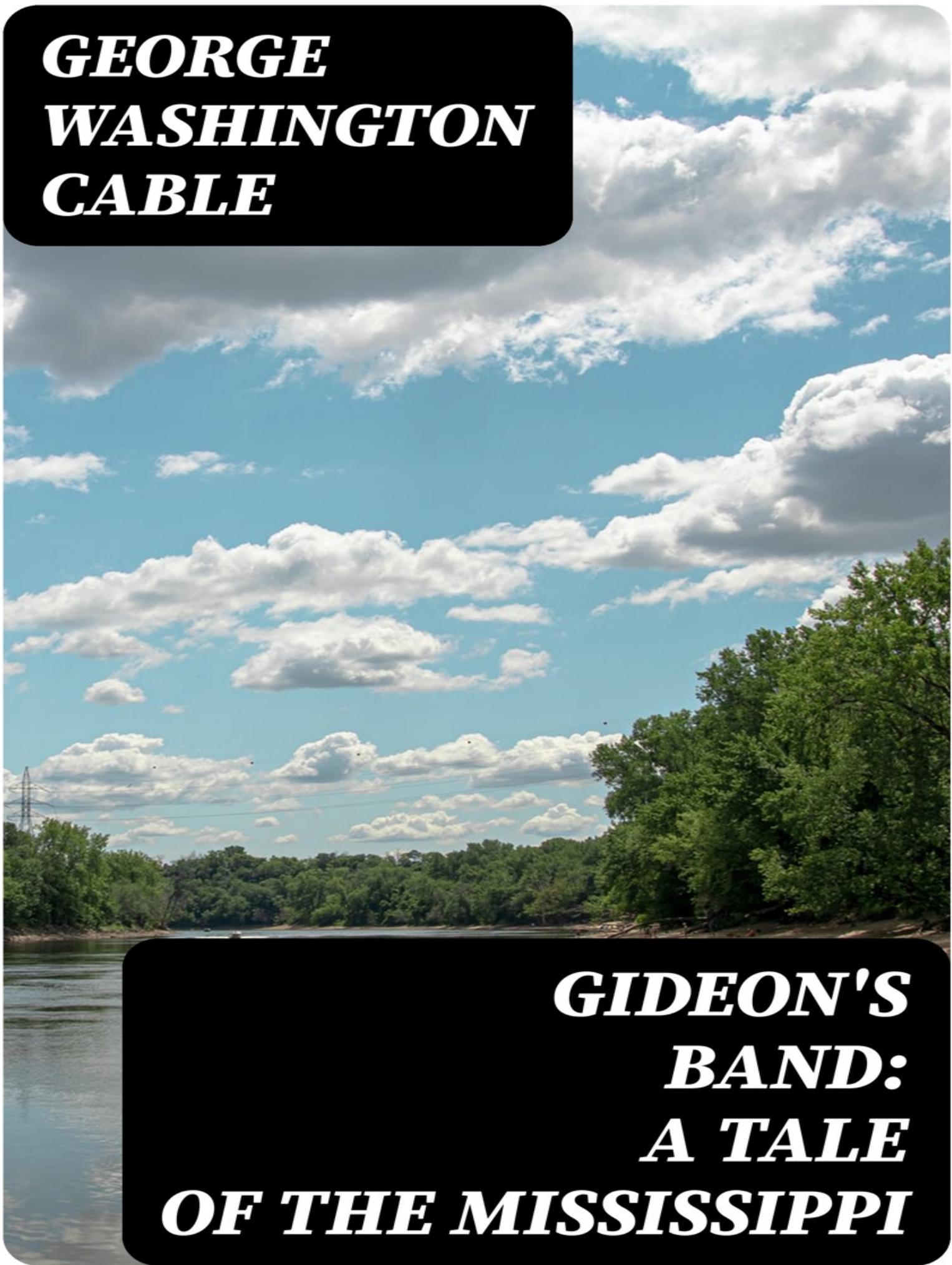


**GEORGE
WASHINGTON
CABLE**



**GIDEON'S
BAND:
A TALE
OF THE MISSISSIPPI**

George Washington Cable

Gideon's Band: A Tale of the Mississippi

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THE STEAMBOAT LEVEE

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Saturday, April, 1852. There was a fervor in the sky as of an August noon, although the clocks of the city would presently strike five.

Dazzling white clouds, about to show the earliest flush of the sun's decline, beamed down upon a turbid river harbor, where the water was deep so close inshore that the port's unbroken mile of steamboat wharf nowhere stretched out into the boiling flood. Instead it merely lined the shore, the steamers packing in bow on with their noses to it, their sterns out in the stream, their fenders chafing each other's lower guards.

New Orleans was very proud of this scene. Very prompt were her citizens, such as had travelled, to remind you that in many seaports vast warehouses and roofed docks of enormous cost thronged out so greedily to meet incoming craft that the one boat which you might be seeking you would find quite hidden among walls and roofs, and of all the rest of the harbor's general fleet you could see little or nothing. Not so on this great sun-swept, wind-swept, rain-swept, unswept steamboat levee. You might come up out of

any street along that mile-wide front, and if there were a hundred river steamers in port a hundred you would behold with one sweep of the eye. Overhead was only the blue dome, in full view almost from rim to rim; and all about, amid a din of shouting, whip-cracking, scolding, and laughing, and a multitudinous flutter of many-colored foot-square flags, each marking its special lot of goods, were swarms of men—white, yellow, and black—trucking, tumbling, rolling, hand-barrowing, and "toting" on heads and shoulders a countless worth of freight in bags, barrels, casks, bales, boxes, and baskets. Hundreds of mules and drays came and went with this same wealth, and out beyond all, between wharf and open river, profiled on the eastern sky, letting themselves be unloaded and reloaded, stood the compacted, motionless, elephantine phalanx of the boats.

The flood beneath them was up to the wharf's flooring, yet their low, light-draught hulls, with the freight decks that covered them doubled in carrying room by their widely overhanging freight guards, were hid by the wilderness of goods on shore. Hid also were their furnaces, boilers, and engines on the same deck, sharing it with the cargo. But all their gay upper works, so toplofty and frail, showed a gleaming white front to the western sun. You marked each one's jack-staff, that rose mast high from the unseen prow, and behind it the boiler deck, high over the boilers. Over the boiler deck was the hurricane roof, above that the officers' rooms, called the "texas." Above the texas was the pilot-house, and on either side, well forward of the pilot-house and towering abreast of each other and above all else—

higher than the two soaring derrick posts at the two forward corners of the passenger and hurricane decks, higher even than the jack-staff's peak—stood the two great black chimneys.

And what a populace teemed round and through all! Here was the Creole, there the New Englander. Here were men of oddest sorts from the Missouri, Ohio, and nearer and farther rivers. Here were the Irishman, the German, the Congo, Cuban, Choctaw, Texan, Sicilian; the Louisiana sugar-planter, the Mississippi cotton-planter, goat-bearded raftsmen from the swamps of Arkansas, flatboatmen from the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky; the horse trader, the slave-driver, the filibuster, the Indian fighter, the circus rider, the circuit-rider, and men bound for the goldfields of California.

More than half the boats, this April afternoon, flew from the jack-staff of each, to signify that it was her day to leave, a streaming burgee bearing her name. A big-lettered strip of canvas drawn along the front guards of her hurricane-deck told for what port she was "up," and the growing smoke that swelled from her chimneys showed that five was her time to back out.

In the midst of the scene, opposite the head of Canal Street—the streets that run to the New Orleans levee run up-hill and get there head first—lay a boat which specially belongs to this narrative. A pictorial poster, down in every café and hotel rotunda of the town, called her "large, new, and elegant," and such she was in fair comparison with all the craft on all the sixteen thousand navigable miles of the vast river and its tributaries. Her goal was Louisville, more than thirteen hundred miles away. Her steam was up, a

velvet-black pitch-pine smoke billowed from her chimneys, and her red-and-white burgee, gleaming upon it, named her the *Votaress*.

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THE "VOTARESS"

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Her first up-river trip! The crowd waiting on the wharf's apron to see her go was larger and included better types of the people than usual, for the *Votaress* was the latest of the Courteney fleet, hence a rival of the Hayle boats, the most interesting fact that could be stated of anything afloat on Western waters.

So young was she, this *Votaress*, so bridally fresh from her Indiana and Kentucky shipyards, that the big new bell in the mid-front of her hurricane roof shone in the low sunlight like a wedding jewel. Its parting strokes had sounded once but would sound twice again before she could cast off. Both pilots were in the lofty pilot-house, down from the breast-board of which a light line ran forward to the bell's tongue, but neither pilot touched the line or the helm. For the captain's use another cord from the bell hung over the hurricane deck's front and down to the boiler deck rail, but neither up there on the boiler deck nor anywhere near the bell on the roof above it was any captain to be seen.

At the front angle of the roof's larboard rail a youth, quite alone, leaned against one of the tall derrick posts to get its shade. He was too short, square, and unanimated to draw

much attention, although with a faint unconscious frown between widely parted brows his quiet eyes fell intently upon every detail of the lively scene below.

The whole great landing lay beneath his glance, a vivid exposition of the vast, half-tamed valley's bounty, spoils, and promise; of its motley human life, scarcely yet to be called society, so lately and rudely transplanted from overseas; so bareboned, so valiantly preserved, so young yet already so titanic; so self-reliant, opinionated, and uncouth; so strenuous and materialistic in mind; so inflammable in emotions; so grotesque in its virtues; so violent in its excesses; so complacently oblivious of all the higher values of wealth; so giddied with the new wine of liberty and crude abundance; so open of speech, of heart, of home, and so blithely disdainful of a hundred risks of life, health, and property. And all this the young observer's glance took in with maybe more realization of it than might be looked for in one not yet twenty-one. Yet his fuller attention was for matters nearer and of much narrower compass.

He saw the last bit of small freight come aboard and the last belated bill-lading clerk and ejected peddler go ashore. He noted by each mooring-post the black longshoreman waiting to cast off a hawser. He remarked each newcomer who idly joined the onlooking throng. Especially he observed each cab or carriage that hurried up to the wharf's front. He studied each of the alighting occupants as they yielded their effects to the antic, white-jacketed mulatto cabin-boys, behind whom they crossed the ponderous unrailed stage and vanished on their up-stairs way to the boiler deck, the

cabin, and their staterooms. Had his mild scrutinizings been a paid service, they could hardly have been more thorough.

By and by two or three things occurred in the same moment. A number of boats above Canal Street and several of lesser fame below sounded their third bell, cast off, and backed out into the stream. The many pillars of smoke widened across the heavens into one unlifted cloud with the sunbeams illumining its earthward side. Now it overhung the busy landing and now, at the river's first bend, it filled the tops of the dark mass of spars and cordage that densely lined the long curve of the harbor's up-town shipping.

At the same time, while the foremost boats were still in sight, the two pilots in the pilot-house of the lingering *Votaress* quietly took stand at right and left of the wheel with their eyes on a distant vehicle, a private carriage. It came swiftly out of Common Street and across the broad shell-paved levee. As quietly as they, the youth at the derrick post regarded it, and presently, looking back and up, he gave them a slight, gratified nod. Through the lines of onlookers the carriage swept close up to the stage and let down two aristocratic-looking men. The taller was full fifty years of age, the other as much as seventy-five, but both were hale and commanding.

As they started aboard the younger glanced up brightly to the unsmiling youth at the roof's rail and then threw a gesture, above and beyond him, to the pilot-house. One of the pilots promptly sounded the bell. Down on the forecastle a dozen deck-hands, ordered by a burly mate, leaped to the stage and began, with half as many others who ran ashore on it, to heave it aboard. But a sharp "avast" stopped them,

and four or five cabin-boys gambolled out on it ashore. A smart hack came whirling up in its own white shell dust, and a fledgling dandy of seventeen sprang down from the seat of his choice by the driver before the vehicle could stop or the white jackets strip it of its baggage.

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CERTAIN PASSENGERS

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From his dizzy outlook the older youth dropped his calm scrutiny upon the inner occupants as they alighted and followed the boy on board. First came a red-ringleted, fifteen-year-old sister, fairly good-looking, almost too free of glance, and—to her high-perched critic—urgently eligible to longer skirts. Behind her appeared an old, very black nurse in very blue calico and very white turban and bosom kerchief; and lastly a mother—of many children, one would have said—still perfect in complexion, gracefully rounded, and beautiful.

This was the first time he on the hurricane deck had ever seen them, but he knew at once who they were and looked the closer on that account. The self-oblivious elation with which the slim lass gave her eyes and mind to everything except her own footing caused him to keep his chief watch on her. He even beckoned a black deck hand to do the same. Wherever her glance went her gay interest went with it, either in a soft soliloquizing laugh or in some demonstration less definite though more radiant; some sign

of delight from her lips, her eyes, her brow, her springing step, dancing curls, or supple arms. The youth on the roof's edge deepened his frown. At a point on the stage where its sheer, naked sides spanned the narrow chasm through which the waters swept between boat and wharf, her feet strayed too near one perilous edge, and just then her eyes went up to him. The two glances had barely met when she tripped and staggered. With a dozen others aboard and ashore, he gave a start. She sent him a look of terror, then turned from deadly pale to rosy red and gasped her thanks to the smiling deckhand, whose clutch had saved her life. The next instant she was laughing elatedly to her horrified nurse, and so disappeared with her kindred on the lower deck and front stairs.

The mellow boom of the third and last parting signal diverted the general mind, and a glance behind him showed the youth the close and welcome presence of that superior-looking man in answer to whose gesture the pilot had tolled the earlier bell. But this person was closely preoccupied. Now his capable glance ran aft along every marginal line of the boat, now it dropped below to where the big stage lay drawn in athwart the forward deck from guard to guard. Now he gave short, quiet orders to wharf and forecastle, now a single word or two to the pilot-house. Far below, the engine bells jingled. The bowline was in. A yeast of waters ran forward from the backing wheels, the breast line slacked away in fierce jerks, and the *Votaress* began to depart.

Meantime there was an odd stir on shore. A cab whirled up furiously and two more youths, shapely, handsome, and fashionable, twins beyond cavil and noticeably older than

their twenty years, visibly rich in fine qualities but as visibly reckless as to what they did with them, sprang out, flushed and imperious, to wave the *Votaress*. One of her guards was still rubbing along the steamer beside her, but before the pair could dash aboard this other boat and half across her deck, a gap had opened, impossible to leap. They halted in rage as the more compact youth on the moving steamer's roof, catching their attention, pointed a good two miles up the river front. Yet what he said they would not have known had not her mate repeated from the forecastle:

"Post forty-six! Drive up thah! We stop thah fo' a load of emigrants!"

They fled back to the cab. Aboard the receding boat the ruthless engine bells jingled on; the broad waterside and the city behind it seemed, from her decks, to draw away into the western clouds, and the yellow river spread wide its shores in welcome to her swinging form. Now its mighty current seemed to quicken and quicken as she gradually overcame her down-stream drift, the ship-lined shores ceased to creep up-stream—began to creep down—and her black crew, standing close about the capstan, broke majestically into song:

"Oh, rock me, Julie, rock me."

From the forecastle her swivel pealed, her burgee ran down the jack-staff, a soft, continuous tremor set in among all her parts, her scape-pipes ceased their alternating roars, her engines breathed quietly through her vast funnels, the flood spouted at her cutwater, white torrents leaped and

chased each other from her fluttering wheels, her own breeze fanned every brow, and the *Votress* was under way.

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THE FIRST TWO MILES

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The youth whom we have called short, square, and so on crossed to the starboard derrick post. Several passengers had come up to the roof, and one who, he noticed, seemed, by the many kind glances cast upon her, to be already winning favor, was the tallish lass with the red curls.

The nurse was still at her back. She drew close up beside him and stood in the wind that ruffled her hat and pressed her draperies against her form. Her servant betrayed a faint restiveness to be so near him, but the girl, watching the steamer's watery path as it seemed of its own volition to glide under the boat's swift tread, ignored him as completely as if he were a part of the woodwork. The very good-looking man who was "taking out" the boat returned from a short tour of the deck and halted by the great bell over the foremost skylights; but soon he moved away again in mild preoccupation. The maiden's frank scrutiny followed him a step or two and then turned squarely to the youth. Her attendant stirred uncomfortably and breathed some inarticulate protest, but in a tone of faultless composure the girl spoke out:

"Is that the captain yonder?"

"No," he said, equally composed, though busy thinking that but for his eye she would at this moment be lying, in all these dainty draperies, as deep beneath the boiling flood as she now stood above it. "That's not the captain."

"Then why is he running the boat?"

"He owns her."

"Oh!" The girl's soft laugh was at herself. Presently—"Where's her captain?"

"Ashore, in the hospital."

"What's he got?"

"Missy!" murmured the dark woman beseechingly.

But missy gave her no heed. "Got cholera?" she ventured, "the Asiatic cholera?"

"No, a broken leg."

"Oh! Is that all he's got?"

"No, he has another, not broken." The speaker was so solemn that, with mirth in every drop of her blood, the inquirer contrived to be grave, herself.

"How'd he get it—I mean get it broken?"

"He was superintending——"

"And fell? When'd he fall?"

"This afternoon, about——"

"Where'd it happen?"

"Down on the lower deck as he——"

"Which is the lower deck?"

"The deck you came aboard on."

"They told me that was the freight deck!"

"It is."

"Then, why—?" She ceased, pondered, and spoke again: "Is there any deck lower than the lower deck?"

"None."

She mused once more: "Why—that's strange."

"Yes," he said, "strange, but true."

"Then how could the captain fall—" Again she ceased and yet again pondered: "Are the boilers—on the boiler deck?"

"No, the boiler deck is just over the boilers."

"Then why do they—" Once more she pondered.

"The boilers," said the youth, "are down on the freight deck."

The questioner brightened. "Do they ever put any freight on the boiler deck?" she asked.

Before he could say yes, and without the slightest warning, a laugh burst from her tightened lips. He could not have called it unmusical and did not resent it, although he did regard it as without the slenderest excuse. Her eyes and brow, still confronting his in a distress of mirth, confessed the whim's forlorn senselessness, while his face returned not the smallest sign of an emotion. As the moment lengthened, the transport, so far from passing, spread through all her lithe form. Suddenly she turned aside, drew herself up, faced him again, and began to inquire, "Do they ever—" but broke down once more, fell upon the old woman's shoulder with a silvery tinkle, shook, hung limp, threw one foot behind her, and tapped the deck with her toe. A married couple drifting by, obviously players and of the best of their sort, enjoyed the picture.

"Why, missy!" the nurse softly pleaded, "yo' plumb disgracin' yo'seff! Stop! Stop!"

"I can't!" whined the girl, between her paroxysms, "till he stops looking like *that*." But as the youth was merely looking like himself he saw no reason why he should stop.

To avoid the current the steamer suddenly began to run so close beside the moored ships that the continuous echo of all her sounds—the flutter of her great wheels, the seething of waters, the varied activities of her lower deck—came back and up to the three voyagers with a nearness and minuteness that startled the girl and drew her glance; but just as her dancing eyes returned reproachfully to the youth the big bell at her back pealed its signal for landing and she sprang almost off her feet, cast herself into the nurse's bosom, and laughed more inexcusably than ever.

The woman put an arm about her shoulder and drew her a few steps back along the rail to where four or five others were gathered. The young man gave all his attention downward across the starboard bow. The engine bells jingled far below, the wheels stopped, the giant chimneys ceased their majestic breathing, and the boat came slowly abreast of a ship standing high out of the water.

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RAMSEY HAYLE

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The flag of Holland floated aft of a deck crowded with a sun-tanned and oddly clad multitude. The Dutch sailors lowered their fenders between the ship's side and the boat's guards, lines were made fast, a light stage was run down

from the ship's upper deck to the boat's forecastle, and in single file, laden with their household goods, the silent aliens were hurried aboard the *Votaress* and to their steerage quarters, out of sight between and behind her engines.

Up on the boiler and hurricane decks her earlier passengers found, according to their various moods and capacities, much entertainment in the scene. The girl with the nurse laughed often, of course. Yet her laugh bore a certain note of sympathy and appreciation which harmonized out of it all quality that might have hurt or abashed the most diffident exile. Childlike as she was, it was plain she did not wholly fail to see into the matter's pathetic depths.

The youth at the derrick post, scrutinizing each immigrant that passed under his eye, could hear at his back a refined voice making kind replies to her many questions. He knew it as belonging to the older of the two men for whose coming aboard the *Votaress* had delayed her start. Between the girl's whimsical queries he heard him indulgently explain that the Dutch ensign's red, white, and blue were no theft from us Americans and that at various periods he had lived in four or five great cities under those three colors as flown and loved by four great nations.

Amazing! She could not query fast enough. "First city?"

First in London, where he had been born and reared.

"And then?"

Then in Amsterdam, where he had been married.

"And then?"

Then for ten years in Philadelphia.

"And then?"

Why, then, for forty years more, down to that present 1852, in New Orleans, while nevertheless, save for the last ten, he had sojourned much abroad in many ports and capitals, but mainly in Paris.

The girl's note of mirth softly persisted, irrepressible but self-oblivious, a mere accent of her volatile emotions, most frequent among which was a delighted wonder in looking on the first man of foreign travel, first world-citizen, with whom she had ever awarely come face to face. So guessed the youth, well pleased.

Presently, as if she too had guessed something, she asked if the boat's master was not this man's son.

He now running it? Yes, he was.

"And was he, too, born in England?—or in Holland?"

"In Philadelphia, 1803."

"And did he, too, marry a—Dutch—wife?"

"No, a young lady of Philadelphia, in 1832; an American."

"Did you ever see Andrew Jackson?"

"Yes, I knew him."

"Were you in the battle of New Orleans?"

"Yes, I commanded a battery."

"Did you know anybody else besides Jackson? Who else?"

"Oh, I knew them all; Claiborne, Livingston, Duncan, Touro, Sheppard, Grimes, the two Lafittes, Dominique You, Coffee, Villeré, Roosevelt—"

"I know about Roosevelt; he brought the first steamboat down the Mississippi. My grandfather knew him. Did you ever have any grandchildren?"

Yes, he had had several, but before she could inquire what had become of them the attention of every one was arrested by the second approach of the cab bearing the two hotspurs who had missed the boat at Canal Street. All the way up from there their labored gallop, by turns hid, seen, and hid again, had amused many of her passengers, and now, as the pair shouldered their angry way across the ship's crowded deck and down the steep gang-plank, a general laugh from the boat's upper rails galled them none the less for being congratulatory. So handsome and dangerous-looking that the laugh died, they halted midway of the narrow incline, impeding the stream of immigrants at their heels, and sent up a fierce stare in response to the propitiatory smiles of the boat's commander and the youth standing near him. Only one of the twins spoke, but the eyes of his brother vindictively widened till they gleamed a flaming concurrence in his fellow's high-keyed, oath-bound threat:

"We'll get even with you for this, Captain John Courteney. We warn you and all your tribe."

The old nurse on the roof, to whose arm her slim charge was clinging with both hands, moaned audibly: "Oh, Lawd, Mahs' Julian! Mahs' Lucian!"

The girl laughed, laughed so merrily and convincingly—as if to laugh was the one reasonable thing to do—that most of the passengers did likewise. Even the grave youth whose back was to her inwardly granted that the lamentable habit could make itself useful in an awkward juncture. While he so thought, he observed the unruffled owner of the *Votress* motion to the chagrined young men to clear the way by

coming aboard, and as they haughtily did so he heard the commander's father say to the girl still at his side:

"I believe those are your brothers?"

"Yes," she responded, for once without mirth, "my brothers," and the peace-loving but conscientious nurse added with a modest pretence of pure soliloquy:

"One dess as hahmless as de yetheh."

The bell boomed. The last transatlantic stranger shuffled aboard, wan and feeble. Now to one wheel, now to the other, the pilot jingled to back away, then to stop, then to go ahead, then to both for full speed, and once more the beautiful craft moved majestically up the river. Her course shifted from south to west, the shores for a time widened apart, the low-roofed city swung and sank away backward, groves of orange and magnolia grew plainer to the eye than suburban streets, and the course changed again, from west to north. Soon on the right, behind a high levee and backed by a sombre swamp forest, appeared the live-oaks and gardens of Carrollton, and presently on the left came Nine-mile Point and another bend of the river westward. As the boat's prow turned, the waters, from shore to shore, reflected the low sun so dazzlingly that nearly all the passengers on the roof moved aft, whence, ravished by the ascending odors of supper, they went below.

But the handsome old man, the sedate youth, the girl, the nurse, remained. Captain Courteney came along the deck and crossed toward the four, eyed from head to foot by the girl even after he had stopped near her. But her gaze drew no glance from him.

"Well, Hugh," he said.

The youth turned with a smile that bettered every meaning in his too passive countenance: "Well, father?"

"Oh!" breathed the startled girl. She looked eagerly into the three male faces, beamed round upon her dark attendant, and then looked again at grandfather, father, and son. "Why, of course!" she softly laughed.

"John," said the older man, "this young lady is a daughter of Gideon Hayle."

"I thought as much." The benign captain lifted his hat and accepted and dropped again the dainty hand proffered him with childish readiness. "Then you're the youngest of seven children."

Her reply was a gay nod. Presently, with a merry glint between her long lashes, she said: "I'm Ramsey."

The captain's smile grew: "That must be great fun."

The girl looked from one to another, puzzled.

"Why, just to be Ramsey," he explained. "Isn't it?"

She gave him a wary, sidewise glance and looked out over the water. "My three married sisters all live near this river," she musingly said; "one in Louisiana, two in Mississippi." Her sidelong glance repeated itself: "I know who it would be fun to be—for me—or for anybody!" Her eyes widened as her brother's had done, though in an amiable, elated way.

"Your father?" asked the captain.

She all but danced: "How'd you know?"

"I saw him—in your eyes," was the placid reply. "Your father and I, and your grandfather Hayle, and this gentleman here—"

"Ya-ass, ya-ass!" drawled the nurse in worshipping reminiscence, and Ramsey laughed to Hugh, and all the while the captain persisted: "We've built and owned rival boats—"

"Fawty yeah'!" murmured the nurse. "Fawty yeah'!"

"Yes, yes!" chirruped the girl. "Pop-a's up the river now, building the *Paragon*! We're on our way to join him!"

"Law', missy," gently chid the nurse, made anxious by a new approach which Ramsey was trying to ignore, "dese gen'lemen knows all dat."

Ramsey twitched her shoulders and waist. Her lips parted for a bright question, but it was interrupted. The interrupters were the restless twins, whose tread sounded peremptory even on the painted canvas of the deck, and the fineness of whose presence was dimmed only by the hardy lawlessness which, in their own eyes, was their crowning virtue.

"Ramsey," drawled one of them, who somehow seemed the more forceful of the two. He spoke as if amazed at his own self-restraint. She whisked round to him. He made his eyes heavy: "Have you had any proper introduction to these —gentlemen?"

A white-jacket, holding a large hand-bell by its tongue, bowed low before the captain, received a nod, and minced away. With suspended breath the girl stared an instant on her brother, then on the captain, and then on his father; but as her eyes came round to Hugh his solemnity caught her unprepared, and, with every curl shaking, she broke out in a tinkling laugh so straight from the heart, so innocent, and so helpless that even the frightened old woman chuckled. Ramsey wheeled, snatched the nurse round, and hurried her

off to a stair, hanging to her arm, tiptoeing, dancing, and carolling in the rhythm of the supper-bell below:

"Ringading tingalingaty, ringadang ding,
Ringading tingalingaty, ringadang ding."

Red and dumb, the questioner glared after them until, near one of the great paddle-boxes, they vanished below. But his brother, the one who had the trick of widening his eyes, found words. "Captain Courteney," he said, "by what right does your son—or even do you, sir—take the liberty, on the hurricane-deck of a steamboat, to scrape acquaintance with an unprotec——?"

The captain had turned his back. "Hugh," he affably said, "will you see what these young gentlemen want?" And then to the older man: "Come, father, let's go to supper." They went.

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HAYLE'S TWINS

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Hugh was grateful for this task in diplomacy, yet wondered what mess he should make of it.

He was here for just such matters, let loose from tutor and books for the summer, to study the handling of a steamboat, one large part of which, of course, was handling the people aboard. Both pilots, up yonder, knew this was his rôle. Already he had tried his unskill—or let "Ramsey" try it—and had learned a point or two. She had shown him, at least twice, what value there might be in a well-timed, unmanageable laugh. But a well-timed, unmanageable laugh is purely a natural gift. If it was to come to his aid, it would have to come of itself. Lucian, the twin who had asked the last question, turned upon him.

Hugh smilingly lifted a pacifying hand. "You're entirely mistaken," he said. "Nobody's tried to scrape acquaintance." In the midst of the last two words, sure enough, there broke from him a laugh which to him seemed so honest, friendly, well justified, and unmanageable that he stood astounded when his accuser blazed with wrath.

"You lie, damn you!" was the answering cry. "And then you laugh in my face! We saw you—all three of you—just now!" The note was so high that one of the pilots began to loiter down from the pilot-house.

Hugh crimsoned. "I see," he said, advancing step by step as the frenzied boy drew back. "You really don't want a peaceable explanation, at all, do you?"

The other twin, Julian, arrested his brother's back step by a touch and spoke for him: "No, sir, we don't. You can't 'peaceably explain' foul treatment, you damned fool, and that's all we Hayles have had of you Courtenays this day. We want satisfaction! We don't ask it, we'll take it! And we'll get it"—here a ripping oath—"if we have to wait for it ten years!"

This time Hugh paled. "It needn't take ten minutes," he said. "Come down to the freight deck, into the engine room, and I'll give both of you so much of it that you won't know yourselves apart."

"One more insult!" cried Lucian, the boy who so often widened his eyes, while Julian, narrowing his lids, said in a tone suddenly icy:

"That classes you, sir, on the freight deck."

"We don't fight deck hands," said Lucian.

"Nor emigrants!" sneered his brother. "And when we fight gentlemen we fight with weapons, sir, as gentlemen should."

Hugh's awkward laugh came again, and the pilot who had come down from beside his fellow at the wheel inquired:

"What's the fraction here?"

"Oh, nothing," said Hugh.

"Everything!" cried Julian. "And you'll find it so the first time we get a fair chance at you—any of you!"

The pilot was amiable. "Hold on," he suggested. "See here, my young friend, what do you reckon your father'd do to this young man"—touching Hugh—"if he should rip around on a Hayle boat as you're doing here?"

"That's a totally different matter, sir!"

The pilot smiled. "Don't you know Gideon Hayle would put him ashore at the first wood-yard?"

"He'd be wrong if he didn't," gravely said Hugh.

"Do you mean that for a threat?—either of you?" snapped Lucian.

"No," said the pilot, "I was merely trying to reason with you. Come, now, go down to supper. It's a roaring good one: crawfish gumbo, riz biscuits, fresh butter, fried oysters, and coffee to make your hair curl. Go on, both of you. You've had—naturally enough—last day in the city—a few juleps too many, but that's all right. A square meal, a night's rest, and you'll wake up in the morning with Baton Rouge and all the sugar lands astern, the big cotton plantations on both sides of us, you feeling at home with everybody, everybody at home with you."

"Many thanks," sneered Julian. "We'll go to our meals self-invited. Good evening."

Hugh granted the pair a slight nod. As they went, Lucian, looking back over Julian's shoulder with eyes bigger than ever, said: "We'll wake up in the morning without the least change of feeling for this boat's owners, their relatives, or their hirelings."

The relative and the hireling glanced sharply at each other. But then Hugh said quietly: "A man can't quarrel with boys, Mr. Watson."