

SIX WEEKS OF SUSPENSE

PORT DEPOSIT SETTLING DOWN TO ITS REGULAR LIFE.

A BIG FRESHET IS BOUND TO COME WITH EVERY HARD WINTER—WHEN NOT FIGHTING THE FLOODS, THE PEOPLE GO FISHING IN THE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER.

PORT DEPOSIT, Md., March 18.—After nearly six weeks of suspense and suffering, the people of this town are getting back into their homes and are resuming the regular routine of life. The ice gorge has come and gone and taken with it more than \$25,000 of the general wealth, including sundry buildings which will have to be replaced.

Night after night the people went to bed with the comfortable anxiety that they would probably be awakened to see their town go sailing down the Susquehanna among the huge pieces of ice, and several nights they were called out to remove their property and flee to the hills before the gorge broke and swept them all away. But the weather was kinder than they had dared to hope, and the accumulations melted safely and gently, and the town escaped the destruction which was so generally predicted and expected.

The dispatches to THE NEW-YORK TIMES recorded the various stages of the gorge and the flood, and told how the water ran seven feet deep through the streets, and how the railroad travel was impeded, and how the people of the country around crowded by thousands to see the sights, but they did not describe the magnificence of the jam of ice which the rapids of the Susquehanna crowded into the narrows of the river in its herculean efforts to rush it into the open waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Port Deposit ice gorge is a regular event of every real Winter season. Just why the town was placed immediately below the narrows of a shallow river 400 miles long is not clear, except that it is well situated for its lumber trade, but here it is, and here, evidently, it has determined to stay. "The fact of the matter is," said one of the citizens, "these annual wash-outs promote cleanliness and keep the town from stagnating. They are a little tough while they last, but after they are over we take hold of things with new energy and soon make up for lost time."

In one respect the citizen's statement is misleading. The cleanliness that the flood has left is a slimy mud that covers the streets and fills the lower parts of the houses. The scenes yesterday and to-day were and are people busily at work washing houses and building fires and trying to get the lower stories in a habitable condition. For three-fourths of a mile along the shore the fences and the back buildings are gone and the mud is spread generously. Workmen are trying to get into shape the twisted rails of the railroad. When the gorge begins, the residents prepare to move either into the second stories or to the hills. After it is over, they work a week or so in fixing up for the next gorge. Life in Port Deposit may be slow, but it is not monotonous.

In the meanwhile William Roberts has returned to his island. He is the dramatic persona of every flood. Without him the gorge would lose the thrill that permeates every description in the newspapers. He lives on the little island in the middle of the river more than half a mile from the shore. He owns the island, and has on it cattle and chickens, which he prizes with peculiar pride.

When the gorge begins he sends his family ashore and corrals his fowls and animals in his house and stays there to protect them. This year the water covered the island, the ice was piled high around him, and the only way the crowds on shore knew he was living was by the thin curl of smoke that issued from the chimney. For two days the smoke was not seen, and then the reporters, not having the smoke to describe, risked their lives in a trip to his dominions. They wanted to rescue him, but his reply was that he was afraid some dishonest person would steal his chickens, and he therefore declined to be rescued. He held out a few days longer, and then came ashore because his provisions were running low.

The Port Deposit heroes have rescued him so often in past years that they have tired of that sort of sport and now always let others do the work. Mr. Roberts sends word that the cattle and chickens are all right.

A most remarkable river is the Susquehanna. It flows in a steep-sided but flat-bottomed trough, with bluffs north of this place from 250 to 300 feet in height, and when the freshets come it seethes and surges through its cañon descending 80 feet in twelve miles and piling its ice and debris at and above Port Deposit, where its rapids end. After that it widens its flow and goes on to the Chesapeake Bay, which is its tidal continuation. Beginning in the Catskills in New-York its waters, therefore, have a run of 600 miles to the mouth of the bay, where they are lost in the ocean.

The towns and cities in Pennsylvania get their share of its floods, and Wilkesbarre has had several picturesque and expensive experiences—especially at the time of the Johnstown disaster—but Port Deposit seems to be its especial delight. But all its efforts have not persuaded the people to find another site. They go on constructing larger buildings and establishing new institutions, the greatest of which is the industrial school, which is to cost \$250,000.

This school is the gift of Jacob Tome. About sixty years ago he came here to find work. He was ambitious but poor. He found employment as general utility man in the town inn. The lumbermen brought their rafts down the river and anchored them at the Port Deposit wharves. While they enjoyed themselves in the inn young Tome earned their gratitude by watching the rafts and seeing that they did not break from their moorings. His attention won their friendship, and gradually he became interested in the lumber trade himself.

The rest of the story runs as it usually runs in the biographies of millionaires. He is now President of four banks, is one of the wealthiest men in the South, and, with all his eighty-three years, is as active a youth of fifty. Two years ago he decided to erect a remembrance of himself greater than the mansion he occupied as a residence, and so the Jacob Tome Industrial School is in course of construction. The endowment will be munificent and Port Deposit will have the finest institution for the training of its boys and girls of any town of its size in the United States.

From the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries 300,000,000 pounds of fish are taken annually. At one time the shad defied its shallows and swam all the way to the New-York border line. There were shad fisheries in the Chenango River, of New-York State. Below there were fisheries with names such as Tuckahoe, Nescopock, Nanticoke, Monocacy, Falling Spring, Wintermoot, Tunkhannock, and Wyalensing Creek. The records of 1787 show that \$53.53 was paid for a half interest in the Shickshinny fishery, and Caleb Wright's son received 1,300 shad as his share of a night's fishing. The shad weighed from three to thirteen pounds and sold for from 12½ cents to 25 cents each. Shad were taken to Salina, N. Y., and traded for salt—100 shad for a bushel of salt.

It is very different now. Instead of going 400 miles into the interior the shad never get above Columbia, forty miles from the river's mouth. Progress built dams, and although, according to voracious chroniclers, the shad occasionally got over the dams they soon learned better and staid in deeper water.

The fishing of to-day is on the broad shoals where the river widens and loses itself in the Chesapeake Bay. Travelers who use railroad trains between New-York and Baltimore or Washington always get a good view of the fishing grounds as the trains roll slowly over the long bridges that span the Susquehanna above Havre de Grace. It is the same region that supplies the canvass-back and red-head ducks. If you want to see fishing that will startle you, visit that place about six weeks from now. Already the fishermen are at work getting their nets and their seines in order. They always begin when the ice gorge goes out. This year they will have more than usual to do because the floods have carried off a large part of their fishing paraphernalia.

A fishing outfit on the Lower Susquehanna is different from that of other sections. At its best it is a floating island made of logs. The one which the writer knows is 184 long, 60 feet wide, and over 11,000 square feet in area. Thick plank flooring securely nailed keeps the logs in firm position. On this float are six houses, including packing house, sleeping apartments, eating house, tables, and accommodations for forty men besides the cooks and extra assistants. There are two horses and 2 steam engine on the float for the motive power for seine hauling. During the Winter this float remains idly along the shore, but just as soon as the first signs of shad or herring appear it is towed out into the water a mile or so, where experience has pointed out the best fishing, and there it is made stationary by enormous piles 50 or 60 feet long, which are driven firmly into the ground, and are arranged so as to allow the float to rise and fall with the tides.

A float like this costs from \$6,000 to \$10,000, and the daily expenses are about \$100. As the season is not a long one there is, of course, every effort made to get all that can be gotten out of it.

The work begins at 2 o'clock in the morning and continues with few cessations until 9 or 10 o'clock at night. Visitors come down from Havre de Grace during the day to see the sights.

First is the laying of the seine. It is carefully coiled on a large and broad deck at the stern of a boat 68 feet long, almost conical in shape, and flat bottomed and swift. At the Captain's cry twenty men jump aboard and take their places at the oars. Another signal and they are off.

In a few minutes the seine begins to unwind, and then the speed is immediately increased. There is generally a big negro with a loud sonorous voice at the stroke oar and his song urging the men to pull steady and strong rises above all other sounds and lends a peculiar interest to the work. It incites the men wondrously. The boat makes a circle of nearly three miles, and guards in smaller boats go out to watch the points of the seine that may need assistance. The last half mile of the large boat is a mad race to the shore, with the men struggling with every force they have and the negro singing with all his might and main.

The float in front slants with a wooden platform about fifty feet long, called an "apron." At each end of the platform, out of the water, the seine is hauled in, at one end by the steam power, at the other by the horses. As soon as the men in the boat reach the float from their seine laying, they jump for the seine that is already being drawn in.

But the expected excitement does not come for nearly an hour. The last sixty yards of the three miles of seine contain what the miles of netting were laid out to catch. When this short part is shortened the fun begins, and the excitement affects even the oldest of the fishermen. The water on the "apron" becomes suddenly animated. A dozen men wade out and hold up the bulging seine so that none of the catch may jump over. A tumult is going on in the small space within. Then, more quickly than it takes to tell it, the men give one concerted pull, and upon the float are thrown thousands of fish, which, jumping desperately in the sunlight, make a picture that glitters and glistens like a mass of boiling quicksilver.

Each of the hauls that THE NEW-YORK TIMES'S correspondent saw on this float yielded more than 20,000 shad and herring, the herring, of course, being largely in excess of the shad. On that one day over 200,000 fish were captured by that float alone, and it was not a specially good day. The highest catch ever made on that float in a single haul was 100,000 herring and 1,800 shad, and there are other floats which claim to do just as well. The fish are shipped to New-York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Most of the herring are salted in barrels on the floats.

A shad is always planked for the visitor by the big colored woman who is chief of the culinary department, and that, with the old-fashioned pone bread that goes with it, is worth all the trouble of a trip to the Susquehanna.

Just below the fishing grounds on Spesutia Island Mr. Cleveland sometimes shoots ducks. More ducks have been killed around this region than anywhere else in America. Fully \$1,000,000 is invested in clubs and shores about the head of the Chesapeake Bay. There are luxurious yachts and all that sort of thing. The estimate is that every duck shot by these clubmen costs on the average at least \$50. The sport has not been at all good this year; too much ice. President Harrison, on his last trip, shivered in vain for the ducks to come, and at last he shot a rabbit in pure desperation for something to shoot, although he broke the game laws of the State when he did it.

Those desperate pirates of the night, the pot hunters, are at work once more. Eight years ago the sportsmen of New-York and Baltimore broke them up and sent some of them to the penitentiary. Their methods are familiar—the use of swivel guns and the wholesale shooting of the ducks at night. Another mole will have to be made against them.

Besides shad and ducks the Susquehanna furnishes bass, "Susquehanna salmon," pike, pickerel, rock, perch, and a fine quality of catfish. The angling is first-class, and the scenery all the way from Port Deposit to the Catskills is worthy of attention. The stream is somewhat rocky for canoeists above navigation, but its main danger is the malaria, and that can be avoided by a few quinine pills.