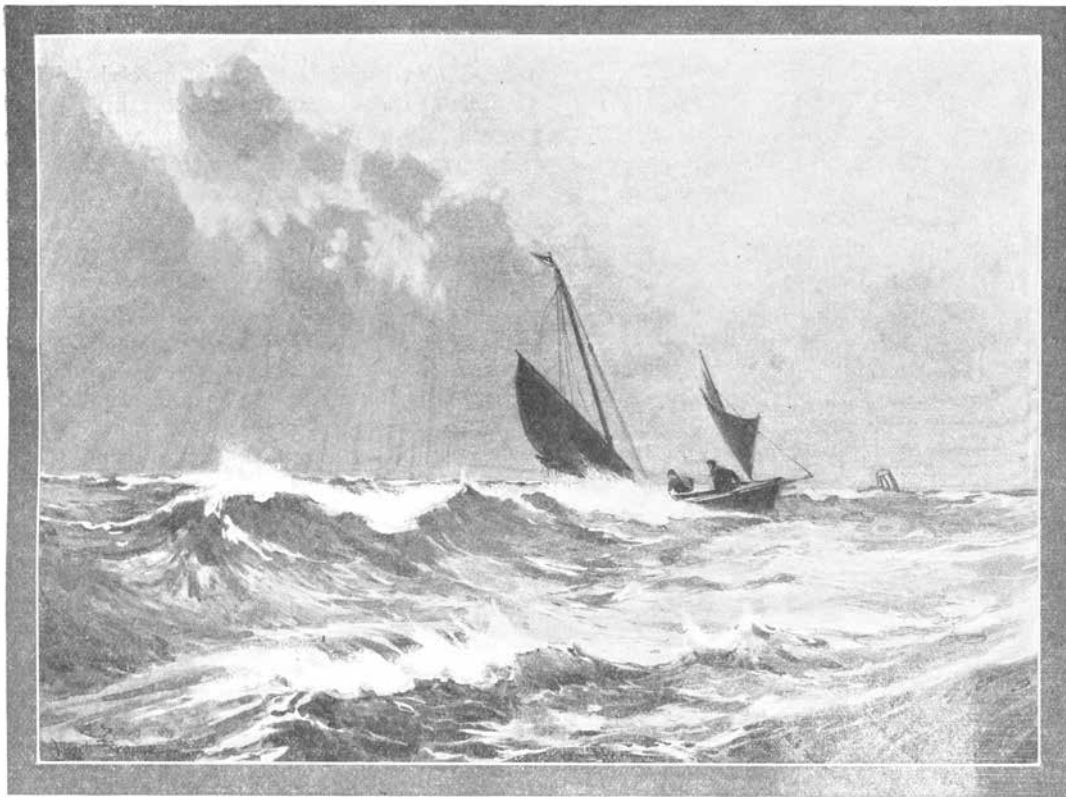
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most engaging speech and manners, lived in a tiny tent on shore. The canoe lived in a shed, and was much better housed than her owner. They were not often afloat, and though I was kindly offered the use of the Yankee for a spin outside, I must frankly confess I funked it, and refrained from gaining a new experience.

Before we left the slip we had the startling experience of a fire on board Cherub. Having carefully prepared a stew (I used to be famous for my stews) and left it on the stove

Fortunately, the boy who attended to the Club dinghy was near by, and being a youth of bright intelligence, managed to put the blaze out before running to tell us. We hurried to the spot, our hearts in our mouths, to find a blackened and charred stove locker, a burst bottle, and the stew pot simmering composedly, with its contents perfectly cooked. Small damage was done, but what a warning!

We ate our dinner amid a strong smell of burnt wood, but could not make up our minds



THE LOOE OVERFALLS.

peacefully bubbling, we went off to pay our call on the Officers of the Camp, forgetful of the evil nature of the stove, and also of the fact that a bottle of whisky, which, by some extraordinary means known only to itself had found its way on board, was concealed in close proximity to the stove.

Directly we had "turned the corner," so to speak, the stove must have indulged in one of its "flare-ups" and the heat caused that wretched bottle of destruction to burst and set its hiding-place on fire!

as to the apportionment of the blame. Were *we* to blame for leaving the stove unattended, was the stove to blame, or was the whole affair due to the wanton person who brought that bottle on board? The point has never been settled; but I have not, since then, left a stove going by itself.

After a few days cruising to Cowes, Ryde, Hamble, and the upper part of Portsmouth Harbour in the search for picturesque relics of the past, in the shape of old hulks of battle-ships, etc., we had a race amongst the

Association boats, at the conclusion of which *Cherub* arrived home in pride of place, but did not win a prize, as she had to give time to all except *Yankee*, who was delayed by "tricks coming off" when about half-way round.

There was only a nice whole-sail breeze, and could *Yankee* have been kept upright she would have beaten all by very many minutes, and had there been more wind *Cherub* would have collared the cup, as she always did best in a hard wind and with reefed canvas.

After the races the meet broke up, and we began to think about getting home to the Thames. So we went along to Ryde and lay at anchor to the westward of the Pier to wait for a slant. The weather had been very broken, with strong S.W. winds and plenty of rain, and a good many coasters were sheltering inside the Mother Bank. We dined on shore that night, and brought our filled-up water tins with us when we came on board, and next morning, on looking out early, we found the wind a little north of west. So we made an early start on the last of the ebb, and with a single reef sail soon drew out past the Warner on our course for the Looe Channel. Clear of the Island there was a large confused sea, not breaking, but very lumpy and irregular, and we went bundling along very happily, but with plenty of motion.

Astern of us was a small sloop of about 5 tons, which did not catch us (*Cherub* was hard to catch on this point of sailing), and remained about half-a-mile astern until we were not far from the entrance to the Looe.

Looking ahead, we were astonished to see right across the Channel, and beyond the Pullar Buoy, one long line of roaring, breaking seas, with no visible passage through. We were quite certain of our position, as both the channel buoys were visible with the binoculars. It is true that "King's Channel Pilot" states that the west entrance to the Looe is "barred by turbulent overfalls." But as it goes on to say that it can only be used by small vessels (and we were small enough in all conscience) the warning had not impressed us sufficiently.

As there was no way round, except by way of the Owers Lightship, and as the strong tide (at least 5 knots) was sweeping us very rapidly towards the breakers, we had to make up our minds quickly and

adopt the only course that seemed practicable, which was to lower the mainsail almost completely, so as to check the boat's speed and yet give steerage way, and let her go bow on to the seas towards which the tide was setting us at a greatly accelerated pace. She cleared the first line of breakers with a big leap, plunged bow under the second lot, which swept her fore and aft, though not much came into the well, smashed again in the next ridge of foam, rose and shook herself free, then staggered through the remaining curlers half smothered with foam, and suddenly shot into comparatively smooth water!

There seemed to be six or eight definite lines of breaking waves about seven feet high, very thin in the crests, and having no buoyancy in them. It was then about two hours flood, and may have been the hottest part of the tide, and the long confused Channel heave perhaps helped to make things unusually bad, but one would not have gathered from the sailing directions that quite such dangerous overfalls were to be encountered. The whole affair was over in what seemed to be quite a short time, and there being no more breakers in sight we again set our sail properly and turned our heads to see how our friend, the little sloop astern, was going to manage the passage.

Evidently alarmed at the breakers, and unwilling to face them, her skipper hauled his wind and stood in towards the "Dries" to the northward, the tide taking him bodily to leeward. The Dries is a very nasty shoal a mile from the shore, with many rocky heads and gravel patches, which at this time of tide would be barely covered. It was not long before we saw the little yacht strike the ground, and then down came her mainsail. She lay on her broadside, rolling horribly, with her headsail still set and driving her up the shoal.

Nothing is more distressing than to see a crew and vessel left helpless to their fate, and although the strong lee-going tide and the westerly wind were quite against our power to assist them, it seemed dreadful to sail away without making some attempt to help. At this moment we saw a fine sturdy cutter yacht of some five and twenty tons turning to windward in the slack of the Boulder Bank, and being ourselves somewhat to windward of her we reached off and

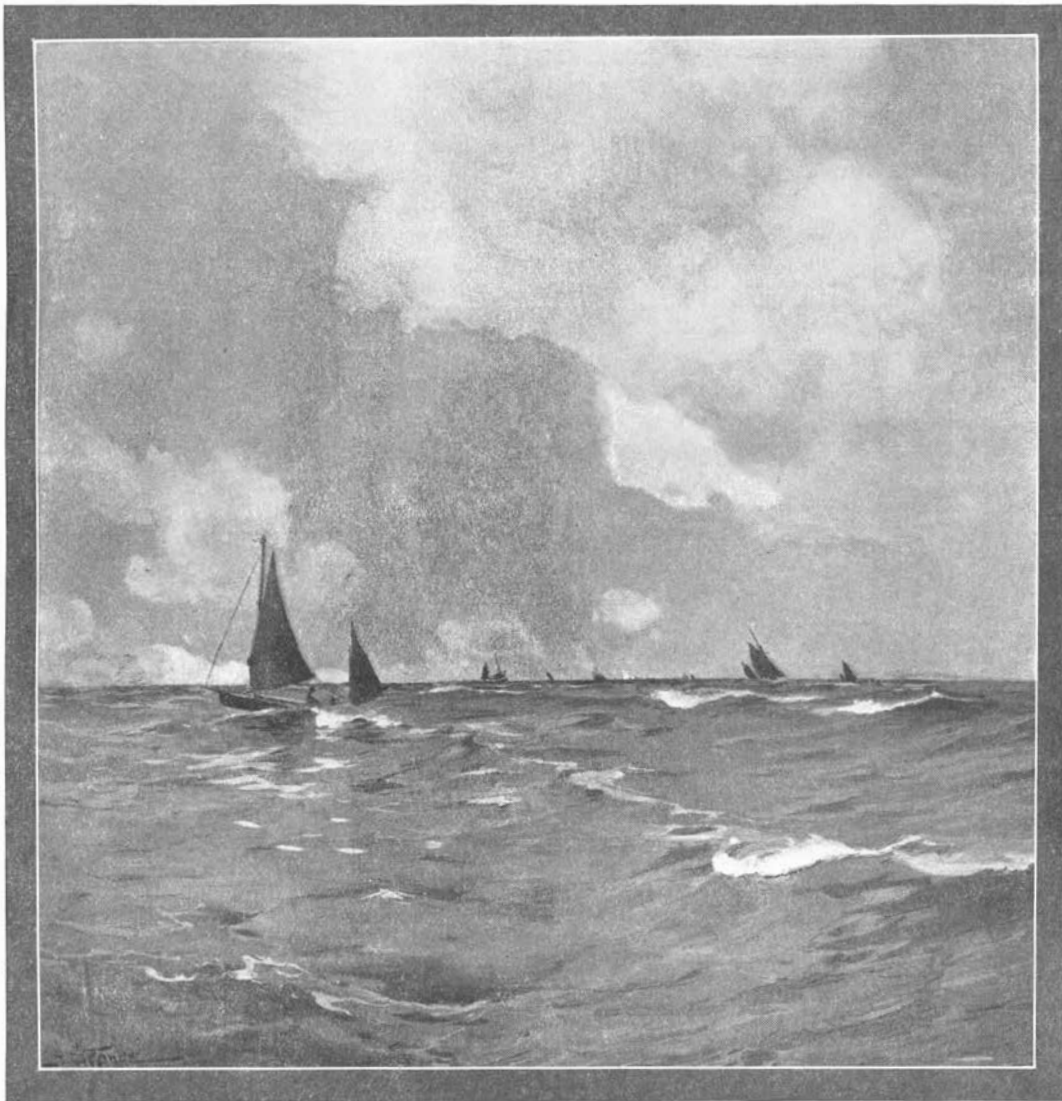
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hailed her skipper, telling him of the accident, which he must have observed, as one of the hands was standing on the weather sheer pole with binoculars to his eyes.

I asked him to stand in as near as he could and send his boat in, to which request he replied that he couldn't get near them with

the Boulder Bank, but which are unmarked by buoys and only known to the native.

We lingered about, vainly trying to turn over the tide to a position from which we could see better what was going on, but as we made good to windward less than nothing at all, and were by now abreast of the Mixon



RUNNING UP CHANNEL.

his yacht. He added that the crew of the stranded sloop had left in their own small boat, he thought, and that in all likelihood assistance would be sent from the shore. He then went about and stretched away to the S.W., evidently intending to use one of the three or four swatchways that intersect

Beacon, we reluctantly bore up and went on our way. After a time, looking astern through our glass, we saw what appeared to be the little sloop standing off the land to the south, still under single headsail only, bound for goodness knows where.

As we munched our biscuits and cheese

we agreed that the events of the morning had been sufficiently exciting for one day, and decided that we would go into Littlehampton instead of on to Shoreham, as we had at first intended.

But before we reached port we were to have one more unusual experience. Half-a-mile off Littlehampton pier end we were struck by a curious revolving sort of squall, into which the boat was luffed sharply. She luffed right round a complete circle, her lee deck well under, and then for a few moments was left almost becalmed.

Something odd and uncanny was evidently abroad to-day, so we took extra care when we sailed up the narrow entrance of the harbour to avoid the effect of the strong cross tide which runs athwart the piers. We

like that holy man of old, carried up to Heaven in that same whirlwind.

As the stove, since its attempt to burn the boat out, had been very troublesome, we sought out a tinker who we thought might perhaps be able to put it into a better frame of mind and spirit. But although when, after much difficulty found at home, he worked his will on it to the extent of three-and-sixpence, its moral betterment was very slight, though its outward appearance was much improved. It went no better, and my deckie, who regarded it with an amount of suspicion bordering on hatred, always alluded to it as "that devil."

Littlehampton we voted rather dull. I daresay it is much improved nowadays. The only object of real interest in the port



A SOLITARY BARGE.

were successful in getting comfortably up to a berth on the east side of the harbour, and as we were making fast a man on the wharf above said: "Did yer fall in with the whirlwind?"

On being told of the squall outside, he remarked: "'Ad it werry 'ard 'ere. It blowed the end o' that there barn in." We looked towards the place he pointed to, and sure enough, just across the harbour, there stood a sort of warehouse with one end completely gone, and all its interior visible.

We felt very glad that we hadn't had it quite so "'ard" as that, for had it struck us with the same force, our ability to withstand it seemed doubtful. We might have been blown clean out of the water, and

was the Pollywog, which lay just below us and had somehow found her way here from Milford Haven. She was beginning to show her years, too.

"Wunnerful fast boat she is," we were told. "Beats all the yachts along this 'ere coast." Very likely she did, but somehow we didn't feel inclined to swap.

We half expected to see the little sloop, whose adventures we had watched in the Looe, come into harbour before dark; but nothing like her appeared, nor could we ascertain anything about her. Her fate remains a mystery to this day.

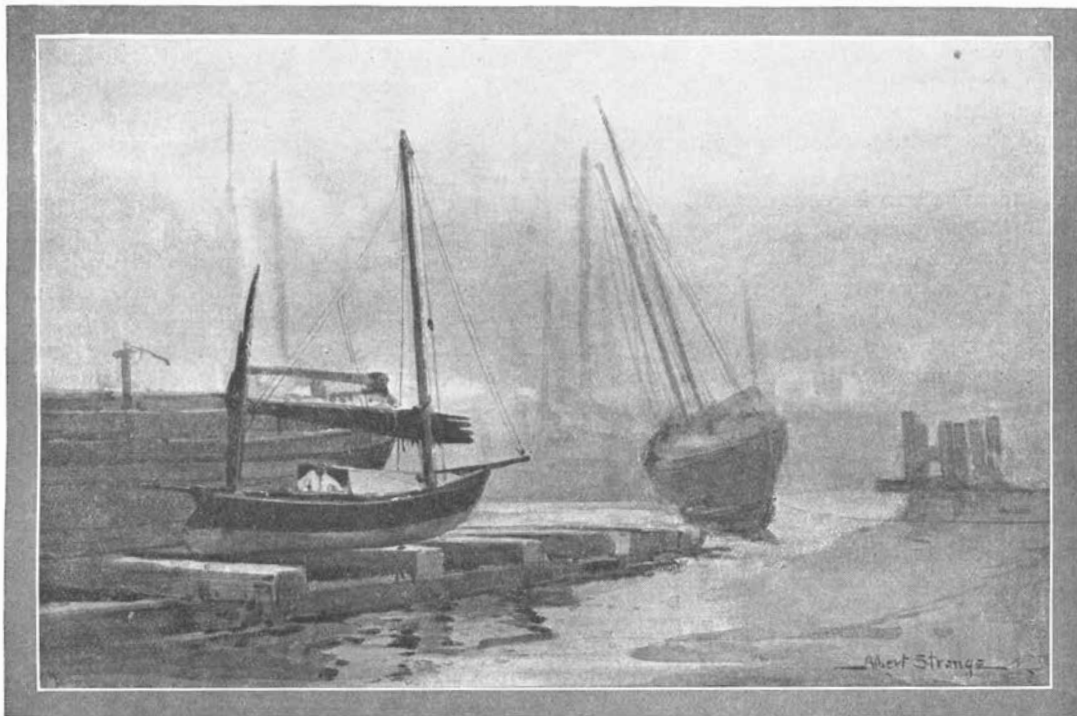
We turned into bed that night with some assurance from the look of the sky, that we should be able to resume our passage up Channel next day—which would be Sunday,

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a day I have invariably found an excellent one for making a passage.

Very early next morning we were out and about, and found a calm, and the ebb tide so far spent as to make it urgent to clear out as soon as possible. We found plenty of water over the bar, however, and we put her head eastward, crawling along over the ebb by the aid of a light air of wind from the N., which remained faint and fickle until we had almost reached abreast of Brighton after the flood had bent. Here it gradually backed and slowly strengthened into a fine hearty breeze from the S.W., which drove

itself felt, and the boat climbed the long slopes of the waves and clove through the tops with a rush. She seemed a brown-winged seabird, so easily did she run, with hardly a spray on deck, and her wake as clean as a knife-cut. Half-way across the bay the wind freshened still more, and she began to over-run the seas, almost half her length forward seemed clear of the water when she lifted above the curling crests. So it was "snug down" to two reefs whilst there was time, yet still she ran fast and dry. The land now looked far off and we passed many craft, like ourselves under shortened



ON THE GRIDIRON, FOLKESTONE.

our little ship along merrily. The fair wind and tide soon brought us up to Beachy Head, whence we laid our course for Dungeness and soon began to leave the land.

Never have the crew of *Cherub* had a more glorious sail than this grand run up Channel. Clear and deep blue was the sky overhead, with warm tinted companies of marching clouds steadily travelling eastward. The sea, dark toned with Homer's purple, broke here and there into small crisp curls of foam. When the west going tide strengthened, a steady growing heave made

canvas, turning to windward. We were in a world of our own—a world of deep blue, and wine tinted purple, flecked with flashing whites of foam and ruby red sails, through which poured the vigour of the glorious wind, bringing strength and laden with life. How such a day stamps itself on the mind! Years have passed, yet this day still lives in my memory with as clear a vision as if it were yesterday.

Towards evening we drew near to Dungeness, running close in to the shore, where there seemed less sea. Just outside us, but

still close in, there passed a naval cruiser, swiftly tearing through the sea on her way eastward. She was making extremely wet weather of it, spray flying aft in a continuous stream. The officer on duty peered at us through his glass, and her oilskin-clad crew gazed with grins—I daresay envying us our drier ship, yet in all likelihood wondering why men went to sea for pleasure in a craft no bigger than a jolly boat.

We luffed round the Ness into smoother water, and spoke a solitary barge brought up under its shelter. Bargee "allowed" it wasn't far off low water, and advised Folkestone for us for the night. We had half thought of making Dover, but my deckie was tired and I was getting tired too, and Dover was voted too far off. So we ran on again, seeming to go slower in the gathering gloom, and it was after dark when we luffed round the end of Folkestone Pier and made fast to a buoy to wait for water to go inside, and meanwhile to prepare our evening meal.

The stove was amiable and the oxtail soup grateful, though no amount of fenders or highly decorative language from the deckie kept Cherub from thumping against the buoy in the uneasy ground swell. About 10 p.m. we groped our way inside in dense darkness, made fast to a species of barge, and gladly lay down to rest after a really wonderful run of 75 miles in 15 hours. Not so bad for a boat under 18 ft. water line and with 10 hours foul tide against her.

I had been inside Folkestone harbour before, but only as a steamboat passenger, so the place was quite unknown to me. Towards morning, about dawn, the wind freshened very much, and I was awakened by the violent trembling of the boat in the strong gusts. Looking out I was horrified to find that we were on a big wooden grid-iron, the boat being delicately poised on one of the timbers where her legs fortunately rested. The fore and aft parts of the boat were quite unsupported.

There was nothing at all that could be

done—movement was out of the question—and I could only gently wake the sleeping deckie and warn him that if he snored at all violently the boat would fall off her perch and be smashed up.

I spent the time until 9 o'clock in a futile endeavour to sleep, the deckie still slumbering on peacefully. When the tide flowed round her again we set about getting breakfast, then shifted our berth, but not before offering up praise and thanks to the particular marine Deity that had watched over us whilst we slumbered, and had seen to it that our legs had rested on the exact and proper spot. If they had failed to do this, what would have happened was too horrible to contemplate!

That day it blew a gale, and with the wind from that quarter (S.W.) we found Folkestone Harbour a most uncomfortable place. There was a heavy range all over the part in which we were moored, and before grounding the boat ran up and down the hard shingle of the bottom in a most alarming manner. We feared that small stones would work in between the centreplate and the keel and so jam it fast.

Steamers lying against the piers ground their fenders to pieces with horrid squeaks and groans, and every craft in the place seemed to have shore ropes out in all possible directions and to every available bollard. In a gale of wind S.W. Folkestone is not an ideal harbour for small craft, and we had no peace until the tide had ebbed a long way.

But we made the best of it—thoroughly cleaned up below, wrote our letters, and wandered through the town. By nightfall the wind had lessened considerably, and the sky had cleared here and there in deep blue patches spangled with stars, giving promise of a fine day's passage on the morrow if the still vexed sea had been sufficiently run down by the strong tides of this part of the Channel.

(To be continued.)