

LIFE ON A RAFT.

Men and Methods Formerly Seen in Daily Life.

The days of rafting on the Mississippi have gone to join the days of romance, says a writer in a late issue of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. Progress has pushed this business with a great many other slow, but sure, and good things to the wall, and steam machinery sings a monotonous lullaby above its cradle. More white pine comes to this market now from the Wisconsin, Black and Chippewa rivers than ever before, and if the process of getting here was the same as in the early days the grand army of raftsmen, instead of being reduced to almost insignificant proportions, would be as magnificent in its numbers as are the ranks of other industries that have maintained their own against the march of invention. The good old days when rafting was much lower than it is now, will be recalled by many. Those were darling times, as the boys say. Men followed rafting as a regular business, and experience was as necessary as in any other line of skilled work in which a man might embark. A good rafter knew the river like a pilot and was as much at home in its channel as a red dog is under a kitchen stove. Life in the lumber camps and on the rolling wave, was full of its plea-



PULLING INTO THE CHANNEL.

sure, and even the hours of toil were spent spinning along on the wheels of music and song. There was lots of fun in the business, and the girls along the shore had their little romances to tell as the fleets went by—romances just like those girls on land can tell.

The same old story, that has been told before, for one heart will trust and another will fall. Until time and change shall be more. The history of those days and nights are left in pleasant rhymes, rattling stories and gleesome songs—some printed and some carried around in the shape of traditions—that once gladdened the hearts of thousands of rafters. As has been said, rafting was slower then than now. It took over two months to bring a fleet of lumber in those times from Wisconsin to St. Louis, where now it takes but two weeks, and of course it was necessary to beguile the hours with pleasures of a popular sort. Every fleet had its fiddler who could scrape out a break-down and play "Rye Straw," the "Rocky Roads," "Haste to the Wedding," and so on; its warblers who filled the moonlight night with glorious song; and its story-tellers, always primed to the chin with yarns that raised a laugh and made hearts happy. The saga of those days are replete with the genuine poetry that belongs to simplicity and to nature's children, and the history of the



THE COOK'S CASTLE.

period, if written by some scribe with a Mark Twain vein of humor and a Herodotian fidelity

to facts, would make as readable a book as any press ever turned out. The story of rafting on the Mississippi is interesting in every detail. The first recorded arrival of a raft of white pine lumber at St. Louis was in the spring of 1840. The raft was run by twenty men, contained 800,000 feet, and was the first raft to reach here from the vast lumber regions of Wisconsin. The fleet came from near the mouth of the Wisconsin river, and was thirty-five days in making the trip. The history of rafting on the Mississippi, however, antedates this period. It goes back to 1831-32. In those days all the rafting was done within 300 miles of the city. E. O. Shephardson, possibly one of the oldest Mississippi river raft pilots, gives it as his opinion that the first lumber raft arrival at St. Louis was in the spring of 1835. He describes the raft as having been 100 feet in length, 30 feet wide, and carrying 150,000 ft. The lumber was yellow pine, cut and rafted in the Gasconade river, about 125 miles from the mouth. The distance from there to St. Louis was 250 miles, and the time required to make the run was seven days. Up to 1840 the principal lumber arriving here in rafts was yellow pine and hard woods. From 1835 to 1840 the receipts ranged anywhere between 1,500,000 to 3,000,000 feet per week.

In 1840 the receipts of white pine lumber aggregated 3,000,000 feet. The rafting business from that time on, had a most remarkable growth, and the following two years numerous saw-mill men of the North followed the example of the pioneer raftsmen, and the result was that hundreds of men were furnished with work in the new field, and the upper river was continually filled, in season, with moving rafts. In 1842, two years after the arrival of the first fleet of white pine lumber, the receipts aggregated 75,000,000 feet, which gives a well defined idea of the rapid increase in the interest. The growth continued with each season until 1860, when the rafts landed 200,000,000 feet of white pine lumber at the North St. Louis landings. During the four years following there was a slight interruption, the result of the civil war. The urgent demand for lumber, however, during that bloody period, brought many new capitalists into the business, and some of them retired after the war with large fortunes. From 1865 to 1872-73 the raftsmen saw their best days. In 1866 the Schulenburg & Boeckeler Lumber Company invented a patent steam wind-lash, which enabled a steamboat to handle a raft of from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 feet. This invention brought with it a great reduction in the cost of running a raft, reduced the danger of wrecking it, and also reduced the number of men required to handle it. The *Mollie Whetmore* was the first steamer to attempt to run a raft in this way and she proved a success. Other steamers followed in the business, and last summer there were 100 boats employed in the trade, the aggregate value of which is put down at \$1,000,000.

The average raft boat carries a crew of eighteen, which includes the mate and captain. A good stout raftboat is able to push a fleet containing as much as 3,500,000 feet of lumber. To move this vast quantity of lumber by rail, would require seven trains of fifty cars each. The time necessary to tow such a raft from La Crosse, Wis., 700 miles north, to St. Louis, is generally fourteen days, although runs have frequently been made in less time. Nearly all the white pine lumber received in St. Louis comes from Wisconsin, Black and Chippewa rivers. The rafting season opens in the spring as soon as the ice runs out. The first raft of the season from the Upper Mississippi usually arrives here at the beginning of May, and the season winds up about November 15th. The local



CAPTAIN OF RAFT.

season, however, has been known to extend into December. With the advent of raft boats, the days of floating rafts reached their end, and the business to day compared with its former greatness is but a shadow, there being very few floating rafts now seen. Where it formerly required two months' time and thirty-five men to run a raft from Wisconsin to St. Louis, a steamer now does the work in fourteen days, with the aid of eighteen

men, thereby reducing the cost more than out of all. In the best days of floating rafts, the cost of running one from Reel's Landing or Stillwater to St. Louis, would reach as high as \$6,000.

From 1865 to 1870 lumber rafts were frequently taken as far South as Memphis and Vicksburg. Now not more than two rafts in a year go south of St. Louis, and these only as far as St. Mary's and Chester. The longest distance ever run by a raft on the Mississippi, was from La Crosse, Wis., to New Orleans. The trip was made in 1870, and this lumber raft was the only one that ever went to New Orleans from the Upper Mississippi. The fleet was made up of ten strings, or about 1,100,000 feet. It was owned by the Gruener Brothers Lumber Company, and was valued at \$30,000. Mr. E. O. Shephardson, at present raft superintendent of the Ganahl Lumber Company, piloted the fleet as far out as Vicksburg, where a Lower Mississippi River pilot took charge. The run from La Crosse to New Orleans was made in ten weeks. There are eight regular raft boats coming to this port which bring in each season about 150,000,000 feet. This does not include what outside steamers tow in here, which swells the figures to 200,000,000 feet. The principal lumber landings are located in North St. Louis, and take in the principal part of the wharf from North Market street to Blair's point. The landings are controlled by the Knapp, Stout & Co. Company, Eau Claire Lumber Company, Gruener Brothers Lumber Company, Henry Lange, the Schulenburg & Boeckeler Lumber Company and I. G. Buckley. The landing in the southern part of the city is in charge of the Ganahl Lumber Company.

These are dry details that do not by any means suggest the departed greatness of the days of floating rafts. The captain of a fleet was, as it were, monarch of all he surveyed. He was the political, religious and civic boss of the men in his employ, and he lorded it over them in a majestic, but, at the same time, quite a humane way. Usually a man of magnificent build, the shagginess of his exterior gives no idea of the bigness of his heart. Heavy booted, top-booted, and filled with the bracing health of the pluries, his presence inspired awe for the moment, but as soon as his mouth opened and the pleasantness of his career month fall upon the ear, the feeling of sublimity gave way to one of admiration, and soon he held your heart in his hand. There were, of course, some rough captains in the old days, but they have quite perished out of memory, and only the agreeable characters remain behind.

There were many exciting times in the lives of the old raftsmen. When they made the shoot of the rapids there was danger in their positions, but just like the men who court death in the log booms, these old chaps braved any danger, and their days and nights were often full of the enthusiasm and excitement that are born of the proximity of trouble. There were not, as a matter of fact, many such thrilling experiences as that related by the literary liar who wrote the "Pike County Folks," but there were some almost equally as interesting. Shooting the rapids was frequently the least dangerous of their exploits. Pulling the channel or steering shy of a bridge, calls for as much care and coolness of nerve as any other effort put forth by the raftsmen. The forward sweeps had to be



CREW OF CUBINE.

worked with great skill, as the slightest error of judgment or misapplication of strength might prove fatal to the rafter and injurious to the fleet. The cook was the canonized saint of the



THE LAST LOG.

party. The sound of his dinner gong was sweet and welcome to the raftsmen's ear, and it always got a kind greeting from an overwhelming appetite. The cook's hut, with its V shape, its smoking stove-pipe and bough-trimmed apex—the temple in which about the only worship the rafters knew took place. Here they worshipped three times a day regularly. The culinary high priest took pleasure in tickling the palates of his devotees, and when at work, whether peeling potatoes on the shady side of his hut, or stirring the huge pots of boiling meat, kept their individual and collective tastes in view, and tried to make the meals and meal hours pleasurable to all. The time passed so agreeably that it was really felt to be a moment of sadness when "breaking-up" came and the rafts were picked to pieces, to be piled away in the lumber yards. Then there came the partings for awhile, often for ever, for in the early days raftsmen were as human as men are now and had their frailties. Whisky often brought on fights, and then the knife and pistol came into play. Many a rafter died a violent death, and the story of his taking off furnished gossip on future trips for those who had known and associated with the unfortunate fellow.

THE LUMBER BUSINESS IN THE OTTAWA VALLEY.

Enormous Output of Square Timber and Sawed Lumber.

Our excellent contemporary the *Ottawa Free Press*, has the following exhaustive article on the lumber industry of the Ottawa Valley:—The leading commercial industry of the Ottawa district is of course the making of square timber and the taking out and manufacturing of lumber of all kinds. A moderate estimate of the capital invested in the lumbering business throughout the watershed of the Ottawa places the figure at sixty million dollars, though some practical authorities place it as high as seventy and seventy-five millions. It may safely be said that the amount of capital invested in the lumbering industry in the Ottawa valley, is almost if not quite equal to the whole of the capital invested in manufacturing in the Dominion. The principal properties or assets of the firms engaged in lumbering are timber limits—that is areas of natural or standing wood, saw mills, improvements on rivers and streams to facilitate log driving, stocks of lumber on hand, piling grounds, and machinery. The area of timber limits under license on the Ottawa and its tributaries in Quebec province is 9,732 square miles and in Ontario 7,153 square miles. The dues upon these limits payable to the provincial governments of Ontario and Quebec are collected at the Crown timber office, the district tributary to that office including the counties of Ottawa and Pontiac in Quebec, and all the territory situated in Ontario, drained by streams falling into the Ottawa. On the Ontario limits within this territory, there were cut, during the season of 1885, saw logs to the amount of 241,000,000 feet broad measure which with about 255,000,000 feet from the province of Quebec furnished material for the employment of some thousands of men and teams in the woods and saw mills and on the rivers. In addition to the saw logs about twenty