

annual floods. While a gain of land is thus taking place on one side, the river is cutting into and undermining the opposite bank, often at the rate of ten feet or more in a year. The most common willow is *Salix nigra*, but Dr. Carpenter tells me there is a rarer species (*Salix longifolia*) intermixed. I inquired how it happened that none of these trees were old, although some part of the banks on which they grew are known to be of considerable antiquity. My companion said, "that in marshy places the *Salix nigra* is not a long-lived tree, rarely lasting more than twenty-five or thirty years."

At length, as we approached the Balize, even these willows ceased to adorn the margin of the river, which was then simply bounded by mounds of bare sand. Balize means beacon in Spanish. It appears that, in 1744, the main passage or entrance of the river was at three small islands, which then existed where this pilot station now stands. It continued to be the principal mouth of the Mississippi for about a quarter of a century later. The present village, called the Balize, has a population of more than 450 souls, among whom there are fifty regularly appointed pilots, and many more who are aspirants to that office. The houses are built on piles driven into the mud-banks, and the greater part of them moored, like ships, to strong anchors, whenever a hurricane is apprehended. They have no fear of the river, which scarcely rises six inches during its greatest floods; but some winds make the Gulf rise six feet, as in the year 1812, and so fast has been the increase of the population of late, that there are scarcely boats enough, as one of the pilots confessed to me, to save the people, should the waters rise again to that elevation. They might, however, escape on drift timber, which abounds here, provided they had time to choose the more buoyant trees; for we observed many large rafts of wood so waterlogged that it could scarcely swim, and the slightest weight would sink it.

Although the chimney of our steamer was not lofty, it stood higher than the houses; but in order to obtain a wider prospect, I went up into the look-out, a wooden frame-work with a platform, where the pilots were watching for vessels, with their