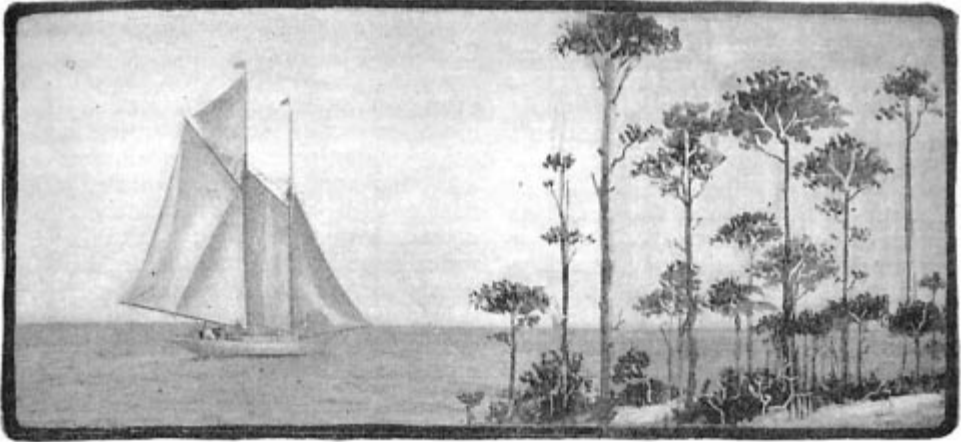


TWILIGHT 'WAY DOWN SOUTH.—THE OYSTER FLEET BELOW NEW ORLEANS.



PLEASURE YACHTING 'WAY DOWN SOUTH.

BY LORILLARD DUDLEY SAMPELL.

"And the health-seeker findeth there
The wine of life in the pleasant air."

"WAY down south" roll the blue waters of a jocund sounding sea called the Gulf of Mexico, praised in song and story as the Mediterranean of the Western continent. Providence tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; nature likewise has placed this great body of water, with its cooling influence upon the adjacent land, where otherwise might have been an arid, scorched and useless plain, and has made what tropic land the continent has vastly more inhabitable. Beautiful in reality are the bordering States, as all the world knows, "the land of flowers," "the land of perpetual sunshine," "the land of orange blossoms," or what you will. Few there are aware of the added zest, and how much more enchanting are the variety of attractions and the exceeding novelty afforded by a cruise along these lovely shores. Tinged with a spirit of romance, perfumed by day by the reoccurring zephyrs from far-away tropic isles, cooled by the refreshing and equally sure northerly land breeze by night, 'tis little wonder those who have been fortunate enough to voyage along this arm of old ocean speak of it in the highest terms; and when it is considered that this is no stern and rock-bound coast, that there are no perceptible tides nor treacherous currents to guard against, that fierce storms are rare, except at two well-defined periods

of the year, the equinoxes (about March 21st and September 23d), and that the winds, as a general thing, are soft and mild to brisk, those familiar with its nooks and corners will be pardoned for declaring them the safest and best waters on the globe for the pleasure of the amateur sailor.

Curving parallel to the green shores of the States of Mississippi and Louisiana, barely within sight upon the horizon, there is a string of low-lying islands. Behind this "nature's breakwater," and separated thereby from the gulf proper, is Mississippi Sound, an ideal place for boating, much frequented by the habitués of the adjacent coast resorts, and forming with Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne and Mobile Bay, the cruising ground of Mobile and New Orleans yacht sailors; the latter city being the Southern center of yachting, that essentially outdoor sport and most healthful and pleasant of all recreative pastimes.

The western end of Mississippi Sound extends well into the State of Louisiana, and there forms a sort of bay, which is called Lake Borgne. West of Lake Borgne, and connected by a narrow strait called the Rigolets, is Lake Pontchartrain.

At West End, a suburb of New Orleans, situated on the south bank of Lake Pontchartrain, is located the Southern Yacht Club, the second oldest organization of the kind in the country. It was formed by a few enthusiasts in 1849, has grown steadily and is now one

of our leading clubs. It has a membership of over 300, and has enrolled quite a large fleet of pleasure craft.

On one of this fleet we went out on a jolly roving commission over these sunny Southern seas.

The moving spirit, and the senior in years as well as affairs nautical, a characteristic Southern yachtsman, was playfully dubbed "Old Sport." This was not from any gambling proclivities of the seemingly prematurely gray and grizzled salt, but because of his love for the water and his wonderful skill and endurance either upon or in it. For twenty years he has spent his leisure hours upon the wave, and many there are who have, literally speaking, "learnt the ropes" from him and at the same time added lustre to the eye, tone to the system, and suppleness and strength to the body just as he has. The second member of the party was the whole-souled and genial owner of the yacht, whom we shall name "The Commodore." Then comes one called the "Cincinnati Sailor," and that fitted his case exactly; not that he hailed from the Queen City, but because he was not well versed in nautical ways, and that term being a phrase of familiar banter. Another member was the frisky and effervescent "O. B. Joyful," who, with the assistance of the good-natured Old Sport, was the life of the party.

All told we were indeed a congenial company. A fellow-feeling made us wondrous kind; the cruise was taking us away from the madding crowd, afforded rare possibilities for fun and frolic and fresh air, was a long, lingering, free and easy holiday, and one capable of adding new life to every man jack of us.

Our yacht, the *Ellen N.*, was 45 feet on the water-line, 60 feet on deck, 17 feet beam, and drew $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet of water. She was a schooner, that is the popular and best rig (two masts) for an all-round family boat, the divisions of the sails making them safer and easier handled with less men than a sloop (one mast) with its tremendous and heavy mainsail. And then, if it should come on to blow, instead of heaving to and reefing, all that is required is to lower away something and keep on with reduced canvas as long as sailing is expedient.

We stepped aboard our trim and tidy boat, anchored off the Southern Yacht

Club-house, at five o'clock. Our hearts were as light as those of a troop of children just let loose from school. Each member was assigned a locker, and was soon busily overhauling and stowing away his own particular duffle. Guns, fishing rods, and an endless assortment of tackle were displayed in taking attitudes round about the cabin, and seamen's sou'westers, oil coats and Havre shirts were laid conveniently away in case of wet weather. As we bedecked ourselves out in go-as-you-please manner and inspected the sinews of war, we were truly in a splendid mood.

At this juncture Mr. "O. B. Joyful," who, being the most active member of the party, had finished his toilet first, gave his jaunty, sailor-knot necktie a dainty and finishing adjustment with thumb and forefinger of the left hand; and having settled a rather respectable-looking hat down upon his locks with both palms, he smiled to himself, threw his head back with a "just-my-fit" air, and jocularly opened a conversation that was just about as profound and wise as are those of the average party of pleasure-seekers enjoying complete surcease from business cares.

"Well, gentlemen," began O. B. J., "here we are, all hunky-dory aboard, and our bonny embodiment of buoyant grace is impatiently champing her bit, as 'twere, waiting for the word to be off;" and in sing-song voice he added: "O, let your hearts be light and free, for soon we'll lightly bounding be o'er the briny blue billowy. How's that—?" "Whose *hat?*?" sarcastically interrupted the Old Sport; "it is safe to wager that it don't belong to you."

"Now, fellows," interposed the Commodore, "you are all pretty well at home here; don't anybody stand on ceremony, and all I have to say is, if you don't see what you want, hunt for it."

The sails were soon set, the Commodore took his place at the wheel, and we "Heave, ho, Heave hoed," on the windlass until we had pulled up to the anchor, when at the cry "Cables up and down, Commodore," the Commodore quickly gave the command, "Break 'er out; up with the jib, and yank that mud hook inboard; lively there." The sails ceased their flapping and bellied to leeward, the booms followed to the left, the yacht filed, away on the star-

board tack, and as we slid away, "boom" went a *bon-voage* gun from the clubhouse, and "bang" went our parting salute bomb as an echo, and we were off. Sheets were trimmed, and sheets, halyards, and other ropes coiled down and made tidy, when the Commodore, casting his critical eye aloft, sang out, "A couple of you who signed the articles with your marks as able-bodied seamen, trice up the peak of that fore-gaff, and two more of you give her some more centreboard; move lively there, now, and we'll put up those kites directly." We were off!

The nose-pole of the *Ellen N.* was pointed directly for the mouth of the Tchefuncta River, twenty-two miles to the north. The wind was light, about southeast, and we sailed along lazily with every stitch of canvas set, and had soon settled down into comfortable positions prepared to enjoy the beauties of the declining day. The sun had set, blazing red, in all the regal beauty peculiar to southern latitudes, and the after-glow on the southwestern horizon presented one of those peerless displays of color, a veritable sailor's delight, a red sunset.

The twilight hour found us mostly silent and observant of the splendors of sea and sky. Then came the dusk, that time in the country when all nature sinks to rest; but now upon the broad expanse of the dark and silent waters the solemnity is infinitely more impressive and grand to him who loves the moods of Nature for herself. As the light of day fades, the reposeful waste of waters becomes darker in color, grows colder looking, seems farther below, and, if possible, becomes more quiet and monotonous still. There is hush and softness in the wind. The graceful contour of the reaching and rigid sails and the gentle ripple of the waters from the rudder showed that the wind was still constant and that we were moving; and the faint but perceptible pressure on the cheek when brought to the proper angle, or the cooling of that side of the lip-dampened and upheld finger told the practiced sailor that the wind was yet from the southeast. 'Twas but the dying breath of the "day breeze" now giving way to the night or "land breeze." One puff more, and it was gone.

"Whew! Good-bye," said the Old Sport, breaking the silence with a long-

blown breath and making a "shooing" motion with the arms in the direction of the fallen wind, "but be sure and be back in the morning."

As the yacht lost all perceptible motion and the sails swung inboard and lifeless, we roused ourselves from our reverie. The Commodore left the steering wheel to shift for itself, and the crew occupied the next half hour in lurching, star-gazing, and importuning and propitiating the patron saint of the wind, which consisted in "whistling for a breeze," "scratching the mast," or in repeating the superstitious Spanish sailor's supplication, "Blow, San Antonio, blow!"

Sure enough, in the next few moments a phenomenon true to the teaching of physical geography took place—the night breeze came blowing from the opposite direction to which the day breeze had gone. Ever so light at first, the sheets were trimmed, the great sails filed over to the opposite side, the breeze came on, and the yacht picked up her heels and skipped merrily along, being close-hauled on the port tack. The anchor was cast just to the eastward of the mouth of the Tchefuncta River, and all hands turned in.

We were up early the next morning, had breakfast, and taking the two yawls the party proceeded on an exploring and sketching expedition up the river. The Tchefuncta vies with the St. John's River, Florida, in beauty. An excursion in a steamer across the lake and up this narrow stream's bewooded, tangled and overhung shores is a very popular day's outing from New Orleans. Our row between its umbrageous banks presented an ever-changing vista of scenic grandeur. It has a typical semi-tropic growth, the tall, wide-spreading live-oak with the pendant Spanish moss predominating. The foliage overhead was alive with bird-life; fish ever and anon flashed their white and glistening sides to the sun; alligators and turtles sported in the water or basked on logs in the midday sun, and solemn and silent cranes were passed standing like sentinels along the farther shore. The seclusion reminded one of the catastrophe of *Ophe-lia*, many a spot on the river's placid and shallow shores meriting the lines:

"There is a willow grown aslant a brook
That shows his hoar head in the glassy stream."

Half past eleven, the dinner hour,



"THE HAUNT OF DEER AND WILD TURKEY."

found us back aboard the yacht, and at one o'clock we said adieu to the romantic river and sailed down the lake shore to Mandeville. This is one of the most popular, north shore pine-woods resorts. We went ashore, paid a call or two, and at half-past three o'clock sail was made

and the yacht headed for the north draw of the Queen and Crescent Railroad bridge. Sailing down through a breezy afternoon, with a free sheet and every inch of sail pulling its pound, we approached the bridge only to find the draw closed for repairs. The yacht was



UP THE TCHEFUNCTA RIVER.

luffed up, and we started to beat down close-hauled for the opening at the other end of the bridge. At dusk we passed through the south draw, just in advance of a fleet of working schooners and sloops, that every afternoon sail in company from New Orleans to the eastward.

The *Ellen N.* was put wing-and-wing, or dead, before the wind, and sailed on, with the red and white lanterns on the bridge, the green and red sailing-lights of the boats astern, and the fixed red light of Pointe-aux-Herbes' lighthouse on the starboard quarter looking cheerful in the distance. We steered a little to the south to keep off a shallow place called the "middle ground," and within the next two hours were abreast of the lighthouse at the western entrance of the Rigolets. The Rigolets, *i. e.*, passage, is a narrow strip of water connecting Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne, and is nine miles long, from one-half to three-quarters of a mile wide, and ninety feet deep in some places. Near its western end stands Fort Pike, old and deserted, but bringing up many memories of the past. In olden times, before the railroads were built, a fine line of steamers plied between New Orleans and Mobile. When a boat neared this point on the route, everybody was on deck to take a look at the historic old Fort Pike.

At about nine o'clock, when half-way through the Rigolets, the wind became very feeble, and then entirely deserted us. The tide was running against the

yacht, and as we were in no hurry it was thought best to come to anchor for the night. Accordingly, the anchor was dropped overboard, the sails were furled, the anchor light hung up and all hands turned in.

Sail was made an hour before sun-up the next morning, and we bowled along on our voyage with a spanking southeast breeze that was good for seven or eight knots an hour. We sailed by the mouth of a narrow pass, the entrance of Lake Catherine, extending down to the south

from the Rigolets, and also upon the same side passed an opening where the Little Rigolets, as it is called, branches off from the main stream. Almost opposite, upon the north shore, is West Pearl River, whose muddy waters spread a way from its mouth in a perfect arch; the line between the discolored river water and the dark blue of the Rigolets is distinctly defined, there being apparently no blending of the two waters.

Our objective point this morning was



"RIP" THE HUNTER IN LOUISIANA.

the Rigolets Rod, Reel and Gun Club-house, near the south end of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad bridge. We anchored off the club-house and took breakfast with several of the club's hospitable members, whom we joined in a day's sport. There are a dozen or more of the fishing and hunting clubs of New Orleans' sportsmen located in this vicinity. Game is plentiful, and all kinds of fishing in both fresh and salt water are afforded by lake, lagoon, river and bayou. As far to the south as the

eye can see is salt marsh, the breeding-ground of innumerable waterfowl, and a few miles to the north are the haunts of deer, bear and wild turkey. In the game list, in addition, the product of sea, marsh, forest and prairie, are wild duck, geese, marsh-hens, rails, woodcock, snipe, grouse, quail, ricebirds and *papabottes*. In fish, all embraced in the category—good, gamy and edible; pompano, sheepshead, green and speckled trout, Spanish mackerel, red fish, red snappers, croakers and flounders, are abundant; and the tarpon, king of all game fish, are taken. Oysters, shrimps and crabs are as numerous as autumn leaves in Vallombrosa.

That morning a *pirogue* (a boat hewn from the trunk of a tree) and the two small boats from the *Ellen N.*, after being supplied with shrimp bait, were rowed away, and ere the sun beamed upon the water, had arrived at some choice and favorite fishing grounds. The Commodore, the Cincinnati sailor, and one of our hosts were in one boat and crossed the Rigolets to the east, headed in the direction of Pearl River proper, and bound for Little Lake. Theirs was a besetting vision of sheepshead, redfish, bass and perch. The Old Sport, than whom it is hard to find a more enthusiastic or expert brother of the angle, set off in the *pirogue*, with a negro paddler, across to the north and west, and went to Double Bayou. Trout—there's magic in the name!—he deemed the only worthy quest. O. B. Joyful and two more brothers Izaak manned the third boat, resolved to cast their lines in quiet places among the reeds, waterlilies and duckweed.

The first boat-load crossed over and fished for a while among the stumps of an old trestle work, the remains of a former railroad bridge that extends out from the north shore of the Rigolets for an eighth of a mile. The water there is thirty or forty feet deep, and the current so strong that boats have to be made fast to the spiling, and four and five-ounce sinkers are required on the fish lines. This is the favorite haunt of sheepshead and redfish, which feed on the barnacles that encrust the old spiling.

The Old Sport found it a good day for bites in Double Bayou. Casting ahead from his seat in the bow of the *pirogue*, the paddler in the stern, with paddle

plied upon one side only, slowly and noiselessly propelled the craft ahead, as straight as an arrow if need be, from place to place along the overhanging bushes of the shady banks. Before he had gone far numerous, fish had snapped at his live and early morning bait, and in two hours' time he had pulled three dozen green trout out from among the water grasses.

Of the three boat-loads the one that went to fish along the Rigolets was the one that had *the* tale to tell, when all had returned for dinner at one o'clock. They rowed steadily along the reedy edge of the Rigolets some half a mile, intending to stop and try their luck here and there in any particularly inviting clump of reeds that in places extend out twenty or thirty feet in the quiet water along the bank. Their boat had just been "staked down" for the first time, and all its occupants had not yet finished adjusting their tackle, when the man in the bow seat uttered the protest: "We have made a mistake, there is not enough water here to catch a crab in!" He cast his line from him with the last word. The hook must have fallen right in front of a fish's nose, for the line had not reached the bottom, when with a whir and a whiz the bobber and about twenty feet of line were jerked into the reeds. For a quarter of a minute the swift fish zigzagged in and out among the reeds, tightly winding the line around their stalks; then he was still. The fisherman that had hooked him said that he had lost it, as he could not feel it pull any more. The others did not think likewise, and one of them picked up an oar and pushed the boat into the thin reeds, and then caught hold of the reeds and pulled the boat forward so as to untie the line, and another commenced to cut down the reeds around which the line was tangled, while the first reeled it up as it was freed. The latter advised his companions to cut the line, as whatever it was had surely gotten away. They persevered, however, until one of them, spying the exhausted fish, placed the landing net under it and lifted a ten-pounder into the boat. It was a sheepshead and proved to be one of the largest ever caught in those waters.

For a quarter of an hour they had been considering a proposition to return to the club, and were just taking a few

parting casts; in fact, one of the party was just about to stow away his rod, but thinking better of it, he turned his back upon the last patch of reeds, and in sheer desperation made a mighty throw of his line a hundred feet or so out into deep water. His hook just had time to touch the water, and he had not fully recovered his balance after the exertion of casting, when a six-foot tarpon snapped up the bait. It made one lunge and a Herculean leap and sprang up fully its own length above the water. As ever, the largest fish of the day always gets away. King Tarpon gave a wicked toss of his head, which shook the hook from his mouth, and then he dropped back into his element.

Early morning of the third day of our cruise found us taking leave of our hospitable entertainers of Rabbit Island. After a day furled, the sails of the *Ellen N.* went up with the rising of the sun, and spread abroad their snowy whiteness, as beautiful as the outstretched pinions of some white-winged dove of peace. Before the anchor was tripped one of the crew blew a blast on a conch shell as a signal for the bridge-tenders to open the draw. This use of the conch in lieu of a horn is one of the characteristics of the Rigolets bridges. At all hours of the day or night its merry music may be suddenly heard as some far-off boat signals its approach "whistling down the wind." It sounds not unlike a huntsman's horn, and if one be half asleep or dozing on a quiet night,

the distant boatman's blowing might set one dreaming of the hunting-field.

In response to our signal the great bridge swung lazily open, with such softness and snail-like slowness as to make one think of the poet who declared he could almost see the grass grow. The bridge swings from the center, there being a passageway on each side, and the motive power is furnished by men. In the center of the drawbridge the three bridgemen could be seen trotting round and round a turnstile, each pushing away at a beam for dear life, and looking like children playing "Ring-around-a-rosy" from the distance. The ponderous structure swung away from either end of the trestle with measured precision. If it did not move as slow and precise as the melting of a chunk of ice, the abject slowness suggested that a barrel of lubricating oil might accelerate matters somewhat. Or better still, a steam engine would be the thing to make it get a move on and keep pace with passing commerce.

We were, perhaps, a little impatient to be off this morning, as we desired to reach the end of Pearl River Island at the mouth of the Rigolets, to make a few casts for fish from deck before the sun got too high.

Once through the bridge we had but a few minutes' sail to the spot where we anchored, amid a small fleet of little boats, whose occupants were already vigorously plying hook and line.

(To be continued.)



OUR OBJECTIVE POINT.