GEORGE WASHINGTON CABLE

STRANGE TRUE STORIES OF LOUISIANA

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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HOW I GOT THEM.

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True stories are not often good art. The relations and experiences of real men and women rarely fall in such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole. Until they have had such treatment as we give stone in the quarry or gems in the rough they seldom group themselves with that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that result when art comes in—not so much to transcend nature as to make nature transcend herself.

Yet I have learned to believe that good stories happen oftener than once I thought they did. Within the last few years there have dropped into my hands by one accident or another a number of these natural crystals, whose charms, never the same in any two, are in each and all enough at least to warn off all tampering of the fictionist. Happily, moreover, without being necessary one to another, they yet have a coherent sequence, and follow one another like the days of a week. They are mine only by right of discovery. From various necessities of the case I am sometimes the story-teller, and sometimes, in the reader's interest, have to abridge; but I add no fact and trim naught of value away. Here are no unconfessed "restorations," not one. In time, place, circumstance, in every essential feature, I give them as I got them—strange stories that truly happened, all partly, some wholly, in Louisiana.

In the spring of 1883, being one night the guest of my friend Dr. Francis Bacon, in New Haven, Connecticut, and the conversation turning, at the close of the evening, upon wonderful and romantic true happenings, he said:

"You are from New Orleans; did you never hear of Salome Müller?"

"No."

Thereupon he told the story, and a few weeks later sent me by mail, to my home in New Orleans, whither I had returned, a transcription, which he had most generously made, of a brief summary of the case—it would be right to say tragedy instead of case—as printed in "The Law Reporter" some forty years ago. That transcription lies before me now, beginning, "The Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana has lately been called upon to investigate and decide one of the most interesting cases which has ever come under the cognizance of a judicial tribunal." This episode, which had been the cause of public excitement within the memory of men still living on the scene, I, a native resident of New Orleans and student of its history, stumbled upon for the first time nearly two thousand miles from home.

I mentioned it to a number of lawyers of New Orleans, one after another. None remembered ever having heard of it. I appealed to a former chief-justice of the State, who had a lively personal remembrance of every member of the bench and the bar concerned in the case; but of the case he had no recollection. One of the medical experts called in by the court for evidence upon which the whole merits of the case seemed to hang was still living—the distinguished

Creole physician, Dr. Armand Mercier. He could not recall the matter until I recounted the story, and then only in the vaguest way. Yet when my friend the former chief-justice kindly took down from his shelves and beat free of dust the right volume of supreme court decisions, there was the terse, cold record, No. 5623. I went to the old newspaper files under the roof of the city hall, and had the pleasure speedily to find, under the dates of 1818 and 1844, such passing allusions to the strange facts of which I was in search as one might hope to find in those days when a serious riot was likely to receive no mention, and a steamboat explosion dangerously near the editorial rooms would be recorded in ten lines of colorless statement. I went to the courts, and, after following and abandoning several false trails through two days' search, found that the books of record containing the object of my quest had been lost, having unaccountably disappeared in—if I remember aright—1870.

There was one chance left: it was to find the original papers. I employed an intelligent gentleman at so much a day to search till he should find them. In the dusty garret of one of the court buildings—the old Spanish Cabildo, that faces Jackson Square—he rummaged for ten days, finding now one desired document and now another, until he had gathered all but one. Several he drew out of a great heap of papers lying in the middle of the floor, as if it were a pile of rubbish; but this one he never found. Yet I was content. Through the perseverance of this gentleman and the intervention of a friend in the legal profession, and by the courtesy of the court, I held in my hand the whole forgotten

story of the poor lost and found Salome Müller. How through the courtesy of some of the reportorial staff of the "New Orleans Picayune" I found and conversed with three of Salome's still surviving relatives and friends, I shall not stop to tell.

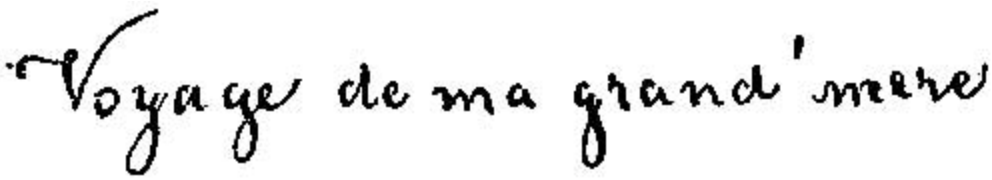
While I was still in search of these things, the editor of the "New Orleans Times-Democrat" handed me a thick manuscript, asking me to examine and pronounce upon its merits. It was written wholly in French, in a small, cramped, feminine hand. I replied, when I could, that it seemed to me unfit for the purposes of transient newspaper publication, yet if he declined it I should probably buy it myself. He replied that he had already examined it and decided to decline it, and it was only to know whether I, not he, could use it that I had been asked to read it.

I took it to an attorney, and requested him, under certain strict conditions, to obtain it for me with all its rights.

"What is it?"

"It is the minute account, written by one of the travelers, a pretty little Creole maiden of seventeen, of an adventurous journey made, in 1795, from New Orleans through the wilds of Louisiana, taking six weeks to complete a tour that could now be made in less than two days."

But this is written by some one else; see, it says



"Yes," I rejoined, "it purports to be a copy. We must have the little grandmother's original manuscript, written in 1822;

that or nothing."

So a correspondence sprang up with a gentle and refined old Creole lady with whom I later had the honor to become acquainted and now count among my esteemed friends—grand-daughter of the grandmother who, after innumerable recountings by word of mouth to mother, sisters, brothers, friends, husband, children, and children's children through twenty-seven years of advancing life, sat down at last and wrote the oft-told tale for her little grand-children, one of whom, inheriting her literary instinct and herself become an aged grandmother, discovers the manuscript among some old family papers and recognizes its value. The first exchange of letters disclosed the fact that the "New Orleans Bee" ("L'Abeille") had bought the right to publish the manuscript in French; but the moment its editors had proper assurance that there was impending another arrangement more profitable to her, they chivalrously yielded all they had bought, on merely being reimbursed.

The condition that required the delivery of the original manuscript, written over sixty years before, was not so easily met. First came the assurance that its spelling was hideous, its writing bad and dimmed by time, and the sheets tattered and torn. Later followed the disclosure that an aged and infirm mother of the grandmother owned it, and that she had some time before compelled its return to the private drawer from which the relic-loving daughter had abstracted it. Still later came a letter saying that since the attorney was so relentlessly exacting, she had written to her mother praying her to part with the manuscript. Then followed another communication,—six large, closely written

pages of despair,—inclosing a letter from the mother. The wad of papers, always more and more in the way and always "smelling bad," had been put into the fire. But a telegram followed on the heels of the mail, crying joy! An old letter had been found and forwarded which would prove that such a manuscript had existed. But it was not in time to intercept the attorney's letter saying that, the original manuscript being destroyed, there could be no purchase or any need of further correspondence. The old letter came. It was genuine beyond a doubt, had been written by one of the party making the journey, and was itself forty-seven years old. The paper was poor and sallow, the hand-writing large, and the orthography—!

But let us translate:

st. john baptist[1] 10 august 1836

My very dear Niece. I received your letter this morning in which you ask me to tell you what I remember of the journey to Attakapas made in 1795 by papa, M. ——-, [and] my younger sister Françoise afterward your grandmother. If it were with my tongue I could answer more favorably; but writing is not my forte; I was never calculated for a public writer, as your grandmother was. By the way, she wrote the journey, and very prettily; what have you done with it? It is a pity to lose so pretty a piece of writing.... We left New Orleans to go to the Attakapas in the month of May, 1795, and in an old barge ["vieux chalant qui senté le rat mord a plien nez"]. We were Françoise and I Suzanne, pearl of the family, and Papa, who went to buy lands; and one Joseph

Charpentier and his dear and pretty little wife Alix [whom] I love so much; 3 Irish, father mother and son [fice]; lastly Mario, whom you knew, with Celeste, formerly lady's maid to Marianne—who is now my sister-in-law.... If I knew better how to write I would tell you our adventures the alligators tried to devour us. We barely escaped perishing in Lake Chicot and many other things.... At last we arrived at a pretty village St. Martinville called also little Paris and full of barons, marquises, counts and countesses[2] that were an offense to my nose and my stomach. Your grandmother was in raptures. It was there we met the beautiful Tonton, your aunt by marriage. I have a bad finger and must stop.... Your loving aunty [ta tantine qui temme]

Suzanne —— née ——

The kind of letter to expect from one who, as a girl of eighteen, could shoot and swim and was called by her father "my son"; the antipode of her sister Françoise. My attorney wrote that the evidence was sufficient.

His letter had hardly got into the mail-bag when another telegram cried hold! That a few pages of the original manuscript had been found and forwarded by post. They came. They were only nine in all—old, yellow, ragged, torn, leaves of a plantation account-book whose red-ruled columns had long ago faded to a faint brown, one side of two or three of them preoccupied with charges in bad French of yards of cottonade, "mouslin à dames," "jaconad," dozens of soap, pounds of tobacco, pairs of stockings, lace, etc.; but to our great pleasure each page corresponding closely, save in orthography and syntax, with a page of the new manuscript, and the page numbers of the old running

higher than those of the new! Here was evidence which one could lay before a skeptical world that the transcriber had not expanded the work of the original memoirist. The manuscript passed into my possession, our Creole lady-correspondent reiterating to the end her inability to divine what could be wanted with "an almost illegible scrawl" (griffonage), full of bad spelling and of rather inelegant diction. But if old manuscript was the object of desire, why, here was something else; the very document alluded to by Françoise in her memoir of travel—the autobiography of the dear little countess, her beloved Alix de Morainville, made fatherless and a widow by the guillotine in the Reign of Terror.

"Was that all?" inquired my agent, craftily, his suspicions aroused by the promptness with which the supply met the demand. "Had she not other old and valuable manuscripts?"

"No, alas! Only that one."

Thus reassured, he became its purchaser. It lies before me now, in an inner wrapper of queer old black paper, beside its little tight-fitting bag, or case of a kind of bright, large-flowered silken stuff not made in these days, and its outer wrapper of discolored brief-paper; a pretty little document of sixty-eight small pages in a feminine hand, perfect in its slightly archaic grammar, gracefully composed, and, in spite of its flimsy yellowed paper, as legible as print: "Histoire d'Alix de Morainville écrite à la Louisiane ce 22 Aout 1795. Pour mes chères amies, Suzanne et Françoise Bossier."

One day I told the story to Professor Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard University. He generously offered to see if he

could find the name of the Count de Morainville on any of the lists of persons guillotined during the French Revolution. He made the search, but wrote, "I am sorry to say that I have not been able to find it either in Prudhomme, 'Dictionnaire des Individues envoyés à la Mort judiciairement, 1789-1796,' or in the list given by Wallon in the sixth volume of his very interesting 'Histoire du Tribunal Revolutionnaire de Paris.' Possibly he was not put to death in Paris," etc. And later he kindly wrote again that he had made some hours' further search, but in vain.

Here was distress. I turned to the little manuscript roll of which I had become so fond, and searched its pages anew for evidence of either genuineness or its opposite. The wrapper of black paper and the close-fitting silken bag had not been sufficient to keep it from taking on the yellowness of age. It was at least no modern counterfeit. Presently I noticed the total absence of quotation marks from its passages of conversation. Now, at the close of the last century, the use of quotation marks was becoming general, but had not become universal and imperative. Their entire absence from this manuscript of sixty-eight pages, abounding in conversations, meant either age or cunning pretense. But would a pretender carry his or her cunning to the extreme of fortifying the manuscript in every possible way against the sallowing touch of time, lay it away in a trunk of old papers, lie down and die without mentioning it, and leave it for some one in the second or third generation afterward to find? I turned the leaves once more, and lo! one leaf that had had a large corner torn off had lost that much of its text; it had been written upon before it was torn;

while on another torn leaf, for there are two, the writing reads—as you shall see—uninterruptedly around the torn edge; the writing has been done after the corner was torn off. The two rents, therefore, must have occurred at different times; for the one which mutilates the text is on the earlier page and surely would not have been left so by the author at the time of writing it, but only by some one careless of it, and at some time between its completion and the manifestly later date, when it was so carefully bestowed in its old-fashioned silken case and its inner wrapper of black paper. The manuscript seemed genuine. Maybe the name De Morainville is not, but was a convenient fiction of Alix herself, well understood as such by Françoise and Suzanne. Everything points that way, as was suggested at once by Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye —There! I have let slip the name of my Creole friend, and can only pray her to forgive me! "Tout porte à le croire" (Everything helps that belief), she writes; although she also doubts, with reason, I should say, the exhaustive completeness of those lists of the guillotined. "I recall," she writes in French, "that my husband has often told me the two uncles of his father, or grandfather, were guillotined in the Revolution; but though search was made by an advocate, no trace of them was found in any records."

An assumed name need not vitiate the truth of the story; but discoveries made since, which I am still investigating, offer probabilities that, after all, the name is genuine.

We see, however, that an intention to deceive, were it supposable, would have to be of recent date.

Now let me show that an intention to deceive could not be of recent date, and at the same time we shall see the need of this minuteness of explanation. Notice, then, that the manuscript comes directly from the lady who says she found it in a trunk of her family's private papers. A prominent paper-maker in Boston has examined it and says that, while its age cannot be certified to from its texture, its leaves are of three different kinds of paper, each of which might be a hundred years old. But, bluntly, this lady, though a person of literary tastes and talent, who recognized the literary value of Alix's *history*, esteemed original *documents* so lightly as, for example, to put no value upon Louisa Cheval's thrilling letter to her brother. She prized this Alix manuscript only because, being a simple, succinct, unadorned narrative, she could use it, as she could not Françoise's long, pretty story, for the foundation of a nearly threefold expanded romance. And this, in fact, she had written, copyrighted, and arranged to publish when our joint experience concerning Françoise's manuscript at length readjusted her sense of values. She sold me the little Alix manuscript at a price still out of all proportion below her valuation of her own writing, and counting it a mistake that the expanded romance should go unpreferred and unpublished.

But who, then, wrote the smaller manuscript? Madame found it, she says, in the possession of her very aged mother, the daughter and namesake of Françoise. Surely she was not its author; it is she who said she burned almost the whole original draft of Françoise's "Voyage," because it was "in the way and smelt bad." Neither could Françoise

have written it. Her awkward handwriting, her sparkling flood of words and details, and her ignorance of the simplest rules of spelling, make it impossible. Nor could Suzanne have done it. She wrote and spelled no better at fifty-nine than Françoise at forty-three. Nor could any one have imposed it on either of the sisters. So, then, we find no intention to deceive, either early or recent. I translated the manuscript, it went to the magazine, and I sat down to eat, drink, and revel, never dreaming that the brazen water-gates of my Babylon were standing wide open.

For all this time two huge, glaring anachronisms were staring me, and half a dozen other persons, squarely in the face, and actually escaping our notice by their serene audacity. But hardly was the pie—I mean the magazine—opened when these two birds began to sing. Wasn't that—interesting? Of course Louis de la Houssaye, who in 1786 "had lately come from San Domingo," had *not* "been fighting the insurgents"—who did not revolt until four or five years afterward! And of course the old count, who so kindly left the family group that was bidding Madelaine de Livilier good-bye, was not the Prime Minister Maurepas, who was *not* "only a few months returned from exile," and who was *not* then "at the pinnacle of royal favor"; for these matters were of earlier date, and this "most lovable old man in the world" wasn't any longer in the world at all, and had not been for eight years. He was dead and buried.

And so, after all, fraudulent intent or none, *this* manuscript, just as it is, could never have been written by Alix. On "this 22d of August, 1795," she could not have perpetrated such statements as these two. Her memory of

persons and events could not have been so grotesquely at fault, nor could she have hoped so to deceive any one. The misstatements are of later date, and from some one to whom the two events were historical. But the manuscript is all in one simple, undisguised, feminine handwriting, and with no interlineation save only here and there the correction of a miswritten word.

Now in translating madame's "Voyage de ma Grandmère," I noticed something equivalent to an interlineation, but in her own writing like all the rest, and added in a perfectly unconcealed, candid manner, at the end of a paragraph near the close of the story. It struck me as an innocent gloss of the copyist, justified in her mind by some well-credited family tradition. It was this: "Just as we [Françoise and Alix] were parting, she [Alix] handed me the story of her life." I had already called my friend's attention to the anachronisms, and she was in keen distress, because totally unable to account for them. But as I further pondered them, this gloss gained new significance and I mentioned it. My new inquiry flashed light upon her aged memory. She explained at once that, to connect the two stories of Françoise and Alix, she had thought it right to impute these few words to Françoise rather than for mere exactness to thrust a detailed explanation of her own into a story hurrying to its close. My question called back an incident of long ago and resulted first in her rummaging a whole day among her papers, and then in my receiving the certificate of a gentleman of high official standing in Louisiana that, on the 10th of last April (1889), this lady, in his presence, took from a large trunk of written papers, variously dated and

"appearing to be perfectly genuine," a book of memoranda from which, writes he, "I copy the following paragraph written by Madame S. de la Houssaye herself in the middle of the book, on page 29." Then follows in French:

June 20, 1841.—M. Gerbeau has dined here again. What a singular story he tells me. We talked of my grandmother and Madame Carpentier, and what does M. Gerbeau tell me but that Alix had not finished her history when my grandmother and my aunt returned, and that he had promised to get it to them. "And I kept it two years for want of an opportunity," he added. How mad Grandmamma must have been! How the delay must have made her suffer!

Well and good! Then Alix did write her story! But if she wrote for both her "dear and good friends," Suzanne and Françoise, then Françoise, the younger and milder sister, would the more likely have to be content, sooner or later, with a copy. This, I find no reason to doubt, is what lies before me. Indeed, here (crossed out in the manuscript, but by me restored and italicized) are signs of a copyist's pen: "Mais helas! il desesperoit de reussir quand' *il desespe* rencontra," etc. Is not that a copyist's repetition? Or this:"—et lui, mon mari apres tout se fit mon *marim* domestique." And here the copyist misread the original: "Lorsque le maire entendit les noms et les *personnes* prenoms de la mariée," etc. In the manuscript personnes is crossed out, and the correct word, prenoms, is written above it.

Whoever made this copy it remains still so simple and compact that he or she cannot be charged with many embellishments. And yet it is easy to believe that some one, with that looseness of family tradition and largeness of

ancestral pride so common among the Creoles, in half-knowledge and half-ignorance should have ventured aside for an instant to attribute in pure parenthesis to an ancestral De la Houssaye the premature honor of a San Domingan war; or, incited by some tradition of the old Prime Minister's intimate friendship with Madelaine's family, should have imputed a gracious attention to the wrong Count de Maurepas, or to the wrong count altogether.

I find no other theory tenable. To reject the whole matter as a forgery flies into the face of more incontestable facts than the anachronisms do. We know, from Suzanne and Françoise, without this manuscript, that there was an Alix Carpentier, daughter of a count, widow of a viscount, an *emigrée* of the Revolution, married to a Norman peasant, known to M. Gerbeau, beloved of Suzanne and Françoise, with whom they journeyed to Attakapas, and who wrote for them the history of her strange life. I hold a manuscript carefully kept by at least two generations of Françoise's descendants among their valuable private papers. It professes to be that history—a short, modest, unadorned narrative, apparently a copy of a paper of like compass, notwithstanding the evident insertion of two impossible statements whose complete omission does not disturb the narrative. I see no room to doubt that it contains the true story of a real and lovely woman. But to come back to my attorney.

While his grave negotiations were still going on, there met me one evening at my own gate a lady in black, seeking advice concerning her wish to sell to some publisher a private diary never intended for publication.

"That kind is the best," I said. "Did you write it during the late war?" I added at a guess.

"Yes."

"I suppose, then, it contains a careful record of each day's public events."

"No, I'm sorry to say—"

"Nay, don't be sorry; that lack may save it from the waste-basket." Then my heart spoke. "Ah! madam, if you had only done what no woman seems to have seen the importance of doing—written the women's side of that awful war—"

"That's just what I have done," she interrupted. "I was a Union woman, in the Confederacy. I couldn't talk; I had to write. I was in the siege of Vicksburg from beginning to end."

"Leave your manuscript with me," I said. "If, on examining it, I find I can recommend it to a publisher, I will do so. But remember what I have already told you—the passage of an unknown writer's work through an older author's hands is of no benefit to it whatever. It is a bad sign rather than a good one. Your chances of acceptance will be at least no less if you send this to the publishers yourself."

No, she would like me to intervene.

How my attorney friend and I took a two days' journey by rail, reading the manuscript to each other in the Pullman car; how a young newly married couple next us across the aisle, pretending not to notice, listened with all their might; how my friend the attorney now and then stopped to choke down tears; and how the young stranger opposite came at last, with apologies, asking where this matter would be

published and under what title, I need not tell. At length I was intercessor for a manuscript that publishers would not lightly decline. I bought it for my little museum of true stories, at a price beyond what I believe any magazine would have paid—an amount that must have filled the widow's heart with joy, but as certainly was not beyond its worth to me. I have already contributed a part of this manuscript to "The Century" as one of its "Wax-papers." But by permission it is restored here to its original place.

Judge Farrar, with whom I enjoyed a slight but valued acquaintance, stopped me one day in Carondelet street, New Orleans, saying, "I have a true story that I want you to tell. You can dress it out—"

I arrested him with a shake of the head. "Dress me no dresses. Story me no stories. There's not one of a hundred of them that does not lack something essential, for want of which they are good for naught. Keep them for after-dinner chat; but for the novelist they are good to smell, not to eat. And yet—tell me your story. I have a use for it—a cabinet of true things that have never had and shall not have a literary tool lifted up against them; virgin shells from the beach of the sea of human events. It may be I shall find a place for it there." So he told me the true story which I have called "Attalie Brouillard," because, having forgotten the woman's real name, it pleased his fancy to use that name in recounting the tale: "Attalie Brouillard." I repeated the story to a friend, a gentleman of much reading.

His reply dismayed me. "I have a faint impression," he said, "that you will find something very much like that in one of Lever's novels."

But later I thought, "Even so, what then? Good stories repeat themselves." I remembered having twice had experiences in my own life the accounts of which, when given, would have been great successes only that they were old anecdotes—great in their day, but long worn out in the club-rooms and abandoned to clergymen's reunions. The wise thing was not to find out or care whether Lever had somewhere told something like it, but whether the story was ever a real event in New Orleans, and, if so, to add it to my now, to me, priceless collection. Meeting the young judge again, I asked boldly for the story's full authentication. He said promptly that the man who told it of his own knowledge was the late Judge T. Wharton Collins; that the incidents occurred about 1855, and that Judge McCaleb could doubtless give the name of the notary public who had been an actor in the affair. "Let us go to his office right now," said my obliging friend.

We went, found him, told him our errand. He remembered the story, was confident of its entire verity, and gave a name, which, however, he begged I would submit for verification to an aged notary public in another street, a gentleman of the pure old Creole type. I went to him. He heard the story through in solemn silence. From first to last I mentioned no name, but at the end I asked:

"Now, can you tell me the name of the notary in that case?"

"Yes."

I felt a delicious tingling as I waited for the disclosure. He slowly said:

"Dthere eeze wan troub' 'bout dat. To *which* case do you *riffer? 'Cause, you know, dey got t'ree, four case' like dat*. An' you better not mention no name, 'cause you don't want git nobody in troub', you know. Now dthere's dthe case of ——. And dthere's dthe case of——. And dthere's the case of ——. He had to go away; yes; 'cause when *he* make dthe dade man make his will, he git *behine* dthe dade man in bade, an' hole 'im up in dthe bade."

I thanked him and departed, with but the one regret that the tale was true so many more times than was necessary.

In all this collection the story of the so-called haunted house in Royal street is the only one that must ask a place in literature as partly a twice-told tale. The history of the house is known to thousands in the old French quarter, and that portion which antedates the late war was told in brief by Harriet Martineau as far back as when she wrote her book of American travel. In printing it here I fulfill an oft-repeated promise; for many a one has asked me if I would not, or, at least, why I did not, tell its dark story.

So I have inventoried my entire exhibit—save one small matter. It turned out after, all that the dear old Creole lady who had sold us the ancient manuscript, finding old paper commanding so much more per ton than it ever had commanded before, raked together three or four more leaves—stray chips of her lovely little ancestress Françoise's workshop, or rather the shakings of her basket of cherished records,—to wit, three Creole African songs, which I have used elsewhere; one or two other scraps, of no value; and, finally, a long letter telling its writer's own short story—a story so tragic and so sad that I can only say pass it, if you

will. It stands first because it antedates the rest. As you will see, its time is something more than a hundred years ago. The writing was very difficult to read, owing entirely to the badness—mainly the softness—of the paper. I have tried in vain to find exactly where Fort Latourette was situated. It may have had but a momentary existence in Galvez's campaign against the English. All along the Gulf shore the sites and remains of the small forts once held by the Spaniards are known traditionally and indiscriminately as "Spanish Fort." When John Law,—author of that famed Mississippi Bubble, which was in Paris what the South Sea Bubble was in London,—failed in his efforts at colonization on the Arkansas, his Arkansas settlers came down the Mississippi to within some sixty miles of New Orleans and established themselves in a colony at first called the *Côte Allemande* (German Coast), and later, owing to its prosperity, the *Côte d'Or*, or Golden Coast. Thus the banks of the Mississippi became known on the Rhine, a goodly part of our Louisiana Creoles received a German tincture, and the father and the aunt of Suzanne and Françoise were not the only Alsatians we shall meet in these wild stories of wild times in Louisiana.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Name of the parish, or county.—Translator.

[2]Royalist refugees of '93.—TRANSLATOR.

THE YOUNG AUNT WITH WHITE HAIR.

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The date of this letter—I hold it in one hand as I write, and for the first time noticed that it has never in its hundred years been sealed or folded, but only doubled once, lightly, and rolled in the hand, just as the young Spanish officer might have carried it when he rode so hard to bear it to its destination—its date is the last year but one of our American Revolution. France, Spain, and the thirteen colonies were at war with Great Britain, and the Indians were on both sides.

Galvez, the heroic young governor of Louisiana, had just been decorated by his king and made a count for taking the forts at Manchac, Baton Rouge, Natchez, and Mobile, and besieging and capturing the stronghold of Pensacola, thus winning all west Florida, from the Mississippi to the Appalachicola, for Spain. But this vast wilderness was not made safe; Fort Panmure (Natchez) changed hands twice, and the land was full of Indians, partly hireling friends and partly enemies. The waters about the Bahamas and the Greater and Lesser Antilles were fields for the movements of hostile fleets, corsairs, and privateers. Yet the writer of this letter was tempted to run the gauntlet of these perils, expecting, if all went well, to arrive in Louisiana in midsummer.

"How many times," says the memorandum of her brother's now aged great-granddaughter,—"How many times during my childhood has been told me the story of my aunt Louise. It was not until several years after the death of my grandmother that, on examining the contents of the

basket which she had given me, I found at the bottom of a little black-silk bag the letter written by my grand-aunt to her brother, my own ancestor. Frankly, I doubt that my grandmother had intended to give it to me, so highly did she prize it, though it was very difficult to read. The orthography is perfect; the difficulty is all owing to the paper and, moreover, to the situation of the poor wounded sufferer." It is in French:

To my brother mister Pierre Bossier. In the parish[3] of St. James.

Fort Latourette, The 5 August, 1782.

My Good Dear Brother: Ah! how shall I tell you the frightful position in which I am placed! I would that I were dead! I seem to be the prey of a horrible nightmare! O Pierre! my brother! hasten with all speed to me. When you left Germany, your little sister was a blooming girl, very beautiful in your eyes, very happy! and to-day! ah! to-day, my brother, come see for yourself.

After having received your letter, not only my husband and I decided to leave our village and go to join you, but twelve of our friends united with us, and on the 10 May, 1782, we quitted Strasbourg on the little vessel North Star [Étoile du Nord],[4] which set sail for New Orleans, where you had promised to come to meet us. Let me tell you the names of my fellow-travelers. O brother! what courage I need to write this account: first my husband, Leonard Cheval, and my son Pierre, poor little angel who was not yet two years old! Fritz Newman, his wife Nina, and their three children; Irwin Vizey; William Hugo, his wife, and their little daughter; Jacques Lewis, his daughter, and their son Henry.

We were full of hope: We hoped to find fortune in this new country of which you spoke with so much enthusiasm. How in that moment did I bless my parents and you my brother, for the education you had procured me. You know how good a musician my Leonard was, and our intention was on arriving to open a boarding-school in New Orleans; in your last letter you encouraged the project—all of us, movables with us, all our savings, everything we owned in this world.

This paper is very bad, brother, but the captain of the fort says it is all he has; and I write lying down, I am so uncomfortable.

The earlier days of the voyage passed without accident, without disturbance, but often Leonard spoke to me of his fears. The vessel was old, small, and very poorly supplied. The captain was a drunkard [here the writer attempted to turn the sheet and write on the back of it], who often incapacitated himself with his first officers [word badly blotted]; and then the management of the vessel fell to the mate, who was densely ignorant. Moreover, we knew that the seas were infested with pirates. I must stop, the paper is too bad.

The captain has brought me another sheet.

Our uneasiness was great. Often we emigrants assembled on deck and told each other our anxieties. Living on the frontier of France, we spoke German and French equally well; and when the sailors heard us, they, who spoke only English, swore at us, accused us of plotting against them, and called us Saurkrouts. At such times I pressed my child to my heart and drew nearer to Leonard, more dead than alive. A whole month passed in this constant anguish.