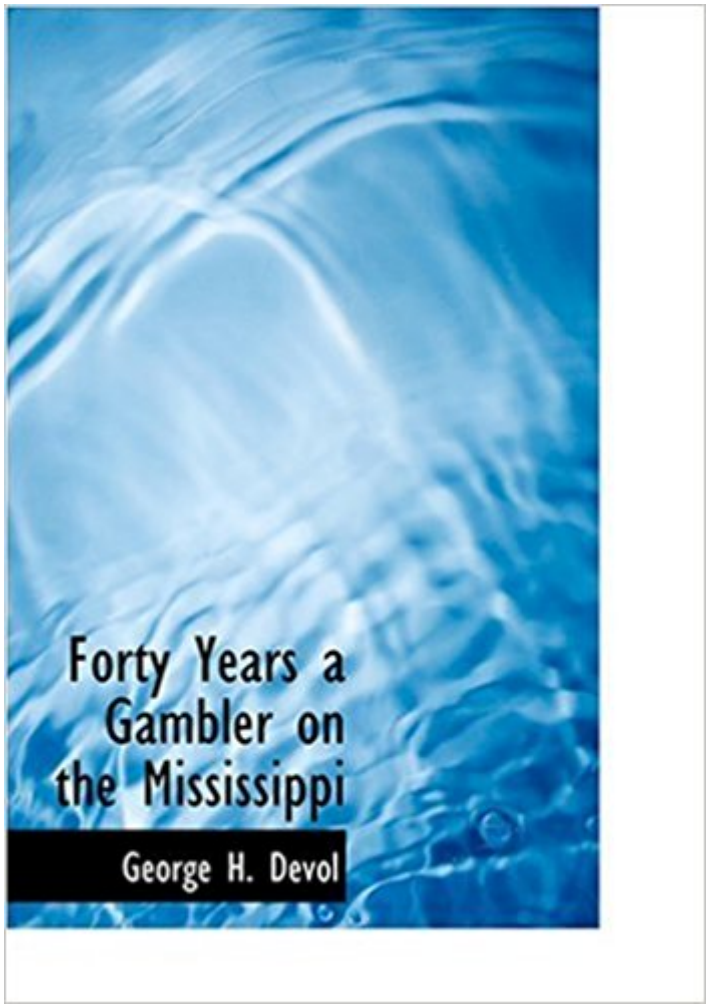
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Forty Years A Gambler On The Mississippi (Large Print Edition)



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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As the title to this 1887 volume reveals, Devol was a riverboat gambler who made fortunes, and even if only half of his many tall stories are true, he lived a remarkable life. He begins the story at age ten when he ran away from his Ohio home to join the crew of a riverboat. There he learned not only about being a sailor but how to cheat at cards. Though it should be taken with a grain of salt, this nonetheless makes for fun reading.Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have been reading this interesting autobiography off and on for the past 4 months, mainly as background flavor to other autobiographies and novels from the same time period, such as Mark Twain’s LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI. Devol really had cut quite the colorful character during his time, and his personal account does shed some light on the "seedier" side of life along that critical geographical area of mid-19th century America.His tales do take on a repetitive aspect, and why I

do recommend to take his tales in short doses. Trying to read it straight through would likely dull the senses and probably bore you to tears. I would read about half a dozen anecdotes, then move on to another book. I did gain quite a bit of insight; however, Devol casually uses gambler slang without explicit explanation, yet over time, from hints and inferences, I began understanding exactly what he meant from his various euphemisms and double-talk. It just takes persistence and attention, which once again, is not easily come by with a straight read-through.All in all, I certainly would heartily recommend this fascinating look at the gambling life along the Mississippi. Not quite engagingly narrated as other travel/life autobiographies, such as Twain or Dickens, but for those who find books such as the classic underbelly exposes by Herbert Asbury entertaining, as well as added flavor of understanding when reading off-hand references in period books, FORTY YEARS A GAMBLER certainly worth a long-term study.

The title of the book is intriguing. But this is more of a swindler’s story rather a gambler’s. The book consists of numerous similar short stories. That’s why when you start reading next story you know how it will end. It also gives us some information about the late 1800’s in the States (I guess not completely united then). Our gambler worked on the boats running on Missisipi River. You cannot help asking yourself if a person might live so many things and if there were so many suckers in those days. You realised later that he cheated not only Americans but also Canadians and the English. He mostly cooperated with a partner (capper). They behaved as if they did not know each other. They found a sucker on the boats or trains. They bent the edge of a playing card. The sucker thought it was the right card to pick. But as soon as he turned the card, he saw it was the wrong card and the roof caved in. When he got wise to the trick, the damage had already done. In other words the hunter became hunted. On top of that he frequently licked a victim if he asked his money back. He even betted that if he could beat an African American. I find the racist expressions about African Americans somewhat disturbing.

Even today,George Devol’s "biography" is a fun read. Devol writes about the glory days of riverboat (and train) gamblers, around the time of the Civil War. The book jumps around in time and place, and you can just as easily start in the middle, since each chapter is a anecdote often set off by random thoughts or remembered friends. Devol presents himself as a professional gambler, or perhaps as a gambling entrepreneur. One of the major themes is that cheating in one form or another was standard in the life of professional gamblers. Devol doesn’t spare himself in his stories and admits quite openly to cheating people of large sums of money. He is quick to also point out his

virtues, including returning money to victims who couldn't spare their losses. Devol's morality is summarized simply as "If you would have taken my money, you can't complain if I took yours", and even in our modern legalistic society it still has some power. Fair warning: This is an uncensored work by someone who spent many years in the South around the time of the civil war. The N world is used, and Devol's views of race relations are brutally simple. Devol doesn't defend slavery for the most part, but he doesn't condemn it either.

By total chance this title caught my eye in the UNLV library when I was walking by. I ended up buying it on when I got back home. Very glad I did (although I hear the Free Kindle version is just as good). This is not so much a book narrative his life as it is a collection of anecdotes and stories from that life, broken up in one to two page sections. What a life. Duval ran away from home as a young boy and worked on a ship. There he learned how to deal cards and also, how to cheat. The thing they say about cons, at least 19th and early 20th century cons, (readÃ Â The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence ManÃ Â if interested) is they never worked on an honest mark. Almost all of them depended on presenting low but illegal hanging fruit in front of a greedy man and then parting him from his money while he grabbed at it. One of Duval's most successful was to conspicuously mark a card in his deck and deal until he knew the victim had spotted the pattern. He'd wait until the man placed a huge bet, certain to win with his inside knowledge, and then deal him a losing hand. Duval seems to have been the embodiment of Roosevelt's expression about walking softly but carrying a big stick. He'd always give some of the winnings back if it was all the loser had in the world, or if he'd bet his wife's jewelry and lost, Duval would send it back to her stateroom later that night. But if they wouldn't take their turn of the cards with some dignity he had no problem fighting or draw his pistol (which he called Betsy Jane but never used). In fact, his favorite weapon was his head, and the book must detail 20 instances where he wins a fight with a solid headbutt. There is a lot of great history in here since he experienced the South both pre, during and post-Civil war (was actually imprisoned by the occupying Union forces for nearly a year). My only criticism is that after about 150 pages the stories all seem to blur together. You can only hear about an overconfident guy falling for a trick and then fighting about the money he lost so many times. But if you read it sporadically or non-linearly it's an excellent book to have.

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