

ST. LANDRY PARTY HAVE GREAT TIME ON THE GULF

With the dawn of a glorious morning sun, our wagons laden with all the paraphernalia of the trip, rolled up the banks of the silvery Mermentau. There swinging to and fro, tagging lazily at its anchor chains, was our houseboat, newly painted and screened, a picture of cleanliness and comfort. Our joy was considerably dampened when we saw strutting fore and aft, with bird countenance and disheveled hair, eyes gleaming from under bushy brows, hands clinched and lips tightly drawn, the occupant of our little palace. We realized that he was in no mood to play "leap-frog." However, with the aid of the local deputy and a few persuasive arguments in the shape of a tack-hammer, the ogre was finally persuaded that for the sake of harmony he would remove his old clothes and leave us undisputed masters of the situation. He did not take long to pitch his wardrobe and kitchen utensils upon the banks and load ours.

Just at this juncture, there came, gliding majestically over the rippling waters, our gasoline, the pretty "Estelle," manned by that gallant seaman, Capt. Enes Rhodes, of Lake Arthur. The Capt. seemed to be suffering from some serious ailment, as could be seen from his haggard features, but the camp Doctors, soon righted matters, with a long curved bistoury and though the shock seemed to have affected the Capt. somewhere around the solar plexus, a 4 oz. decoction of aqua pura and spiritus frumenti, (Paul Jones) soon had "the smile that won't come off" on his bloodless physiognomy.

"All aboard" reverberated through the myriads of towering cypress, and the Estelle, with the houseboat in tow, shot out gracefully into mid-stream, beginning the eventful trip of three weeks upon the turbulent waters of the Mexican Gulf.

Eight bells had been sounded when Dave, the boatswain, pale as the ghost of Hamlet, came running on deck, and with a voice thrilled with excitement, shouted "Stop the engine, rudder line is broken." Let us here interpolate, that mariners should be instructed, that under no pretence should they speak above a whisper, especially, when a man is neck-a-neck with that sparkling mineral water that made Milwaukee famous. The break was quickly repaired, and once again we were speeding towards our destination.

On each side of the river, on every projecting stump, log, or limb, numerous turtles, large and small and of every variety, were basking in the sun, and on our approach, would stretch their long necks, in evident curiosity at beholding such a medley of gogginess, bathing suits, director's poles and overalls. Their effrontery became unbearable, Mr. J. N. Rhodes, a marksman of no mean ability, proceeded to arbitrate matters with them, using a 30-50 cal. Savage Rifle.

The echoes of one shot had no sooner become inaudible, than that old Savage would belch forth another argument; but strange as it might appear, those turtles persisted in dragging on to those logs and refused to be killed.

However, perseverance has its reward, for as the last cartridge from the box of 500 was shoved into the magazine, there loomed up, about ten yards ahead, a large soft-shell, clinging to the limit a tropical sun. Rhodes grasped the rifle, and with a look in his eye, leveled the gun at the head of the impudent amphibian; the trained eye had glanced along the smooth surface of the polished barrel, when there was a deafening explosion, and a pig enjoying its bath on the opposite shore will never appear any more.

Two hours later the crack of the rifle had given way to the whir of the reed, as some hungry bass would dash through the crystal waters and emerge a struggling minnow or delectable troll. From the kitchen emanated a savory smell, a pleasant

order that my olfactory associated with memories of turtle-soup.

At 6 p. m. we sat down to a repast that would have made old Epicurus have a convulsion.

A partial menu of which would read: Appetizer, Absinthe, a la Marie Brissard, Turtle-Soup, Bass Courtbouillon, a la Lena Ford, Spring Chicken au petit pois, Roast Pig, a la J. N. Durio; Tomato Salad, Potatoes, Julienne, Canteloupes, Cafe Noir, Niersteiner Wine, Pousse Cafe.

After having aided digestion by imbibing a few pints of our mineral water, all repaired to the parlor, where we were entertained for an hour, by the Captain, who gave us an artistic exhibition of unique and fancy piano-playing. He has Paderewski skinned from Sunset to Sabine Pass.

As the moon in all its grandeur cast its shimmering light over the cool waters, everybody lined up for a plunge. Talk about your costumes, —but some of those bathing suits were inspirations. One, especially, deserves special mention: it was designed, built and worn by Mrs. Charles Thibodeaux of Opelousas. The material was fine imported red flannel with plaid effects, warranted to turn water like a duck's back and having the peculiar property of reflecting the moon's rays, forming a miniature aurora borealis.

Next evening we were entertained by that estimable couple, Mr. and Mrs. Pete Uncle. An old fashioned watermelon party was organized, and under the gigantic oaks that surround their colonial mansion, was spread such an array of melons as would give hydrophobia to a blue-gum nigger.

What we did to those melons is a silent but strong testimonial of our appreciation of the agricultural abilities of Mr. Uncle.

A stop of three days at Negro Island, situated at the entrance to Grand Lake, and then we sail for the Gulf.

On the red-fish banks, about two miles out from the mouth of the river, we cast anchor, and awaited the pleasure of the wily "snapper."

Renez gives a vigorous jerk; at the same time a click of the reel, and the line unwinds yard by yard until the spool is nearly bare. The fish changes its course to a right angle and Renez reels him in like an organ-grinder in a country town. Forty-five minutes of angling and he lands—a stingaree. He says a few things that look like a blue streak in a sulphurous atmosphere.

In the meantime the ladies had gone on to the beach to pick sea-shells. Some very interesting entomological facts were noted, the most peculiar of which was, that the shells collected by Mrs. Thibodeaux had a peculiar affinity for those of the others, causing them to wander around the room, and get into the trunks of some of the others of the party. Mrs. Thibodeaux vouches for the accuracy of this statement for she kept an eye on those shells and saw this strange phenomenon repeated on several occasions.

The camp doctor, believing in a diversification of diet, as well as crops, strolled leisurely on the beach, searching fruitlessly for game.

Finally, becoming fatigued, he sat down in despair, but "everything comes to him who waits" and after a while a long-legged, gaunt, consumptive-looking plover lit about twenty yards out on a mud-bank; in another minute plovers began to come from all points of the compass; they came in squads, brigades and battalions. The doctor remained as stolid and silent as the Sphinx.

When he thought there was no possibility of one single shot going astray, he began to fire volleys right into the midst of them, behind them, and in front of them. That old Remington Automatic was coughing like a Mexican burro with the epizootic. The atmosphere was filled with smoke and feathers and when Doc ceased firing and began to search over the field of carnage and discovered that was that same old cachectic veteran that first came upon the scene, the air became laden with something else besides smoke and feathers.

I have often heard it said that people who are lost will wander in a

circle, but it was left to D. M. and Renez Durio of Jennings to prove the fallacy of this theory. We had gone "foundering" with a torch and gig, but the aforesaid gentlemen having become dissatisfied with such tame sport, concluded while the Capt. and Doctor would amuse themselves harpooning these indolent little fish, they would catch a sheephead or two by the light of the moon. Embarking in a two-oared skiff, they proceeded down the river into the Gulf and on to the red-fish banks. After fishing for an hour or so, with very little better than fishermen's luck, they decided to return. The moon was hidden behind large dark clouds, the wind had arisen and unsuspectingly. They had dragged anchor far into the Gulf. After arguing the point, they decided, as usual, on the wrong direction. After awhile realizing that they were lost, they began to feel queer. After taking several different directions and not reaching camp, they "right about faced" and with a few vigorous strokes of the oars landed in a mud-flat, from which they could not extricate the boat. Now they began to negotiate the soft mud on foot, meanwhile taking turns at yelling like Comanches.

Walking was now too slow and they broke into a trot and with each whoop, the speed increased, until their speedometer having reached the limit, broke a spring. The Capt. and Doctor having begun their return journey, on reaching the bank of the river, heard a blood-curdling yell from the opposite bank that made them feel like ice-water had been poured down their backs. Louder and louder grew the shouts, interspersed here and there with some poetical remarks about the Doctor's auditory nerve. Let it be known, however, that our two lost friends were profuse in their expressions of gratitude when the Capt. and Doctor hove in sight. At the time, they were wading waist-deep in mud, in a parallel line to the shore.

Another incident that made an indelible impression on the author's memory is an evening spent in Grand Chenier.

Returning from a pleasant bath, with appetites cultivated to a scientific point; with many comments and reflections upon the pot of boiled crabs that would be cooked upon our arrival, and that ice-cold mineral water as a chaser. But what was our consternation when we arrived to find the two cooks, safely esconced underneath four woolen blankets, covered over with a cheese-cloth mosquito net—nothing cooked. We thought they had a chill, but they were only trying to protect themselves from the millions of snipe-billed mosquitoes that came to visit us. This particular breed of mosquito has a broboscis like an ordinary aspirating syringe and must have some knowledge of human anatomy, for without hesitation they would plunge their long slender bills to the hilt into our necks and in a second we were as bloated as a red nosed prohibitionist in a wet town.

The doctor advised mineral water as an antidote, but after having imbibed a case or so, we decided that Grand Chenier mosquitoes evidently came from Texas and were immune, so we made up our minds to "vamoose" to the Gulf. Accordingly everybody grabbed a blanket and pillow and made a dash for the Gasoline.

My friend, Renez, being of a more sanguine temperament, thought of the jug of snake medicine in the refrigerator and concluded it would be prudent to take it along, as he had often heard of the danger of being bitten by sea-serpents. The stage-plank having been removed for a hurried departure, he made a spring for the deck, but miscalculating the distance, he described a hyperbolic curve and plunged into the river.

He emerged, jug in hand, and after having blown the water from his nostrils like a porpoise, said a few things not found in a hymn-book. We anchored about two miles out in the Gulf, leaving both mosquitoes and houseboat behind.

After three weeks of varied experiences we began the return trip. On Grand Lake a storm overtook us,

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and if we could have used all the energy spent by some of the ladies on board, attempting to get rid of their supper, we would have crossed the Lake in an hour. The Doctor was called up to assist in the hoisting process, but being busy himself could not respond to the call.

Midway across the Lake we broke a pump on the engine but thanks to the mechanical skill of Capt. Rhodes we managed to reach a safe landing place about 2 a. m., having taken nine hours to make eighteen miles.

Our energetic Captain, next day, took passage on the mail-boat and in less than twelve hours was back, standing before us with his Jean Francois hat in one hand and the repaired pump in the other.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful and in two days more we bade farewell to our gallant Captain and his charming wife.

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