

LETTER XII.

Ohio, Marietta, (Fort Harmar,) Sept. 20, 1807.

Dear Friend,

IN my last I promised to give you some account of the different kinds of boats made use of on these waters, and shall now proceed to gratify your curiosity on that subject. The smallest kind of craft in use are simple log canoes; next follow perrogues, which are a larger kind of canoes, but sufficiently strong and capacious to carry from twelve to fifteen barrels of salt. Skiffs are built of all sizes, from five hundred to twenty thousand pounds weight burthen. Batteaux are the same as the larger kind of skiffs, and indifferently known by either name. Arks are not much in use on these waters; what few I have noticed were similar to those you have seen on the Susquehanna. Kentucky boats are strong frames of an oblong form, varying in size from twenty to fifty feet in length, and from ten to fourteen in breadth; they are built of stout square timber, and, before they are sided and roofed in, have much the appearance

of old graving scows, excepting that the front part or bow has somewhat of a rake. The gunwales are generally from twelve to twenty-four inches high, and from three to six inches thick; on the top of these are mortised square joist of three or four feet in length, and four or five inches thick, which are sided up like a house with ordinary boards; on the top of these studs are secured the foot of each rafter, over which the roof is laid, which likewise answers the purpose of a main and quarter deck; they are steered by a long swing oar of the whole length of the boat, and generally have from one to three hands to manage a boat, having frequent occasion, when heavily loaded, to use their unwieldy oars, in order to keep nearly in the middle of the river. Some of these floating machines, with a shed roof, bear a very striking resemblance to what you daily see in the streets of New-York, where new houses are building, and generally denominated a lime-house.

New-Orleans boats are built upon the same model as the Kentucky boats, excepting that they are generally much larger and stronger, with an arched roof fore and aft. When I first saw a row of these boats lying high and dry on the shore at Pittsburgh, I really concluded they were detached pieces of some large rope-walk which had been carried off by the freshes from above. The largest boats of this kind will carry four hundred

and fifty barrels of flour. Keel boats are very different from what their name would seem to imply to a stranger who has never seen one, especially to an inhabitant of a sea-port, where the name is always applied to sailing boats, particularly those kinds that can beat up against a wind. Here, however, it is given to a species of the Schenectady boats, which you will find particularly described in my account of the navigation of the Mohawk River. The principal difference consists in this, that the timbers or knees of these are built upon a small keel, about three inches in depth, and four or five in width; from which circumstance they are denominated keel boats. I have no doubt but the keel is an additional strength to the boat, as it receives the first shock of any obstruction in the navigation, which otherwise would fall immediately upon the planking; but at the same time it makes a draft of three inches more water than Schenectady boats of the same size and burthen. These boats are generally built from forty to eighty feet in length, and from seven to nine feet in width; the largest kind require but one hand to steer and two to row, in descending the Ohio, and will carry about one hundred barrels of salt; but, to ascend the stream, they will require at least six or eight hands to make any considerable progress.

The last and best kind of boats used on the Ohio and Mississippi is what is called a barge.

You will have a tolerable correct idea of this kind when you see a ship's long boat, or those used at the ferry from the city of New-York to Long Island, adding thereto about three times the length and a proportionable depth, their width being generally between seven and ten feet. These boats are steered by a rudder, and are easily managed while they have any *way* upon them ; but when descending with the force of the current alone, are not so easily twisted and turned as a keel boat is by her long steering oar. A barge will carry from forty to sixty thousand weight, and requires four hands besides the helmsman to descend the river ; but, to return with a loading, from eight to twelve become necessary. Barges, as well as keel boats, generally carry a moveable mast a-midships, and, whenever the wind will permit, set a square-sail, and some few top-sails. A small fleet of six or seven of these vessels coming up before a wind, at a distance of three or four miles, is equally as pleasing a sight in this country, as an equal number of the largest square-rigged vessels entering the harbour of New-York.

The prices of the various kinds of boats already described are as follows : Canoes from one to three dollars ; perrogues from five to twenty ; small skiffs from five to ten dollars ; large skiffs or batteaux from twenty to fifty ; arks one dollar a foot in length ; Kentucky and New-Orleans boats from one dollar to one and a half a foot ; keel boats from two and a half to three dollars a

foot, and barges from four to five dollars a foot. These are the customary prices for new boats; but, from the constant influx of boats of every description down the Monongahela and Alleghany Rivers, whose destination is no farther than Pittsburgh, boats may often be had at very reduced prices.